

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL
FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL
WEST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

Held on Tuesday, 11 June 2019 at 10.30 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Mr D Ambrose Smith
Mrs S. Broughton
Mr J.P. Cowen

Mrs J. French
Mr S. Gallant

In Attendance

Sam Anthony
Jo Andrews
Paul Corney
Emma Grima

Nick Khan
Jill Korwin
Christine Marshall

Adrian Mills
Stuart Philpot

- Head of HR & OD
- Strategic Manager (Revenues)
- Head of ARP
- Director of Commercial Services (East Cambs District Council)
- Strategic Director (East Suffolk)
- Director (West Suffolk District Council)
- Executive Director Commercialisation (S151 Officer)
- Strategic Manager (Benefits) ARP
- Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP

Action By

11/19 CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN (AGENDA ITEM 1)

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was:

RESOLVED that Councillor Sarah Broughton be appointed as Chairman for the ensuing year.

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was:

RESOLVED that Councillor Phil Cowen be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

12/19 TREASURER (AGENDA ITEM 2)

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that:

Breckland Council be appointed as Treasurer for the ensuing year.

13/19 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2019 be approved.

Action By

14/19 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 4)

Apologies for absence were received from Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer (S151) for Fenland District Council and Siobhan Martin, Internal Auditor for East Suffolk District Council.

15/19 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

None.

16/19 DECLARATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 6)

None declared.

17/19 GOVERNANCE AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS RELATING TO INTERNAL AUDIT (AGENDA ITEM 7)

This item had been deferred until the next meeting on 17 September 2019.

18/19 PERFORMANCE REPORTS (AGENDA ITEM 8)

(a) Joint Committee Performance Report April 2019

Stuart Philpot, the Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP, presented the report.

It was noted that the Local Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefits indicators for both East Suffolk and West Suffolk had been amended since the publication of the agenda and new up-to-date versions would be attached to the Minutes accordingly. This had been due to the work carried out in respect of the merger between the two Councils.

The first part of the new style performance report featured the performance of all partners combined which also included the fraud and compliance figures for the month of April.

It was explained that the 'green dots' within the performance charts represented being on target.

It was noted that due to various refunds, the Council Tax collected for Breckland Council was below target but would recover later in the year. The Vice-Chairman explained that this was largely due to pre-payments.

Referring to the figures under fraud and compliance for East Cambridgeshire District Council, it was explained that these were much lower in comparison to the other partners due to the funding to support Single Person Discounts from Cambridgeshire County Council being stopped.

In relation to the performance information in respect of the business rates target for Fenland District Council, Members were informed that this result had been due to a successful appeal.

There was some discussion on time limits for appeals and the impact they had on the authority. It was noted that a reassessment was on-going as to whether hospitals could claim business rate relief, as the Doctor surgeries

Action By

had, which in turn had created a significant impact on local authorities. It was further noted that the Finance Officers would build in provision for this if it should happen. Christine Marshall, the Executive Director for Commercialisation & S151 Officer for Breckland Council, advised that Reserves would have to be utilised too.

It was noted that the next business rates revaluation should take place in 2021, followed by another in 2024.

The Vice-Chairman felt that renewable energy could be a further risk to take into consideration. It was noted that Sizewell power station in Suffolk could be an issue. The Executive Director for Commercialisation & S151 Officer for Breckland Council explained that when local infrastructure became national infrastructure the business rates collected would be lost. Business Rates were now being looked at like a budget comprising of different segments and the risks associated with them i.e. such as hospitals.

Jo Andrews, the Strategic Manager for Revenues (ARP), presented the Service updates as at April 2019-20.

The Enforcement Team continued to perform well, having collected £16.157M since the Team started of which £5.669M had been collected in the last financial year.

ARP had dedicated Officers working within the Further Recovery Team. The Team had its best year for collection in 2018/19 collecting £1,111,595 which exceeded the amount collected the previous year by £203k. The Team was partly funded by Norfolk and Suffolk County Council and this funding would continue to be provided un March 2021 from Norfolk County Council and March 2020 from Suffolk County Council. Cambridgeshire County Council had ceased funding from April 2018 and therefore the work the Team could do was fairly limited.

Referring to the report, the Vice-Chairman asked a question about the charging orders and at what point possession came into effect. Members were informed that a sale of the property could be enforced and the debt could then still be collected; however, arrangements for the debt to be paid were put in place and most were collected - possession was always the last resort.

The Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP then provided Members with an update on the annual billing project. The annual billing 2019/20 project had been completed as planned with over 340,000 bills and notifications sent out in one week and on time.

The Anglia Revenues website had been enhanced and was now much more transactional and had proven a success with over 250,000 hits with the most being on the payment page.

As far as the Customer Survey was concerned, a new shared ARP satisfaction survey had been trialled with encouraging initial results including quite a positive feedback. The new Customer Group was already putting together the next survey; looking at the reason why some people were not using on-line services.

Action By

(b) Presentation of Data Q4 FINAL 18-19

The final data for Q4 was noted.

(c) ARP Financial Out-turn 2018-19

The Executive Director for Commercialisation & S151 Officer for Breckland Council presented the ARP Financial outturn report.

The under-spends for each authority totalling £91k were highlighted. These surplus amounts would be shared between the partner authorities in the approved shares.

The transformation funding on page 78 of the agenda pack was also highlighted.

All costs in the table showing the actual full year financial performance as at 31/3/2018 had been split based on the Joint Committee Agreement.

In response to a question, Members were informed that the Mitel Join Up unified essential communications into a single application and prevented ARP sharing the resource on answering all telephone calls.

The Vice-Chairman mentioned robotics and artificial intelligence data that had been gathered from various bodies and had noticed that the Partnership had not been included on the list and felt that it should respond. Paul Corney, the Head of ARP pointed out that the Operational Improvement Board (OIB) had been working on this but unfortunately, had not fed into it.

The report was otherwise noted.

19/19 SERVICE PLAN AND RISK UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Paul Corney, the Head of ARP presented the report.

In accordance with the ARP Agreement the Service Delivery Plan had to be revised and agreed by the Joint Committee by the end of December each year and the Risk Register has to be reviewed on a six monthly basis.

Information contained in the report at section 1.2.1 of the report highlighted that the ARP had achieved significant success in the last year. In addition to service aims and objectives the Service Plan included a risk assessment and details of the major projects that the ARP would be implementing in the next 12 months. Other achievements had been listed under section 1.2.2 to 1.2.6 of the report. Referring to section 1.2.4 of the report (a major initiative going forward), rebates totalling £40k had already been achieved in respect of the development of online forms that had been integrated with the Capita system.

A proposal would be taken to OIB to develop on line forms and transactions to further improve the customer journey.

The ARP had entered into an agreement with DWP to jointly help customers to make the transition to Universal Credit; a Universal Support Partnership had been set up and agreed; however, this expired 31 March 2019 when

Action By

DWP moved the funding to Citizen's Advice. Members were reminded of the pilot scheme in Harrogate of which up to 3,000 existing benefit claimants would be moved to the six-in-one system from July, in the first test of "managed migration". Adrian Mills, the Strategic Manager (Benefits) would be working on the managed migration on behalf of ARP.

Norwich City Council had delegated their enforcement work to Breckland Council who would be passing this work to the ARP Enforcement Agency from July 2019. Other Councils were interested in delegating their services to partner Councils leading to ARP collecting the debts and growing the resilience of the Enforcement Team.

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor Cowen, was aware that the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) had been given a pot of cash to deal with the migration of customers to Universal Credit for a year only and wanted to know how this would affect the ARP once the monies had been used. The Head of ARP advised that there was a great deal of uncertainty in respect of Universal Credit implementation and uncertainty over future Government funding but all matters had been included on the Risk Register (see page 87 of the agenda pack).

Following further discussion, it was

RESOLVED that:

1. the progress in respect of the December 2018 Service Delivery Plan be noted; and
2. the revised Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register at Appendix A of the report be approved.

20/19 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 10)

Adrian Mills, the Strategic Manager (Benefits) ARP, presented the report and provided Members with a detailed overview and update on the following matters:

- Universal Credit – situation to date
- Discretionary Housing Payment
- Benefit Cap; and
- Social Rented Sector Rent Restrictions

In terms of Universal Credit, DWP had started work on a managed migration trial at Harrogate Jobcentre that was scheduled to commence July 2019; subject to Parliamentary approval. On 15 May 2019, DWP had introduced new legislation that would mean that new claims from mixed age couples, where one partner was a pensioner and the other working age, must claim UC and be subject to UC conditionality rules, with certain exceptions. Given benefit rates were higher for existing pensioners, this would have the effect of reducing benefit entitlement.

The Chairman asked if the Discretionary Housing Payment grant from DWP was capped. Members were informed that if the grant was not totally spent it would have to be paid back. For 2018/19 ARP had achieved a near full spend.

The report was otherwise noted.

	<u>Action By</u>
21/19 <u>FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 11)</u>	
Councillor Steve Gallant asked if all Members were content with the Terms of Reference and the structure of the ARP.	
Members were informed that the Partnership Agreement would be reviewed and was already scheduled to come back to the Joint Committee in the autumn.	All to Note
22/19 <u>NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 12)</u>	
The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 17 September 2019 at 10.30am, Level 5 meeting room in Thetford were noted.	All to note

The meeting closed at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN

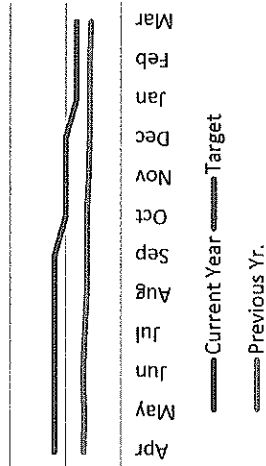
Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support				
	Apr-19	Q2	Q3	Q4
2019/20	14.60	0.00	0.00	0.00
Target	12.00	12.00	10.00	8.00
2018/19	6.63	6.12	5.65	5.41

Year End Target	8
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1

Local Council Tax Reduction



Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

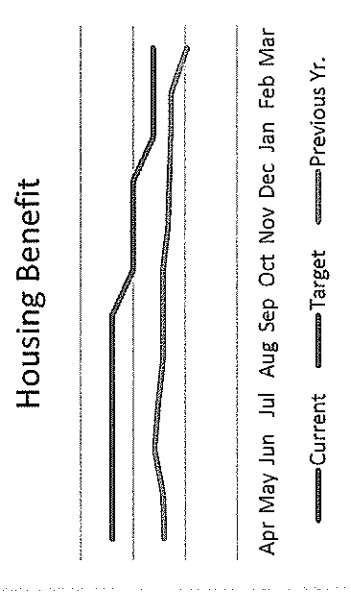
Narrative

Whilst this indicator has not been met for April, it should be noted we do not expect to achieve the target for quarter 1 due to the downtime associated with the merger of East Suffolk and West Suffolk systems. During the first three weeks of April we were not able to process East Suffolk cases, and although we are working to recover the position following the merged systems, inevitably this may cause delays. We are targeting cases to minimise customer impact and are expecting we will achieve the annual target at the end of the year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit				
	Apr-19	Q2	Q3	Q4
2019/20	12.23	0.00	0.00	0.00
Target	12.00	12.00	12.00	8.00
2018/19	6.96	7.90	7.05	4.80

Year End Target	8
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Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Housing Benefit new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

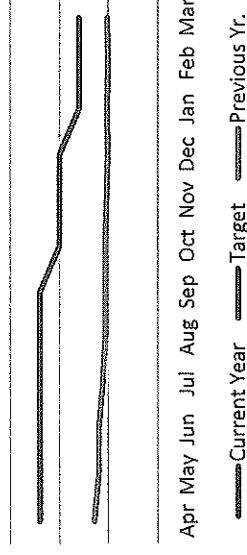
Whilst this indicator has just been exceeded for April, it should be noted we do not expect to achieve the target for quarter 1 due to the downtime associated with the merger of East Suffolk and West Suffolk systems. During the first three weeks of April we were not able to process East Suffolk cases, and although we are working to recover the position following the merged systems, inevitably this may cause delays. We are targeting cases to minimise customer impact and are expecting we will achieve the annual target at the end of the year.

Days to process Local Council Tax Support				
	Apr-19	Q2	Q3	Q4
2019/20	11.68	0.00	0.00	0.00
Target	12.00	12.00	10.00	8.00
2018/19	6.43	5.29	5.05	5.11

Year End Target	8	●
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3

Council Tax Support



Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

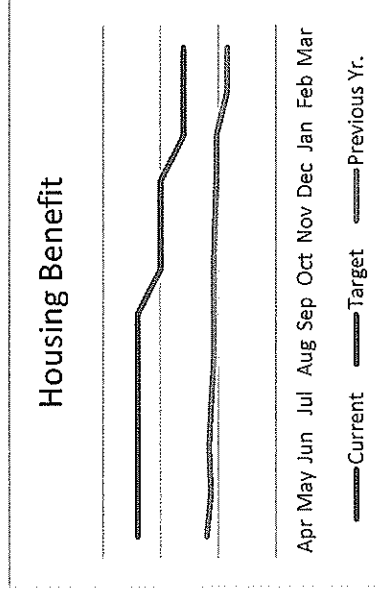
Narrative

Whilst this indicator has been met for April, it should be noted, due to the three week downtime in April associated with the merging of systems, the target may not be met for the first quarter of the year. We are working to recover the position following the merged systems, inevitably, this may cause delays, although we are targeting cases to minimise customer impact. We expect the annual target to be met at the end of the year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit				
	Apr-19	Q2	Q3	Q4
2019/20	9.74	0.00	0.00	0.00
Target	12.00	12.00	10.00	8.00
2018/19	5.98	5.36	5.14	5.14

Year End Target	8
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Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Housing Benefit new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

Whilst this indicator has been met for April, it should be noted, due to the three week downtime in April associated with the merging of systems, the target may not be met for the first quarter of the year. We are working to recover the position following the merged systems, inevitably, this may cause delays, although we are targeting cases to minimise customer impact. We expect the annual target to be met at the end of the year.