

A G E N D A

ANGLIA REVENUES & BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE & TIME Tuesday, 15th September, 2020 at **11.00 am**
Virtual meeting via Teams

THIS MEETING IS IN LINE WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND POLICE AND CRIME PANELS (CORONAVIRUS) (FLEXIBILITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY AND POLICE AND CRIME PANEL MEETINGS) (ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS 2020

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/392/contents/made>

For the attention of:

Mr D. Ambrose Smith, East Cambridgeshire District Council
Mrs S. Broughton, West Suffolk District Council
Mr M. Cook, East Suffolk Council
Mr P. Cowen, Breckland Council
Mrs J. French, Fenland District Council

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1. CHAIRPERSON AND VICE-CHAIRPERSON

To appoint a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson for the ensuing year:

The terms of reference of the Joint Committee stipulate that:

1. The persons eligible to be elected as Chair shall not be the appointees of a Council whose appointee held that position in any of the four previous years.
2. The persons eligible to be elected as Vice-Chair shall not be the appointees of a Council whose appointee held that position in the previous year.
3. The Chair and Vice-Chair shall not be appointees of the same Council.

For your information, the Chairmanship has to rotate round so that each Council takes its turn in a 5-year period (previous 6-year Chairmanship shown):

*Breckland DC - June 2014
East Cambs DC - June 2015
Fenland DC - June 2016
Suffolk Coastal - June 2017
Waveney District Council – June 2018
West Suffolk – June 2019 (current)*

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<p>2. <u>TREASURER</u> To appoint a Treasurer for the ensuing year.</p>	
<p>3. <u>MINUTES</u> To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2019.</p>	1 - 7
<p>4. <u>APOLOGIES</u> To receive apologies for absence.</p>	
<p>5. <u>URGENT BUSINESS</u> To note whether the Chairman proposes to accept any items of urgent business pursuant to Section 100(B)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972.</p>	
<p>6. <u>DECLARATIONS</u></p>	
<p>7. <u>PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE UPDATES (STANDING ITEM)</u> Report of Stuart Philpot, ARP Strategic Manager (Support).</p>	8 - 39
<p>8. <u>ARP FORECAST FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2020-21</u> Report of Alison Chubbock, BDC Chief Accountant (Deputy S151 Officer).</p>	40 - 44
<p>9. <u>COVID RESPONSE REPORT</u> Paul Corney, Head of ARP.</p>	45 - 54
<p>10. <u>WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM)</u> Report of Adrian Mills, ARP Strategic Manager (Billing & Benefits).</p>	55 - 58
<p>11. <u>FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM)</u> To note any items.</p>	
<p>12. <u>NEXT MEETING</u> To note the arrangements for the next meeting on 8 December 2020 at 11am.</p> <p>Breckland Council's Calendar of Meetings for 2021/2022 has been drafted and the provisional dates scheduled for the Anglia Revenues Partnership Joint Committee meetings are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 March 2021 (already confirmed) • 22 June 2021 • 21 September 2021 • 07 December 2021 • 01 March 2022 <p>All meetings are on a Tuesday at 11:00am – confirmation as to whether these will continue to be held virtually or at Breckland House, Thetford will be</p>	

confirmed accordingly.

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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, 17 December 2019 at 11.00 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Mrs S. Broughton (Chairman)	Mr P.D. Claussen (Substitute Member)
Mr D Ambrose Smith	Mrs K. French (Substitute Member)
Mr M. Cook	

In Attendance

Jo Andrews	- Strategic Manager (Revenues)
Sam Anthony	- Head of HR & OD
Alison Chubbock	- Chief Accountant (Deputy Section 151 Officer) (BDC)
Tom Darling-Fernley	- Programme Manager (ARP).
Nick Khan	- Strategic Director (East Suffolk)
Rachael Mann	- Assistant Director (Resources & Performance)
Siobhan Martin	- Head of Internal Audit
Adrian Mills	- Strategic Manager (Billing & Benefits) ARP
Stuart Philpot	- Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP
Ian Smith	- Finance Manager & S151 Officer (East Cambs)
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer

Action By

35/19 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

(a) 11 June 2019

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

(b) 17 September 2019 - Notes

The Notes of the meeting held on 17 September 2019 were noted.

36/19 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cowen and J French. Substitutes in attendance were Councillors Claussen and K French.

Apologies were also received from Paul Corney and Peter Catchpole.

37/19 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

38/19 DECLARATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

None declared.

Action By

**39/19 GOVERNANCE AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS RELATING TO
INTERNAL AUDIT (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

Siobhan Martin, the Head of Internal Audit (East Suffolk Council) provided Members with a detailed overview of the role of the internal audit, and provided clarity in respect of the responsibilities of the Operational Improvement Board and the Joint Committee in relation to the reporting arrangements provided by Internal Audit.

The Heads of Internal Audit at East Suffolk, Fenland and West Suffolk jointly provided the Internal Audit Service to the five partner councils and worked collaboratively when planning work to ensure efficient and effective reviews took place to support all stake holders.

The reporting arrangements were explained.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith asked about the external audit provision. Members were informed that the relationship between internal and external audit complimented each other. The East of England used Ernst & Young LLP and regular meetings were held. The S151 Officers and the Heads of Paid Service also had regular briefings with the External Auditors.

The report was otherwise noted.

**40/19 REVIEW OF THE ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP CONSTITUTION
(AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Rachel Mann, the Assistant Director (Resources & Performance) for West Suffolk Council presented the report.

The report asked Members and recommended to each partner Authority to consider and approve the revised Partnership Agreement to have effect from the 1 April 2019.

The current Agreement had been in force for a number of years and many changes/updates to the document had been made.

The revised Agreement had been considered by each Partner's Legal, Financial and Audit Teams to reflect the Councils merging in East and West Suffolk. A further update had also been requested at the 17 September 2019 Joint Committee meeting in relation to the quoracy of the Committee. The quoracy had been amended to four Members unless the Chair in consultation with the Joint Committee felt that it would be appropriate for all five Members (or their substitute) to be present. In this situation, the item would be deferred until the next meeting.

It was:

RESOLVED that the revised Partnership Agreement be approved – to have effect from 1st April 2019; and

RECOMMEND to each Partner Authority's Cabinet that:

1. the revised Agreement be approved; and
2. subject to the approval from each Partner Authority the revised Agreement be signed and sealed by each Council.

41/19 PERFORMANCE REPORT AND SERVICE UPDATES (AGENDA ITEM 7)

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

Members were informed that all Partner Councils combined for 2019/20 for Business Rates and Council Tax collection were on target and the target for fraud and compliance for the year had been exceeded.

Breckland's Council Tax collection was behind target by £230,173 due to the high level of refunds for this year, £609k compared to £475k at this point last year – an increase of £134k which had reduced collection.. Breckland also had an increase in the amount of pre-payments for the current financial year and the first summons for non-payment had been delayed one month by the Court which would have an effect. The situation was being closely monitored.

Members were informed that whilst the Housing Benefit performance indicator had been exceeded and overachieved, this had been due to the downtime associated with the merger of East Suffolk and West Suffolk systems.

Referring to East Suffolk Council Business Rates, the collection rates were behind target for the current financial year by £347k. There had been £3.9m of backdated refunds as a result of reductions in rateable value.

As far as enforcement was concerned, the Enforcement Team continued to perform well and had collected almost £19m. From July 2019, the Team had been taking cases from Norwich City Council with some good results.

The Anglia Revenues website design had been enhanced to be more transactional and as straight forward as possible for customers and was now showing a 10% increase in usage for Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes.

The Chairman mentioned the Better Customer Journeys Programme and asked if the website was going to be further improved. Members were informed that ARP was currently working with Capita to make such improvements. All partner Councils would need to be involved to make sure that the product was fit for purpose and make it an easier journey for the customer.

Adrian Mills, the Strategic Manager for Billing & Benefits reported that Capita had now released version 2 of the address form which was in test to check enhancements that had been identified and implemented.

The Performance Report and Service updates were otherwise noted.

42/19 ARP FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Alison Chubbock, the Chief Accountant for Breckland Council presented the report.

The report highlighted the full year financial information against the budget for ARP. The latest forecast at this stage of the year showed a small over spend of £34k (0.4%) for the whole of ARP.

Action By

The funding held in the ICT Reserve had now started to be spent and income from Norwich City's enforcement cases was now starting to come through and would increase accordingly.

The report recommended that the end of year variance be distributed between the partner authorities in the approved shares. The shares for each partner had been highlighted on page 110 of the agenda pack.

The Chairman asked what had caused the over spend. In response, the Chief Accountant advised that this had been due to the employment of agency staff but was hopeful that most of it would be 'clawed' back.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith mentioned the comments made on page 113 in relation to the reason behind the over spend. Members were informed that this was one of the difficulties caused by setting the budget early.

RESOLVED that:

1. the report and appendix be noted; and
2. the final full year variance at 31 March 2020 be shared between the partner authorities in the approved shares.

43/19 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Adrian Mills the ARP Strategic Manager (Billing & Benefits) presented the report.

The Universal Credit section at paragraph 2.2.3 of the report was highlighted. DWP had announced a £10m Universal Credit Transition Fund to help vulnerable people but funding application details were not yet available.

The outcome of the migration trial at Harrogate Job Centre was still awaited.

Referring to the Welfare Benefit Up-rating April 2020 new announcement at paragraph 3 of the report, Members were informed that the benefit rates would be increased from April 2020 by 1.7%, the State Pension would also be raised by 3.9%.

The Chairman asked if the CAB and what other charities would be entitled to a share of the £10m Universal Credit Transition Fund. In response, the ARP Strategic Manager advised that the application process had not been notified but it was likely CAB and charities such as Food Banks as well as Local Authorities could apply.

Councillor Claussen asked how much funding it would mean for ARP. Members were informed that this would all be subject to how it was divided up; there were approximately 300 Councils, so small amounts locally, through the LGA, the Government could be lobbied to increase the pot.

The report was otherwise noted.

44/19 ARP STRATEGY REFRESH (AGENDA ITEM 10)

Following introductions, Tom Darling Fernley, the new Programme Manager presented his report.

Action By

Members were provided with a detailed overview of the work involved to develop coherent annual service delivery plans, change delivery plans and a target operating model that had led to a review of the Partnership's strategic priorities that now included benefits, customer needs and development of staff.

A strategy had been developed along with a Service Plan, details of the whole process that was followed could be found at Appendix C of the report.

The strategic themes at section 3.2.3 of the report were highlighted.

The Chairman was pleased to note that 'customers' were one of the top priorities.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith was concerned that none of the themes/priorities included the Department of Work & Pensions. Members were informed that DWP would come within 'relationships'.

Referring to Appendix D, Councillor Claussen had noticed that under 'colleagues' agile working was mentioned that would, in his opinion, be a complete culture shift and asked where ARP was at in that journey. The Strategic Manager (Support Services) explained that this would mean being able to work across all 4 sites and would be helpful for homeworking too. It was noted that this agile approach included management.

Councillor Claussen asked if this agile working would free up space at Breckland House. Members were informed that the building would not be overloaded – there was desk space and hot desking would be available.

Councillor Cook asked where ARP was with its 'digital by default' service. The Programme Manager advised that 'digital by default' had the potential to free up a large amount of full-time posts as it would promote more self-service.

In response to a question about timelines, Members were informed that Universal Credit automation was on track to be delivered by April/May 2020. The software was being tested and more elements could be added, subject to system capability.

RESOLVED that the mission, strategic themes and vision as set in the report and in Appendix D be approved.

45/19 THE ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP (ARP) SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN (AGENDA ITEM 11)

In the absence of Paul Corney, the Head of ARP, Jo Andrews, the Strategic Manager for Revenues presented the report.

In accordance with the ARP Agreement a revised Service Delivery plan should be agreed by the Joint Committee by the end of December each year.

The last Service Delivery Plan had been agreed in December 2018 and the report provided Members with the progress/achievements that had been made since then (see section 2.1 of the report). One improvement had been on call handling and performance had increased significantly in comparison to

Action By

the previous year due to new phone technology being introduced in March 2019. Another success had been the introduction of a generic role called a Council Tax Billing Officer; a more flexible resource that could be moved from Council Tax Support cases to billing as the workload demands.

The next Service Delivery Plan would incorporate the strategic themes for all partner Councils as discussed in the previous report.

The Risk Register that had been inadvertently omitted from the Agenda and had been circulated at the start of the meeting was discussed. The one 'red' risk relating to income retained for Business Rates and Council tax was explained. It was noted that the Court Hearing for the NHS claim had been held last month and although the outcome had been successful (the NHS was not classed as a charity); Appeals from hospitals could follow.

There was some discussion on historical outstanding Appeals.

The Chairman was disappointed to note the high staff turnover and the lack of basic training. Members were informed that a shorter training programme was now in place to enable staff to become operational sooner. The high staff turnover was in respect of all the temporary posts.

RESOLVED that:

- the progress on respect of the December 2018 Service Delivery Plan be noted; and
- the revised Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register be approved.

46/19 ARP JOINT COMMITTEE PARTNERSHIP BUDGET (AGENDA ITEM 12)

Alison Chubbock, the Chief Accountant for Breckland Council presented the 2020/21 budget for the whole of the Partnership.

It was explained that each partnership Council prepared and set its own budget.

Approval was now sought from the Joint Committee Members for the ARP budgets to be incorporated into the 5 Partners' individual budgets for their own budget setting.

The budgets had been set using the same principles as previous years and included an efficiency target of £120k to be achieved from 2021-22 onwards.

Benefits payments and subsidies, court fee income and other grants specific to the individual authorities had not been included within the partnership budgets as these were the direct responsibility of the individual authorities.

The overall budget showed an increase of £450k compared to 2019-20. The reasons for this were explained at section 1.5 of the report.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith pointed out that the budget had increased overall by 4.8%. He then highlighted the increase to the budget for each Partner Council. For East Cambridgeshire this would mean an increase of 6.3% which was more than he was willing to support; however, he had been very encouraged by what he had heard.

Action By

The Chief Accountant explained that for some Councils, the increases were higher than others but this was due to how the Partnership contributions had been split. Another reason for East Cambs percentage increase had been due to the drop in its enforcement cases.

Councillor Claussen reminded Members that East Cambs budget included a zero increase to its Council Tax.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded, and following a vote, 4 in favour and 1 against, it was:

RESOLVED that the Partnership budget for 2020-21 at Appendix A of the report be approved.

47/19 JOINT COMMITTEE ARP BROCHURE (AGENDA ITEM 13)

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

It was noted that all suggestions provided at the last meeting had been incorporated into the brochure and Members were thanked for providing their photographs.

Section 5 of the report in respect of costs was highlighted and it was further noted that only 250 copies of the brochure would be printed.

The ARP brochure would be reviewed on a regular basis; there would be an on-line version in a PDF format as well as a link.

Councillor Cook was pleased with the brochure and asked for the link to be sent round to Members again.

RESOLVED that:

1. the new ARP Brochure be adopted for use by the Anglia Revenues Partnership to provide information to Members, new Joint Committee Members and new staff working as part of the ARP; and
2. the December version of the ARP Brochure be approved.

48/19 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 14)

Nothing to report.

49/19 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 15)

The arrangements for the next meeting on 24 March 2020 at 11am in Level 5 meeting room, Thetford were noted.

It was further noted that the pre-briefing for Members of the Joint Committee would commence at 10am.

The meeting closed at 12.10 pm

CHAIRMAN



Joint Committee Performance report July 2020



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All Partner Councils Combined



Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 40,382,156	£ 52,622,012	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 40,752,304	£ 53,850,381	£ 127,690,735	£ 157,670,850	●
2019/20	£ 68,526,436	£ 89,400,479	£ 201,591,204	£ 243,658,978	●
Year End Target				£157,670,850	●

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£127,454,324	£168,298,594	£0	£0	●
Target	£131,101,223	£174,174,510	£386,585,468	£454,258,929	●
2019/20	£125,766,695	£167,135,544	£370,954,312	£439,901,785	●
Year End Target				£454,258,929	●

Number of Electronic Forms Received					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	12,089	15,734	0	0	●
2019/20	9,375	12,935	28,498	36,405	●
Year End Target				36405	●

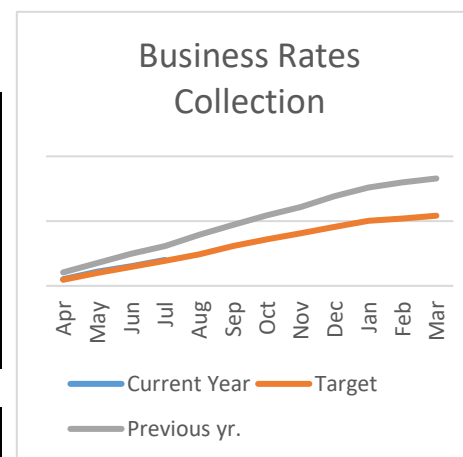
Fraud and Compliance	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	Yr Target
Single Person Discount Fraud	£529,263	£751,440	£0	£0	£500,000
Local Council Tax Support	£6,050	£19,478	£0	£0	£150,000
Tenancy Fraud	£6,480	£9,720	£0	£0	£400,000
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£113,556	£186,624	£0	£0	£250,000
Fraud Identified	£655,349	£967,262	£0	£0	£1,300,000

Performance Information July 2020

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 6,046,513	£ 7,995,602	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 5,828,246	£ 7,775,438	£ 18,214,406	£ 21,669,107	
Refunds	£ 403,258	£ 600,171	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 9,936,479	£ 12,271,820	£ 27,763,428	£ 33,171,404	●

Year End Target	£ 21,669,107	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

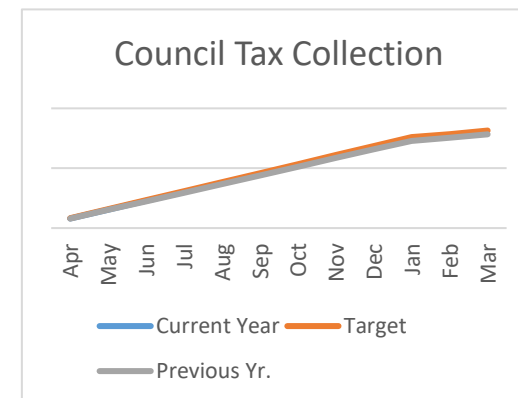
Narrative

Collection is on target for the current financial year. Targets have been amended to reflect the grants which will be received this year in respect of the rate reliefs funded by Government.

Further recovery action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £800. Enforcement action in 2021/21 has resulted in collection of £11,745.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 22,830,485	£ 30,112,686	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 23,306,834	£ 30,834,102	£ 68,527,467	£ 81,463,941	
Refunds	£ 204,527	£ 296,059	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 22,364,957	£ 29,591,068	£ 65,767,484	£ 78,299,417	●
		Year End Target	£81,463,941	●	



Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is behind target by £721,415. The Government is funding a hardship scheme which has provided up to £150 to each LCTRS recipient of working age. Targets have been adjusted to reflect these payments. Whilst Covid has affected some customers ability to pay, we haven't been able to take our normal action to recover outstanding amounts through the Magistrates Court. Also, the amount of Council Tax support awarded has increased during the first part of this financial year, reducing the amount to be collected.

Further recovery action in 20/21 has resulted in collection of £15,080. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £134,060.

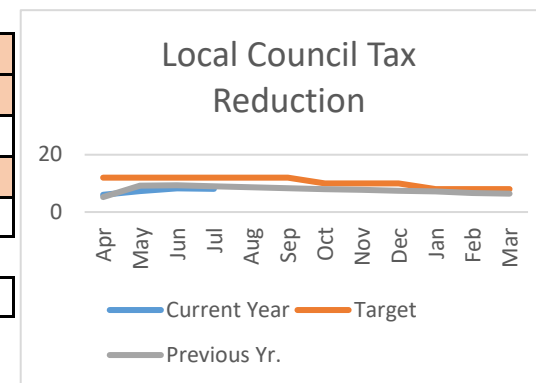
Charging Orders have been obtained to secure £368,754 debt.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support

	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	8.26	8.13	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	9.34	8.99	7.46	6.43	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

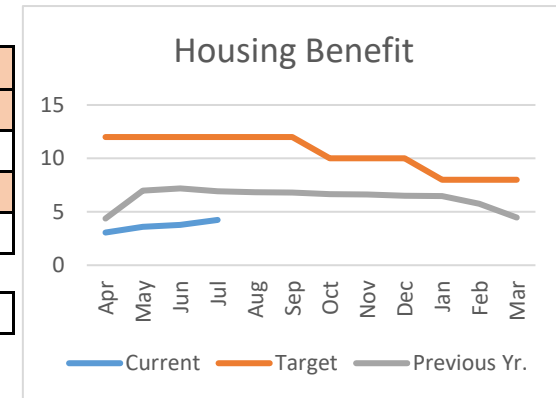
This indicator measures the average year to date number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	3.77	4.24	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	7.19	6.92	6.50	4.47	●
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

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.

Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The team are working with Housing Option Teams and also with Housing Associations to tackle Right to buy and subletting abuse where investigation agreements are in place. The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges.

The team are also forging closer working relationships with a number of service areas in an attempt prevent and detect fraud and error.

Recent involvement includes a closer working relationship with both Planning Enforcement and Economic Development.

In a broader sense the team are also working with County in setting up the Fraud Hub in Norfolk. This is an attempt to match data sets across County to increase Council Tax and Business Rate income. Funding from Norfolk county continues to support the Premium Single Person Discount Reviews.

The team are also working on a trial with NFI relating to Council Tax voids and all ARP partners are subscribing to the NFI Mortality Data set matches.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£117,886	£184,297	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£1,346	£5,246	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£53,563	£65,107	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£172,794	£254,650	£0	£0



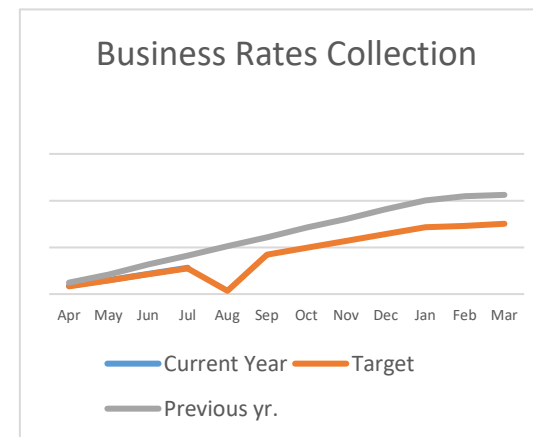
Performance Information July 2020



Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 4,321,819	£ 5,637,270	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 4,237,694	£ 5,522,854	£ 12,817,527	£ 15,047,841	
Refunds	£ 219,614	£ 301,339	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 6,372,977	£ 8,241,872	£ 18,185,963	£ 20,979,468	●

Full Year Target	£15,047,841	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is on target for the current financial year. Targets have been amended to reflect the grants which will be received this year in respect of the rate reliefs funded by Government.

There have been claims by NHS Trusts for charitable rate relief which have been subject to a High Court appeal. If successful this could result in a backdated refund of £553K. The High Court have rejected the claim that the NHS Trusts are charities, however the NHS trusts are now appealing this decision.

Further recovery action in 2020/21 has not resulted in any collection. Enforcement action in 20/21 has resulted in collection of £5,580.

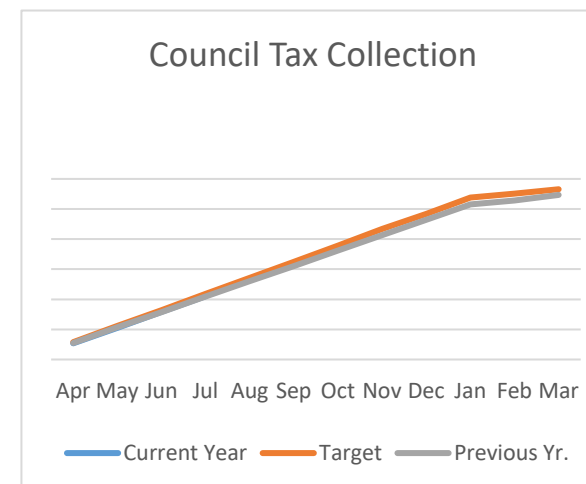


Council Tax



Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 15,859,812	£ 21,045,367	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 16,420,947	£ 21,851,229	£ 48,431,329	£ 56,565,439	
Refunds	£ 149,975	£ 227,388	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 15,730,723	£ 20,933,850	£ 46,402,469	£ 52,780,989	●

Year End Target	£ 56,565,439	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is behind target by £805,862. The Government is funding a hardship scheme which has provided up to £150 to each LCTRS recipient of working age. Targets have been adjusted to reflect these payments. Whilst Covid has affected some customers ability to pay, we haven't been able to take our normal action to recover outstanding amounts through the Magistrates Court. Also, the amount of Council Tax support awarded has increased during the first part of this financial year, reducing the amount to be collected.

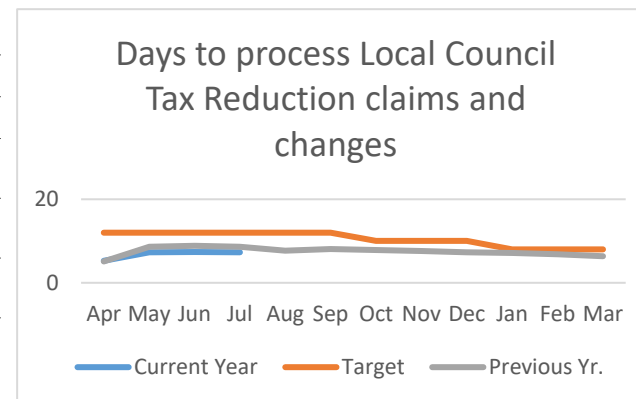
Further recovery action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £5,593. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £66,334.



Local Council Tax Reduction



Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	7.37	7.32	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	8.86	8.62	7.31	6.38	●



Year End Target	8	●
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Description

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

Narrative

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.



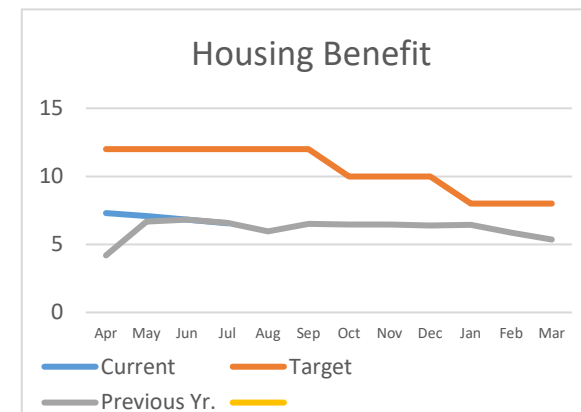
Housing Benefit



Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	6.82	6.55	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	6.82	6.58	6.38	5.36	●

19

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

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.



Fraud and Compliance



Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The review of newly awarded Single Person Discounts continues to provide positive outcomes.

The team are working with the largest Social Housing provider in the authority to tackle Right to Buy and subletting abuse.

The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges.

The team are trying to progress closer working relationships with service areas in an attempt prevent and detect fraud and error.

In a broader sense the team are also working with Cambridgeshire County in setting up the Fraud Hub in Cambridgeshire. This is an attempt to match data sets across County to increase Council Tax and Business Rate income. A business case and project team is progressing the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub.

20 The team are also to review ARP matches for all partners after subscribing to the NFI Mortality Data set matches in June 2020.

	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£27,997	£33,809	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£2,122	£2,610	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£0	£48,481	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£30,119	£84,900	£0	£0

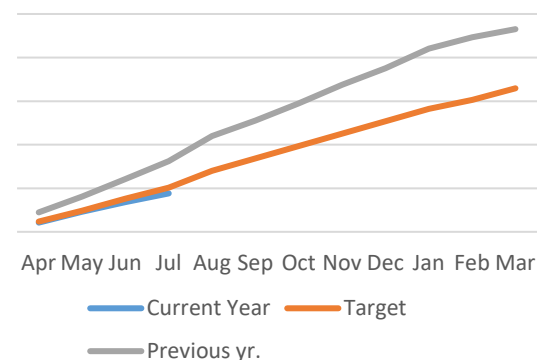
Performance Information July 2020

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 13,586,679	£ 17,630,581	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 15,170,233	£ 20,214,263	£ 50,816,322	£ 65,881,975	
Refunds	£ 613,691	£ 10,881,162	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 24,147,964	£ 32,365,017	£ 75,034,979	£ 89,323,475	●

Year End Target	65,881,975	●
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Business Rates Collection



Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

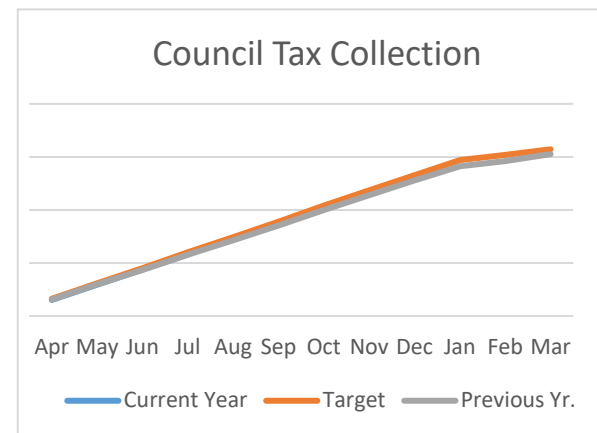
Collection is behind target by £2,583,682 for the current financial year. Collection targets have been adjusted to reflect the amount of Government funded rate relief awarded to businesses which was notified to Government in early April. However, since then new guidance has been issued increasing the number of eligible businesses and others have been identified, which has increased the amount of relief awarded. The authority will receive this funding but it may not be in this financial year. Also, one significant ratepayer is in arrears with instalments amounting to £1.8M and there have been backdated refunds of £862K made in this financial year mostly in respect of appeal against rateable values.

Further recovery action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £5,832. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £4,552.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 43,986,884	£ 57,939,652	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 45,144,195	£ 59,946,086	£ 132,855,610	£ 157,132,596	
Refunds	£ 464,206	£ 761,340	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 43,402,134	£ 57,629,165	£ 127,711,105	£ 146,086,921	●

Year End Target	157,132,596	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

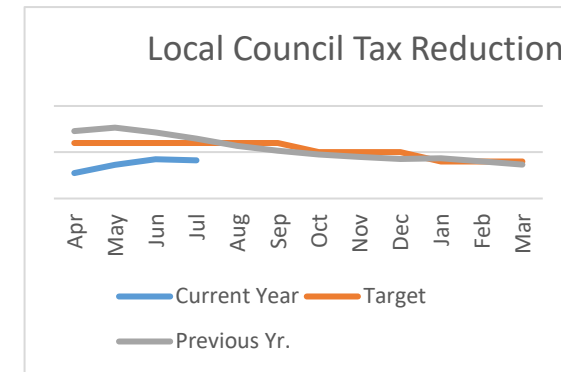
Collection is behind target by £2,006,433. The Government is funding a hardship scheme which has provided up to £150 to each LCTRS recipient of working age. Targets have been adjusted to reflect these payments. Whilst Covid has affected some customers ability to pay, we haven't been able to take our normal action to recover outstanding amounts through the Magistrates Court. Also, the amount of Council Tax support awarded has increased during the first part of this financial year, reducing the amount to be collected.

Further recovery action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £35,110. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £204,745.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	8.49	8.28	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	14.29	12.97	8.55	7.33	●

Year End Target	8	●
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23

Description

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

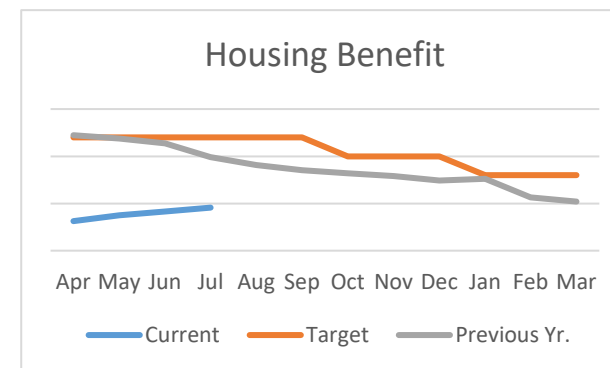
Narrative

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	4.16	4.56	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	11.36	9.91	7.42	7.33	●

Year End Target	8	●
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24

Description

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

Narrative

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.

Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The reviews of NFI SPD matches and newly awarded Single Person Discounts continue to provide very positive outcomes.

The team work closely with the East Suffolk Corporate Fraud Team and ensure the transfer of fraud referrals across the teams.

The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges.

The team are trying to progress closer working relationships with service areas in an attempt prevent and detect fraud and error. The team are also to review ARP matches for all partners after subscribing to the NFI Mortality Data set matches in June 2020.

The team have also assisted in due diligence checks of businesses applying for COVID 19 government grants.

	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£191,318	£263,047	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£254	£2,073	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£6,353	£14,060	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£197,925	£279,181	£0	£0

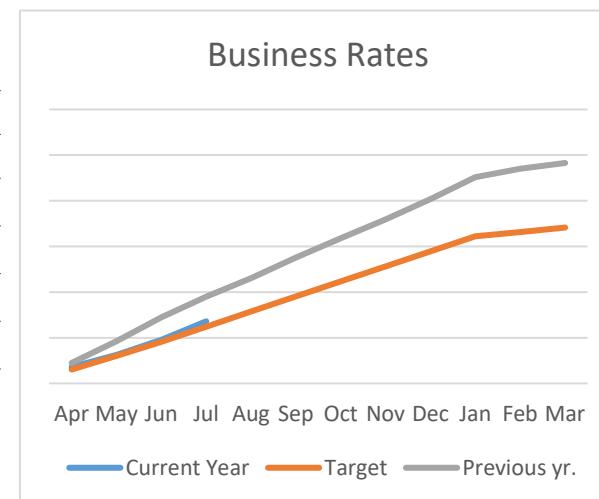
Performance Information July 2020

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 4,752,965	£ 6,799,531	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 4,554,615	£ 6,187,898	£ 14,454,996	£ 17,069,917	
Refunds	£ 380,024	£ 441,544	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 7,228,152	£ 9,483,729	£ 20,173,070	£ 23,504,251	●

26

Year End Target	£17,069,917	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is on target for the current financial year.

There have been claims by NHS Trusts for charitable rate relief which have been subject to a High Court appeal. If successful this could result in a backdated refund of £1.686M. The High Court have rejected the claim that the NHS Trusts are charities, however the NHS trusts are now appealing this decision.

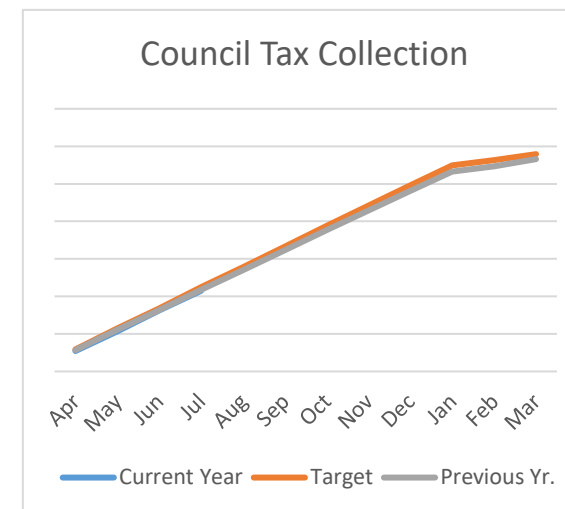
Further recovery action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £104,714. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £19,807.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 16,234,901	£ 21,477,928	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 16,835,316	£ 22,435,505	£ 49,631,461	£ 57,913,023	
Refunds	£ 137,534	£ 245,583	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 16,330,949	£ 21,766,495	£ 48,152,964	£ 54,669,805	●

27

Year End Target	£57,913,023	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is behind target by £957,577. The Government is funding a hardship scheme which has provided up to £150 to each LCTRS recipient of working age. Targets have been adjusted to reflect these payments. Whilst Covid has affected some customers ability to pay, we haven't been able to take our normal action to recover outstanding amounts through the Magistrates Court. Also, the amount of Council Tax support awarded has increased during the first part of this financial year, reducing the amount to be collected.

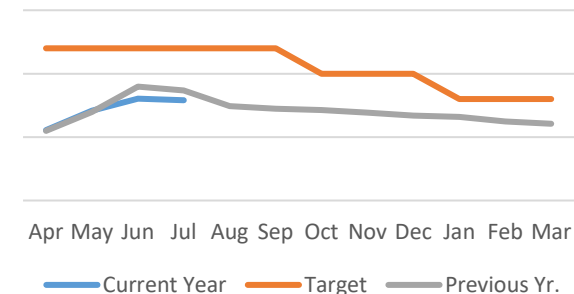
Further recovery action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £5,824. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £99,213.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	8.03	7.90	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	8.98	8.67	6.70	6.06	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Local Council Tax Support



Description

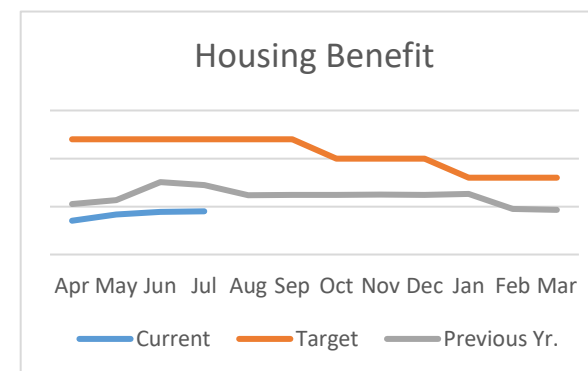
This indicator measures the average number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	4.43	4.50	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	7.54	7.24	6.20	4.65	●
Year End Target		8			●



Description

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

Narrative

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.

Fraud and Compliance

Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The review of newly awarded Single Person Discounts continues to provide positive outcomes.

The team are working closely with the Housing and Housing Option Team with positive results.

The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges.

The team are trying to progress closer working relationships with service areas in an attempt prevent and detect fraud and error.

In a broader sense the team are also working with Cambridgeshire County in setting up the Fraud Hub in Cambridgeshire. This is an attempt to match data sets across County to increase Council Tax and Business Rate income. A business case and project team is progressing the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub.

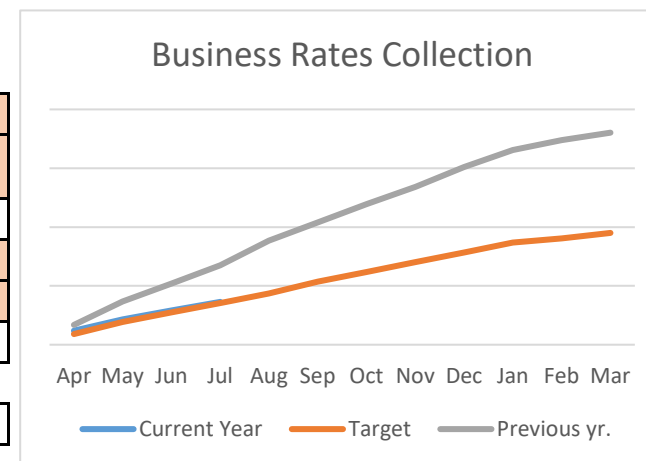
The team are also to review ARP matches for all partners after subscribing to the NFI Mortality Data set matches in June 2020.

	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£51,619	£78,529	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£0	£2,145	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£48,463	£53,797	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£100,082	£134,471	£0	£0

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 11,674,180	£ 14,559,028	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 10,961,516	£ 14,149,928	£ 31,387,484	£ 38,002,010	
Refunds	£ 887,279	£ 1,097,784	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 20,840,864	£ 27,038,041	£ 60,433,764	£ 69,587,482	●

Year End Target	38,002,010	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

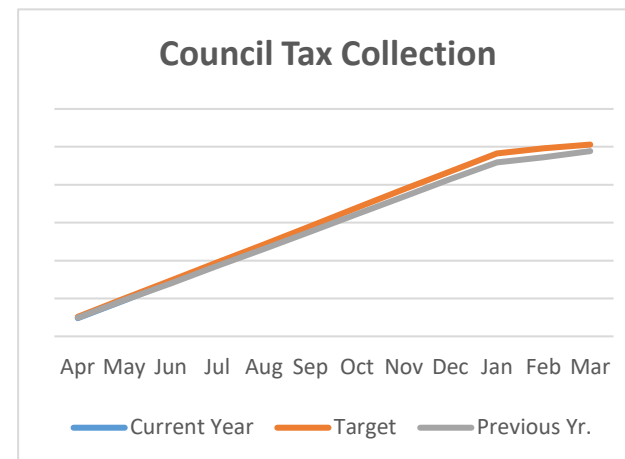
Collection is on target for the current financial year.

There have been claims by NHS Trusts for charitable rate relief which have been subject to a High Court appeal. If successful this could result in a backdated refund of £5.2M. The High Court have rejected the claim that the NHS Trusts are charities, however the NHS trusts are now appealing this decision.

Further recovery action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £5,800. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £4,733.

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	£ 28,542,242	£ 37,722,961	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 29,393,932	£ 39,107,589	£ 87,139,600	£ 101,183,930	
Refunds	£ 281,783	£ 439,937	£ -	£ -	
2019/20	£ 27,937,932	£ 37,214,966	£ 82,920,290	£ 94,467,436	●

Year End Target	101,183,930	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

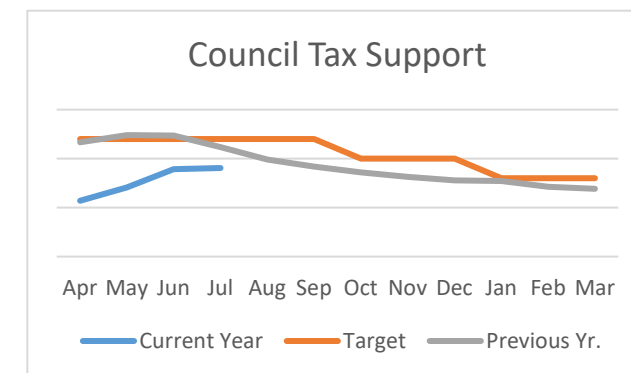
Collection is behind target by £1,384,628. The Government is funding a hardship scheme which has provided up to £150 to each LCTRS recipient of working age. Targets have been adjusted to reflect these payments. Whilst Covid has affected some customers ability to pay, we haven't been able to take our normal action to recover outstanding amounts through the Magistrates Court. Also, the amount of Council Tax support awarded has increased during the first part of this financial year, reducing the amount to be collected.

Further recovery action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £33,868. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £149,936.

Days to process Local Council Tax Support

	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	8.91	9.04	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	12.36	11.18	7.77	6.92	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

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

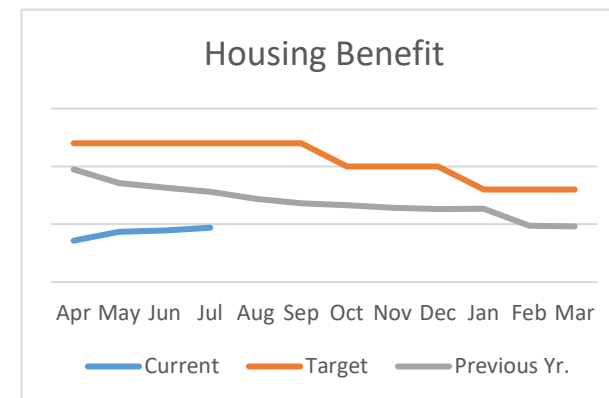
Narrative

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4	
2020/21	4.47	4.70	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2019/20	8.16	7.82	6.30	4.81	●

Year End Target	8	●
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34

Description

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

Narrative

This indicator is currently being met and is expected to achieve target at the end of the year, although an economic downturn could increase demand thereby impacting processing performance.

Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The team work closely with the Housing Option Team and also with Housing Associations to tackle Right to Buy and subletting abuse where investigation agreements are in place. The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges. The team are also forging closer working relationships with a number of service areas in an attempt prevent and detect fraud and error. A closer working relationship with Planning Enforcement, Public Health and Housing and Economic Development has had a positive effect. The team have assisted in the identification of businesses entitled to the NDR government grant scheme. The team are also to review ARP matches for all partners after subscribing to the NFI Mortality Data set matches in June 2020.

	Q1	Jul-20	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£140,444	£191,758	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£2,327	£7,405	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£6,480	£9,720	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£5,177	£5,177	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£154,428	£214,059	£0	£0

Service Updates as at July 2020



Enforcement

All Enforcement visits were suspended by The Ministry of Justice in March 2020 and re-commenced on 24 August 2020, however we are not permitted to enter properties to take control of goods. In the meantime we have continued to try and engage with customers offering long term payment arrangements and assisting customers where possible. Consequently the level of collection has reduced substantially. This year we have collected £1M compared to £1.838 at the same point last year.

Further Recovery

With effect from March 2020 all recovery actions were temporarily suspended until recently and we have now re-commenced these actions. However, income of £216K in total has been received compared to £416K at the same point last year. We have £1.78 M debt secured through Charging Orders.

Non-Domestic Rates

The team has had an increased workload over the first two months of this year due to the additional rate reliefs to be awarded and the payment of grants to businesses. This has seen extremely high levels of telephone calls and correspondence, however the team has worked hard to bring the outstanding work down to normal levels.

The revaluation planned to take place on 1 April 2021 has been postponed until 1 April 2023 with an antecedent date of 1 April 2021 (this is the date that the valuation are based on).

A bill to implement rate relief for public lavatories is currently before Parliament and it is intended to have a retrospective effect for 2020/21

The Government has issued a Call for Evidence in respect of it's commitment to carry out a fundamental review of business rates. Views are being sought on the multiplier, reliefs, transitional relief, valuations, rating Lists, the billing process and alternatives to business rates.

Council Tax

As expected Covid -19 has had an impact on collection during April and May but we expect the application of the hardship fund payments to accounts during July to significantly offset this and we will have a clearer picture of collection against target at that point. We have updated our website and phone message to provide help and support to those struggling to pay through this difficult time and are signposting customers to claim Universal Credit and Council Tax Support.

We have offered the option of a two month payment break to provide more flexibility during Covid-19. An online form has been implemented to allow customers to request a 2 month payment break, a change from 10 to 12 instalments or a change of payment date. To date we have received over 1600 completed forms and the fraud and enforcement teams have helped us process these requests in a timely manner.

We have sent 2 rounds of 'soft reminders' which have had a positive effect on collection. The reminders have signposted customers to the flexible payment form and other help available from the Council, DWP and other outside agencies and we have ensured that direct debit payments have not been collected where a hardship payment is due and the account balance is £150 or less.

The first Statutory Reminders will be issued in August for customer in arrears for 2019/20 and behind by three instalments or more for the current year.

Throughput for council tax billing is up 26% on last year overall and now that the lockdown restrictions are gradually lifting we have seen an increase in the number of moves reported to almost the same level as the same period last year. We have remained in a great position workwise with outstanding work being well below the level it was at the same point last year. This is a direct result of the project to introduce Generic Council Tax Billing Officer which provide a resilient team who have been able to switch between billing and benefits to help cope with ever changing work loads and priorities during the pandemic. Being up to date and having the tiered phone messages in place has helped us maintain a level of 47% fewer phone calls during May as compared to last year and achieve a handling rate of 99.01% in billing.

Benefits

Whilst both Council Tax Support and Benefits performance is presently achieving targets, there is a risk COVID-19 could cause an economic downturn with potentially significant increases in unemployment and claims.

We continue to see significant increases in claims since March compared to the same period last year and we expect to see a second spike when the furlough scheme ends. Throughput overall for benefits has been approximately a third up on 2019/20.

In April we changed the Local Council Tax Support schemes for all partners to include a 'tolerance rule' which is applied to monthly changes in Universal Credit which are notified to us via Universal Credit Data Share (UCDS) from DWP. The new rule allows us to ignore changes in Universal Credit of under £15.00 per week and our software provider, Capita, has worked with us to develop and implement new functionality to do this automatically.

We currently receive an average of just under 4000 UCDS records from the DWP per week and we fully automate around 53% of these. The introduction of the tolerance rule has reduced the number of Council Tax Support re-assessments resulting from DWP UCDS records by 32%, which is in line with the results of modelling undertaken during consultation. This in turn has reduced the number of Council Tax adjustment notices, and refund request and allows customers to manage their payments easier.

The Council Tax Support Hardship Fund awards were issued to every qualifying working age customer by the end of July 2020, either by a credit of up to £150 on to their Council Tax account or by arranging a refund where one is due. We are monitoring expenditure given the rise in caseload due to COVID-19 to identify risk that the fund will exhaust prior to the end of the year. Representations continue to be made to HMCLG that the fund will not support awards to every customer.

ARP Website and Online Self Service

April 2020 has seen an increase in website activity on the ARP website by 60% when compared with April 2019 due to the effect of the Covid Pandemic resulting in all the ARP offices being closed for face to face visits.

The ARP Strategic Support Manager has been working with Capita, the main software provider for Revenues and Benefits in establishing a design team to develop the Self Serve Portal that is easy to use and satisfies the requirements expected of a modern self-service option. Although at its early stage, there have been discussions between the ARP Management to Senior Managers at Capita offering a more collaborative approach in development of their products, making them relevant to the Revenues and Benefits Strategic Business needs.

As a result of the Digital Design Meetings, Capita have issued a new release, which has included some of the recommendations from the customer group and have also established a listing of requested improvements for the customer base to decide which suggestions should received the highest priority based on business needs.

Fraud and Compliance

In line with Government advice and guidance, property and business Visits were temporarily suspended and Fraud and Compliance staff, where possible, were redeployed into other areas of the ARP business that were receiving a significant increase of incoming work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the usual increase as a result of the Annual Billing project.

A full Risk Assessment has been agreed across the partnership and Visits have successfully resumed, with social distancing restrictions in place and supplies of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment provided to all Visiting Officers.

Norfolk County Council have committed to continue providing funding until March 2022 and Suffolk County Council until March 2021, at which point a further review will take place. Norfolk County Council have additionally funded a Premium review of Single Person Discounts for both Breckland District Council and Norwich City Council for 2020/2021 with matches against a number of additional data sets held within the National Fraud Initiative (NFI). The results from the 2019/2020 Breckland Council Premium matches exceeded expectations.

Whilst there is currently limited work on Fenland and East Cambridgeshire cases, newly awarded Single Person Discounts continue to be reviewed by the Compliance Team with positive outcomes.

There is continued success for the ARP Fraud and Compliance team who continue to work closely with local DWP Fraud Teams in the joint working initiative. Ongoing relationship building continues with the teams across the partnership.

During the pandemic it is not possible to interview customers under caution on a face to face basis. Advice has been taken from the Law Society and the Crown Prosecution Service in relation to alternative methods of interviewing under caution. With assistance from the solicitor used for ARP Fraud prosecutions it has been agreed that customers will be interviewed by letter and a process and procedure has been set up to enable this.

With the ARP Management arrangement with Norwich City Council it continues to allow us to employ an additional resource fully funded by Norwich City Council and Norfolk County Council, to undertake Single Person Discount Reviews and Council Tax Support investigations for Norwich City Council.

Having undertaken additional Single Person Discount reviews for Norwich City Council with the Premium service for 2020/2021 Norfolk County Council have funded an additional resource. A recruitment process has now been completed and the additional resource is now in post and has been trained entirely by way of virtual solutions.

Breckland Council and Norwich City Council are also part of the Norfolk Fraud Hub. As previously mentioned, the Fraud Hub is fully funded by Norfolk County Council and is now matching additional data sets from all authorities to identify Fraud and Error across the county. The Fraud Team to continue to work alongside Norfolk County on this project and are also in the process of reviewing results.

The Fraud Team are also progressing relationships with social housing providers across the partnership looking at opportunities to investigate housing fraud. Paid investigations for two social housing providers have either been concluded or are currently being investigated. This has resulted in the successful recovery of a property as part of a paid for investigation and we are currently awaiting the court result in relation to the criminal case.

Better Customer Journeys Programme

While several projects have taken a 'back seat' due to Covid-19 contingency response, many have actually been catalysed by the crisis. The updates above on Council Tax and Benefits talk in more detail about the outcomes, all of which directly support families, communities and businesses by supporting uplifts in capacity and speed of response.

Through the Better Customer Journeys Programme, ARP is identifying how to build on the major increases in ARP website visits and Self-Service usage. 28 August is the first meeting of ARP's customer strategy team since February, when the partners' customer service heads will begin to map out how best ARP can support customer service teams' new, emerging operating models. From this will come a gap analysis, and a set of plans for closing that gap. For example, we will discuss how best to capitalise on increased online activity and interest and make sure our communications with customers are pointing that way (allowing more opportunity to support traditional channels for people who need them).

Since April, we've met every week with Capita One's Digital product and helpdesk teams. These sessions work alongside the design workshops touched on last quarter to keep the pressure on Capita and ensure the partnership can deliver on its self-service aspirations.

In a separate but related strand, ARP is developing its change delivery and project management capabilities, which apply to Better Customer Journeys projects, the Performance Framework Programme, further automation, and other standalone projects. Most of the management team have now been through project management training, and we're increasing our use of our new Change Delivery Framework.

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Maxine O'Mahony, Executive Director Strategy & Governance

To: ARP Joint committee, 15 September 2020

Author: Alison Chubbock, Chief Accountant

Subject: ARP Forecast Financial Performance

Purpose: To provide information on the forecast full year financial position against budget for the ARP

Recommendation(s):

- 1) That the report and appendix be noted

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Each of the partner Councils provides forecast full year financial information against budget for the ARP. The information is collated to provide an overall financial performance report, to provide information to Joint Committee on the progress against budget. This report is based on information as at 31 July 2020 and all costs are included and shared based on the Partnership agreement.
- 1.2 The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on the ability for ARP to generate income from the enforcement service. The forecast presented in this report assumes that the level of enforcement work remains minimal until the end of August, rising slightly in September and October and back to budgeted expectations for November onwards and this is dependent on the courts reopening..

The forecast at this stage of the year shows an over spend against budget of £690k for the whole of the ARP and this is detailed further in Appendix A along with details of the variances.

- 1.3 Appendix A also provides details on the remaining transformation funding which was set aside in previous years from below budget spend and grant funding. £66k is earmarked for projects in progress this year and there is a further £93k available for future transformation projects.

The appendix also provides detail on the values held and earmarked in the ICT reserve, which was introduced to smooth the financial effects of major ICT spend.

- 1.4 Based on the current forecast variance the cost share at the end of the year for each partner would be:

Breckland	£111k
East Cambs	£52k
East Suffolk	£275k
Fenland	£110k
West Suffolk	£142k
TOTAL	£690k

The variation in cost share reflects that the main overspend is from lost enforcement income and the percentage shares for this area are based on the enforcement case loads as per the ARP agreement.

- 1.5 All authorities have directly received new burdens funding from Government to cover the additional costs of administering the Covid-19 grant scheme for small businesses and retail hospitality & leisure. Due to vacancy levels within ARP there is no forecast requirement to use any of these grants to offset additional staff costs within the partnership. These grants are retained directly by each authority and will help to offset the overspend within ARP.

In addition, Government are providing grants to individual local authorities to offset the losses from sales fees and charges income. Early indications show that authorities are expected to absorb the initial 5% of lost income against budget and after that the grant will provide 75p in every £ of lost income. We are awaiting the final guidance to be released to see whether the ARP Enforcement income can be included in the grant claim and will update Joint Committee in the next financial report.

2.0 **OPTIONS**

- 2.1 That the report and appendices are noted.

3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 To provide Members information on the financial position against budget for the whole of the ARP.

4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

- 4.1 To provide Members information on the financial position against budget for the whole of the ARP.

5.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Transformation Programme; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

5.2 **Financial**

- 5.2.1 This report is financial in nature and financial information is included within the report and appendices.

5.2 **Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales**

- 5.12.1 Accountants at the partner Councils have been consulted on their financial forecasts.

6.0 **WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

- 6.1 N/A

7.0 **ACRONYMS**

- 7.1 ARP – Anglia Revenues Partnership
- 7.2 JC – Joint Committee

Background papers:- [See The Committee Report Guide for guidance on how to complete this section](#)

Lead Contact Officer

Name and Post: Alison Chubbock, Chief Accountant
Telephone Number: 01362 656865
Email: alison.chubbock@breckland.gov.uk

Key Decision: No

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Mandatory & Discretionary Services

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Financial performance report

Anglia Revenues Partnership Joint Committee

Forecast Full Year Financial Performance as at 31st July 2020

Description	Approved Budget 2020/21 £	Forecast Actuals 2020/21 £	Forecast Variance Over/(Under) £	Variance %	Notes
Employee Related Costs	9,501,073	9,499,885	(1,188)	(0.01)	
Premises Related Costs	285,440	275,056	(10,384)	(3.64)	
Transport Related Costs	149,856	106,949	(42,907)	(28.63)	1
Supplies & Services	1,801,444	1,855,933	54,489	3.02	2
Support Services	555,000	554,550	(450)	(0.08)	
Income	(2,490,695)	(1,800,050)	690,645	(27.73)	3
TOTAL PARTNERSHIP COSTS	9,802,118	10,492,323	690,205	7.04	4

Variance Notes

1. The under spend is due to meetings being carried out by microsoft teams, suspension of visiting officers work and officers working from home
2. The overspend is due to additional costs for software incurred for the award of business grants due to Covid.
3. The shortfall in income is due to less Enforcement work carried out over the 4 month period due to the current situation. The forecasted outturn assumes that the level of work is the same for the next month, rising slightly in September and October with back to budgeted expectations for November, December and Q4, however this is dependent on the Courts reopening.
4. Each council has received grants from government to cover extra burden placed on the business rate team to award business grants due to Covid. These grants will be retained by each council and will not therefore show against the ARP over spend. Each council may also be able to claim a Government grant for a percentage of lost income relating to Enforcement, we are currently awaiting final Government guidance to be released to see if claims can be made.

Transformation funding - committed expenditure as follows:

Description	Approved Budget 2020/21 £	Forecast Actuals 2021/22 £	Forecast Actuals 2022/23 £
Already committed from grant funding received last year			
Mitel Join Up	35,000	0	0
HR Business support	15,409	0	0
Fines officer	16,000	0	0
Total	66,409	0	0
Unallocated	93,100	0	0
Grand Total	159,509	0	0

The committed transformation funding is £66,409. It is expected that the budget will be spent by the end of the year. If all of the identified expenditure goes through in 2020/21 there will be £93,100 remaining for future projects, however, it is likely that this will be spent on projects this year.

ICT Reserve	Approved Budget 2020/21 £	Approved Budget 2021/22 £	Approved Budget 2022/23 £
Opening Balance	88,700	22,701	22,701
Partnership contribution	72,500	72,500	72,500
Earmarked - ICT refresh replacement servers software element and kit for working from home	(138,499)	(72,500)	(72,500)
	22,701	22,701	22,701

ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

Report of Stuart Philpot – ARP Strategic Manager (Support)

To: ARP Joint Committee – September 2020

Subject: ARP Business Continuity

Purpose: Inform Members of the impact COVID-19 has had on the provision of ARP Services

Recommendation(s):

- This report is for information to Members regarding the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic and the significant actions required directly from Central Government.
- This report is also for information regarding the impact on Business Operations and the Business Continuity response of the Anglia Revenues Partnership.

1.0 Timeline and Summary of impact on ARP business continuity

1.1 Working from Home

1.11 On the 3rd December 2019 the ARP, assisted by the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit, carried out a desktop exercise, with the scenario of the sudden loss of Breckland House. The exercise included representatives from all key stakeholders of the ARP and provided valuable information for the live Business Continuity actions carried out in March, affecting all sites.

1.12 One strength identified was the number of people already home enabled and an action was to gradually move all staff to laptops to facilitate full provision for working from home for all sites over time. This action had to be accelerated due to Covid as follows:

- 10th March 2020 – The first action was taken by the ARP in advance of the Pandemic and with West Suffolk ICT, accelerated the planned procurement of additional laptops to primarily enable homeworking for vulnerable staff.
- As at 10th March there were approximately 130 staff (around 40%) across all sites with homeworking capability
- 12th March 2020 - Action Plan was drawn up, including an overview and responsibilities, with declaration of a Pandemic. At this point, the ARP invoked their Business continuity plan.
- 16th March 2020, the Lockdown began and of the 296 staff across the four partner employers, those with either underlying health conditions or childcare responsibilities were prioritised for homeworking kit.
- 23rd March 2020 the stay at home guidance was issued by Central Government and work from home if possible. At the same time West Suffolk ICT continued with the build of laptops for ARP staff and office kit repurposed for home working.
- From 23rd March a planned technical refresh across the partnership was accelerated to migrate all staff to homeworking. Due to the sudden unprecedented demand for Homeworking kits, West Suffolk ICT repurposed much of the existing hardware from Breckland House in order to enable all staff to work from home.
- The ARP Senior Management Team formally extend thanks for the commitment of West Suffolk ICT in the refresh task over just five weeks, completed by 29th April
- West Suffolk ICT, East Suffolk ICT and Fenland ICT have successfully enabled the operations of the ARP to continue during the transition to homeworking.

1.2 Communications

- 1.21** A communication group using the social media platform “Whats-App” was set up as a result of the Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery exercise. Using personal mobile Telephones for Senior Management Team, Operations Managers and HR for internal communications.
- 1.22** Home working including telephony was also supplied by East Suffolk ICT and Fenland ICT, providing base units and some laptops. The Support team lead the co-ordination of the Covid-19 emergency plan and actions for ARP Business Continuity.
- 1.23** The use of Microsoft Teams and Skype enabling virtual meetings for two or more, has not only had a positive impact with a reduction of travelling required by staff, but also to an extent, overcomes the negative effects of feeling isolated when working from home and has also enabled the continuation of regular 1-1's with line managers.
- 1.24** An ARP Staff Support chat group has been created on Facebook to help staff feel connected.
- 1.25** Business continuity preparations were communicated through regular updates and latest guidance available to staff from their own employers' intranets and through meetings and 1-1s held by team leaders and managers.
- 1.26** The Operational Improvement Board have held weekly virtual meetings to review weekly performance data and to discuss strategy/approach to the challenges we have been facing. The ARP Management Team have also held weekly virtual meetings to discuss allocation of resource and performance.

1.3 Continuation of essential services

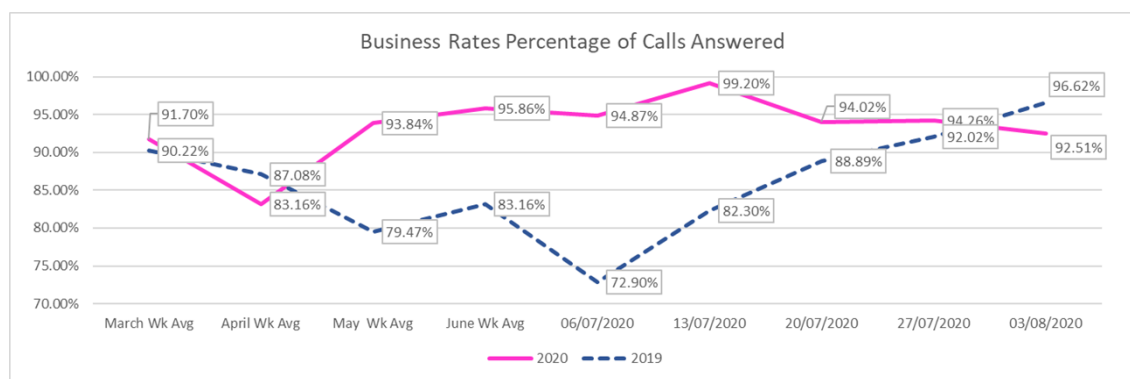
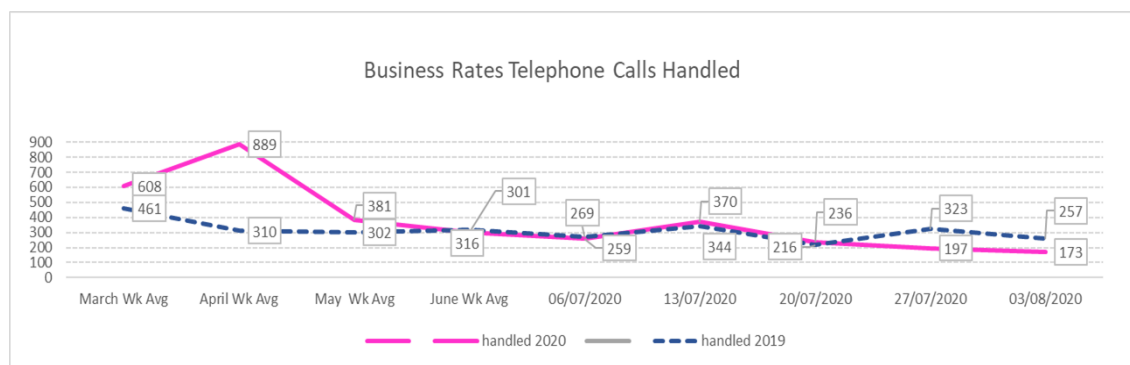
- 1.31** The post room at Breckland House operates for all partners, receiving all ARP post and document submissions centrally to Breckland House. The post opening procedures were immediately revised in line with government guidelines and included a reduction to two members of staff opening the post 2 days after delivery with gloves and hand sanitising available to staff.
- 1.32** Due to the sudden requirement to work from home Mitel phones had to be reconfigured for home workers. Again, the fact we already had a significant number working from home before the emergency put us in a strong position in the short term.
- 1.33** We have implemented a project to recruit and train new staff virtually, given social distancing restrictions. We interviewed candidates virtually using video and have put together a package of online training to enable us to deliver virtual training. We trialled this approach with existing staff, receiving positive feedback. We plan to utilise virtual training for our programme of staff refresher and new legislation training.
- 1.34** The following information relating to the delivery of the ARP services demonstrates the effectiveness of the reaction to the emergency allowing the continuation of services during the response to Covid.

2.0 Business Rates

- 2.1** 2020/21 has so far seen an unprecedented increase in workload and calls. There has been an effective response from the ARP and all partners in paying grants whilst maintaining business as usual at the same time
- 2.2** At the budget in March, Government announced that it was going to expand the existing Retail Relief scheme by removing the Rateable Value limit for relief, increasing relief to 100% and including business involved in leisure and hospitality. This is to be fully funded by the Government.

- 2.3** Later the Government announced that 100% rate relief would be provided to childcare nurseries.
- 2.4** Relief has been granted to 5,444 businesses amounting to over £100M
- 2.5** Government also announced that certain businesses would be entitled to grants. Funding was provided by Government to each authority to make these payments: -
- Businesses in receipt of Retail, Hospitality & Leisure (RHL) relief would be entitled to a grant of up to £25K, dependant of rateable value. Businesses whose rateable value was above £51K were not entitled to the grant.
 - Those businesses entitled to Small Business Rates Relief were also awarded grants of £10K
 - Charities who would have been entitled to RHL grant had they not received charitable relief were added later.
- 2.6** All the above measures required a significant amount of resource to achieve. Accounts were reviewed for entitlement to relief and lists prepared of those entitled to grants. The Government issued updated guidance frequently which then had to be reflected in the accounts and qualifying grants lists.
- 2.7** The NNDR team worked closely with all partners to facilitate payment of the grants, dealing with numerous queries as they arose. The team received over 1700 queries for resolution over and above the incoming work described further on in this report.
- 2.8** The Government announced a discretionary grants scheme in May. Following guidance issued on 13 May, a new set of qualifying properties had to be identified and passed to each partner to help inform their schemes.
- 2.9** As a result of the new reliefs and grants for business rates payers there was significant increase to the number of phone calls and correspondence to The Business Rates team. At its peak up by 300% at the same point last year as demonstrated below: -

Increase in phone calls is across all partners



2.10 Currently Magistrate Court Hearings for Liability Order applications are suspended which will impact on collection and recovery of business rates this financial year. Accounts have been reviewed and a series of statutory reminders and soft reminders have been sent for outstanding instalments. We will continue to issue reminder and final notices, however any further recovery action for the current year debt will be dependent on the Magistrates Court re-opening for our cases. Meetings were held with The Court in late July but no further update has been received since

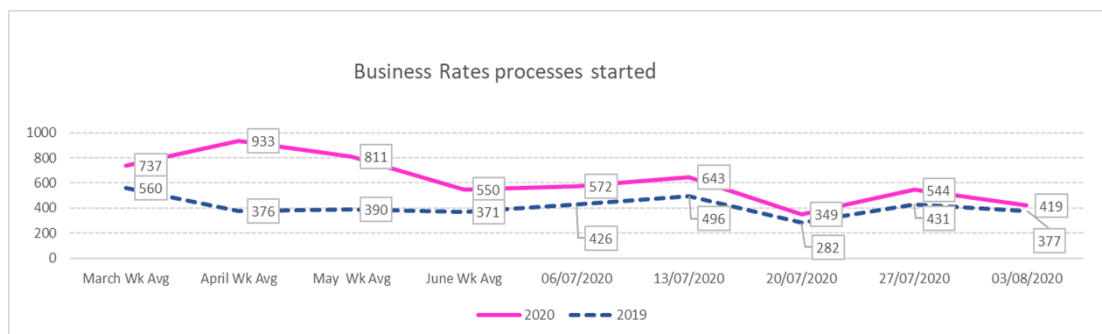
2.11 There have also been many other demands on our resource since March in order to communicate with and update customers, Government and the partner authorities. These include: -

- Updates to website
- Updates to recorded messages on the telephones (RAD messages)
- Amendments to templates which mention recovery action/costs
- Additional web forms published to allow ratepayers to request payment arrangements
- Provision of statistical data for comparison & monitoring of progress
- Regular review meetings with partner authorities for Grant application queries
- Daily monitoring of info from the Government
- Government returns

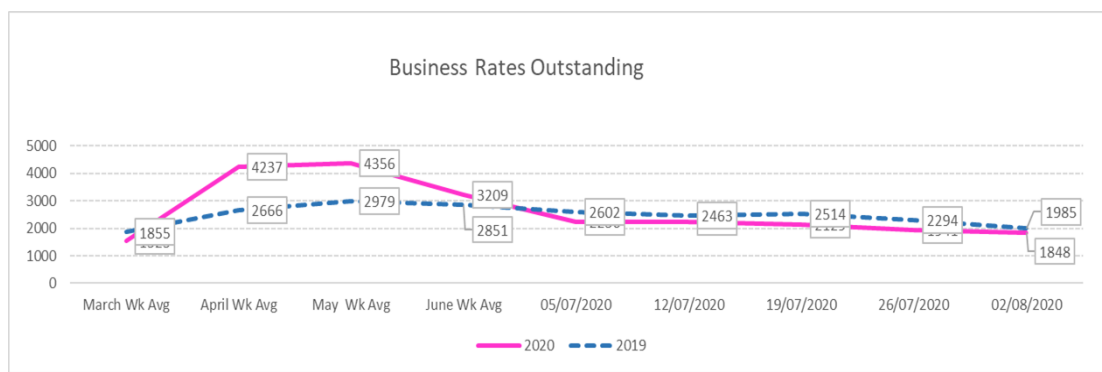
2.12 In order to address the additional pressure on our resources we have taken on additional agency staff and re-deployed staff from other teams to support the Business Rates team.

Increase in Business Rates post and the effect on processes.

Business Rates work received



Business Rates work outstanding



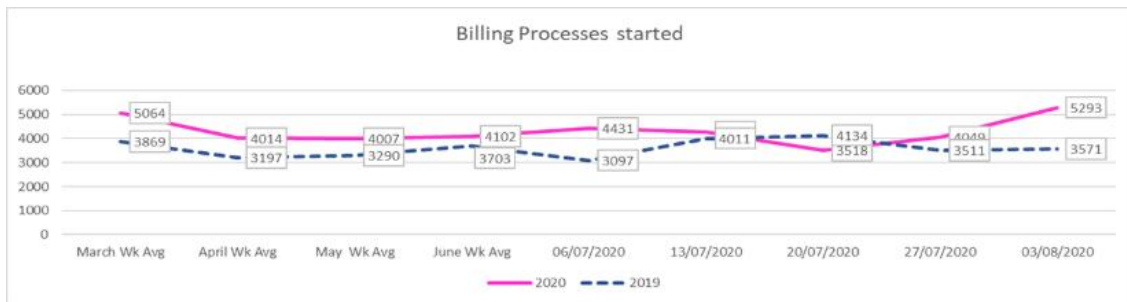
3.0 Council Tax Billing and Benefits

3.1 Increased demand

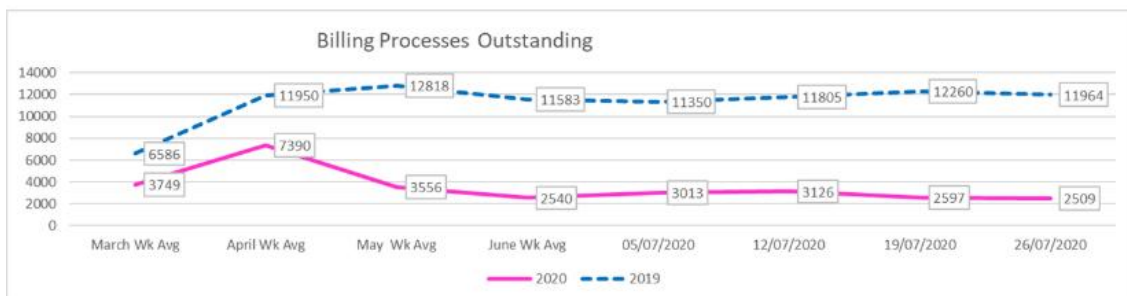
3.2 Whilst we have seen an increase in demand related to COVID-19, since March we have processed and cleared a greater volume of work, with less outstanding, when compared to last year.

3.3 The following graphs show reductions in outstanding work when compared to last year. This is a direct result of the project we delivered last year where we introduced a new generic role to improve Council Tax Billing work, along with improved telephone call routing and handling.

Council Tax Billing Processes Started – work received



Council Tax Billing Processes Outstanding



Benefits processes Started – work received

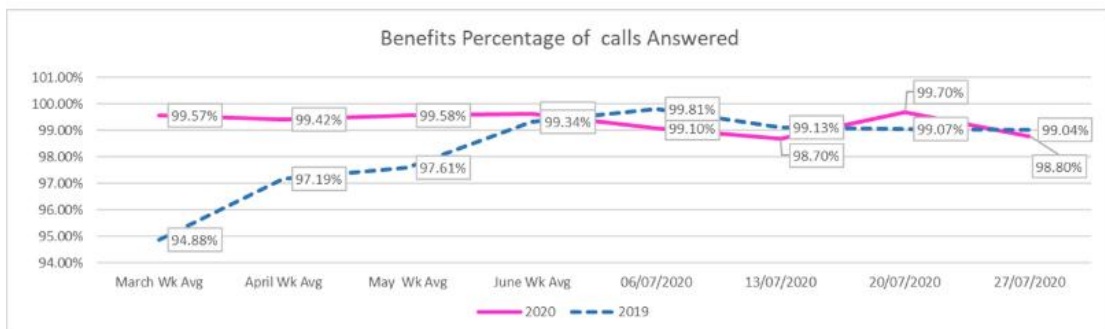
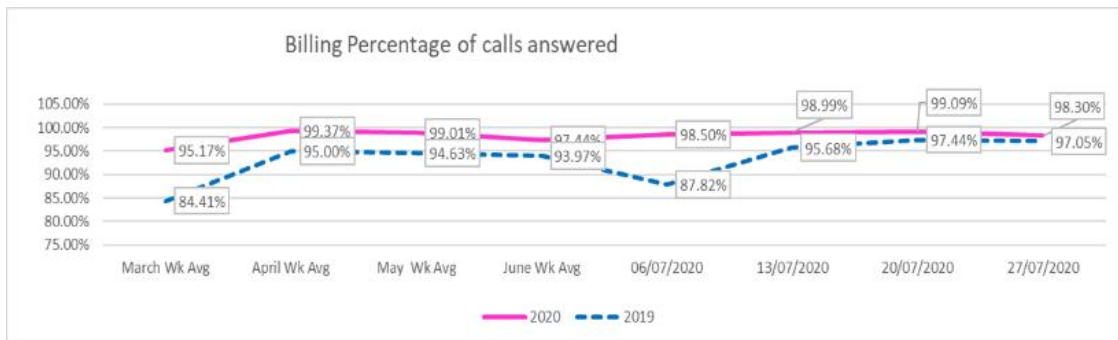


Benefit Processes Outstanding



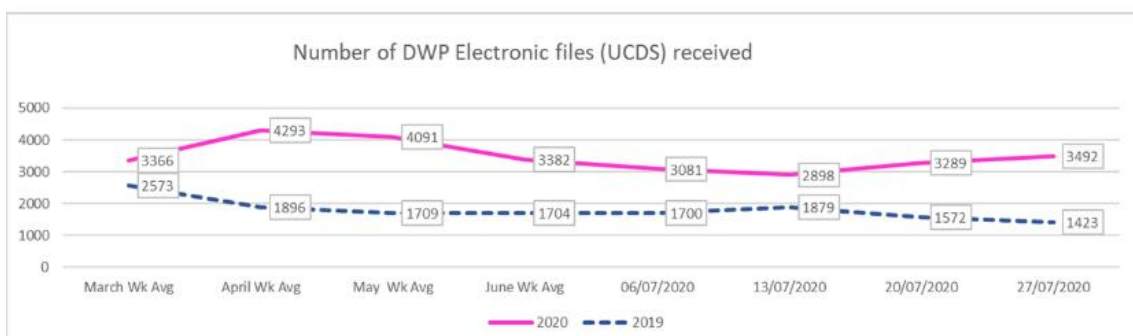
- 3.4** Without these improvements and given the increased demand caused by COVID-19, it is likely the overall picture would not be as strong for customers. Our agile approach along with performance management has been key to the improvements customers are seeing.
- 3.5** The improvement in work clearance and outstanding work has significantly reduced the volume of telephone calls we received this year when compared to last year, despite the increase in demand caused by COVID-19 and associated contact. The following graphs show reduced contact this year, assisted by improved call messaging and call routing along with shift to self-serve.

Improved call handling



4.0 Increases in Universal Credit claims

- 4.1** When the lockdown was implemented, we immediately saw an increase in new Universal Credit claims and monthly award revisions, peaking at a five-fold increase in new claims in mid-April compared to the same time last year. This has since settled to approximately double the volume we received last year.
- 4.2** Due to previous changes we had introduced to our Local Council Tax Support schemes, the impact on customers has been significantly reduced given we do not require customers to complete a separate application form to claim Support. Instead, we take DWP data to trigger a claim for Council Tax Support. It should be noted that most Councils still insist on an additional claim form, thereby placing unnecessary further burden on customers at these difficult times.



- 4.4 The impact of the increased UC change notifications has significantly reduced following the implementation of our project to automate these changes. We are presently automating approximately 55% and continue to work with our software supplier and the DWP to configure further functionality to increase automation opportunities.
- 4.5 The further changes we introduced to this year's Local Council Tax Support scheme are working well, essentially the introduction of a tolerance rule to these fluctuating earnings. This results in reduced customer notifications and reduced requirement for us to frequently revise their instalment payments, thereby helping with their budgeting.
- 4.6 We are aware other Councils throughout the region followed our initiative and have likewise introduced a tolerance rule or are considering doing so for next year's scheme.

5.0 Impact of DWP welfare reforms

- 5.1 As part of measures to help Benefit customers, in March DWP introduced legislation to increase Working Tax Credit earnings disregards and to increase the Local Housing Allowance ceiling for assessing Housing Benefit (increase to the 30th percentile of average market rents).
- 5.2 This required our software suppliers to design and implement new functionality, in turn requiring extensive testing by our staff, resulting in significant increases in the volumes of DWP data we received. These data notifications required reassessment of several thousand cases. Due to delivery of our project to automate DWP data we were able to automate the majority of these records, thereby reducing the impact on customers and service delivery through reducing the otherwise inevitable delays caused by manual reassessment.
- 5.3 We are aware many Councils struggled to cope with manual reassessment as they had not implemented automation of these records – in May the Welfare Minister wrote to Chief Executives highlighting that some Councils were either late assessing increased Benefit or were yet to do so, meaning customers were missing out. All five ARP Councils had timeously implemented the change so were able to report the work had been completed on time.
- 5.4 We have worked with Customer Service teams to redesign evidence gathering requirements to support claims following the closure of public access facilities, given customers cannot hand deliver documentation, including greater use of online evidence and proactive customer telephone engagement.
- 5.5 We are engaging with DWP regarding relaxing evidence gathering rules and for subsidy easements to assist customers and Councils during these challenging times.

6.0 Council Tax Collection

- 6.1 Collection to the end of July is behind target by just under £6 million against the budgeted position. Targets have been adjusted to reflect the awards of Council Tax Support hardship fund grants, whilst the anticipated increase in claims and expenditure is forecast to further increase the deficit. For more detailed information please refer to the performance report.
- 6.2 Forecasting the economic impact of COVID-19 in terms of increased claims and expenditure is difficult – DWP do not supply any intelligence concerning future forecasting.
- 6.3 On 24th March Government announced a £500m fund to assist Council Tax Support customers economically impacted by COVID-19, with the policy intention to award a credit up to £150 to all existing and new customers receiving support during this financial year.

- 6.4** ARP participated in HMCLG meetings to design the scope of the policy and to work through guidelines for Councils. Discussions also took place with our software supplier to design the system functionality to award the grant.
- 6.5** Modelling was undertaken to forecast options to spend the grant and to estimate the level of demand the grant could meet for each Council. Our estimates established limited capacity to cover the potential full extent of significant increases in unemployment caused by COVID-19 economic downturn.
- 6.6** We have shared our modelling forecasts with HMCLG and LGA to build a case to Treasury to commit to fully funding an award to every Council Tax Support recipient this year, given the caseload data HMCLG used as at October 2019 does not take into account increases in caseload attributed to COVID-19 economic impacts. At time of writing a response has not been forthcoming.
- 6.7** During testing and implementing the software solution ARP System Admin identified critical errors with the software and software companies underestimated the development time required. The software eventually became available on 14th July and following testing we were able to credit accounts and write to every customer by the end of July.
- 6.8** In anticipation of the delay and to help customers during these difficult times we suppressed the collection of Direct Debits for Council Tax Support customers and will continue to do so until the grant is credited to customer accounts.
- 6.9** A letter had been sent to all Council Tax Support customers informing them of the delay and the range of help available including payment holidays and reprofiled payment arrangements.

Apr-20		May-20	
Total Direct Debit Suppressions	Total	Total Direct Debit Suppressions	Total
Breckland	1073	Breckland	1099
East Cambs	191	East Cambs	214
East Suffolk	1085	East Suffolk	1104
Fenland	235	Fenland	258
West Suffolk	602	West Suffolk	607
All Partners	3186	All Partners	3282

- 6.10** We issued statutory reminders in August to those who are 3 instalments in arrears and to those with arrears from last year. We have issued two gentle reminders to everyone failing to pay an instalment in April and May and so this step will be necessary to effect engagement from any customers who have not responded at this time.
- 6.11** The table below shows the number of reminders to be issued which is far less than the number of reminders issued in April 2019. When we issue reminders to those behind by 1 instalment or more, we expect far higher numbers.

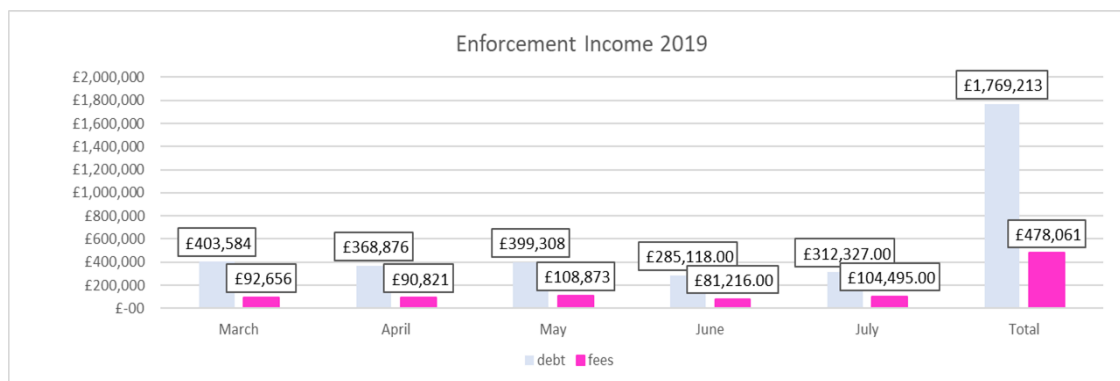
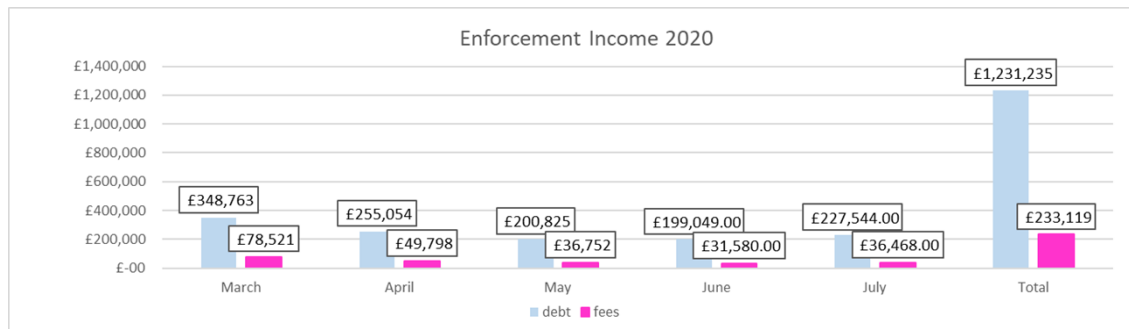
Reminder Parameters		Breckland	East Cambs	East Suffolk	Fenland	West Suffolk
Rem 1, 2 & 3, All Non DD paymethods, Including CTS cases, upto and inc 2019, all arrears						
Value		£201,677.40	£173,463.52	£317,237.52	£194,057.96	£304,490.66
Reminders		930	542	1740	959	1416
Rem 1, All Non DD paymethods, Including CTS cases, Year 2020, 3 instalments						
Value		£1,140,310.75	£640,799.62	£1,965,726.38	£1,005,903.23	£1,509,972.27
Reminders		1936	1086	3503	1752	2504
Number of 1st reminders sent in April 2019 - 1 instalment in arrears						
		3892	2276	8906	4173	5532

- 6.12** We will continue to monitor Hardship grant expenditure to identify if the fund will exhaust prior to the 31st March 2021. There is a risk increased unemployment leading to caseload growth will put pressure on the fund. We are preparing options for individual Section 151 officers to consider. As mentioned above, representations are being made to HMCLG that the caseload numbers based on October 2019 data has been and will continue to be overtaken by the economic impact of the pandemic.

7.0 Enforcement Income

7.1 From March we had to cease all Enforcement visits, however we continued to try and engage with customers offering long term arrangements and assisting customers where possible over the phone.

7.2 Government allowed visits to re-start from 24 August 2020 and in preparation for this letters were sent to all customers who were due to be visited with a view to negotiating a payment arrangement with them, However the collection of debt and the fee income generated has been substantially affected as illustrated below and this is likely to continue until Magistrates Court Hearings re-commence.



7.3 As well as not carrying out visits the work coming into the team has reduced as shown below. However, we have been able to use the additional resource that has been created to: -

- Deliver home working kits to staff
- Deliver Care packages to residents
- Assist with the payment of grants by visiting premises to encourage applications
- Staff re-deployed to assist other teams
- Outbound calling to debtors

7.4 Incoming Letters/Emails have also decreased across the Enforcement Team. This is due to two main factors.

- Outbound Letters were temporarily halted for our two external authorities who requested all work to be put on hold during COVID 19.
- Texts to customers have also stopped which also generated mail and calls as above

8.0 Council Tax & HB Overpayment Recovery

8.1 At the end of March The Magistrates Court suspended Liability Order Hearings which will have a significant effect on the recovery of Council Tax. Whilst we can issue

reminders, we cannot then enforcement payment without a Liability Order from The Court.

- 8.2 Also new enforcement actions on existing Liability Orders and outstanding HB invoices were suspended due to the current situation which also means we were not able to progress any new further recovery actions such as charging orders. These actions have now re-commenced.
- 8.3 This has resulted in a reduction in incoming phone calls and correspondence: -
- 8.4 We have continued to work on system reports e.g. cash allocation and have taken the opportunity to undertake some housekeeping and tracing activities which will assist us when business has returned to normal.
- 8.5 We have also been able to use the spare capacity within the recovery teams to support other teams who have seen an increase in work, for example Business Rates.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Risk

The report is for information only

9.2 Financial

The report is for information only

9.3 Legal

The report is for information only

9.4 Equality and Diversity

Not applicable.

Background Papers

Appendix A -

Appendix B –

Lead Contact Officer

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ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

Report of Adrian Mills – ARP Strategic Manager (Billing & Benefits)

To: ARP Joint Committee, 15th September 2020

Subject: Welfare Reform

Purpose: To provide an update on welfare reform

Recommendation(s):

- That the report is noted, updates highlighted.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1** Welfare Reform was introduced by Government in 2012 as part of wider fiscal measures to reduce deficits, with the intention to encourage work whilst reducing welfare expenditure. This report contains the latest updates on welfare reform and builds on previous reports to Joint Committee.

2.0 Matters of interest

2.1 Universal Credit – situation to date

2.1.1 Universal Support

- 2.1.2** The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) established Universal Support to help people to claim Universal Credit and budgeting support to help customers to manage their payments.

- 2.1.3** Since the introduction of Universal Credit, the DWP has funded Local Authorities to provide these services, who in turn have been free to do so either directly or through commissioning arrangements. The ARP partner Councils provided direct help to claim within their Customer Services teams, with all bar one of the Councils funding Citizen's Advice to provide budgeting support.

- 2.1.4** From the 1st April 2019 the DWP awarded a 12 month contract to Citizens Advice (CAB) to provide these services. CAB nationally have, through their various CAB networks throughout Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, established the following arrangements locally:

- Advisors dial into a national call centre
- Web chat
- Face to face arrangements – some on an appointment basis, others on a drop in basis or a mixture of the two. Rural provision can be patchy

- 2.1.5** Concerns have been raised that CAB are only funded to help to the first payment. Given DWP's processing figures show 80% of claims are paid on time (at five weeks) and given that the Housing Element (for rent) is typically the cause of delay, concerns have been expressed that vulnerable people may be affected and at risk of falling into rent arrears and subsequent consequences. CAB have said they will continue to help such customers, drawing on their usual funding streams.

- 2.1.6** The partner Customer Services teams intend to continue to help customers to claim, which may include signposting to CAB.
- 2.1.7** ARP continues to monitor the position and through meetings with the LGA and DWP, will continue to raise issues and concerns.
- 2.1.8** DWP are yet to publish a six-month review of the Service and are yet to indicate plans for April 2020.

2.1.9 Summary of the latest position on the expansion of Universal Credit

- Funding to smooth the transition to Universal Credit, including an additional two week run on of existing DWP benefit, will apply from 2020 to help with the gap to customers first Universal Credit payment. NB – Housing Benefit has provided a two week run on since April 2018
- Funding to increase in work allowances - thereby boosting UC payments
- Managed migration of existing cases to commence from November 2020, but only after testing of up to 10,000 claimants from July 2019 at Harrogate and completion set by December 2023
- At time of writing only a handful of selected, volunteered customers have had intensive support to move them to Universal Credit
- Reductions in maximum deductions from Universal Credit – to offset criticisms advance payments were being deducted too quickly and at punitive rates
- For newly self-employed the introduction from September 2019 of a longer, 12 month, grace period before a minimum income floor calculation is applied
- Pensioner Housing Benefit to continue until at least 2023
- DWP has announced a £10 million Universal Credit Transition Fund for outreach programmes to help vulnerable people make Universal Credit claims.
- The fund will be available to partner organisations across the UK, including charities, from April 2020. It will aim to help vulnerable people, including disabled people, care leavers and those with mental health issues, claim Universal Credit as a route into work. It will support innovative ideas for engaging with vulnerable people early, helping them to make timely claims to the new benefit.
- Funding application details were not available at time of writing.

2.2 At a national level the following concerns have been raised:

- How DWP will monitor and report Citizen's Advice performance delivering Universal Support
- Concerns the Harrogate trial is not a meaningful trial, given the claimant population demographics and the intensive support will not be sustainable
- The lack of Managed Migration detailed plans and schedule
- Failure to populate UC systems with legacy systems data – all existing customers for HB will be expected to make a new claim. This is being reviewed.
- Concerns the Managed Migration process will leave customers without benefit during the transfer - DWP adopting a 'who knows me approach'
- The five week wait for UC payments – rent element often lags behind
- Alternative Payment Arrangements and data share for Private Landlords
- Housing Benefit Debt
- LA funding
- Management Information including LA access to UC Information

2.2.1 During July DWP commenced a small scale managed migration trial at Harrogate Jobcentre. This will test:

- The 'who knows me' approach
- methods to 'warm up' customers selected to migrate to UC (no compulsion)
- options to explain the UC claiming process
- how to UC claim – online and evidence requirements
- how to understand monthly UC payments and how to budget

- understanding award letters and customer journal requirements to ensure UC conditionality compliance
- testing pre population of existing customer data
- testing how transitional protection can work
- those participating in the trial will not have their legacy benefit stopped without UC entitlement established
- Parliament is required to consider the results of the trial prior to considering next steps – this is not expected before Summer 2020

2.2.2 On 15TH May 2019 DWP introduced new legislation that means new claims from mixed age couples, where one partner is a pensioner and the other working age, must claim UC and be subject to UC conditionality rules, i.e. required to actively seek work to receive benefit, with certain exceptions. Given benefit rates are higher for existing pensioners, this will have the effect of reducing benefit entitlement. Protections are in place for existing customers until a relevant change in their circumstances.

2.2.3 Universal Credit – new matters arising

- Due to COVID-19 DWP stopped the Harrogate managed migration pilot. Consequently, a planned report has not gone to Parliament before Summer recess, in turn meaning managed migration plans are on hold. Given UC Programme staff are largely redeployed to UC assessment centres, DWP have not provided any further updates.
- It is anticipated DWP will simply allow cases to naturally migrate to UC when they have a change of circumstances rather than manage migration. It is worth noting managed migration is more challenging for customers, administratively more complex for DWP and LAs, whilst also incurring transitional protection cost when new UC entitlement is less than previous benefit levels.

2.3 Discretionary Housing Payment - no new matters arising

2.3.1 Discretionary Housing Payment grant is funded by DWP, designed to help customers remain in their homes or to move to affordable and sustainable accommodation. DWP continue to reduce funding, with further reductions this year and likely in 2020/21.

2.3.2 Spend continues to be within DWP grant and we aim to use all the grant to help customers where we can. The main area of expenditure continues to be to assist customers with rent shortfalls, due to restrictions on Housing Benefit rent levels. The scheme is promoted through our stakeholder contacts.

2.4 Benefit Cap – no new matters arising

2.4.1 DWP introduced the reduced Benefit Cap on the 7th November 2016; the maximum family income before the Benefit Cap applies reduced from £26,000 to £20,000 (£13,400 for single adults with no children).

2.4.2 The Benefit Service continues to work with colleagues in Customer Service and Housing Options teams to seek to avoid homelessness and the cost of temporary housing.

2.4.3 DWP have provided New Burdens funding to assist Councils with extra administrative costs and have increased Discretionary Housing Payment grants to help customers with the reduction – it should be noted the increase does not cover all the reductions.

2.5 Social rented sector rent restrictions – no new matters arising

2.5.1 In August Government finally responded to consultation on funding for supported housing, dropping proposals to move away from a subsidised demand led model to a grant model. For the foreseeable future, supported accommodation, including hostel tenancies, will remain in Housing Benefit and will not move to Universal Credit.

3.0 Welfare Benefit Up-rating April 2020

- 3.1** Government have confirmed an end to the four year Benefit up-rating freeze. From April 2020 all Benefits increased by CPI as of September 2019, 1.7% with the State Pension rising by 3.9% due to the 'Triple Lock'.

4.0 Options

- 4.1** The report is for information purposes

5.0 Reasons for recommendations

- 5.1** The report is for information only

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Risk

The report is for information only

6.2 Financial

The report is for information only

6.3 Legal

The report is for information only

6.4 Equality and Diversity

Not applicable.

Background papers: - None

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