

A G E N D A

ANGLIA REVENUES & BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE & TIME Tuesday, 1st March, 2022 at 11.00 am

VENUE: Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford.
IP24 1BT

For the attention of:

Cllr David Ambrose-Smith, East Cambridgeshire District Council
(Chairman)
Cllr Jan French, Fenland District Council (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr E. Back, East Suffolk Council
Cllr Sarah Broughton, West Suffolk District Council
Cllr Philip Cowen, Breckland Council

Should members of the public wish to attend this meeting, please email
democraticservices@breckland.gov.uk

PART A **ITEMS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

	<u>Page(s) herewith</u>
1. <u>MINUTES</u> To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021.	1 - 5
2. <u>APOLOGIES</u> To receive apologies for absence.	
3. <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.	
4. <u>DECLARATIONS</u>	
5. <u>PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM)</u> Report by Matthew Waite-Wright, Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP).	6 - 37
6. <u>WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM)</u> Report by Lorraine King, Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP).	38 - 41

	<u>Page(s) herewith</u>
7. <u>ARP FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2021-22 (STANDING ITEM)</u> Report by Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director of Finance & S151 Officer (BDC).	42 - 46
8. <u>VERIFICATION POLICY</u> Report by Lorraine King, Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP).	47 - 57
9. <u>FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM)</u> To note any items.	
10. <u>NEXT MEETING</u> To note the arrangements for the next meeting to be held on Tuesday, 21 June 2022 at 11am, Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford.	
11. <u>EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC</u> To consider passing the following resolution: “That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act.”	
PART B – ITEMS FROM WHICH THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED	
12. <u>PARTNERSHIP WORKING THROUGH SECTION 113 AGREEMENT</u> Report by Adrian Mills, Head of ARP.	58 - 59

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, 7 December 2021 at 10.00 am in the
Seminar and Training Room, Keystone Innovation Centre, Croxton Road, Thetford.
IP24 1JD

PRESENT

Cllr David Ambrose-Smith
(Chairman)
Cllr E. Back

Cllr Sarah Broughton
Cllr Philip Cowen

In Attendance

Paul Corney
Sam Anthony
Alison Chubbock

Lorraine King

Rachael Mann

Brian Mew

Adrian Mills
Matthew Waite-Wright

Ian Smith

Teresa Smith

- Head of ARP
- Head of HR & OD (Fenland)
- Section 151 Officer & Assistant Director Finance
- Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP)
- Assistant Director (Resources & Performance) (West Suffolk)
- Chief Finance Officer & S151 Officer (East Suffolk)
- Head of ARP
- Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP)
- Finance Manager & S151 Officer (East Cambs)
- Democratic Services Team Leader

Action By

35/21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

36/21 APOLOGIES

An apology had been received from Councillor French.

37/21 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

38/21 DECLARATIONS

None declared.

39/21 JOINT COMMITTEE SERVICE PLAN AND RISK REGISTER REPORT

Adrian Mills, the Assistant Head of ARP presented the report that recommended to Members to approve the Service Delivery Plan and Risk

Action By

Register as outlined at Appendix B of the report based on the progress in respect of the December 2020 Service Delivery Plan.

Councillor Cowen had noted that the focus on cyber issues remained a high risk but asked how ARP ensured that their systems remained protected and what steps had been put in place to maintain level support to teams. He also thought it should be highlighted as a separate risk item.

The Assistant Head of ARP said that West Suffolk District Council provided the IT support to the ARP systems and maintained compliance with PCN and assurance was given that all systems were cyber protected. In addition, training to refresh staff was underway.

The Head of ARP said that whilst it was already included within the Risk Register detailed emphasis would be made to highlight the importance of Cyber security.

Councillor Broughton asked at what stage were customers chased for payments. Members heard that when a customer had not paid an instalment the recovery programme would be followed. If no payment was forthcoming following a final notice, then it would be referred to Court and the ARP Enforcement team. If a customer was not found, then the debt could be written-off but ARP took all necessary steps to recover any debt.

RESOLVED that the:

- 1) progress in respect of the December 2020 Service Delivery Plan be noted.
- 2) revised Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register (at Appendix B of the report) subject to the Strategic Review as outlined within the report be approved by the ARP Joint Committee.

40/21 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM)

Matthew Waite-Wright, Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP) presented the Performance report and particularly highlighted the service updates to Members.

The Chairman noted that the report made reference to a strong plan of priorities for the ARP Systems and Digital and asked for further detail. Members heard that an Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) was key and that the plan would review which processes would benefit ARP in the future and consider whether to continue with the current system, or alternatives.

Councillor Cowen was pleased to see that there was a positive collection rates despite the pandemic but asked how long it would continue, particularly with the new variant on the horizon. Matthew Waite-Wright said that the huge subsidies that had been provided to businesses had provided relief, however it was difficult to forecast due to the continuation of the COVID risk.

The Chairman was pleased to see the narrative that had been added to the report.

Members noted the contents of the report.

Action By

41/21 ARP FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2021-22 (STANDING ITEM)

Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director of Finance and S151 Officer for Breckland Council presented the report on the forecast full year financial position against budget for the ARP.

The forecast at this stage of the year showed a small underspend against budget of £62k for the whole of the ARP. The share of the forecast outturn for each partner based on the Joint Committee agreement and income compensation expected to be retained by each authority was shared.

Members were content to receive their final full year variance at the end of the financial year.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The report and appendix be noted
- 2) The final full year variance at 31 March 2022 be shared between the partner authorities in the approved shares.

42/21 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM)

Lorraine King, the Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing presented the report that provided members with an update on the Welfare Reform.

It was highlighted that DWP had commenced a formal process to request bids for a digital and telephony service and intended to award the contract from April 2022 for one year.

DWP were launching a Universal Credit awareness campaign to encourage voluntary migration to encourage customers to transfer to Universal Credit, however Ministers were advocating caution when advising customers as voluntary customers would not receive the transitional protection which would be afforded to managed customers.

The recent budget announcement regarding Universal Credit that the taper for Universal Credit would be reduced from 63p to 55p per pound to help plug the gap left by the removal of the £20 uplift which affected 4.4million households nationally. The change was expected to benefit around 1.9million families.

The Chairman noted the report and recognised that DWP estimated that 30 – 50% of customers would be worse off when transferring to Universal Credit and asked how Officers would deal with that.

The Assistant Head of ARP said that DWP were promoting an awareness campaign and information was available on the website that also linked customers to benefits calculators.

Councillor Cowen asked what effect the change in strategy of the Citizens Advice Bureau had been and if customers continued to have access to those services. Members heard that ARP were not aware of any deterioration or improvement to the service, and that the deadline for the next contract had ended. Members would receive a further update at the next meeting.

Members noted the content of the report.

Action By

43/21 ARP BUDGET SETTING 2022-23

Alison Chubbock, the Assistant Director of Finance and S151 Officer for Breckland Council presented the budget setting report for 2022-23.

The annual budget setting had been based using the normal agreed principles and was prepared by the service accountants and each authority. The Budget was due to be approved in December to allow time for the ARP budgets to be incorporated within the 5 partner's individual budgets for their own budget setting.

The Chairman thanked the Breckland Finance team for the report and asked in order for better comparison that the current year was also included within the Budget setting summary.

Paul Corney, Head of ARP, also asked for thanks to be noted to the Breckland Finance team for their continued support with preparing the budgets for the ARP.

Councillor Cowen said looking ahead he could see that there would be an increased in costs and asked what plans would be set in place in order to cover that increase.

Members were informed that the increase would be due to staff salaries and general rises that would be expected, and there would be scope to control the supplies and services. However, in order to bring costs down then either additional income would need to be made or savings would be required.

Members were particularly interested in the income stream that had seen huge success particularly with enforcement and felt that there could be additional opportunities that needed to be identified.

RESOLVED that the partnership budget as shown at Appendix A of the report for 2022-23 be approved.

44/21 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM)

Nothing to report.

45/21 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday 1 March 2022 at 11am, Level 5 meeting room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street Thetford were noted.

46/21 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

47/21 NORWICH FRAUD SERVICES - SECTION 113 AGREEMENT

Adrian Mills, Assistant Head of ARP presented the report that asked Members to approve a Section 113 Agreement with Norwich City Council for

ARP to continue providing fraud services.

Members considered the item and asked for Officers to return with further detailed information in income generation for the Anglia Revenues Partnership.

RESOLVED that the item be deferred until next meeting.

Action By

The meeting closed at 11.10 am

CHAIRMAN



Joint Committee Performance Report December 2021



CONTENT PAGE

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All Partner Councils Combined



Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 51,853,578	£ 112,789,537	£ 173,398,222	£ -	●
Target	£ 48,450,483	£ 106,693,333	£ 164,196,789	£ 206,288,251	●
2020/21	£ 40,382,156	£ 80,234,076	£ 122,593,614	£ 151,680,832	●
Year End Target				£206,288,251	●

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£138,277,607	£272,346,866	£406,747,413	£ -	●
Target	£135,996,887	£268,533,270	£403,621,187	£475,114,297	●
2020/21	£127,454,324	£251,468,250	£379,825,898	£454,493,276	●
Year End Target				£475,114,297	●

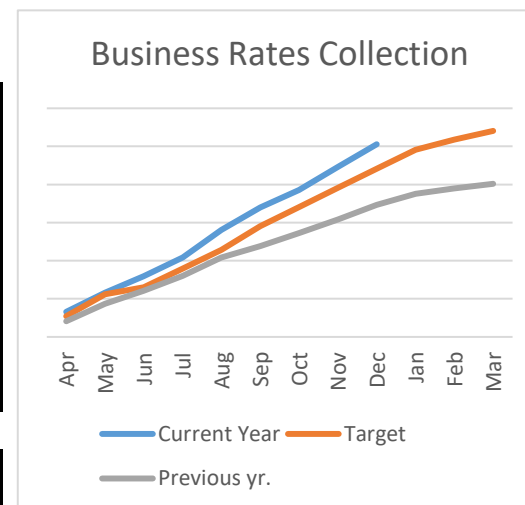
Number of Electronic Forms Received					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	14,052	32,059	52,995	£ -	●
2020/21	12,089	23,189	37,184	55,159	●
Year End Target				55159	●

Fraud and Compliance	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Yr Target
Single Person Discount Fraud	£501,867	£865,687	£1,067,670	£ -	£500,000
Local Council Tax Support	£35,778	£74,758	£107,217	£ -	£150,000
Tenancy Fraud	£195,720	£288,720	£381,720	£ -	£400,000
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£112,776	£243,015	£391,002	£ -	£250,000
Fraud Identified	£846,141	£1,472,179	£1,947,609	£ -	£1,300,000

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 7,948,881	£ 16,972,674	£ 25,281,050	£ -	●
Target	£ 6,522,632	£ 14,548,273	£ 22,059,422	£ 27,034,111	
Refunds	£ 207,992	£ 452,743	£ 789,640	£ -	
2020/21	£ 6,046,513	£ 11,935,167	£ 17,330,233	£ 20,092,010	●

Year End Target	£ 27,034,111	●
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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.

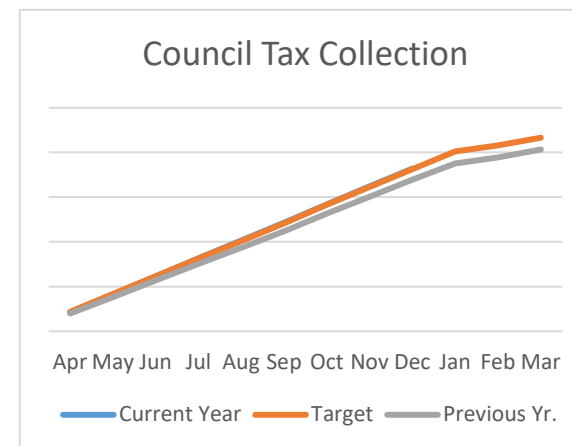
Narrative

Collection is on target.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 24,672,337	£ 48,614,835	£ 72,809,733	£ -	●
Target	£ 24,656,445	£ 48,331,128	£ 72,611,966	£ 86,608,060	
Refunds	£ 236,148	£ 511,663	£ 772,466	£ -	
2020/21	£ 22,830,485	£ 44,806,050	£ 67,828,605	£ 81,338,654	●

Year End Target	£86,608,060	●
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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.

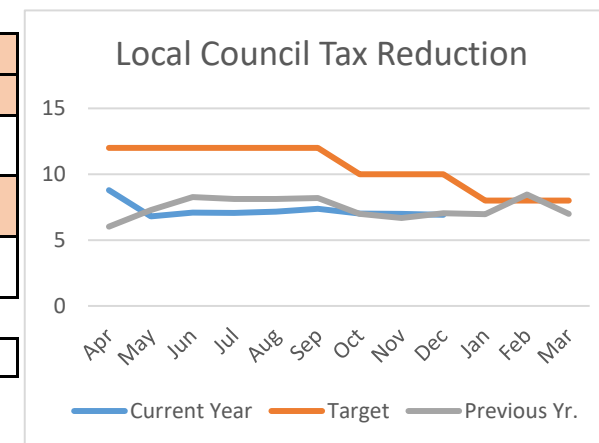
Narrative

Collection remains on target for the current financial year. New recovery measures are being introduced using a 3 touch approach via phone, text messaging and emails prior to reminders to encourage early payment.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	7.08	7.38	6.92	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	8.26	8.20	7.04	6.98	●
Year End Target				8	●



Description

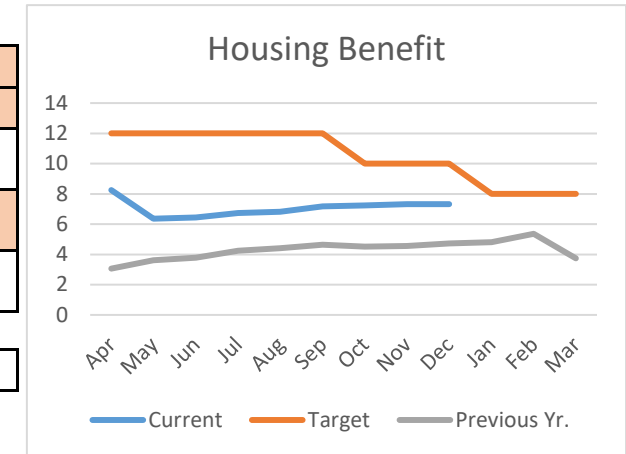
This indicator measures the average year to date number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	6.45	7.18	7.33	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	3.77	4.64	4.72	3.74	●
Year End Target		8			●



12

Description

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

Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.

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 continue to proactively 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 close working relationship with both Planning Enforcement has resulted in a number of positive outcomes.

More recent discussions with the extended Housing Team has resulted in positive moves and greater planned collaboration

The team continue to work closely with County in the management of 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 Single Person Discount Reviews.

The team continue to work with both the Covid Grants Team and NNDR in post assurance business rates grants and further investigation and enquiries where required.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£129,085	£204,094	£237,241	-
Local Council Tax Support	£2,516	£10,792	£17,737	-
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	-
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£6,820	£48,612	£126,513	-
Fraud Identified	£138,422	£263,498	£381,490	-



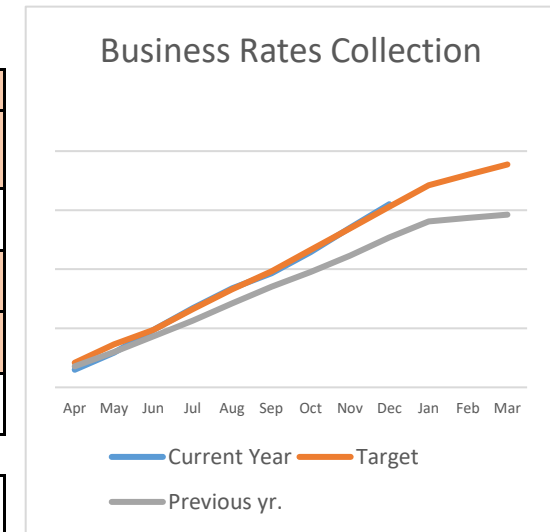
Performance Information December 2021



Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 4,854,955	£ 9,670,643	£ 15,508,986	£ -	●
Target	£ 4,850,561	£ 9,813,754	£ 15,292,489	£ 18,870,377	
Refunds	£ 215,059	£ 1,076,342	£ 1,161,305	£ -	
2020/21	£ 4,321,819	£ 8,513,137	£ 12,702,067	£ 14,622,123	●

Full Year Target	£18,870,377	●
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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.

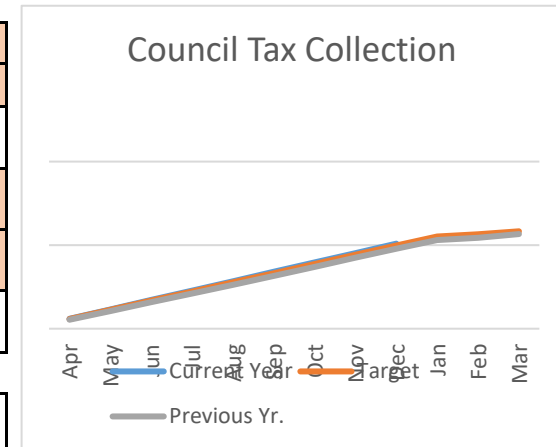
Narrative

Collection has improved to slightly above target having been below the previous quarter.



Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 17,191,094	£ 34,009,954	£ 50,890,485	£ -	●
Target	£ 16,766,400	£ 33,160,487	£ 49,781,334	£ 58,281,818	
Refunds	£ 192,547	£ 382,265	£ 602,680	£ -	
2020/21	£ 15,859,812	£ 31,561,919	£ 47,847,998	£ 56,630,706	●
Year End Target		£ 58,281,818		●	



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

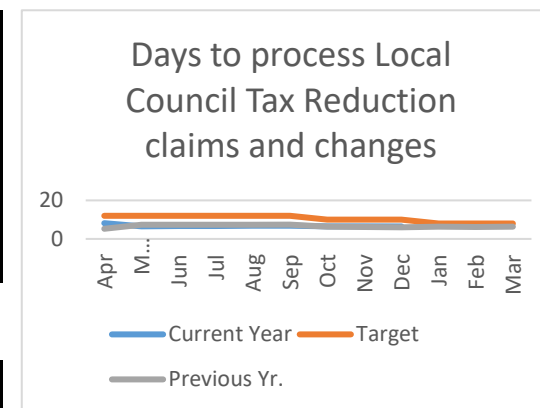
Collection remains on target for the current financial year. New recovery measures are being introduced using a 3 touch approach via phone, text messaging and emails prior to reminders to encourage early payment.



Local Council Tax Reduction



Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	6.68	6.82	6.47	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	7.37	7.42	6.03	6.36	●



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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

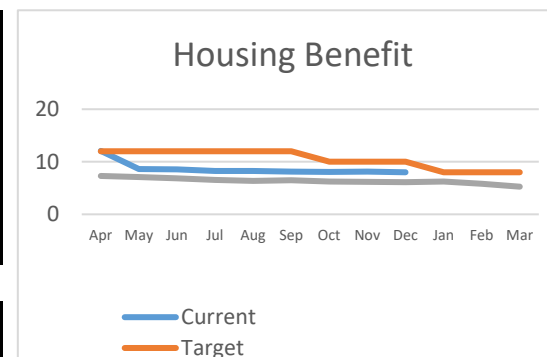
This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.



Housing Benefit



Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	8.57	8.13	8.00	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	6.82	6.48	6.14	5.26	●



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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 has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.



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.

There has been some recent progression with the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub and East Camb's DC and Fenland DC approving the business case to extend the Fraud and Compliance work for the two partners. This would align the Fraud and Compliance work currently being carried out for other partners of the Anglia Revenues Partnership as indicated in the fraud savings on the quarterly performance report. This work has again consistently seen savings outweighing the costs of the work in the areas of Local Council Tax Reduction and Single Person Discounts particularly, over several years. Funding for 2 additional posts from County has been secured for 2 years.

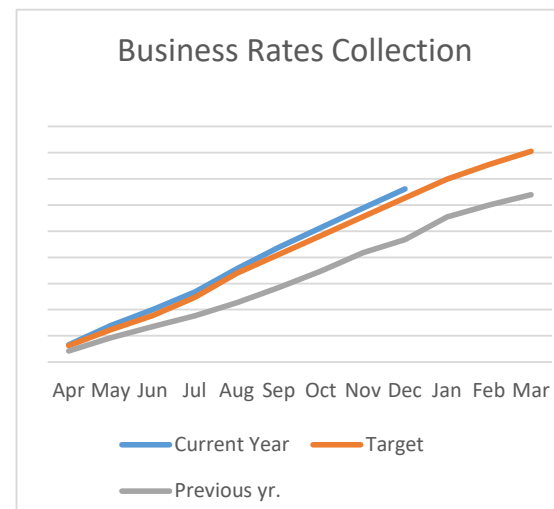
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£51,848	£67,958	£72,953	-
Local Council Tax Support	£927	£2,744	£3,211	-
Tenancy Fraud	£93,000	£93,000	£93,000	-
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£58,291	£91,838	£122,283	-
Fraud Identified	£204,065	£255,541	£291,447	-

Performance Information December 2021

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 20,107,177	£ 43,843,831	£ 66,117,817	£ -	●
Target	£ 17,758,942	£ 41,058,827	£ 62,660,988	£ 80,506,639	
Refunds	£ 467,003	£ 1,637,421	£ 2,180,266	£ -	
2020/21	£ 13,586,679	£ 28,476,749	£ 46,751,882	£ 63,912,082	●

Year End Target	80,506,639	●
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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.

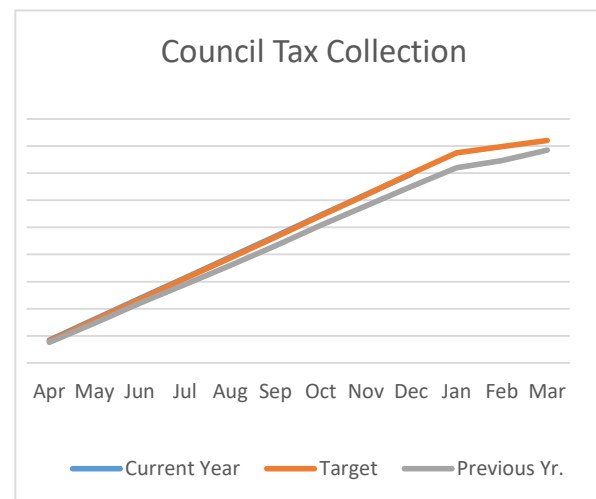
Narrative

Collection continues to be above target.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 47,659,907	£ 93,493,803	£ 139,441,540	£ -	●
Target	£ 46,989,812	£ 92,913,773	£ 139,808,907	£ 164,143,078	
Refunds	£ 523,435	£ 1,108,793	£ 1,692,261	£ -	
2020/21	£ 43,986,884	£ 86,547,244	£ 130,268,131	£ 157,025,532	●

Year End Target	164,143,078	●
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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

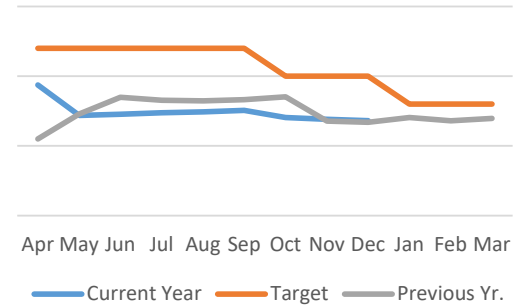
Collection has slipped slightly behind target in the run up to Christmas; a full recovery cycle and additional Hardship Payments may improve the position in the last quarter. New recovery measures are being introduced using a 3 touch approach via phone, text messaging and emails prior to reminders to encourage early payment.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	7.27	7.55	6.81	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	8.49	8.32	6.70	6.98	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Local Council Tax Reduction



Description

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

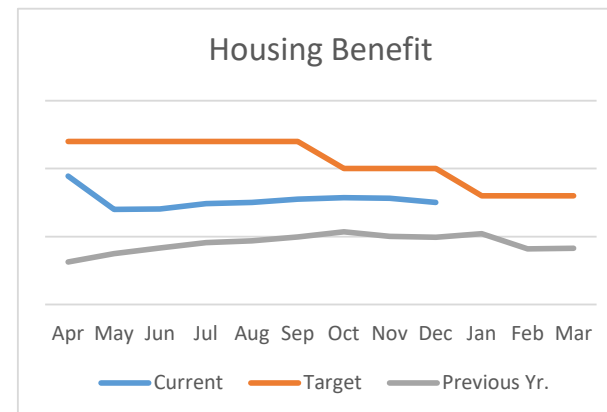
Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	7.03	7.75	7.51	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	4.16	4.98	4.95	4.14	●

Year End Target	8	●
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22

Description

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

Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.

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.

Work within the NFI SPD review process continues to provide a number of positive outcomes.

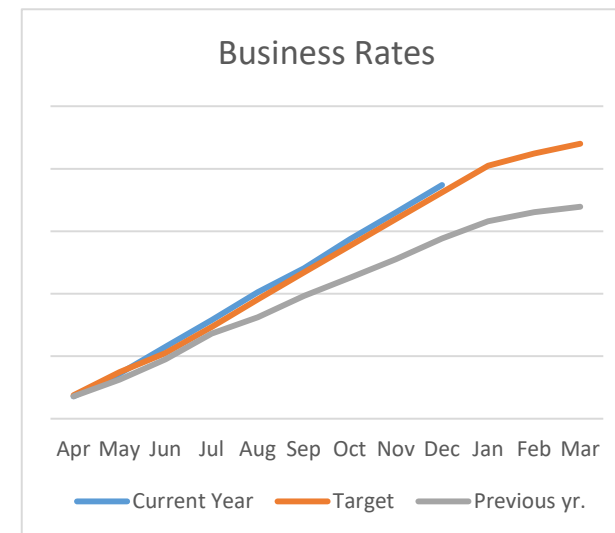
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£124,407	£257,865	£346,502	-
Local Council Tax Support	£8,793	£28,910	£44,905	-
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	-
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£1,676	£13,879	£20,804	-
Fraud Identified	£134,876	£300,654	£412,211	-

Performance Information December 2021

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 5,750,467	£ 12,027,514	£ 18,696,649	£ -	●
Target	£ 5,252,660	£ 11,697,906	£ 18,106,158	£ 21,998,313	
Refunds	£ 291,391	£ 641,198	£ 932,560	£ -	
2020/21	£ 4,752,965	£ 9,815,866	£ 14,405,039	£ 16,956,825	●

Year End Target	£21,998,313	●
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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

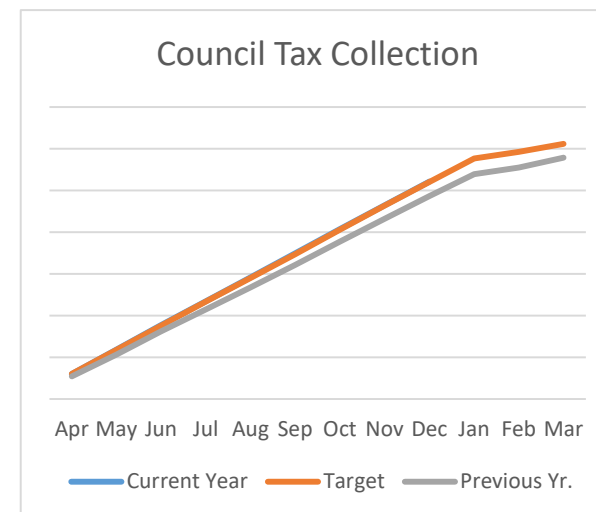
Collection remains on target

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 17,701,900	£ 34,963,410	£ 52,134,820	£ -	●
Target	£ 17,551,558	£ 34,743,756	£ 52,062,693	£ 61,172,317	
Refunds	£ 213,560	£ 434,573	£ 736,078	£ -	
2020/21	£ 16,234,901	£ 32,182,036	£ 48,651,700	£ 57,863,955	●

25

Year End Target	£61,172,317	●
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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.

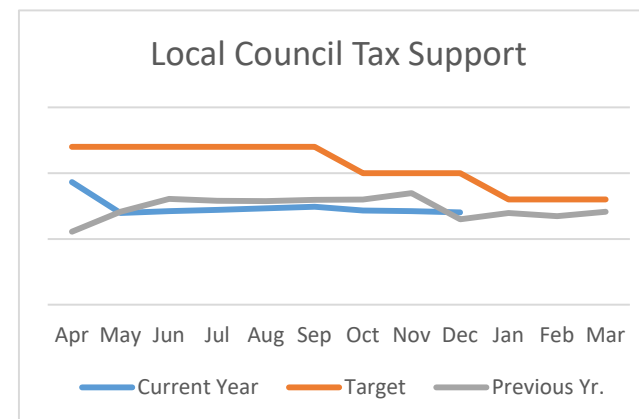
Narrative

Collection remains on target for the current financial year. New recovery measures are being introduced using a 3 touch approach via phone, text messaging and emails prior to reminders to encourage early payment.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	7.11	7.44	7.02	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	8.03	7.98	6.49	7.06	●

Year End Target	8	●
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26

Description

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

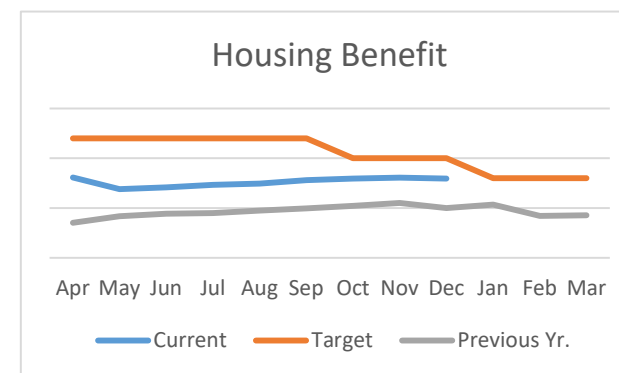
Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	7.09	7.79	7.95	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	4.43	4.98	5.01	4.28	●

Year End Target	8	●
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27

Description

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

Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.

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 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.

There has been some recent progression with the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub and East Camb's DC and Fenland DC approving the business case to extend the Fraud and Compliance work for the two partners. This would align the Fraud and Compliance work currently being carried out for other partners of the Anglia Revenues Partnership as indicated in the fraud savings on the quarterly performance report. This work has again consistently seen savings outweighing the costs of the work in the areas of Local Council Tax Reduction and Single Person Discounts particularly, over several years. Funding for 2 additional posts from County has been secured for 2 years.

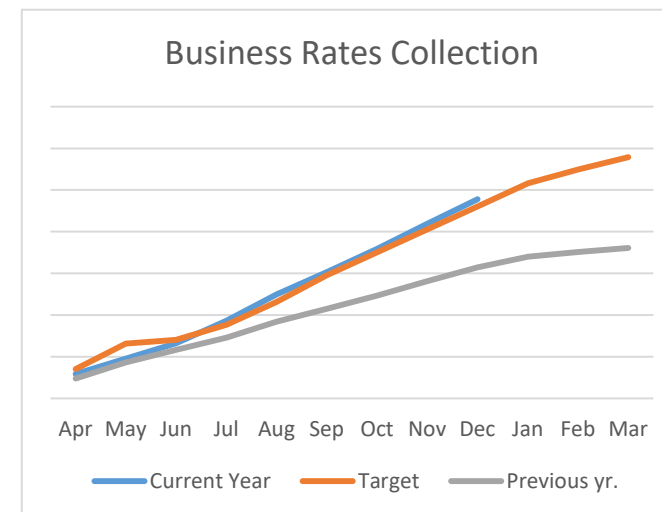
20

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£72,811	£105,397	£123,485	-
Local Council Tax Support	£16,333	£22,342	£20,811	-
Tenancy Fraud	£93,000	£93,000	£93,000	-
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£33,838	£65,919	£94,247	-
Fraud Identified	£215,982	£286,658	£331,543	-

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 13,192,098	£ 30,274,875	£ 47,793,720	£ -	●
Target	£ 14,065,688	£ 29,574,573	£ 46,077,732	£ 57,878,811	
Re-funds	£ 460,862	£ 1,351,136	£ 2,095,952	£ -	
2020/21	£ 11,674,180	£ 21,493,157	£ 31,404,393	£ 36,097,792	●

Year End Target	57,878,811	●
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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.

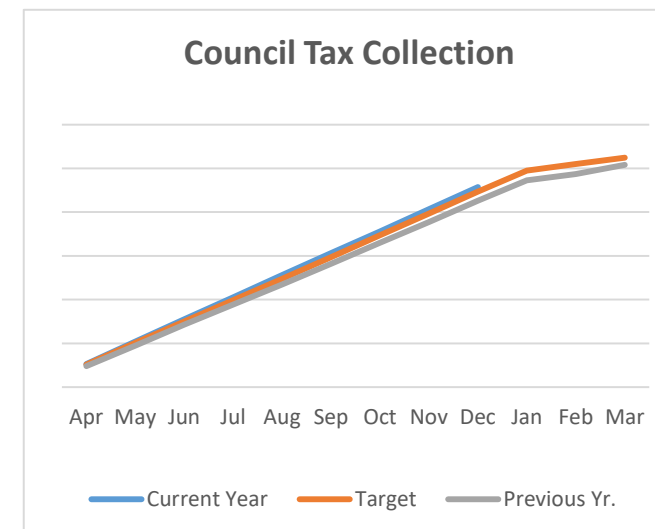
Narrative

Collection is on target.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 31,052,369	£ 61,264,863	£ 91,470,836	£ -	●
Target	£ 30,032,672	£ 59,384,126	£ 89,356,287	£ 104,909,024	
Refunds	£ 335,028	£ 715,406	£ 1,097,575	£ -	
2020/21	£ 28,542,242	£ 56,371,002	£ 85,229,464	£ 101,634,429	●

Year End Target	104,909,024	●
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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 remains on target for the current financial year. New recovery measures are being introduced using a 3 touch approach via phone, text messaging and emails prior to reminders to encourage early payment.

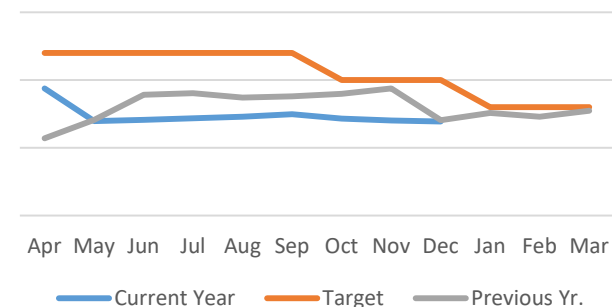
Days to process Local Council Tax Support

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	7.07	7.47	6.94	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	8.91	8.79	7.04	7.73	●

31

Year End Target	8	●
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Council Tax Support



Description

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

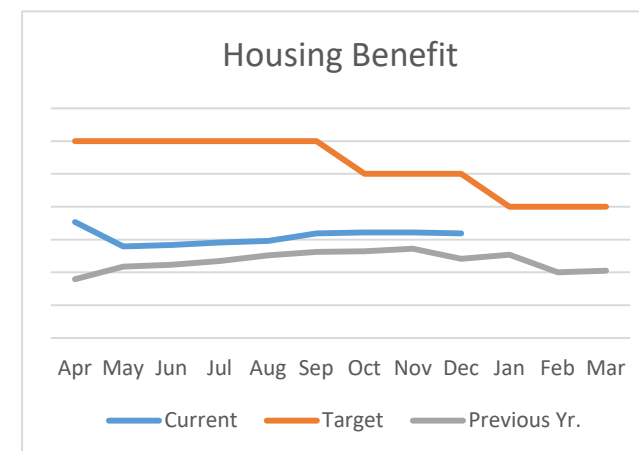
Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	5.66	6.37	6.38	-	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	4.47	5.24	4.82	4.10	●

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 has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target.

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. 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 continue to assist in post assurance of businesses entitled to the NNDR government business rates grant scheme. The team continue to work closely with the Internal Audit team to carry out the assurance work.

The NFI SPD review process and SPD New awards continue to provide positive outcomes.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£123,716	£230,372	£287,490	-
Local Council Tax Support	£7,209	£9,970	£20,554	-
Tenancy Fraud	£9,720	£102,720	£195,720	-
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£12,152	£22,766	£27,155	-
Fraud Identified	£152,797	£365,828	£530,919	-

Service Updates as at December 2021



Enforcement

Enforcement visits are continuing with all the necessary personal protective equipment and risk assessment in place. Collection has continued to rise back to near normal levels. We continue to try and engage with customers offering long term payment arrangements and assisting customers where possible. Short term sickness has impacted, but year on year our collection continues to improve.

The two new Agents will be certified shortly but their impact is already being seen.

Parking cases for West Suffolk and East Suffolk are coming through to Enforcement with positive results on collection. We recently had a meeting with West Suffolk where a closer working arrangement regarding problem cases was agreed.

- Q1. This year we collected in July £383,262.49 compared to £227,543.66 at the same point last year.
Q2. This year we collected in October £442,596.09 compared to £282,112.06 at the same point last year
Q3. This year we collected in November 382,04845 compared to £221,137.43 at same point last year

Total for financial Year 2021/2022 is £3,511,917 debt with £863,468 in fees as at December 2021

Further Recovery

Further recovery performance continues to a high level, collecting the figures below. These figures now exceed the pre Covid 2019 figure in December 2019 which was around £988,268.19.

CTAX	NDR	HBOP	TOTAL
£697,501.59	£364,138.41	£26,208.38	£1,087,848.38

Council Tax

Demand for council tax billing continues at very high levels, in particular the high number of people moving continues to be 35% more than last year to date. However, outstanding work continues to reduce and is below the peaks previously seen, which is testament to our project to introduce the generic Council Tax Billing Officer role, which provides a resilient team who have been able to switch between billing and benefits to help cope with ever changing workloads and priorities during the pandemic, providing increased flexibility to the use of our resources, along with maximising automation functionality.

In the last financial year formal recovery proceedings were delayed and some customers made extended arrangements into this financial year. This may impact on current year collection, we will monitor the situation closely.

We are currently awaiting the return of information from HMRC and DWP in relation to a Cabinet Office pilot to share data to provide information that will allow us to identify cases that can be recovered through attachment to earning or benefits, and assist us in consideration of debtors financial vulnerability. Around 16,000 cases were sent so the impact of the returned data processing and recording the success of the pilot scheme will be significant on the team. If the pilot is successful we may in the future be able to make this an integral part of our recovery process.

Benefits

Both Council Tax Support and Benefits performance has achieved targets, despite the increased demand attributed to the economic recovery from the pandemic. We continue to see increases in demand from the continuing high levels of changes of addresses and continue to utilise generically trained staff to focus resource where it is most needed.

The Test & Trace Self Isolation payment scheme has been extended to 31 March 2022 with additional Government funding. Demand for the £500 payments has risen steeply over December and January and we are reviewing resources to help deal with the increased demand and ensure we provide financial support in a timely manner.

Non-Domestic Rates

Reviews of SBRR reductions continue and will be done on a rolling basis going forward , whilst reviews of discretionary reliefs have been issued.

Work volumes and outstanding processes are in a better position than earlier this year although the return of relief reviews may impact over the next few months.

A new Discretionary Relief, CARF, has been announced; ARP is liaising closely with partners regarding its implementation. Further liaison is being undertaken regarding the extension of Transitional Relief and Supporting Small Business Relief announced just before Christmas.

ARP Systems and Digital

Work is progressing with Capita to review their Digital product working with other LA's to provide feedback from a wider group of Capita users. We are working with a large Unitary Council where we are sharing our knowledge and experiences, this will be beneficial for ARP in the future.

Work volumes with both System admin and EDMS have been quite high, but through working with the Programme Manager we are making a strong plan of priorities so we can ensure that resources can meet expectations and demands. All ongoing projects have been scored in line with strategic priorities and regular project updates are provided for each team.

Work is now underway on our Annual Billing process, with Customer Service teams reviewing bill content and system testing commencing.

Fraud and Compliance

There has been some recent progression with the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub and East Camb's DC and Fenland DC approving the business case to extend the Fraud and Compliance work for the two partners. This would align the Fraud and Compliance work currently being carried out for other partners of the Anglia Revenues Partnership as indicated in the fraud savings in the performance report. This work has again consistently seen savings outweighing the costs of the work in the areas of Local Council Tax Reduction and Single Person Discounts particularly, over several years. Norfolk County Council had additionally funded one Council Tax compliance Officer for 2021/2022 to continue Single Person Discount reviews for Norwich City Council and any additional work identified through the Norfolk Fraud Hub. Funding from Norfolk County Council has now been secured for two years from April 2022 including funding of the additional post and use of the premium matching service for Breckland and Norwich. Suffolk County Council have also approved an increase in funding from April 2022 for a period of two years. This funding includes the premium matching service and funding for an additional post within the team.

We are still unable to interview customers under caution on a face-to-face basis and continue to interview customers by letter and a process and procedure has been set up to enable this. Sanctions and prosecutions continue to be conducted using this process. However, we are now looking to identify interview rooms to enable safe interviews to be conducted under the guidance of the Health and Safety Teams. The Fraud Manager has visited and inspected interview room facilities at Dereham, Mildenhall, March, Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill and plans are in place to visit other sites shortly. We hope to return to face to face interviews by the end of January 2022.

Better Customer Experience Programme

Our new online Council Tax change of address service is now live for all partners, following testing with Customer Service teams. Customer take-up is above expectations, we had anticipated 30% of moves would come through the new facility as we encourage customers to transact that way. Through close working with customer service teams that level is currently 43%, which is testament to excellent work with customers and the effectiveness of the new on line form.

The project team is now investing resources to implement automation, working closely with Capita to ensure it fulfils its potential.

Our Tel solutions treble-touch nudging is working well within the Enforcement team whilst roll out to other areas continues, including Council Tax reminders.

On a partner-specific basis, we have supported Breckland's chatbot launch, and we are investigating more efficient ways to plug revenues and benefits data into East Suffolk's channel shift analysis, which should help inform future improvements. Along with the Customer Strategy group we are considering a review of website content and an evaluation of the ease of journeys across websites, supported by a trial of more integrated web analytics.

ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

Report of Lorraine King – ARP Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing

To: ARP Joint Committee, 01.03.2022

Subject: Welfare Reform

Purpose: To provide an update on welfare reform

Recommendation(s):

- That the report is noted.

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 – update at 2.1.13 and 2.1.14

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** In April 2019 changed their strategy, awarding a 12-month contract, subsequently extended to the 2021-2022 year, 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 approximately 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 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 review of the CAB Help to Claim service but have confirmed the CAB arrangement will continue into the 2021-2022 year, with a review underway for provision from 2022.
- 2.1.9** DWP recently requested expressions of interest from public, private, and voluntary sectors to deliver a digital and telephony help to claim service from April 2022, stating DWP will take responsibility for face to face assistance. An expression of interest was made.
- 2.1.10** The Customer Services Team, comprising of partner Heads of Customer Service, support the ARP view that the best fit for our residents would be for DWP to take full responsibility for helping customers to claim UC, a benefit they administer. To provide a seamless service DWP could utilise their existing digital and telephony capability to provide assistance to supplement their face to face Job Centre capability.
- 2.1.11** At Joint Committee 22nd June 2021 Members requested a briefing note to assist with any discussions with their MPs, subsequently issued.
- 2.1.12** DWP have commenced a formal process to requests bids for a digital and telephony service, intending to award contract from April 2022 for one year.
- 2.1.13** It was announced at the end of January that the Help to Claim scheme has been renewed for a further year. Ministers confirmed that Citizens Advice will continue to deliver independent support and from April 2022 and that the support will be provided through telephony and digital channels. Individuals who are unable to access support via these channels will be supported by the local jobcentres.

2.1.14 Summary of the current position on the expansion of Universal Credit

- Due to redeploying staff to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, DWP pulled the Harrogate pilot of managed migration of existing cases in Spring 2020. DWP now plan to recommence the pilot this year and report to Parliament with the aim of completing migration by 2024. DWP have not released any further detail or indicative timetable at this stage.
- DWP are launching a UC awareness campaign to encourage voluntary migration as numbers are very low and not meeting UC business case volumes or costings. Difficulty presents that voluntary customer will not receive the transitional protection afforded to managed customers – DWP itself estimates 30-50% will be worse off at the point of transfer, with Ministers advocating caution when advising customers.
- As a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Universal Credit rates were temporarily increased by £20 per week for the 2020-2021 year and extended in the budget. This ended on 06th October, and we have received change files for all UC recipients. Due to the recent improvements to automation, we have been able to automate around 96% of these changes seamlessly, requiring no intervention from the team, whilst other Councils are struggling to cope with the increase in manual assessments. It should be noted all the partner Local Council Tax Support schemes provided for customers to receive the full benefit of that uplift.
- The Chancellor announced at the 2021 Budget that by 1st December the taper for UC will be reduced from 63p to 55p per pound to help plug the gap left by the removal of the uplift which affected 4.4 million households nationally. This change is expected to benefit around 1.9m families.
- The UC work allowance will also increase by £500 per year from the same date and a new target of March 2025 was set for the rollout of UC to be complete, and for the introduction of a pension age housing costs scheme.

- Ministers announced in December that they will resume the managed migration process at some point during 2022, but it is felt that any movement this year will be very slow with rollout accelerating through 2023-24. We await any announcements.

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
- The lack of Managed Migration detailed plans and schedule
- Failure to take advantage of existing data to prepopulate UC systems with legacy systems data – all existing customers including Housing Benefit will be expected to make a new claim. DWP say they cannot 'lift and shift' existing known data held on their systems to the UC system. I have challenged that as a missed opportunity to smooth the customer migration journey.
- Concerns the Managed Migration process will leave customers without benefit during the transfer - DWP adopting a 'who knows me approach'
- The five weeks 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

2.3 Discretionary Housing Payment

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. For the 2020-2021 year DWP increased funding to offset the impact of private sector rents increasing above the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates used to calculate Housing Benefit.

2.3.2 However, funding for 2021-2022 has returned to 2019-2020 levels, despite concerns the pandemic will increase demand throughout this year. We are in close conversations with individual Housing teams to plan, profile and monitor demand and expenditure to meet requirements to ensure full spend, but not to exceed funding levels, given a budget does not exist to top up.

2.3.3 Funding for 2021-2022 was allocated in two parts with £100m at the start of the year and £40m at mid-year. We received the second allocation in September.

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.

2.5 Social rented sector rent restrictions – no new matters arising

2.5.1 In August 2020 Government 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 Uprating April 2022

- 3.1** Government ended the four-year Benefit uprating freeze in 2020. However, the link between pensions and the triple lock was severed in September 2021 because of wage inflation. Instead, in 2022/23 the State Pension will rise in line with the highest of inflation or 2.5%, with CPI for September historically being the figure used, reported at 3.1%.

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

Lead Contact Officer

Name/Post: Lorraine King (ARP Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing)

Email: Lorraine.king@angliarevenues.gov.uk

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director Finance

To: ARP Joint Committee, 1 March 2022

Author: Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director Finance

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 of 31 January 2022 and all costs are included and shared based on the Partnership agreement.
- 1.2 The forecast at this stage of the year shows a small underspend against budget of £51k (0.53%) for the whole of the ARP and this is shown 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. £129k is earmarked for projects in progress or due next year and there is a further £101k available for future transformation projects between all five partners.

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 The Government have continued the grants to local authorities to offset the losses from sales fees and charges income for the first quarter only of 2021-22. 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. Due to the profiling of income received, we have been able to claim for some Enforcement income under this scheme for each partner.

The table below shows the share of the forecast outturn for each partner based on the JC agreement and income compensation expected to be retained by each authority, however this will change for the final values at the end of March 2022.

	Forecast Out-turn	Enforcement income claim
Breckland	(£19,457)	(£14,374)
East Cambs	£7,590	(£6,599)
East Suffolk	(£22,330)	(£23,591)
Fenland	(£12,150)	(£13,220)
West Suffolk	(£4,735)	(£17,202)
TOTAL	(£51,082)	(£74,986)

- 1.5 Data retained on the Capita processing system was cleansed for East and West Suffolk databases at the time of the Council mergers, the additional Capita costs of this were met in full by East and West Suffolk Councils at that time and were not charged to the JC partnership budget. It is proposed to undertake the cleanse to the remaining three databases for Breckland, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland in spring 2022 in order to improve the performance and processing speed of the software and support GDPR compliance.

Usually, this type of cost would be met from the ARP transformation funding, but as the costs for East and West Suffolk databases have already been met by the councils directly it would not be equitable to use the transformation funding on this occasion. Therefore, the costs to Breckland, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland of £14,400 each will be met directly by the three Councils, with the possibility that the savings or income shown in the table in paragraph 1.4 above could be used to cover these one off costs if partners choose.

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: 07967 325037

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 31/01/22

Description	Approved Budget 2021/22 £	Forecast Actuals 2021/22 £	Forecast Variance Over/(Under) £	Variance %	Notes
Employee Related Costs	9,910,741	9,782,078	(128,663)	(1.30)	1
Premises Related Costs	275,886	275,834	(52)	(0.02)	
Transport Related Costs	103,805	98,040	(5,765)	(5.55)	
Supplies & Services	1,803,631	1,792,899	(10,732)	(0.60)	
Support Services	495,228	478,205	(17,023)	(3.44)	
Income	(2,931,410)	(2,820,257)	111,153	(3.79)	2
TOTAL PARTNERSHIP COSTS	9,657,881	9,606,799	(51,082)	(0.53)	

Variance Notes

1. The employee under spend is due to senior managers vacancies and other staff vacancies year to date.
2. The shortfall in income is due to lower enforcement cases than budgeted post the Pandemic, with the income for next year expected to be as budgeted.

Transformation funding - committed expenditure as follows:

Description	Approved Budget 2021/22 £	Forecast Actuals 2022/23 £	Forecast Actuals 2023/24 £
Already committed from grant funding received in previous years			
Call management replacement (Teams)	0	20,000	0
Fines officer	6,500	0	0
Self isolation	39,148	0	0
IRRV training	5,985	0	0
New image server	32,435	0	0
Compliance officer (subject to approval)	25,000	0	0
Total	109,068	20,000	0
Unallocated	100,574	0	0
Grand Total	209,642	20,000	0

The committed transformation funding is £129,068. Expenditure totalling £109k has been made from the Reserve in 2021/22 and it is expected £20k will be spent in 2022/23. The remaining £101k will be used for future projects between all 5 partners which will come to fruition next year.

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ICT Reserve	Approved Budget 2021/22 £	Approved Budget 2022/23 £	Approved Budget 2023/24 £
Opening Balance	0	22,500	35,000
Partnership contribution	72,500	72,500	72,500
Earmarked - ICT refresh replacement servers software element and kit for working from home	(50,000)	(60,000)	(70,000)
	22,500	35,000	37,500

ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

Report of Lorraine King – Head of Benefits and Council Tax Billing

To: ARP Joint Committee, 1st March 2022

Subject: Verification Policy

Purpose: To approve a Verification Policy for 2022-2023 onwards

Recommendation(s):

- That the Anglia Revenues Partnership Joint Committee approve the revised Verification Policy for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims from April 2022 for Breckland Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, East Suffolk Council, Fenland District Council and West Suffolk Council.
- That the Anglia Revenues Partnership Joint Committee approve this Verification Policy as a permanent policy without the requirement to review annually.

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask Members to approve the continued use of the current Verification Policy from April 2022.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Housing Benefit Regulations require Local Authorities to obtain information which allows an accurate assessment of a claimant's entitlement to benefit to be made. However, except for a national insurance number and proof of identity, they do not specify what evidence is required in support of the claim.
- 2.2 In 2011, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provided an option for Local Authorities to replace their Verification Policy with a risk-based approach, applying different levels of checks to benefit claims. Since 2004 DWP has not prescribed a Verification Policy, instead leaving individual Local Authorities to determine their own policy.
- 2.3 Anglia Revenues Partnership introduced RBV in 2012 and had continued with the same policy until April 2021, where we had found it worked well.
- 2.4 Last year Anglia Revenues Partnership replaced RBV with a new verification policy. The onus of the new policy was to reduce the burden for customers to supply documentation and utilise digital data sharing with DWP, HMRC and housing providers.

3.0 Policy review

- 3.1 The introduction of the new Verification Policy has proven to be very successful. As anticipated the greater use of real time secure data has reduced the requirement for customers to obtain and submit evidence. Customers are only asked to provide information where information cannot be obtained from other sources. This has led to an improvement to the customer experience.
- 3.2 Furthermore, changes to Council Tax Support schemes will further enhance use of shared data from 1st April 2022. Customers will be directed to claim Council Tax Support as part of a Universal Credit application rather than direct to ARP. Universal Credit, claims for Council Tax Support have already gone through DWP and HMRC scrutiny and verification, meaning we are already accepting the data received without the need for additional customer engagement.
- 3.3 Staff have indicated that it is much more effective to use VEP (Verify Pensions and Earnings) and DWP data than contacting customers directly. Information is available immediately and avoids Customer Services Teams and Administration Teams collating and indexing documents.
- 3.4 More claims have been assessed when first appraised. Processing performance continues to improve as delays resulting from requesting additional information are minimised. Customers are awarded both Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit with fewer delays.

4.0 Matters to consider

- 4.1 DWP have confirmed they support the use of VEP data as a viable level of verification to assess new claims and changes in circumstances. Indeed, following conversations with them they plan to update their guidance for all LAs.
- 4.2 In reviewing these standards we are satisfied the requirements detailed in Housing Benefit Regulations and each partners Local Council Tax Support Scheme are met.
- 4.3 This policy change does not require a partner's Council to mandate the change; DWP suggest it is good practice for Members to approve the policy and in a partnership environment that can be done by the ARP Joint Committee.

5.0 Revisions to policy

- 5.1 A revised Appendix A is attached to the Verification Policy at Appendix 1, detailing the verification standards applied to different types of evidence requirements.
- 5.2 As a result of the Council Tax Support changes from 01.04.2022 the verification rules have been amended because of the removal of tariff income and a decrease in the capital threshold limits for working age customers.

- 5.3 The change means that we will no longer be required to verify capital levels of under £9000, declared by working age customers
- 5.4 As before, in most cases we will continue to use real time DWP & HMRC data to obtain the required verification, with a targeted approach where the information cannot be obtained by other means. Evidence and documentation will only be reasonably requested to determine that person's entitlement. It should be noted future improvements to DWP and HMRC data share might potentially reduce the burden on these customers, so evidence requirements may change accordingly throughout the period of the Policy.
- 5.5 Following the successful implementation of the 2021-22 verification policy and this 2022-23 review, it is felt that there is no longer a requirement to review it on an annual basis. Therefore, future reviews should take place only where there is a foreseen change to verification requirements for either Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support.

6.0 Risk

- 6.1 Risk continues to be mitigated by compliance with DWP Housing Benefit Regulations, which in turn will continue to satisfy DWP Subsidy requirements and is compliant with the Local Council Tax Support Schemes. It should be noted the change of policy is not reducing the quality of the evidence we have always required and will continue to require; it is simply making maximum use of DWP and HMRC secure data share. The policy has approval from both internal and external auditors.

7.0 Reasons for recommendation

- 7.1 The Department for Work & Pensions require Councils to review their Risk Based Verification Policies annually and require Members to approve the continuance or revision of their policy. 7.2 ARP no longer apply Risk Based Verification and as such there is no requirement to review the verification policy on an annual basis.
- 7.3 Following some minor changes to the Council's Council Tax Support schemes for 2022-23 the verification policy has been amended accordingly and the changes require approval.
- 7.4 Any future review of the policy will only be required on an adhoc basis, where changes to verification standards or requirements are foreseen or implemented.

Background papers: None

Lead Contact Officer

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Appendices attached to this report: Appendix 1

Appendix 1 – Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Verification Policy.

APPENDIX 1



The Anglia Revenues Partnership

**Housing Benefit and Council Tax
Support Verification Policy
(Restricted)**

DOCUMENT SPONSOR (Client Officers):

Breckland	- Alison Chubbock
East Cambs	- Ian Smith
East Suffolk	- Brian Mew
Fenland	- Peter Catchpole
West Suffolk	- Rachael Mann

DOCUMENT OWNER: Lorraine King

Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership

DATE APPROVED: 1st March 2022
LAST REVIEW: 9th March 2021
DOCUMENT APPROVED AT: Joint Committee



Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Verification Policy (Restricted)

1. Introduction

The Verification Framework Policy was initially introduced by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) as guidance in line with the Social Security Administration Act 1992 for administering Housing Benefit claims. Since the abolition of that Policy in 2004 the DWP has left Local Authorities to determine their individual approach to verification standards. The Anglia Revenues Partnership has prepared the following policy for Benefit claim Verification.

2. Policy Statement

Breckland Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, East Suffolk Council, Fenland District Council and West Suffolk Council, working together as The Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) will apply verification to all Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support new claims and change of circumstances as set out in this policy.

3. Objective

This policy is provided to ensure that the Local Authorities within ARP fulfil their statutory requirements and operate a strict regime to prevent fraud and error, while making accurate and prompt assessments for customers.

4. Equality

The ARP is committed to equality of opportunity and valuing diversity in both the provision of services and in its role as a major employer. We believe that everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect. We are committed to the elimination of unfair and unlawful discrimination in all our policies, procedures and practises. We are determined to ensure that no member of the public, employee or job applicant receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of their age, child care or other caring responsibilities, disability, gender, HIV status, language, marital status, race, religion, sexuality, membership or non-membership of a trade union, or by any requirement which cannot be shown to be justifiable.

5. Background

Anglia Revenues Partnership must adhere to Housing Benefit legislation and its partner Council's Local Council Tax Support schemes. The Housing Benefit regulations do not specify what information and evidence should be obtained from a benefit customer. However, it does require an Authority to have information which allows an accurate assessment of a claimant's entitlement, both when a claim is first made and when the claim is reviewed.

Housing Benefit Regulation 86 states;

“a person who makes a claim, or a person to whom housing benefit has been awarded, shall furnish such certificates, documents, information and evidence in connection with the claim or the award, or any question arising out of the claim or the award, as may reasonably be required by the relevant authority in order to determine that person’s entitlement to, or continuing entitlement to housing benefit and shall do so within one month of being required to do so or such longer period as the relevant authority may consider reasonable.”

These Regulations do not impose a requirement on authorities in relation to what specific information and evidence they should obtain from a claimant. However, it does require an authority to have information which allows an accurate assessment of a claimant’s entitlement, both when a claim is first made and when the claim is reviewed. A test of reasonableness should be applied

Furthermore, Section 1 of the Social Security (Administration) Act 1992 dictates a National Insurance number must either be stated, or enough information provided to trace or allocate one. This legislation applies to both customers and their partners.

(1A) No person whose entitlement to any benefit depends on his making a claim shall be entitled to the benefit unless subsection (1B) below is satisfied in relation both to the person making the claim and to any other person in respect of whom he is claiming benefit.

(1B) this subsection is satisfied in relation to a person if–

- (a) The claim is accompanied by–*
 - (i) a statement of the person’s national insurance number and information or evidence establishing that that number has been allocated to the person; or*
 - (ii) Information or evidence enabling the national insurance number that has been allocated to the person to be ascertained; or*
- (b) the person makes an application for a national insurance number to be allocated to him which is accompanied by information or evidence enabling such a number to be so allocated.*

Given those requirements are at the core of the process of administering claims these shall always be adhered to and be considered within the Quality Assurance checks completed on benefit claims assessed.

6. Verification standards

From April 2021 Anglia Revenues introduced a Verification Policy as detailed below for each customer scenario.

In the majority of claims we will access real time DWP & HMRC secure data to verify claims; for all other scenarios customers may be required to provide evidence either before a claim is determined or during post payment assurance as detailed in Appendix A. Information to support a customer’s claims for benefit will only be requested if reasonably required. In most cases a decision should be able to be made based on data share information and customer’s claim form details.

Housing Benefit customer's claims may be subject to some further checks to ensure audit and subsidy compliance; claims for Council Tax Support are not subject to DWP subsidy payment rules so there is less requirement to request additional verification.

Removing the burden for most customers to provide additional supporting information where we have access to secure data will improve the customer journey and allow staff to focus on requesting details where it may be necessary to request extra documentation.

Examples are detailed below:

- Where there might be evidence of fraud
- To establish liability – for example students, persons from abroad, customers without a National Insurance Number
- Capital above the lower threshold for Housing Benefit or Pensioner Age Council Tax Support
- To ensure a commercial tenancy exists
- Ownership of other property - to obtain value of property
- Company directors - to clarify income
- If our secure data check reveals a discrepancy, we will need details of actual income before we can process and may pass the claim for a further compliance check.

Post payment check for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support customers where necessary

ARP will ensure for the scenarios detailed claims will be subject to a post payment review.

This will include, but not limited to:

- where we have been unable to obtain information through data sharing resources
- where customers have capital over the lower capital threshold limit. For working age Housing Benefit customers this will be any capital declared over £6,000
- where working age Council Tax Support customers have capital close to the £10,000 capital limit.
- Where pension age Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support customers who declared £10,000 or more capital on their claim form.

These additional checks should ensure that customer's claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support assessments remain correct.

In addition to the above, when considered proportionate, the Decision Maker can arrange for one or more of the following additional checks:

1. A Credit Reference (CRA) check could be made to determine if there are any discrepancies between the information provided by the customer on their claim form and the information available via a CRA check.

2. For Private Tenants a Land Registry check can be made to ensure the landlord has been correctly declared on their application.
3. In any case, a pre-payment review either in person, by telephone or by home visit, where necessary and permissible, to the customer to review the information provided on the claim and the evidence supplied

The relevant activity and outcome will be appropriately logged against the claim.

Assessors may liaise with the Investigation Team who will be able to give them a fraud perspective and advice; this may lead to further compliance checks or an investigation.

* With the technological advances in the modern world and the increasing move to self-service, it is acknowledged that supporting documentation such as payslips and bank statements, which serve as evidence, are often now in electronic formats and subject to being printed off by claimants on demand. These types of supporting evidence are admissible as scanned documentary evidence for all risk groups.

Recording and Monitoring

This Policy has been produced in compliance with Housing Benefits Regulations 2006 and our Local Council Tax Support Schemes.

7. Implementation and Training

This revised policy will require staff training and amendments to our online claim forms. The policy will be made available to all staff and internal verification procedures will be documented. These procedures will be reinforced with refresher training and management supervision of all staff involved. Our programme of quality checks will continue.

8. Complaints

The respective Council's individual 'Compliments and Complaints Procedure' (available on the each of the Councils' websites) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about this policy.

9. Policy Review

This policy is a long-term policy there is no requirement by the DWP for an annual review. Advances in DWP and HMRC data share may reduce further the requirement to engage with customers. Accordingly, when that occurs, we may review the requirements stated above and at Appendix A if it is beneficial to the customer through improving their claim journey.

Owner	Lorraine King
Review Date	1 st March 2022
Next Review	Not required
Document Version	1.8

REVISION HISTORY

Issue	Description	Date	Author(s)
1.0	Original Policy	Dec 2012	Sharon Jones
1.1	Policy reviewed	March 2015	Adrian Mills
1.2	Policy reviewed	March 2016	Adrian Mills
1.3	Policy reviewed	March 2017	Adrian Mills
1.4	Policy reviewed	March 2018	Adrian Mills
1.5	Policy reviewed	March 2019	Adrian Mills
1.6	Policy reviewed	March 2020	Adrian Mills
1.7	Policy reviewed	March 2021	Adrian Mills
1.8	Policy reviewed	March 2022	Lorraine King

Appendix A

Type of Evidence	Sub-category of evidence	Housing Benefit Claims	Council Tax Support only claims
Identity and Nino	Identity – claimant and any partner	Secure data check	Secure data check
	Nino – claimant and any partner	Secure data check	Secure data check
Residency/Rent	Private Tenants	Rent proof required from customer	N/A
	Social Landlords	Information provided by RP held by LA or required as necessary	N/A
	Council tenant	Information held by LA	N/A
Household Composition	Partner Income/Capital	Secure DWP data or based on information declared on claim form, then post payment check	Secure DWP data or based on information declared on claim form
	Dependants under 18	Based on information declared on claim form	Based on information declared on claim form
	Non-dependants in remunerative work	Customer claim data accepted, or evidence required	Based on information declared on claim form
	Non-dependants receiving DWP benefits	Secure DWP data	Secure DWP data
	Non-dependant student	Based on information declared on claim form, then post payment check	Based on information declared on claim form
	Non-dependant not in remunerative work/other	Based on information declared on claim form	Based on information declared on claim form
Income	State Benefits & Pensions	Secure DWP data	Secure DWP data

	Earnings/SMP/SSP	Secure DWP data	Secure DWP data
	Self employed earnings	Claim form should contain all information required. Discretion to ask for/query information	Claim form should contain all information required. Discretion to ask for/ query information
Child Care Costs		Based on information declared on claim form, then post payment check	Based on information declared on claim form.
Student Status	Student grant / other income required	Customer asked to provide evidence within claim form	Customer asked to provide evidence within claim form
Capital	Below lower capital limit	Based on application form	Based on application form
	Above lower capital limit	If working age and over £6k based on application form then post payment check If pension age and over £10k based on application form then post payment check	If working age customer has over £9k based on application form then post payment check If pension age customer has over £15k based on application form then post payment check
	Property	Customer asked to provide evidence within claim form	Customer asked to provide evidence within claim form

**blue shading indicates where further customer evidence is required.

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