

A G E N D A

ANGLIA REVENUES & BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE & TIME Tuesday, 18th June, 2024 at 10.00 am

VENUE: Keystone Innovation Centre, Croxton Road, Thetford. IP24 1JD

For the attention of:

Cllr Paul Ashton, East Suffolk Council (Chairman)
Cllr Diane Hind, West Suffolk Council (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Philip Cowen, Breckland Council
Cllr Jan French, Fenland District Council
Cllr James Lay, East Cambridgeshire District Council

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

PART A **ITEMS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

Page(s)
herewith

1. CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

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 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):

*East Suffolk Council – 2023 (Current Chairperson)
Fenland DC – 2022
East Cambs DC – 2021
Breckland DC – 2020
West Suffolk DC – 2019
Waveney DC – 2018*

	<u>Page(s)</u> <u>herewith</u>
<i>Suffolk Coastal DC - June 2017</i> <i>West Suffolk Council (current Vice Chair)</i>	
In accordance with the Terms of Reference, West Suffolk Council be appointed as Chairperson and Breckland Council be appointed as Vice Chairperson.	
2. <u>TREASURER</u>	
To appoint a Treasurer for the ensuing year.	
3. <u>MINUTES</u>	1 - 6
To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2024.	
4. <u>APOLOGIES</u>	
To receive apologies for absence.	
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.	
6. <u>DECLARATIONS</u>	
7. <u>PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM)</u>	7 - 38
Report of Matthew Waite-Wright, Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP).	
8. <u>ARP FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (STANDING ITEM)</u>	39 - 43
Report of Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director of Finance & S151 Officer (BDC).	
9. <u>WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM)</u>	44 - 45
Report of Theresa Mann, Principal Benefits & Council Tax Billing Manager (ARP).	
10. <u>ARP SERVICE PLAN AND RISK REGISTER</u>	46 - 58
Report of Lorraine King, Head of ARP.	
11. <u>FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM)</u>	
To note any items.	
12. <u>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</u>	
13. <u>NEXT MEETING</u>	
To note the arrangements for the next meeting to be held on Tuesday, 3 September 2024 at 10am.	
This will be a virtual meeting held via Teams.	

14. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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 paragraphs 2 and 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act.”

**PART B –
ITEMS FROM WHICH THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**

15. HUNTINGDONSHIRE MANAGEMENT OF FRAUD SERVICES SECTION 113 AGREEMENT

Report by Katey Mills, Principal Fraud & Enforcement Manager (ARP).

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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 & BENEFITS JOINT COMMITTEE

Held on Tuesday, 5 March 2024 at 10.00 am in the
Virtual meeting via Teams

PRESENT

Cllr Paul Ashton (Chairman) Cllr Jan French
Cllr Diane Hind (Vice-Chairman) Cllr James Lay
Cllr Philip Cowen

In Attendance

Lorraine King	- Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP)
Rachael Mann	- Director (Resources & Property) (West Suffolk)
Adrian Mills	- Head of ARP
Matthew Waite-Wright	- Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP)
Ian Smith	- Director, Finance (East Cambs)
Marie McKissock	- Deputy Finance Officer (East Suffolk)
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer (BDC)

Action
By

1/24 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

2/24 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from officers Lorraine Rogers (East Suffolk DC) and Alison Chubbock (Breckland DC).

Marie McKissock was in attendance as Lorraine Rogers' substitute.

3/24 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

4/24 DECLARATIONS

None declared.

5/24 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM)

Matthew Waite-Wright, the Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP), presented the Performance report as at the end of December 2023.

All five authorities were above the set target for Business Rates collection and that position remained at the end of February. Council Tax collection was ahead overall; however, two authorities, East & West Suffolk DCs, were

Action By

slightly behind by just under 1% of the collection target. The position had since improved for those two Councils, but both were still slightly behind target.

The number of electronic forms continued to increase and under fraud & compliance, the fraud identified had reached £3.1m against an annual target of £2.8m, exceeding the set target.

Each individual Councils performance was then provided.

In terms of Breckland Council, the target was slightly behind for days to process Local Council Tax Support as well as the Housing Benefit element. Lorraine King, the Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing, explained that a software issue had affected performance during Qtr2 and Qtr3 but had now been resolved. Performance had also been affected by the two energy schemes that had now closed; however, Housing Benefit process times had now improved since Qtr2 for all Partners. An ARP wide focus day had been held ahead of annual billing which had been successful and in February at the regular quarterly Liaison meeting, DWP had noted ARP's good performance in all areas compared to local and national averages and had conveyed its thanks to the Team.

Referring to the Council Tax collection for East & West Suffolk DC, the Vice-Chair, Councillor Hind, asked if there was a reason for these both being below target.

The Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement said that it was difficult to pinpoint one specific reason, but as everyone was aware, there were cost of living pressures across the whole country but he assured Members that all partner authorities had been in a similar position the previous year and it had righted itself at the end of that financial year and he hoped the same would happen again for the end of March results. As far as processing was concerned, the recovery timetables and reminders were all up to date, but he was aware that in East Suffolk, Lowestoft itself had its own issues but a great deal of the outstanding debt had been identified in terms of Council Tax.

Councillor Hind thanked him for the explanation but felt that such issues would be across the board and not just affecting two authorities.

The Chairman felt that another factor could be new house occupations as this would have an impact on how much Council Tax was raised. The Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement agreed, new homes were registered by ARP but there could be a slight delay sometimes of 2 or 3 months from the moment that the property was built to when a Council Tax bill was sent. The occupants could find themselves with higher bills to pay as Council Tax would have to be backdated to the time of occupancy. He pointed out that ARP had Officers monitoring new build sites and the debit was added into the equation.

The Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing assured Members that such a matter was being closely monitored. The Team was also looking at whether customers payments methods were changing such as moving from 10-month instalments to 12-month instalments to establish whether this was having an impact on the collection rates.

The same comments across all the different schemes applied to East Cambridgeshire DC. However, in terms of East Cambs fraud performance,

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following the funding from County for fraud & compliance, the figures identified for fraud was £778,820 compared to the previous year's total which was less than £100k. The same applied for Fenland DC, albeit slightly less but the funding received have had a significant impact on identified fraud.

Councillor French was concerned about the amount of fraud being identified and felt that more advertising was required to deter people from applying or claiming for discounts that they were not entitled to.

The Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement explained that ARP was providing additional statistics to Fenland DC in terms of the position of the fraud investigations but agreed that perhaps some further advertising could be beneficial. He pointed out that a warning was already included on the Council Tax bills and that they could be liable to a £70 penalty. He would be happy to have conversations with all partners and their Communication Teams to establish what else could be done to advertise such issues. It was noted that Single Person's discount was the most widely abused in terms of fraud.

Councillor James stated that although £778,820 of fraud had been identified across Cambridgeshire, he asked how much of this amount had actually been recovered.

Members were informed that from that amount there was £410k of Single Person Discount fraud and this amount was added to the Council Tax pot to collect. The collection figures were roughly between 98% & 99% and that included the Single Persons discounts that had been cancelled.

The Chairman felt that it would be useful to report on how much of the fraud was being recovered. The Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement said that this was a perfectly reasonable request, and would make some enquiries, and hopefully come back with a report at a future meeting.

In response to a further question about tenancy fraud, Members were informed that this was where ARP identified, with the help of Housing Associations, to carry out any investigations. A nominal figure was put on each property that was either recovered by the Housing Association for a fraudulent tenancy or an illegal subletting or where a tenant had been struck off their waiting list. Housing Associations were charged for this service and the figures were derived from the National Associations of how much it was worth for ARP to collect. The figure of £93k for East Cambs equated to 2 or 3 properties that had been brought back into public use.

To supplement the points made, Adrian Mills, the Head of ARP, explained that ARP had taken away an action to present a Briefing to Members ahead of the June meeting to define fraud and also highlight how much fraud was being identified and how much was being recovered.

As a follow up question, Councillor James believed that many Housing Associations had properties that they were not aware of being sublet and wondered if ARP's database had been looked at in comparison with the Housing Associations database. This suggestion would be taken on board, but it would be at a cost for ARP to carry out such a task.

For the remaining authorities, the performance and collection rates were very similar.

Service Updates as at December 2023

At the end of the calendar year over £3.2m in debt repayments had been collected in terms of enforcement and just over £935k in fees. The fee element was paid back to the partner authorities.

The Further Recovery Team had surpassed the total amount monies collected in 2022/23.

For Council Tax, the major task that had been completed was the automation of web Direct Debits and refunds to improve the customer experience.

For Benefits, ARP was now automating 97% of changes in Universal Credit and had become a reference site for other supplier sites.

Collections for Non-Domestic Rates was going well, and each partner authority was above target. The small business rate reviews had been completed and the administration of the 4 bids throughout the partnership and 3 enterprise zones continued.

PDF attachments had been implemented for e-billing. Customers could sign up to it and have their bills sent via email with an electronic PDF attachment. This would hopefully reduce the postal costs.

Fraud & Compliance work had commenced for Broadland and South Norfolk, which was achieving some good results.

The Contact-Us form on the website had been improved capturing all required information including evidence all on the one form, and in one place.

The report was otherwise noted.

6/24 ARP FORECAST FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (STANDING ITEM)

Adrian Mills, the Head of ARP, presented the Financial Performance report as at 31 December 2023 on behalf of Alison Chubbock, the Assistant Director of Finance & S151 Officer (BDC), who had sent her apologies.

The forecast showed an overspend against budget of £186k (1.8%) for the whole of ARP. This equated to a £45k pressure compared to the previous financial report. This had been mainly due to the National Pay Award increase and also, since October 2023, Royal Mail had significantly increased its postal charges by 18% as well as other increased inflationary pressures from all suppliers.

New Burdens funding had been received from the Government to off-set the cost of delivering the two alternative energy funding schemes and this had been included in the financial forecast.

The current budget did include an efficiency target of £100k, rising to £200k in future years. The 100k target had been met for 2023-24 and work was underway to achieve the £200k target that had been set in the budget for 2024-25.

Details contained in Appendix A were highlighted and the table at section 1.4

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of the report highlighted the share of the forecast outturn for each partner Council based on the ARP Joint Committee Agreement. The figures would most probably change at the end of March 2024.

The report was otherwise noted.

7/24 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM)

Lorraine King, the Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP), presented the report.

A number of updates for this quarter were provided.

The outcome of the bid in terms of the Help to Claim scheme should have been announced in December 2023 but had not as yet materialised.

A plan for the 2024-25 migration had now been decided and would be based on benefit types starting with Income Support case followed by Employment Support Allowance (ESA) with tax credits then Jobseekers. Housing Benefits only cases and Housing Benefit with tax credits would follow. A gradual movement should be seen in terms of Housing Benefit cases for this year and into April 2025.

Case estimates were still waited for the roll out plan. Work had already been carried out and the Team had some idea how this would turn out for the partnership. DWP had stated that it could only supply national estimated cases and not broken down by every authority. Guidance was still awaited, but in the interim an all-local authority conference call would be taking place on 15 March 2024.

Work was underway to determine New Burdens funding to support the close of the Housing Benefit claims.

The Team also continued to press for more information and timelines at the regular DWP & LGA liaison meetings.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) allocations for the financial year ending March 2025 would remain the same as the previous 2 years as part of the 2-year funding freeze.

The Chairman asked if any of the timescales mentioned were at risk bearing in mind the impending General Election. Members were informed that this should not cause any impact as the years programme had already been confirmed and communicated.

Councillor Cowen mentioned the Citizen's Advice Bureaus (CABs). He was aware that a number of authorities across the country were struggling with their finances and, unfortunately, one of the quick wins, would be to reduce funding to the CABs. Given the relationship with DWP, he asked if ARP was seeing any tensions across the Partnership with CAB facilities being withdrawn or reduced.

The Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing said that this was being closely monitored but currently ARP was not aware of any issues.

Councillor Lay stated that the CAB in West Suffolk had been overwhelmed

Action By

with requests for help and East Cambs DC relied on the CAB in Newmarket and was working with them to find more staff to be trained to assist with the increase.

The Vice-Chairman felt that the CAB did an invaluable job, which was recognised, and she hoped that all Partners had been and would continue to support them.

Members were informed that ARP had its own Liaison Officer who did a great deal of work with all stakeholders including the CABs.

The report was otherwise noted.

8/24 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM)

As it was Adrian Mills, the Head of ARP's, last formal meeting before his pending departure, the Chairman wished him the very best for the future and a great retirement and, for ARP, to build on what he had put in place.

Councillor Cowen, as one of the longest serving Members on this Committee, and on behalf of everyone at Breckland Council, he thanked Adrian for everything that he had done in 'steering this ship' through what had been some quite difficult times and felt that it was to Adrian's credit that ARP was where it was today.

As a relatively new Member of the Committee, the Vice-Chair, Councillor Hind, said that it had become plainly obvious to her just how much work Adrian had put into the partnership, and she wished him well in his retirement, and thanked him for his sterling work. She was sure that the new Head of ARP, Lorraine King, would be more than a capable person going forward.

Councillor French concurred with all the above comments and wished him luck with any venture that he chose to do.

As one of the shortest serving Members on the Committee, Councillor Lay also thanked Adrian and said it was obvious to him that the Partnership had been in a safe pair of hands but was confident that Lorraine would take the reins and do the same.

Adrian thanked everyone for their kind and generous comments and thanked all Members for their support and the support for the Partnership and he agreed that he would be leaving ARP in very good hands with Lorraine.

9/24 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 18 June 2024 at 10am were noted.

The meeting closed at 10.40 am

CHAIRMAN



Joint Committee Performance Report

March 2024



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Anglia
Revenues Partnership

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All Partner Councils Combined



Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	£ 67,768,223	£ 139,515,448	£ 203,744,239	£ 245,214,418	●
Target	£ 61,704,919	£ 128,580,723	£ 191,110,435	£ 239,550,804	
2022/23	£ 59,956,790	£ 126,388,945	£ 182,560,970	£ 222,341,168	●
			Year End Target	£239,550,804	●

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	£152,371,801	£300,004,529	£447,929,019	£ 534,434,250	●
Target	£151,930,845	£299,624,951	£448,909,622	£ 533,233,453	
2022/23	£149,681,569	£287,091,491	£427,218,713	£508,924,099	●
			Year End Target	£533,233,453	●

Number of Electronic Forms Received					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	18,463	40,278	63,387	90,895	●
2021/22	14,052	32,059	52,995	76,378	●
			Year End Target	76378	●

Fraud and Compliance	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Yr Target
Single Person Discount Fraud	£683,416	£1,357,666	£2,029,063	£ 2,486,426	£1,080,000
Local Council Tax Support	£82,333	£160,769	£232,731	£ 375,240	£322,500
Tenancy Fraud	£279,000	£372,000	£372,000	£ 375,240	£860,000
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£307,721	£373,091	£488,820	£ 298,543	£537,500
Fraud Identified	£1,352,470	£2,263,526	£3,122,614	£ 3,850,057	£2,800,000

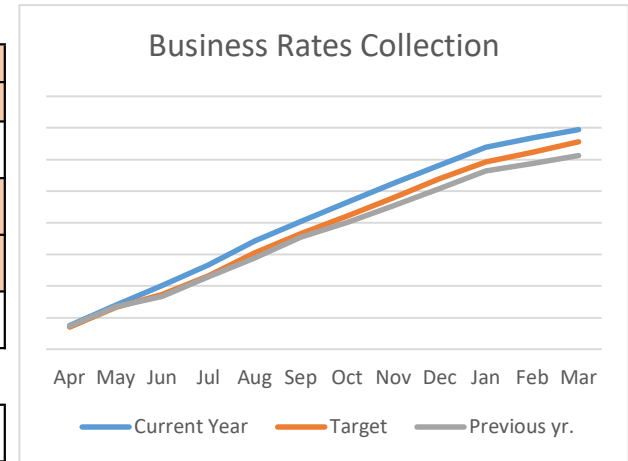


Performance Information March 2024



Business Rates

Business Rates Collection						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2023/24	£ 10,067,781	£ 20,239,464	£ 29,119,017	£ 34,725,336	●	
Target	£ 8,667,567	£ 18,309,721	£ 26,970,487	£ 32,803,925		
Refunds	£ 332,018	£ 489,472	£ 980,088	£ 1,301,682		
2022/23	£ 8,392,011	£ 17,755,633	£ 25,449,325	£ 30,645,961	●	



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Year End Target	£ 32,803,925	●
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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

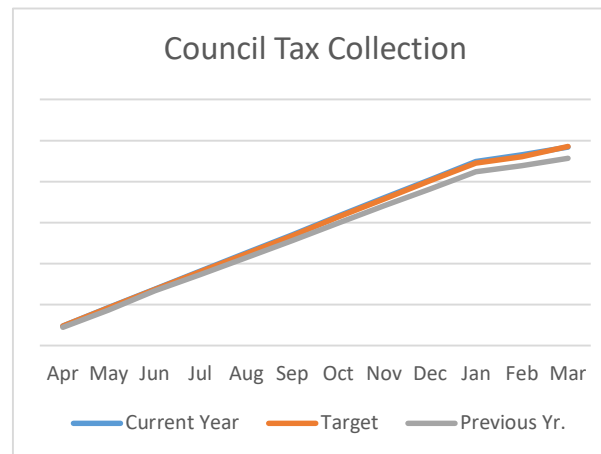
Collection has exceeded target at year end by £1.9m. We will continue to closely monitor collection into 2024-2025 in the current economic climate.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2023/24	£ 27,531,029	£ 54,039,505	£ 80,822,642	£ 96,864,907	●	
Target	£ 27,270,949	£ 53,595,656	£ 80,395,006	£ 97,105,615		
Refunds	£ 233,307	£ 609,555	£ 933,103	£ 1,280,626		
2022/23	£ 26,680,055	£ 51,256,995	£ 76,440,286	£ 91,393,141	●	

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Year End Target	£97,105,615	●
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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.

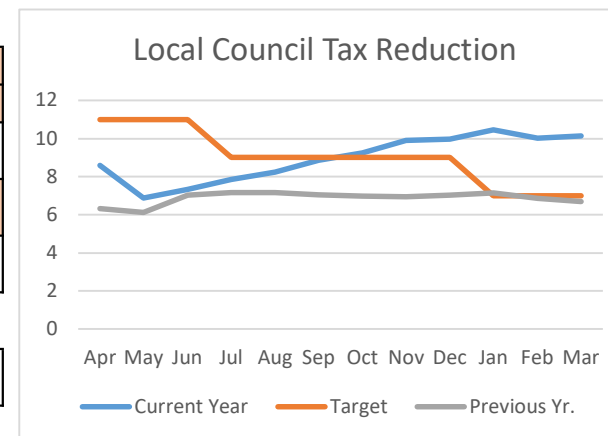
Narrative

Collection is below target at year end but well within the 1% tolerance. Collection will continue to be closely monitored throughout 2024-2025 in the current economic climate.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	7.34	8.87	9.97	10.14	●
Target	11	9	9	7	
2022/23	7.03	7.05	7.03	6.71	●

Year End Target	7	●
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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.

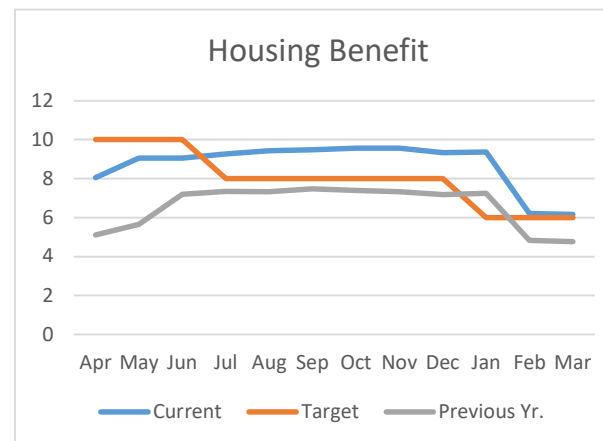
Narrative

The number of days to process Council Tax reduction at the end of Q4 is over the 7 day target by just over 3 days. A series of focussed work is in January and March helped bring the work up to date but the effect on performance will not be seen until Q1 2024-25. A software issue which affected performance during Q2 and 3 has now been resolved. We will continue to focus on keeping new claims up to date into Q1 of next year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	9.05	9.49	9.33	6.16	●
Target	10	8	8	6	
2022/23	7.19	7.47	7.03	4.77	●

Year End Target	6	●
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Description

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

Narrative

The number of days to process Housing Benefit in Q4 is just above the target of 6 days - this is an impressive reduction of over 3 days since Q3. Performance has been impacted by the energy schemes which have now closed and a software issue affecting automation of UC records has also impacted resource requirements within Benefits. Several focus days in Q2-3 and a planned partnership wide campaign day at the end of January ahead of Annual Billing have helped bring performance to almost within 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 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. This includes further funding for the roll out of the NFI Premium data matching service in 2023/2024.

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	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£142,373	£243,933	£328,132	£430,273
Local Council Tax Support	£32,274	£47,239	£57,455	£76,441
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£14,537	£19,061	£25,767	£112,812
Fraud Identified	£189,185	£310,232	£411,354	£619,526



Performance Information March 2024

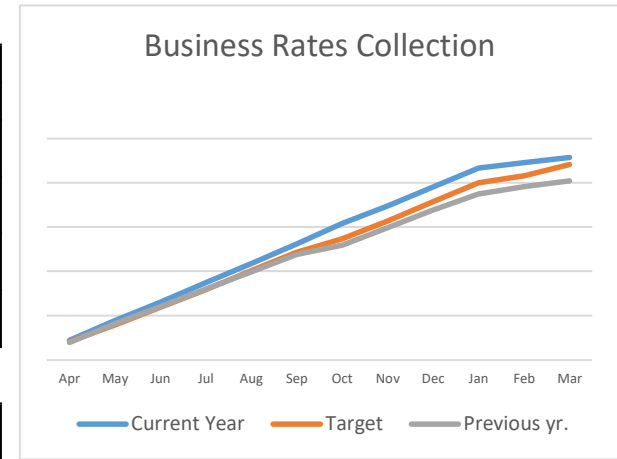


Business Rates

Business Rates Collection						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2023/24	£ 6,536,259	£ 13,090,896	£ 19,510,088	£ 22,864,867		●
Target	£ 5,951,099	£ 12,180,922	£ 17,842,235	£ 22,071,920		
Refunds	£ 271,670	£ 329,367	£ 849,270	£ 1,568,345		
2022/23	£ 6,032,224	£ 11,905,740	£ 16,939,915	£ 20,213,268		●

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Full Year Target	£22,071,920	●
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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.

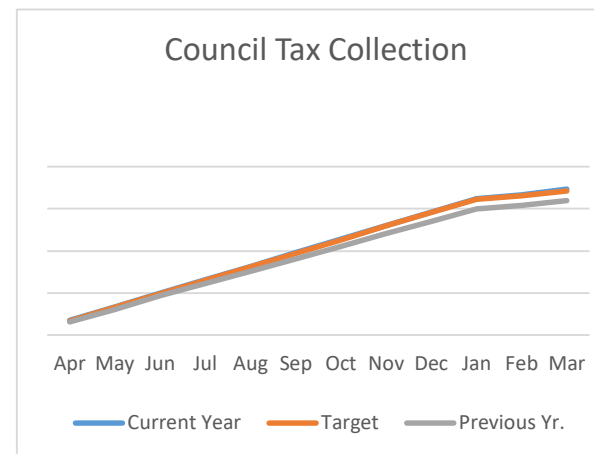
Narrative

Collection has exceeded target at year end by £600k. Collection will continue to be closely monitored throughout 2024-2025 in the current economic climate.



Council Tax

Council Tax Collection						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2023/24	£ 19,921,293	£ 39,208,716	£ 58,446,507	£ 69,335,019	●	
Target	£ 19,633,224	£ 38,832,184	£ 58,202,677	£ 68,511,010		
Refunds	£ 221,763	£ 466,640	£ 755,941	£ 1,034,528		
2022/23	£ 18,778,113	£ 36,286,983	£ 54,114,832	£ 63,953,017	●	



Year End Target	£ 68,511,010	●
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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 exceeded target year end by £800k . Collection will continue to be closely monitored throughout 2024-2025 in the current economic climate.

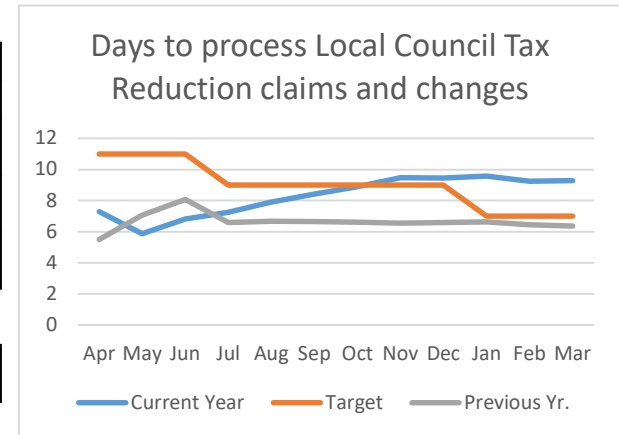


Local Council Tax Reduction



Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	6.82	8.42	9.46	9.29	●
Target	11	9	9	7	
2022/23	8.08	6.66	6.61	6.38	●

Year End Target	7	●
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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

The number of days to process Council Tax reduction at year end is over the 7 day target by more than 2 days. A series of focussed work is in January and March helped bring the work up to date but the effect on performance will not be seen until Q1 2024-25. A software issue which affected performance during Q2 and 3 has now been resolved. We will continue to focus on keeping new claims up to date into Q1 of next year.

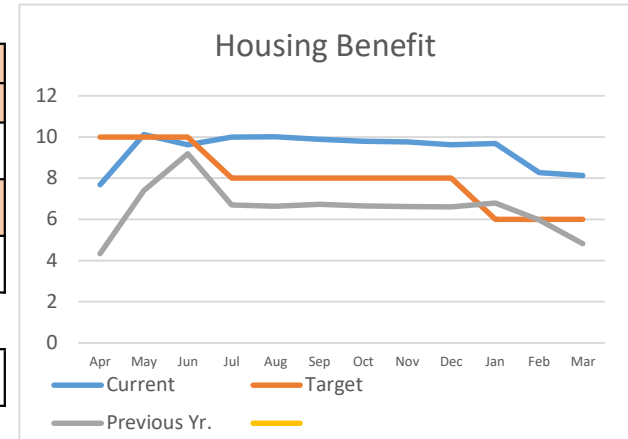


Housing Benefit



Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	9.61	9.89	9.62	8.12	●
Target	10	8	8	6	
2022/23	9.18	6.73	6.61	4.83	●

Year End Target	6	●
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Description

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

Narrative

The number of days to process Housing Benefit at year end is over target by just over 2 days. Performance has been impacted by the energy schemes which have now closed and a software issue affecting automation of UC records has also impacted resource requirements within Benefits. This has also now been resolved and we aim to meet target by the end of the year and have planned a partnership wide campaign day at the end of January ahead of Annual Billing.



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.

Work on the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub has commenced following East Cambs and Fenland approving the business case to extend the Fraud and Compliance work for the two partners. This has aligned 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. Funding for 2 additional posts from County has been secured until the end of the financial year and those posts have been filled. This includes further funding for the roll out of the NFI Premium data matching service in 2023/2024.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£49,572	£204,868	£410,421	£461,493
Local Council Tax Support	£12,185	£21,465	£28,044	£35,090
Tenancy Fraud	£93,000	£93,000	£93,000	£93,000
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£126,108	£147,972	£247,355	£274,420
Fraud Identified	£280,865	£467,305	£778,820	£864,003

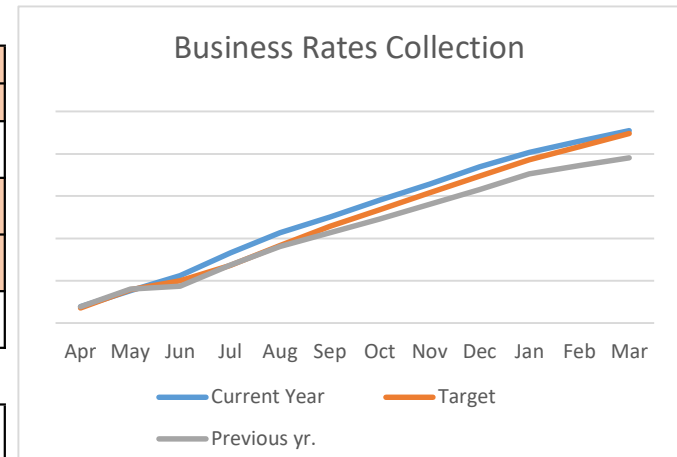


Performance Information March 2024



Business Rates

Business Rates Collection						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2023/24	£ 22,407,281	£ 49,989,647	£ 73,780,586	£ 90,865,462	●	
Target	£ 19,965,948	£ 45,762,883	£ 69,496,618	£ 89,602,932		
Refunds	£ 1,059,107	£ 1,571,498	£ 2,015,483	£ 3,090,063		
2022/23	£ 17,431,378	£ 42,658,428	£ 63,154,466	£ 78,033,010	●	



20

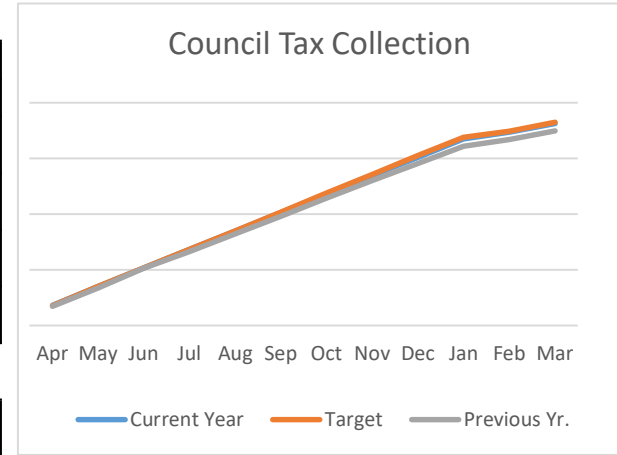
Year End Target	89,602,932	●
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Description
 This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative
 Collection has exceeded target at year end by around £1.2m. Collection will continue to be closely monitored throughout 2024-2025 in the current economic climate.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	£ 51,605,854	£ 101,242,912	£ 151,083,155	£ 181,371,437	●
Target	£ 51,691,556	£ 101,797,118	£ 152,495,778	£ 182,376,077	
Refunds	£ 521,384	£ 1,212,275	£ 1,845,002	£ 2,610,576	
2022/23	£ 51,262,165	£ 97,920,907	£ 145,561,042	£ 174,705,482	●



21

Year End Target	182,376,077	●
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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.

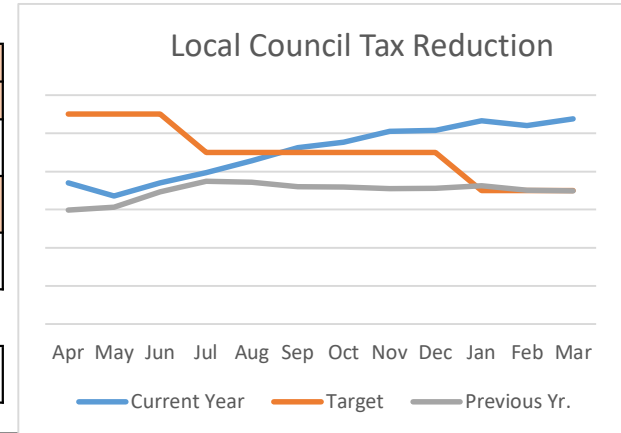
Narrative

Collection is slightly below target at year end but well within the tolerance of 1%. Collection will continue to be closely monitored throughout 2024-2025 in the current economic climate.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	7.41	9.24	10.15	10.76	●
Target	11	9	9	7	
2022/23	6.93	7.19	7.11	6.98	●

Year End Target	7	●
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Description

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

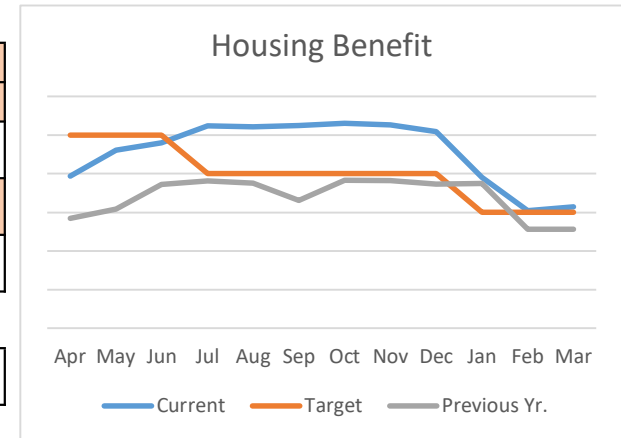
Narrative

The number of days to process Council Tax reduction at year end is over the target by over 3 days. A series of focussed work is in January and March helped bring the work up to date but the effect on performance will not be seen until Q1 2024-25. A software issue which affected performance during Q2 and 3 has now been resolved. We will continue to focus on keeping new claims up to date into Q1 of next year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	9.61	10.49	10.19	6.28	●
Target	10	8	8	6	
2022/23	7.44	6.62	7.45	5.13	●

Year End Target	6	●
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23

Description

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

Narrative

The number of days to process Housing Benefit at year end is just above the target of 6 days - this is an impressive reduction of almost 4 days since Q3. Performance has been impacted by the energy schemes which have now closed and a software issue affecting automation of UC records has also impacted resource requirements within Benefits. This has also now been resolved and we aim to meet target by the end of the year and have

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. Suffolk County have agreed to fund a further post in order that the NFI Premium matching service can be utilised for 2023/24.

24

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£144,559	£283,689	£380,760	£477,542
Local Council Tax Support	£6,022	£28,256	£51,063	£91,249
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£1,698	£36,679	£39,542	£67,495
Fraud Identified	£152,279	£348,624	£471,365	£636,287

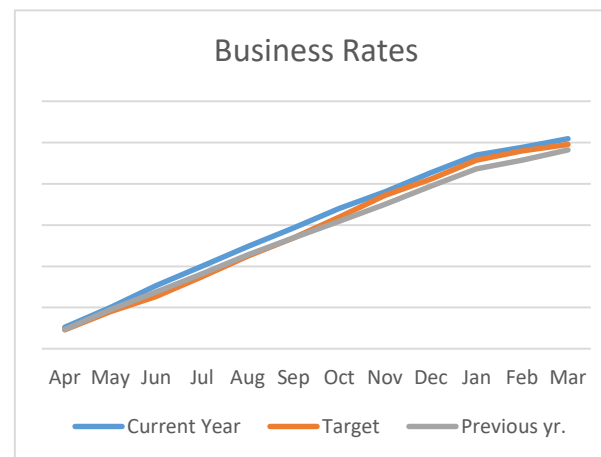
Performance Information March 2024

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	£ 7,636,425	£ 14,640,439	£ 21,345,038	£ 25,460,126	●
Target	£ 6,328,587	£ 13,437,456	£ 20,572,849	£ 24,779,458	
Refunds	£ 286,004	£ 610,782	£ 1,087,100	£ 1,448,713	
2022/23	£ 6,886,502	£ 13,413,855	£ 19,699,069	£ 24,120,990	●

01

Year End Target	£24,779,458	●
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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.

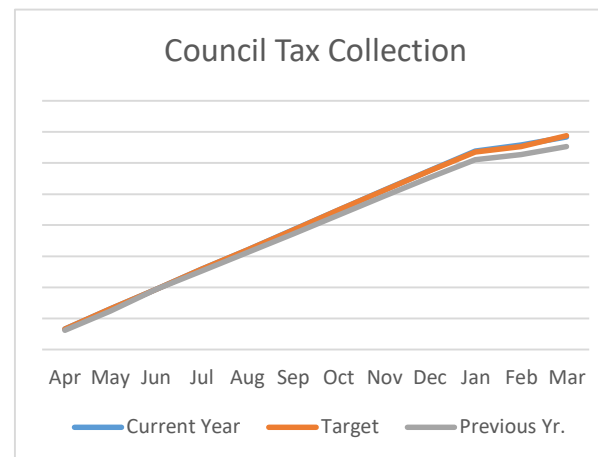
Narrative

Collection has exceeded target at year end by £600k. Collection will continue to be closely monitored throughout 2024-2025 in the current economic climate.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2023/24	£ 19,400,484	£ 38,563,439	£ 57,568,740	£ 68,341,134	●	
Target	£ 19,426,351	£ 38,421,156	£ 57,429,446	£ 68,755,817		
Refunds	£ 220,722	£ 447,331	£ 686,697	£ 956,393		
2022/23	£ 19,437,583	£ 37,186,868	£ 55,231,245	£ 65,262,181	●	

Year End Target	£68,755,817	●
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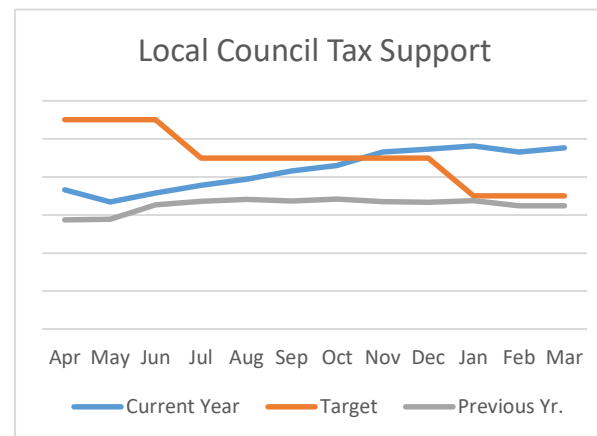
Description
 This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative
 Collection is below target at year end but well within the 1% tolerance. Collection will continue to be closely monitored throughout 2024-2025 in the current economic climate.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	7.15	8.31	9.45	9.52	●
Target	11	9	9	7	
2022/23	6.54	6.73	6.67	6.48	●

Year End Target	7	●
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27

Description

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

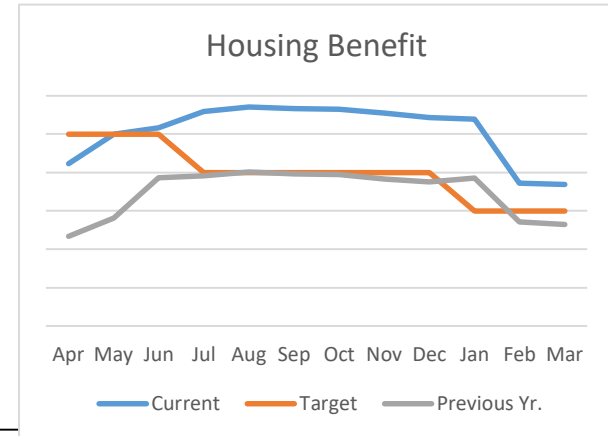
Narrative

The number of days to process Council Tax reduction at year end was over the target by 2.5 days. A series of focussed work is in January and March helped bring the work up to date but the effect on performance will not be seen until Q1 2024-25. A software issue which affected performance during Q2 and 3 has now been resolved. We will continue to focus on keeping new claims up to date into Q1 of next year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	10.33	11.33	10.86	7.37	●
Target	10	8	8	6	
2022/23	7.72	7.93	7.51	5.29	●

Year End Target	6	●
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Description

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

Narrative

The number of days to process Housing Benefit at year end was just over 1 day over target - this is an impressive reduction of over 4 days since Q3. Performance has been impacted by the energy schemes which have now closed and a software issue affecting automation of UC records has also impacted resource requirements within Benefits. This has also now been resolved and we aim to meet target by the end of the year and have planned a partnership wide campaign day at the end of January ahead of Annual Billing.

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.

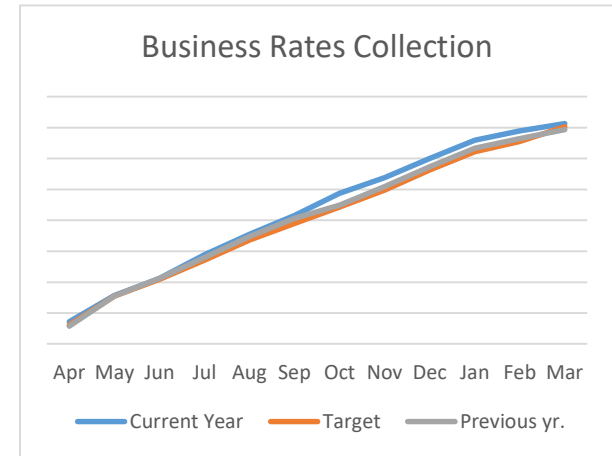
The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges.

Work on the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub has commenced following East Camb's and Fenland approving the business case to extend the Fraud and Compliance work for the two partners. This has aligned 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. Funding for 2 additional posts from County has been secured for until the end of the financial year and those posts have been filled. Discussions are on going for 2024/25 provision.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£120,746	£237,996	£411,601	£564,927
Local Council Tax Support	£16,025	£22,449	£39,575	£45,919
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£93,000	£93,000	£93,000
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£165,378	£169,379	£169,942	£169,942
Fraud Identified	£302,149	£522,823	£714,118	£873,788

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2023/24	£ 21,120,477	£ 41,555,002	£ 59,989,510	£ 71,298,627	●	
Target	£ 20,791,718	£ 38,889,741	£ 56,228,246	£ 70,292,569		
Refunds	£ 735,836	£ 1,558,348	£ 2,350,262	£ 3,800,109		
2022/23	£ 21,214,675	£ 40,655,289	£ 57,318,195	£ 69,327,939	●	



30

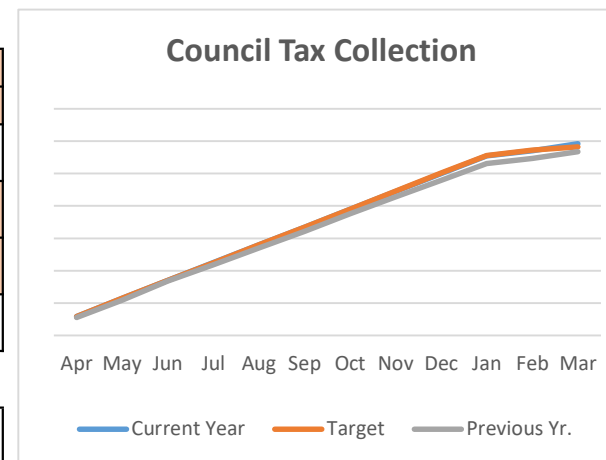
Year End Target	70,292,569	●
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Description
This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative
Collection has exceeded target at year end by £1m. Collection will continue to be closely monitored throughout 2024-2025 in the current economic climate.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	£ 33,913,141	£ 66,949,957	£ 100,007,975	£ 118,521,753	●
Target	£ 33,908,764	£ 66,978,837	£ 100,386,716	£ 116,484,934	
Refunds	£ 381,697	£ 805,676	£ 1,213,268	£ 1,768,695	
2022/23	£ 33,523,653	£ 64,439,738	£ 95,871,308	£ 113,610,278	●



31

Year End Target	116,484,934	●
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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.

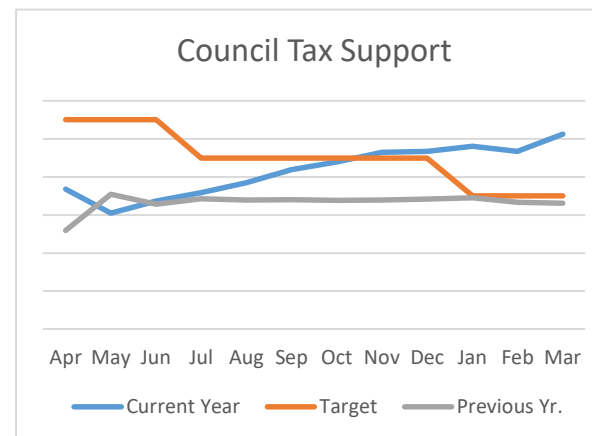
Narrative

Collection exceeded target at year end by just over £2m. Collection will continue to be closely monitored throughout 2024-2025 in the current economic climate. West Suffolk's Council Tax Support scheme temporarily increased the maximum award for working age to 100% during 2023-2024 and this will continue into 2024-2025.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	6.74	8.39	9.34	10.25	●
Target	11	9	9	7	
2022/23	6.56	6.79	6.82	6.61	●

Year End Target	7	●
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Description

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

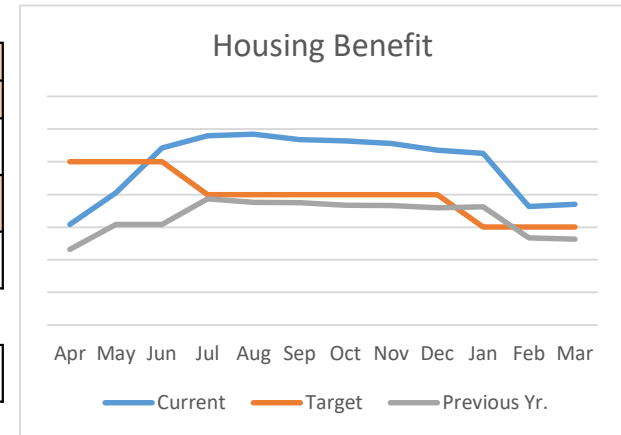
Narrative

The number of days to process Council Tax reduction at year end was more than 3 days over the target. A series of focussed work is in January and March helped bring the work up to date but the effect on performance will not be seen until Q1 2024-25. A software issue which affected performance during Q2 and 3 has now been resolved. We will continue to focus on keeping new claims up to date into Q1 of next year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2023/24	10.85	11.36	10.72	7.40	●
Target	10	8	8	6	
2022/23	6.15	7.49	7.19	5.25	●

Year End Target	6	●
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CS

Description

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

Narrative

The number of days to process Housing Benefit at year end was 1.4 days over target - this is an impressive reduction of over 3 days since Q3. Performance has been impacted by the energy schemes which have now closed and a software issue affecting automation of UC records has also impacted resource requirements within Benefits. This has also now been resolved and we aim to meet target by the end of the year and have planned a partnership wide campaign day at the end of January ahead of Annual Billing.

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. Suffolk County have agreed to fund a further post in order that the NFI Premium matching service can be utilised for 2023/24. Discussions are ongoing regarding funding provision for 2024/25.

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	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£226,167	£387,181	£498,149	£552,190
Local Council Tax Support	£15,826	£41,361	£56,594	£68,359
Tenancy Fraud	£186,000	£186,000	£186,000	£189,240
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£0	£0	£6,214	£46,665
Fraud Identified	£427,992	£614,542	£746,957	£856,454

Service Updates as at March 2024



Enforcement

There had been a higher than usual level of sickness which had an adverse impact on visits achieved during Q3, however the situation significantly improved into Q4. Ongoing discussions continue with our external partners, Broadland and South Norfolk Councils and the East and West Suffolk parking teams regarding the flow of cases.

On 27th March 2024 Norwich gave 6 months notice to ARP to terminate Enforcement services, with effect from 30th September 2024. Resource implications have begun to be considered but it is hopeful that any loss can be offset by potential new enforcement agreements with other partners.

At the end of quarter 4 the team collected over £4.5 million in debt repayment and fees of over £1.3 million.

35

Further Recovery

At the end of Q4 the Further Recovery Team have surpassed the total amount of monies collected in 2022/23 by almost £800,000.

CTAX	NDR	HBOP	TOTAL
£583,936.52	£1,201,483.17	£3,974.03	£1,789,393.72

Council Tax

Overall collection for council tax at the end of year is slightly above target with three authorities being marginally under but within the 1% tolerance; ongoing inflation and interest rate issues might be impacting. A similar picture is being reported by other Suffolk and Norfolk Authorities and the collection rates are being closely monitored.

Demand for council tax billing continues at very high levels, in particular the high number of people moving. Several focus days are taking place in April and May to help deal with the increase in move notifications. We also continue to benefit from introducing the generic Council Tax Billing Officer (CTBO) role, which has created a resilient team who have been able to switch between billing and benefits to help cope with ever changing workloads and priorities, providing increased flexibility to the use of our resources, along with maximising automation functionality. We had 8 new CTBOS join in July and are now advertising for a new round of recruitment. Work has continued on the change of address automation project and we continue to work closely with our supplier to further develop the functionality and we are close to extending the volumes we can automate. We have also had great success in the automation of web Direct Debits, and refund automation has just gone live on two authorities, with the others to follow shortly. At the end of December 2022 the Government announced a new £100m Council Tax Support Fund to help economically vulnerable residents with their Council Tax Bills. The majority of allocations were applied directly to 2023-24 Council Tax bills during annual billing, with the remaining funds being used to provide additional support to new Council Tax Reduction claimants throughout the 2023-24 year and additional exceptional hardship funds for vulnerable council tax payers. At the end of year four of the five local authorities funds had been allocated in full.

Benefits

Neither Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Q4 targets have been met. We are holding focus days in April and May to bring Housing Benefit new claims and Council Tax Support claims up to date. We have also been working on some new automation areas to improve performance and to further smooth the customer experience.

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. We have beta tested and implemented Capita's fraud prevention automation functionality and helped develop an online solution for accuracy reviews.

We are now automating 97% of changes in UC and have become a reference site for other supplier sites. but a system bug affected our performance in this area during Q2 and Q3. DWP held a successful face to face workshop at ARP to help them understand the difficulties and complexities of administering Housing Benefit for supported and specified accommodation as the time taken to process these claims is far greater than the general HB claims that are due to migrate to UC. The Government has announced a full UC roll out plan for the remaining legacy benefits including Housing Benefit, and has brought forward the migration of ESA claimants from 2028 to 2025. We are undertaking a review of the potential impact that this will have on our caseload.

Non-Domestic Rates

Annual billing was successfully carried out in March.

The overall collection and for each individual authority is above target at the end of the fourth quarter. This will continue to be closely monitored in the current economic climate.

A new NDR Valuation List came into effect on the 1 April 2023, every property was assigned a property value. For the team it means that they are administering changes to the 2017 and 2023 VOA property lists - apart from a handful of appeals the 2010 list is now closed.

Recovery Cycles successfully continued across all partners.

The review of Small Business Rate reviews was completed in Q3 meeting the internal audit deadline.

The Team has 1 vacancy due to a secondment to another area and has recruited to another vacancy.

ARP Systems and Digital

Work is progressing with our supplier to review their Digital product working with other LA's to provide feedback from a wider group of users.

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.

We are now successfully automating web DDs and have now completed testing of refunds for Direct Debit payers being rolled out in April. Both of which will complement move automation; testing has progressed during Q4 following some system enhancements and fixes. Work to amend the system start date was completed earlier in the year for all 3 Councils for Council Tax and NNDR as planned. A new improved Contact us form with the option of uploading evidence has been launched and we are seeing increased use of this month on month. PDF attachment e-bills were employed at annual billing and we plan a partnership wide campaign to increase take up in the new financial year.

Fraud and Compliance

The Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub became operational in Quarter 1, with exceptional results achieved by close of Q4. Norfolk County Council continue to fund one Council Tax compliance Officer 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 2024, including funding of the Norwich post plus an additional post to utilise the premium matching service for Breckland and Norwich. Suffolk County Council have also approved funding from April 2024 for one year, supported by East and West Suffolk. This funding includes the premium matching service for both East and West Suffolk and an additional post within the team to progress this workflow.

Fraud work commenced for Broadland and South Norfolk in Quarter 2 although this was delayed by their change in software supplier. Successful outcomes were recorded in Qtr 4. To improve the registration of new properties, the Visiting team are utilising a digital solution and this has been rolled out to all partners.

A project has commenced to explore the technology available to enable digitisation of Single Person Discount reviews for all partners.

Better Customer Experience Programme

The new contact us form helps enhance the customer experience by capturing all required information including evidence within the one form. Recently we have published further guidance on uploading evidence, including file types accepted and file sizes. Automating Council Tax moves is an ongoing project which is starting to see massive benefits to automation and back-end processing. We were live with 2 move types ahead of annual billing; the next move types will be incoming tenants and tenant vacating. Further work will then be carried out to look at new properties in the hope we can find a quicker way for these to be set up. Current automation is around 22% but we expect this to rise when we widen the scope of automation types. Text solutions is an innovative way of contacting our residents and sending reminders without producing paper. Over the past 6 months the number of printed reminders has reduced by over 50%. This has reduced postage and printing whilst improving collection. This same technology is being researched to introduce within NDR.

PDF E-Billing was launched for 24/25 to great success. A project group has been created to improve ARP wide e-billing take up. This will tie into our wider strategic aim of moving people to a more automated service with direct debit and eBilling. Our telephony project has led to a thorough review of our call scripts and the options available for customers and the new system is now live. We have made improvements to our call flow and scripts to help ensure the customer is routed to the right place more efficiently, whilst ensuring the right support is provided. Any changes to our IVR scripts and call flow can now be actioned quicker and more efficiently in house without having to rely on third parties or utilising a human to record dialogue.

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director Finance
To: ARP Joint Committee, 18 June 2024
Author: Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director Finance
Subject: ARP Actual Financial Performance 2023-2024
Purpose: To update the Joint Committee on the actual financial out-turn 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 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. All costs are included and shared based on the Partnership agreement.

1.2 The actual out-turn is an overspend against budget of £377k (3.5%) for the whole of the ARP and this is shown further in Appendix A along with details of the variances.

The main reasons for the overspend include the national pay award which was higher than the original budget estimates and job re-evaluations, alongside a significant increase in Royal Mail postage charges which took effect from October 2023 and a tighter triage on the cases sent through to the Enforcement service. We have received Government *New Burdens* funding to help offset the costs incurred for delivering the two alternative energy funding schemes which has increased income in this year.

This actual overspend is £192k higher than reported at quarter 3, the main reasons for this movement are; the job evaluation costs at one partner Council to bring their pay into a more comparable position with others and a tighter triage on the cases sent through to the Enforcement service during 2023-24. Enforcement fees collection remains high in 2023-24 and the debt collection element is seen within individual council's Council Tax income rather than within the ARP budgets.

The efficiency target of £100,000 was met through provision of fraud and enforcement services. Careful management of vacancies through the year helped to mitigate the national pay award increases, with use of agency staff reduced from circa 5% of staff budgets in the last financial year to 0.6% of staff budgets in 2023-24.

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. £19k is earmarked for projects in progress and there is a further £41k 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 The table below shows the share of the outturn for each partner based on the ARP Joint Committee agreement.

	Forecast Out-turn
Breckland	£57,750
East Cambs	£49,754
East Suffolk	£130,841
Fenland	£57,901
West Suffolk	£81,687
TOTAL	£377,933

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
7.3 OIB – Operational Improvement Board

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

Lead Contact Officer

Name and Post: Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director Finance
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

Outturn position 2023/24

Description	Approved Budget	Actuals	Variance	Variance	Notes
	2023/24	2023/24	Over/(Under)		
	£	£	£	%	
Employee Related Costs	10,682,482	10,891,415	208,933	1.96	1
Premises Related Costs	185,902	146,306	(39,596)	(21.30)	2
Transport Related Costs	86,767	83,954	(2,813)	(3.24)	
Supplies & Services	2,042,687	2,111,973	69,286	3.39	3
Support Services	485,515	471,908	(13,607)	(2.80)	
Income	(2,901,205)	(2,745,476)	155,729	(5.37)	4
TOTAL PARTNERSHIP COSTS	10,582,147	10,960,080	377,933	3.57	5

Variance Notes

1. The overspend is due to employee related cost pressures including East Suffolk job revaluations and the national pay award increases.
2. The underspend is mainly due to lower business rates for 2023/24 compared to budget
3. Supplies and services overspend is mainly due to increased postage costs in year and includes a one off data share cost for East Cambridgeshire (other partner costs for data share are included in their direct budgets).
4. The overspend is due to reduced income from Enforcement as fewer cases were passed to the service than expected.
5. The outturn position includes funding for the administration of the two energy support grants.

Transformation funding - committed expenditure as follows:

Description	Approved Budget	Outturn	Forecast Actuals
	2023/24	2023/24	2024/25
	£	£	£
Already committed from grant funding received in previous years			
Call management replacement (Teams)	22,300	22,300	0
Work to identify unrated properties (estimated value)	25,000	12,500	12,500
Set up costs for virtual post room	7,000	7,000	0
Consultancy days for implementation of HBAAi form and automation	6,755	6,755	0
Consultancy days for implementation of New Refund Form (not yet invoiced)	6,755	0	6,755
Consultancy days for Arrangement Manager form and automation	6,755	6,755	0
Total	74,565	55,310	19,255
Unallocated	41,009	0	0
Grand Total	115,574	55,310	19,255

Call Management replacement has been spent £22k, with a further investment of approximately £25k anticipated to identify unrated properties, of which £12.5k was spent in 23/24 and a further £12.5k in 24/25. OIB in December approved £7k to be used for set up costs of a virtual post room. OIB in January approved additional hardware costs for call management (Teams) and consultancy days; for implementation of HBAAi form and automation, implementation of new refund form, arrangement manager and automation totalling £20k. At the end of 2023/24 there is £41k remaining for future projects.

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ICT Reserve	Approved Budget	Approved Budget	Approved Budget
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	£	£	£
Opening Balance	(35,000)	(47,500)	(50,000)
Partnership contribution	(72,500)	(72,500)	(72,500)
Earmarked - ICT refresh replacement servers software element	60,000	70,000	90,000
	(47,500)	(50,000)	(32,500)

ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

Report of Theresa Mann – ARP Principal Benefits and Council Tax Billing Manager

To: Joint Committee, 18th June 2024.

Subject: Welfare Reform

Purpose: To provide an update on welfare reform

Recommendation(s):

- That the Joint Committee note the report.

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 Support – Situation to date

2.1.1 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.

2.1.2 Since April 2019 the Citizens Advice (CAB) have delivered Help to Claim support to help people make a new UC claim and manage their claim, up to receiving their first payment.

2.1.3 The Minister of State for Employment announced on 11th March 2024 that the Help to Claim scheme delivered by the CAB would be extended for another two years from April 2024. The support will continue to be provided through telephony and digital channels. Individuals who are unable to access support through these channels will be supported by their local jobcentre.

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

2.2.1 On the 15th March 2024 a session was held by the Local Authority Partnership, Engagement & Delivery, and Universal Credit Programme teams with over 500 representatives from local authorities. Following this, updated guidance was shared with local authorities.

2.2.2 The DWP intend to contact households by benefit combination order, rather than geography. Migration Notices will be issued to working age benefit households from April to June for those in receipt of Income Support; June to August for those in receipt of Housing Benefit only; July to September for those receiving income related Employment and Support Allowance with Child Tax Credits; Pensioners on tax credits being asked to move to Pension Credit will be contacted from July, with those being asked to claim Universal Credit being notified from August.

2.2.3 On 19th April 2024 local authorities were sent a letter from the DWP confirming the announcement by the Prime Minister to bring forward the migration of ESA customers to Universal Credit from 2028 to 2025. This will have an impact on all local authorities as this includes a large number of working age Housing Benefit recipients. As a result of this we are reviewing the potential impact on our resources and workload requirements.

2.2.4 The DWP are carrying out some UC discovery activity in June, inviting a small number of ESA claimants to move to UC ahead of the national scaling in September 2024. They are potentially looking to carry out one of these pilots in East Suffolk, and we are currently in discussions with the DWP to offer our support with this, which will involve testing the enhanced support journey for these claimants.

3.0 Options

3.1 The report is for information purposes.

4.0 Reasons for recommendations

4.1 The report is for information only.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Risk

The report is for information only.

5.2 Financial

The report is for information only.

5.3 Legal

The report is for information only.

5.4 Equality and Diversity

Not applicable

Background papers: - Joint Committee Welfare Reform report March 2024

Lead Contact Officer

Name/Post: Theresa Mann – Principal Benefits and Council Tax Billing Manager

Email: Theresa.mann@angliarevenues.gov.uk

ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

Report of Lorraine King – Head of ARP

To: **Joint Committee, 18th June 2024**

Subject: The Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) Service Delivery Plan.

Purpose: To report on progress in respect of the December 2022 Service Delivery Plan for 2023/24 (Appendix A) for the 6 months ending March 2024.

Recommendation(s):

- That Joint Committee note the progress in respect of the December 2022 Service Delivery Plan (Appendix A) for the 6 months ending March 2024.

INTRODUCTION

1. Background

- 1.0 In accordance with the ARP agreement a revised Service Delivery Plan for the new financial year should be agreed by the Joint Committee by the end of December of the previous year and delivery of the plan is reviewed every 6 months.
- 1.1 A Service Delivery Plan for 2023/24 was agreed in December 2022 and this report provides an update below which details progress against the plan and an update to the risk register.
- 1.2 A new Service Delivery Plan for 2024/25 was subsequently agreed in December 2023 and came into effect April 2024.
- 1.2 In December 2023 Members reviewed the strategic direction of the ARP, deciding to maintain objectives whilst implementing a four-year Business Plan, subsequently effective from April 2024. The annual Service Plan complements the Business Plan and runs until 2028.

2. April 2023/24 plan objectives performance and update

- 2.0 The ARP has seen significant success thus far in 2023/24 and we have achieved the following:
 - In December 2022 a new Government scheme was announced to help support economically vulnerable families by providing additional reductions to their Council Tax bills. The Council Tax Support Fund (CTSF) was administered at our busiest time of year where we facilitated automatic reductions for those in receipt of Council Tax Reduction at the time of annual billing and those making a claim successful claim during 2023-24. A residual fund was retained to provide additional support via the Exceptional hardship claim route throughout 2023-24. The funds were managed to maximise use, with 100% of the funds being spent by 31st March 2024 for four out of five partners, and just 5% remaining for East Cambridgeshire.
 - In January 2023 two new Government schemes were announced to help support residents with rising energy costs if they did not receive payments automatically. The schemes (Energy Bill Support Scheme (Alternative funding) and Alternative Fuel Payments (Alternative funding) were administered by The Department of Energy, Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) with Local Authorities

responsible for undertaking verification checks and making payments. The schemes ran from late February through to July during our busiest time of year alongside the CTSF and annual billing process. As a pilot site ARP played a key part in helping to shape and design the scheme guidance and processes and was the first Authority to make payment nationally. In total we paid out almost £1.6 m to help residents with rising fuel costs.

- We successfully implemented the revaluation of all business premises for April 2023.
- Council Tax collection finished above target at the end of Q4 overall with over £543 million collected. Breckland, East Suffolk and Fenland were below their target but within 1% tolerance with East Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk above target. We continue to closely monitor collection in the current economic climate.
- Non-Domestic Rates exceeded collection targets for all authorities at the year-end 2023-24. A total of £245 million was collected, over £5 million above target.
- We continue to see more customers using e-services The suite of forms and other functionality is available to all customer teams using Capita customer contact software to sign customers up to e-services and the number of those using e-services continues to rise. We launched a new improved 'Contact Us' online form which signposts customers to online forms and gathers all required information at the first contact. The volume of emails received (compared to overall contact via email/form or in writing) has reduced from 75% to 54% during 2023-24 due to the implementation of the new form. Over the coming months email traffic will be reduced further by removing this option for the majority of contacts.
- Our Annual Billing process was exceptionally well managed achieving tighter deadlines to facilitate the use of economy post for all of our annual bills and notifications. This made additional efficiency savings of over £9,000 in addition to savings already achieved using economy mail for our daily bills throughout the last 3 quarters of 2023-24.
- We also successfully implemented PDF attachment e-bills in Q4 of 2023-24 and utilised this method with our Annual Billing. The PDF option removes the complex sign-up and log in process previously required to view an annual Council Tax bill and resulted in a significant reduction in contact, including a 10% reduction in email, from those unable to log into their accounts over our busiest time of year.
- A Partnership wide e-billing take up campaign is in the early planning stages, to be implemented throughout 2024-25 in conjunction with the Customer Strategy Team.
- The further recovery work jointly funded by County Councils collected just under £1.8 million. This has increased from £1m in 22/23. This is a great result for a small team actioning complex further recovery cases for the collection of Business Rates and Council Tax.
- The Fraud teams work, also jointly funded by the County Councils, identified over £3.8 Million in fraud and error last year, an increase on the previous year. This is due to the further resource funded by Cambridgeshire County Council and has allowed us to expand proactive fraud and error identification.
- The higher demand on services seen in 2022-23 has continued throughout 2023-24.
- In collaboration with each partner's Housing teams, we took a risk-based approach to target empty properties where data indicated occupation. During the 2023-24 empty property review, a number of properties that had not returned review forms were visited and 38% of these were found to be occupied.
- Following our Strategic Review with Joint Committee in December a new ARP wide Housing Task and Finish group has been set up to share experience, knowledge and ideas around initiatives, subsidy implications and trends. This replaces the separate Housing liaison meetings that took place and has been very well received with the second meeting due soon.
- At the end of 2023 an initiative to work collaboratively with the Communities team to identify refer and help facilitate joined up multi-agency support on a case-by-case basis was piloted with Breckland Council. Despite the project being in its infancy there are already plans to roll the initiative out across East and West

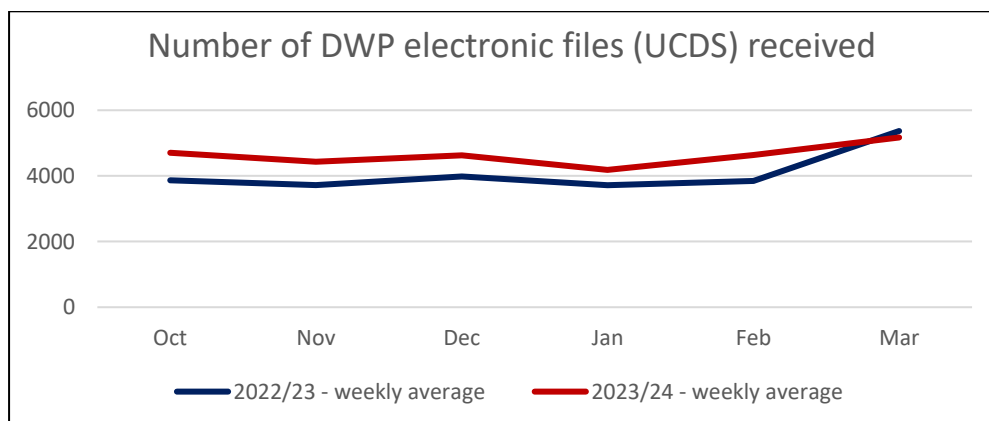
Suffolk. Discussions are in place to enable a mechanism to measure and feedback levels of engagement and outcomes.

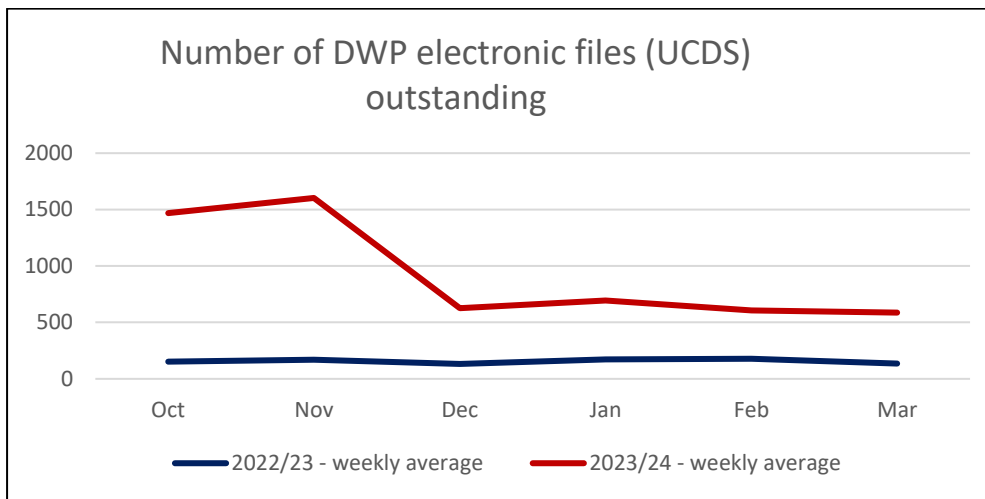
- The NDR team successfully completed the huge task of reviewing all Small Business Rate Relief awards by the Audit deadline of October 23. This process included writing to every recipient to establish if the award was still relevant and handling the postal responses. Completing this task had a detrimental effect on other items of work but is complete.
- On 25th October 2023 following storm Babet the Governments Flood Recovery Framework was activated. Impacted households across Breckland, East Suffolk and West Suffolk were eligible to claim assistance through a Community Recovery Grant, Council Tax Discounts and Business Rates Relief. ARP worked collaboratively to develop processes and have provided £277,093.88 of support to 405 households and 11 businesses collectively as at the end of 2023-24. Council Tax discounts will continue into 2024-25 for those who are still unable to return home following the flood damage.
- Following the early retirement of the Head of ARP the vacancy was filled by an internal applicant. A proposed restructure of the remaining Strategic Manager posts was approved, and we successfully recruited to two new Principal Manager posts through an internal recruitment process. The new posts provided a development opportunity to study for the professional IRRV honours qualification alongside a career pathway plan with progression into a higher SMT grade upon successful completion of the plan and qualification. The next stage of backfilling the successful applicants is now underway. This is testament to the success of our overall OD plan including training and development and succession planning programme.

Some other achievements relating to the Transformation Programme are detailed below, despite resources being redirected to deliver Government schemes, particularly during the first 2 quarters of the year:

- 2.1 We continue to automate around 97% (in effect as close to 100% as possible) of changes reported by Universal Credit Data Share (UCDS) and following successful collaboration with our software supplier we helped to develop and implement automation of new claims via UCDS. Currently 35-40% of these new claims are automated and we continue to work with our software supplier to expand and improve the functionality.

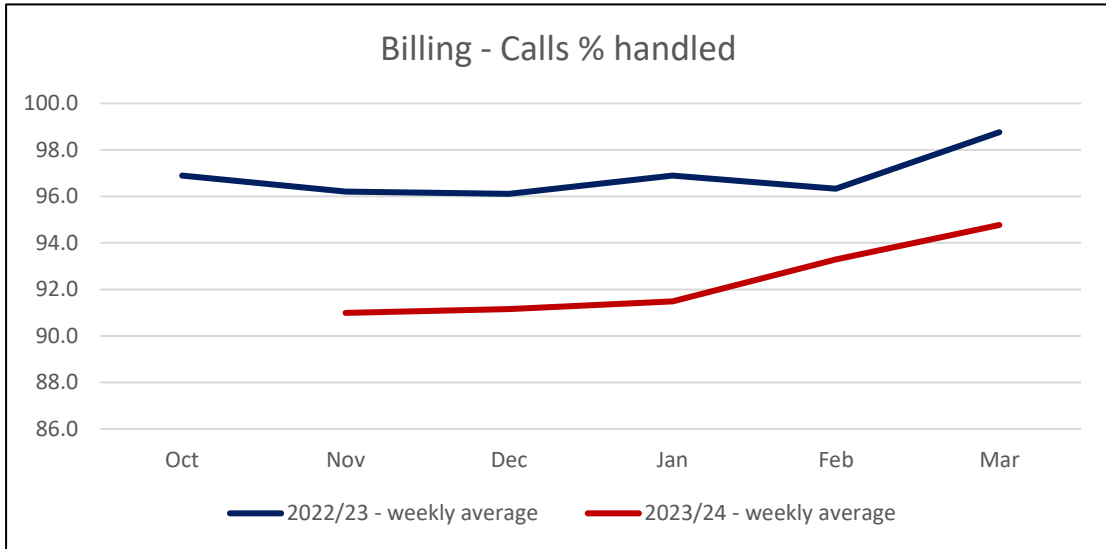
UCDS received and outstanding





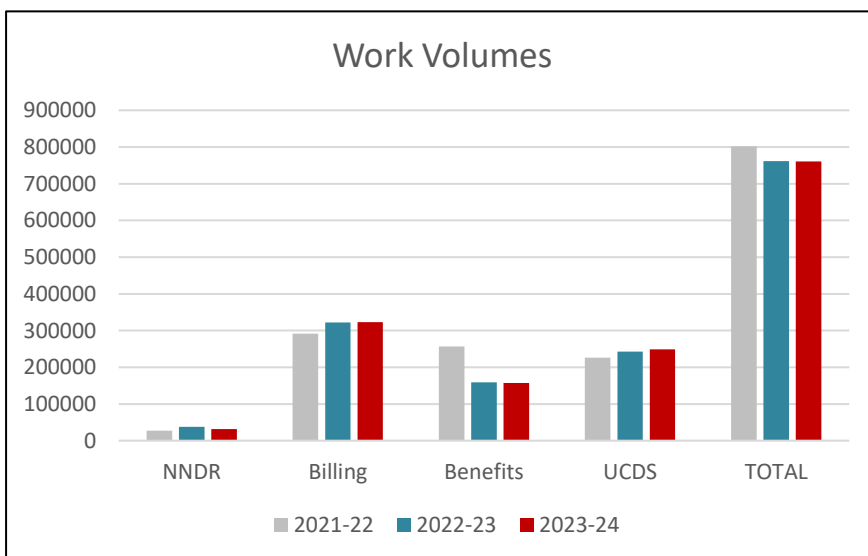
- 2.2 To supplement Automation of Universal Credit records and streamline the customer experience a “Tolerance Rule” was introduced into our Council Tax Support Schemes two years ago. Following an increase in the tolerance level from £65 to £100 in April 2022 approximately half of the changes in income received no longer result in a revised bill and payment profile for our customers, leading to a clearer picture of what they have to pay. At the same time, we introduced other scheme changes which have further streamlined the customer experience. There were no further scheme changes introduced in 2023-24 apart from one partner who increased the maximum CTR rate to 100% in response to the cost-of-living crisis. This change has now been extended to 2024-25 following consultation. There are no further changes to the 2024-25 scheme for the other four Councils.
- 2.3 The number of outstanding UCDS files gradually increased from June 2023 when a system issue was identified that prevented 13% of the more complex records from automating correctly. A fix was received and implemented in Q3 and automation rates have returned to approximately 97%.
- 2.4 We introduced a new online change of address form which uploads data directly into our back-office system in 2022 and have started to introduce automation of straightforward tasks as we collaborate with our supplier to further develop the product. We now automate 22% of moves reported online and further enhancements to the product including a newer version of the form are currently being beta tested in collaboration with our software supplier. We aim to implement the new form in Q1 of 2024-25 and expect to see an increase in automation at the same time.
- 2.5 In addition to automated moves, we have also successfully implemented new automation functionality within our processing system in the following areas this year:
- Direct Debit requests via our web form – over 55% are now automated.
 - Housing Benefit Award Accuracy (DWP pilot site)
 - HMRC earnings and Pensions data (pilot site)
 - New daily extracts of our usual monthly data share with DWP using API (pilot site)
- 2.6 We are also working on other automation projects which should enable us to automate refunds and set up payment arrangements automatically using a new online form.
- 2.7 ARP has been instrumental in setting up a nationwide user group focussing on use of Capita online forms. As chair ARP is leading over forty local authorities to push for continuous improvement and address issues that affect the customer experience. ARP has been instrumental in gathering valuable feedback through surveys.
- 2.8 It has continued to be the case that the phone technology (RAD message routing) allows us to achieve strong call handling response times. We have achieved this through allowing ARP to manage calls so that the simpler calls go to our less experienced staff and customers are offered online services as an alternative to

needing to speak to an officer, thereby releasing experienced staff for more complex calls and to assess more difficult cases. In October 2023, in collaboration with West Suffolk ICT, we moved from a handset phone system to a new supplier within MS Teams. The transition has been successful with no loss to service provision or customer access.



2.9 The introduction of a generic role, called a Council Tax Billing Officer, continues to be successful, providing flexibility and resilience whilst increasing the skills of staff. These posts process Council Tax changes and certain types of Council Tax Support (CTS) cases (where there is no Housing Benefit). This role means that resource is more flexible and can be moved from CTS to billing as the workload demands. We also continue to recruit to Resilience Officers and have a program to continue to upskill Housing Benefit Officers in end-to-end generic processing over the coming year as part of our plan to manage the impacts of Universal Credit roll out.

2.10 OVERALL WORK VOLUMES



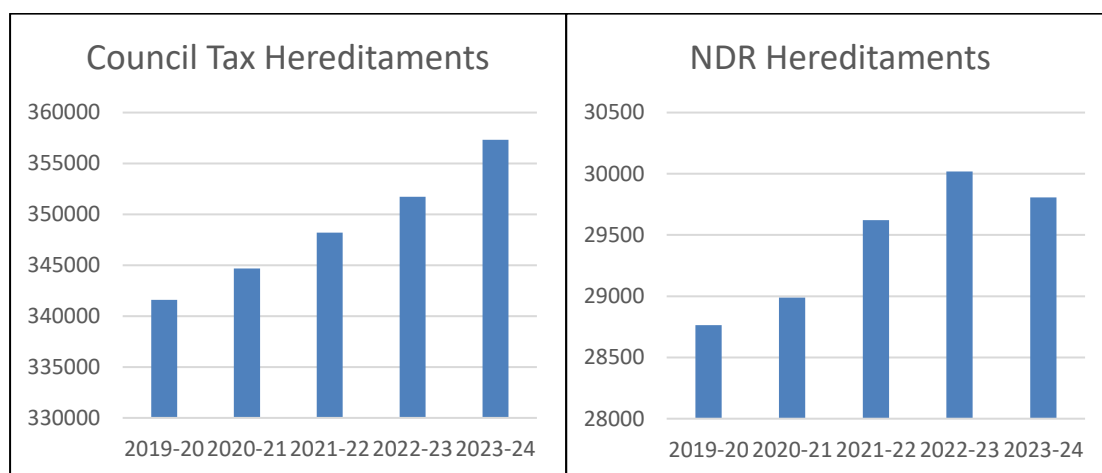
2.11 Overall workload across Council Tax, Benefits and NNDR has increased by 63% since 2019 with the largest increase seen during the Covid pandemic in 2020.

Despite this increase in demand, through our expanding automation, we have been able to reduce our complement again this year. Since 2019 we have reduced the compliment by 6.38%. This is equivalent to almost 18 full time post and a financial saving of around £700,000 pa. The reduction takes into account the introduction of 7 new funded posts linked to the provision of additional fraud services.

Were it not for the level of our automation, we would have required additional resource to cope with increasing workloads, as seen at most other Councils at this time.

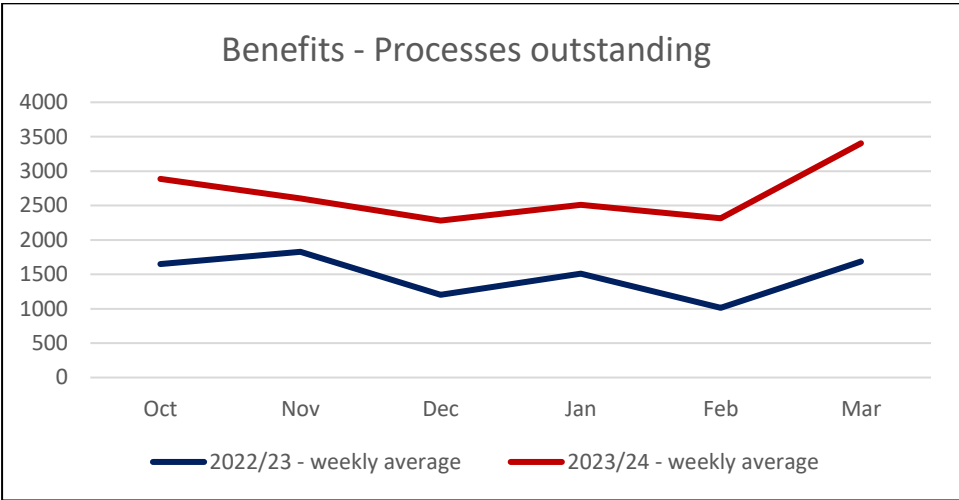
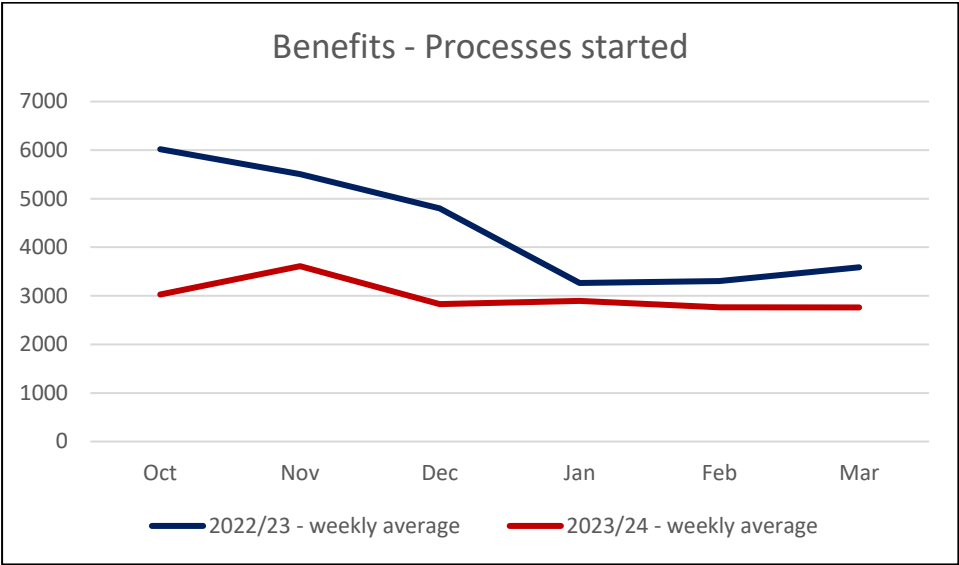
HEREDITAMENTS

- 2.12 Hereditaments (properties) have also steadily increased over the past 5 years with NNDR seeing 3.6 % increase overall and Council Tax 4.6%. The reduction for NNDR during 2023-24 was partially due to the change in regulations regarding the treatment of holiday lets.

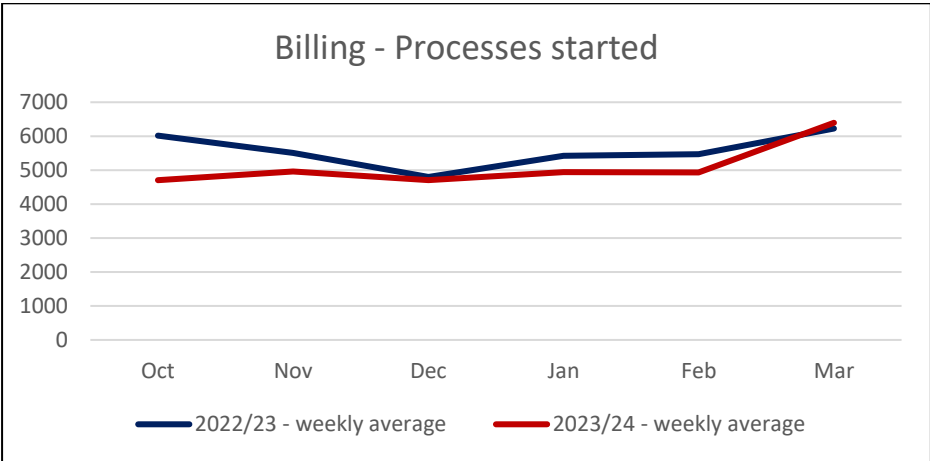


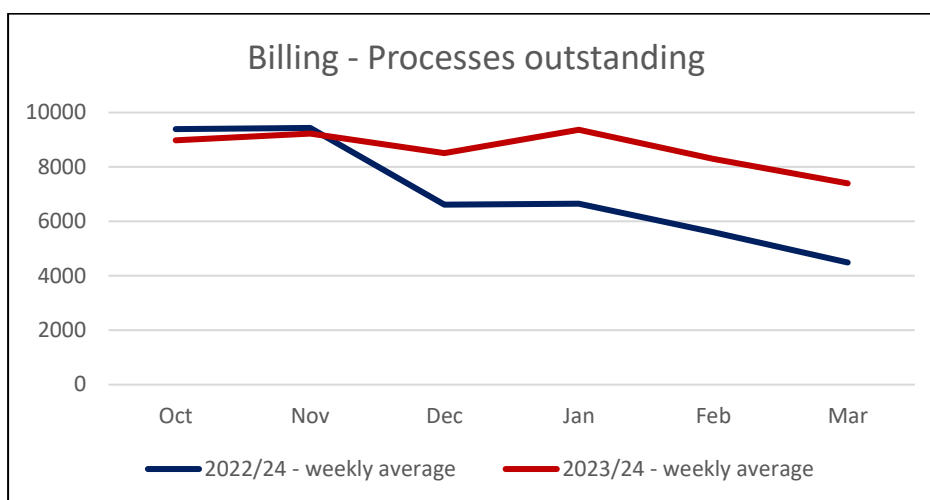
BENEFITS

- 2.13 The number of outstanding benefits processes during the last 2 quarters of the year are higher than the previous year. This is due to several factors:
- The volume of incoming work has increased during quarter two.
 - The system issue with UCDS records has meant resource has been re-directed to cover the additional manual processing in that area.
 - The two energy schemes and the Council Tax Support Fund were both administered internally by the benefits team,
 - As cases migrate to Universal Credit the remaining caseload contains a higher proportion of the more complex Housing Benefit Supported and Temporary Accommodation cases which take longer to verify, approve and process.
- 2.14 During October we have targeted new Housing Benefit claims and brought them up to date which has reduced the number of outstanding processes and reduced the year end processing times. Council Tax Support claims were later targeted in January and February 2024.



BILLING





2.15 Norwich City Council delegated their enforcement services to Breckland Council from July 2019. Due to their approach to debt enforcement the volume of cases received has not been as expected. Norwich City Council have given 6 months' notice on the arrangement to provide enforcement services, with a provisional end date of 30th September 2024

Broadland Council agreed to delegate their enforcement services to Breckland Council from July 2022.

2.16 Norwich agreed to continue with ARP providing fraud services from April 2022.

2.17 Fraud Services commenced for Broadland and South Norfolk Councils in April 2023.

2.18 The Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub went live April 2023, with the County Council and the District Councils agreeing to use the established and proven ARP methodology to detect and report fraud. There has been significant success seen as a result of the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub, with the County Council providing continued funding into a second year.

2.19 Partnership working between teams across all Councils and the ARP teams continues to work well, remaining a priority to ensure that we continue to work as closely in the future, especially with regard to the impact of rising living costs and economic pressures.

2.20 Appendix A attached to the report shows the status of the priorities agreed in December 2022

2.21 The year end outturn for 2023-24 resulted in a deficit in the budget. This was mainly attributable to higher than anticipated pay awards for 2023, along with inflationary increases in supplier costs, an 18% Royal Mail increase in postages in October and a tighter triage on the cases sent through to the enforcement team. The efficiency target of £100,000 was met through the provision of fraud and enforcement services and we are working through a plan to achieve the £200,000 target set for the current financial year. Vacancies will be kept under review throughout the year as we manage the Universal Credit migration alongside inflationary pressures to achieve the budget.

3 Revised Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register

3.1 The December 2023 Service Delivery Plan for 2024-25 details the high-level actions that the service must implement to ensure that the varied demands on the service are met. The plan has two areas:

- Service plan – business as usual and innovative activities
- Risk matrix

3.2 The Service Delivery Plan seeks to detail actions to achieve the visioning detailed in the Strategic Direction.

3.3 The priorities of the Revenues and Benefits service are:

“Colleagues”: Our operations rely on the people who make up our team, both directly within the partnership and in partner service areas. We will develop our people professionally and pursue a comprehensive organisational development plan.

“Customers”: We focus all of our work on supporting the families, communities, individuals and businesses located in our partnership area. We will continue to make our services as convenient and as accessible as possible.

“Digital”: We will aim to increase our ‘digital by default’ service including full self-service. We will use automation to speed processing and release our teams to focus on vulnerable and complex cases.

“Relationships”: We are a partnership of five district councils, pooling resources to share the provision of revenues and benefits services, offering greater returns on investment in change and innovation projects.

“Sustainability”: We are organisationally designed to improve the financial sustainability and self-sufficiency of our partners, through the collection of council tax and business rates and the ethical recovery and enforcement of related debts.

3.4 We continue to develop online facilities to enable customers to self-serve thereby releasing existing resource to help those unable to self-serve. The development of the online portal, forms and automation will continue to be a priority.

3.5 The Customer Strategic Team (the lead officer from each Councils customer services team and ARP officers) is focusing on understanding customer needs with a programme of customer engagement to help inform improvements to online forms and service design.

3.6 In 2024-25 we will continue to invest time and resource into developing automated processes to deliver savings and to streamline the customer experience as we seek to maximise the use of secure data share to design our services. Our top priority projects this year include a move to offer PDF attachment e-bills, a move away from emails in favour of a new interactive and intelligent contact us form. This will not only increase automation opportunities and ensure we gather the correct information at the earliest opportunity, but it will also reduce customer contact, increase processing times and free up officer time to concentrate on more complex cases where alternative contact methods are needed or preferred. In addition to this work continues on our moves automation in collaboration with our software supplier and have now introduced the automation of refunds and direct debits alongside moves.

3.7 During 2022-23 ARP participated in a pilot organised by the Cabinet Office surrounding the provisions within the Digital Economy Act. The pilot was for the DWP and HMRC to provide benefit and work details to Local Authorities to improve the collection of Council Tax. The pilot proved to be unsuccessful as the data was delayed in being returned and HMRC did not provide work details without a National Insurance Number or Date of Birth, data which is not permitted to be held for Council Tax purposes. This feedback has been provided to the Cabinet Office. ARP look forward to participating in any future exercise should an agreed approach with HMRC be established.

3.8 The ARP strategic team will continue to influence national initiatives such as Universal Credit and Business Rates reform and to influence system design to improve performance. Enhancing data share is key to help inform service redesign.

3.9 We will also continue to maintain our flexible workforce. The Council Tax Billing role continues to work generically across Council Tax and Council Tax Support cases and we will continue to recruit vacancies to this new role as we see Universal Credit and automation changing the way in which we receive and process our work.

3.10 We need to ensure that we have resilience in key roles and so have developed a planning framework to ensure continued service delivery. We continue to work closely with HR who have led on a programme to identify future leaders as well as leadership

development, career pathways and use of coaching/mentoring, and professional training/qualifications in leadership.

- 3.11 DWP relaunched their 'Move to UC' programme in 2022 to migrate customers to Universal Credit. Following a successful pilot with five authorities a report was published with the outcomes, leading to improvements for the remainder of the move programme. In the Autumn budget in November 2022, it was announced that plans to continue to move across 2.5 million cases on to UC will continue but the move of a further 1 million ESA customers will be delayed until 2028. It was announced in April 2024 that the migration of ESA customers will be brought forward to 2025 and work is underway to plan for and manage the impact of this change on resource levels and overall performance. The plan to consider movement of Pensioners on to a Housing Element was also delayed from 2025 to 2028-29.
- 3.12 The first tranche of UC migration commenced in July 2023 for all five partners. This involved tax credit only cases (with no Housing Benefit) so will have no impact on our caseloads. Less than 100 households per Authority who were claiming tax credits and in receipt of CTS have been affected and their CTS is automatically updated to reflect the change from tax credits to UC. We are continually reviewing resource requirement and forecast the overall impact of the delay in the full roll out and the next stage of moving more legacy benefits including Housing Benefit across from 2024/25.
- 3.13 The risk register also continues to highlight the need to monitor the impact of the cost of living and inflationary pressures upon customers, service delivery and the budget as well as Universal Credit migration on customers and DWP subsidy, amongst others. We continue to influence changes in delivery through representation on DWP steering groups.

4 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Risk

6.2 Financial

6.3 Legal

6.4 Equality and Diversity

Not applicable.

Background papers: - None

Lead Contact Officer

Name/Post: Lorraine King (Head of the ARP)

Contact: Lorraine.king@angliarevenues.gov.uk

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A – Service Delivery Plan December 2022 final progress update

Topic	Link to Strategic aims	Core Purpose	Summary Action Required	Links with other actions and projects	timeframe	Suppliers/Relationships	Interdependencies	Progress June 2024	Flag
Annual Council Tax and NDR Billing and Benefits letter production	Customer Sustainability	Annual exercise to get bills for new Council tax & NDR year and benefit letters to customers with in prescribed time to collect instalments	The production and dispatch of year end bills and benefit letters	Collection and customer service	Commence January 2023 for issue of bills and letters mid-march	External mailing Contract	Preceptors setting their Council Tax early enough for bills to be produced	Annual billing completed on time for 2023/24. Lessons learned fed into 2023/24 process with leaflet signoffs for S151s and authorisation of County precept figures. Tighter timelines enabled us to arrive economy post.	
Budget monitoring	Relationships Sustainability	To keep officers and members informed of performance against projections to ensure that financial planning can be accurate and to ensure Subsidy is maximised.	Monitor income, expenditure and Subsidy in the light of NDR extension scheme, CTRLS, UC and conversion issues	Maximising Taxbases	Annually - April - March initial review against budget on monthly basis and report to 351 officers any variance	OIB, SMT & Operational Mgmt. team, partner Finance teams across ARP & HR's	Finance officer function group will continue to agree information to be provided and frequency	Reported quarterly to JC. Finance teams advised if issue identified monthly. 2023-24 monthly monitoring and outcome to be reported to OIB and Members May/June 2024. Inflationary pressures continue to impact the budget, through increased salaries and postages etc.	
Business plan	Colleagues Customers Digital Relationships Sustainability	Review and update the four year business plan to complement the annual service plan.	Joint Committee to agree Annual Review	ARP Strategy	Next four year review scheduled for 2025.	OIB/JC/Members	OIB & JC	Next four year review scheduled for 2025. JC strategy review took place December 2023 and a new 4 year plan was agreed in March 2024. Future reviews to fall in line with electoral cycle.	
Communication and Digital Strategy	Colleagues Customers Digital Relationships Sustainability	Promote a digital culture throughout the organisation through digital champions/ Subject Matter Experts.	Utilise variety of digital platforms to develop framework for measuring impact of ARP services for the partnership. Work closely with programme, project and Comms Officer/ ARP Hub administrator team to increase accessibility and use of ARP Hub.	Implement digital learning - corporate. ARP Communications Strategy	Sep-23	SMT and ARP Corporate Comms	WS IT Team	ARP Hub is live and continues to be developed within service areas, in particular with the Staff Forum. WSIT updates are automatically updated in ARP Hub. COT group are looking at customer insights programme and ways to maximise uptake of online services whilst providing multi channel access for all. Email traffic is reducing due to the new contact us form.	
Cost of Living	All	To monitor and manage the impact of Cost of Living demands on the service and staff.	Cost of Living indicators in place. Monitor impact on collection, performance and resources.	Staff Retention, maximising tax base, performance.	Throughout 2023.	Relationships with partners, colleagues and customers.	Impact of inflationary pressures on the economy	The impact continues to be monitored throughout the year, with additional data gathered and reporting to capture increased demand. Two additional Government fuel schemes and the Council Tax Support funding scheme were delivered this year.	
Customer Journey - Automation of Services	Customer Digital Sustainability	To maximise the number of automated transactions, that are received electronically, to speed up processing times for customers and to provide efficiencies	Self service forms to be auto-indexed (a significant percentage of form are now auto-indexed) - and auto assessment increased. Move automation to be increased from 20% further enhancements to existing automation functions. Functionality in NDR and Recovery to be developed with Capita.	This project is part of the Customer journey programme and, in particular, links to the online services action on this service plan	Billing and Benefits automation to be expanded by December 2023 and Revenue to be developed by December 2023.	Dependent upon supplier/ engagement and delivery	A reliance on Capita and the Government Agencies agreeing data sharing protocols and providing data and software enabling automation	Achieved 97% automation with LDCS change files. Move automation increased slightly but have been reliant on software enhancements to achieve higher volumes and we continue to work closely with our software provider to help develop this further. We are currently testing a new move form which will feed into these enhancements. During the year we have also successfully implemented automation for Housing Benefit Award Accuracy process being a pilot and helping to shape the product, and are now automating 55% of direct debit requests submitted online. Work is underway to automate refunds and credits for Council Tax and a new arrangement helping online form. A new improved contact us form was introduced in September and has already proven to be successful in streamlining the customer journey and increasing automation.	
Customer journey - online services	Customer Digital Sustainability	To offer as simple a journey as possible for the customer to access online services and information. Where possible to offer 24.7 & 365 services to customers to be able to transact with the Councils which will increase self-service transactions using online forms that lead to automation	To work with Customer Service teams to make links between websites as seamless as possible. To further enhance the Capita Change of Address (COA) form and collaborate with to further develop online forms and integration with the back office. To further improve the use of online services and consider alternative options including PDF attachments. Developing program with Capita for Revenues automation.	This project is part of the Customer Experience programme and, in particular, links to the automation action on this service plan	To implement new contact us form during 2023, to reduce customer contact and to move away from emails.	Capita provide ARP with the portal and online form functionality	A reliance on Capita - providing data and software enabling automation	The Customer Strategy Team (leads from all LA and ARP) have developed strategy and programme concerning development of the website, online services and the new 'contact us' form. A new Contact Us form has been introduced with links to online forms that we can automate. A partnership wide self-billing capability is planned for 2024-25 following successful implementation of PDF attachment bills at annual billing in February 2024, in conjunction with COT	
Leadership & Succession Planning	Colleagues Customers Sustainability	Continue to build upon the established strategic approach to succession planning at Management level so that we identify and develop our leaders of the future inhouse where possible in areas of virtual leadership traits.	Continue Leadership and Management development programmes to support succession planning. Continue with matrix working, job shadowing, sharing knowledge and skills to build workforce resilience. Continue to include mandatory mental health awareness into leadership and management development programmes. Consider future structure in light of critical Managers leaving.	Resource Management	January 2023 to December 2023	OIB, SMT and Ops mgmt, Assessment Centre providers and L&D teams	Reliance on TNA of operational leadership and identifying future leaders as part of new ARP structure. Funding to deliver qualifications	We continue to assess critical posts and age profiles, considering business needs when vacancies arise. We offer leadership and management development opportunities including mentoring qualifications and currently have 9 apprenticeships across the partnership with 8 due to commence in the new year. Following the early retirement of the Head of ARP his post was successfully recruited to internally and to help develop and support our own talent post a mini re-structure resulted in 2 new career pathway opportunities to run alongside a 3 year study IRRV honours programme. The new roles commenced on 01/04/24.	
Learning & Development Strategy	Colleagues Customers Sustainability	To oversee and ensure corporate L&D meets the strategic GO, Corporate induction and service level workforce plans whilst maximising the key contributions from the partnership councils, in order to upskill the workforce and promote from within	Bi-annual review of operational TNA & skills gap priorities and provide direction to achieve key OD objectives inline with L&D calendar. Utilise Levy at each LA. Communicate career pathways/career clusters for each job profile. Improve internal and external recruitment offering, job shadowing, and Review operational skills needed to upskill or cross-train IRVY Qualifications / Apprenticeships	Succession Planning, L&D strategy & Operational projects	July 2023 to review strategy.	SMT and Ops mgmt, ARP Trainers & Resilience Officers and L&D teams	Reliance of Ops teams providing TNA data and any changes to Apprentices Levy schemes, with use of funding and providers available.	Strategy reviewed, information from Appraisals and Corporate teams for each partners received to develop schedule of activities. TNA feeds into annual programme of training and development, utilising the apprenticeship levy where possible. New starter and probationary reviews are undertaken to help develop the induction and training process for all new starters. A programme of coaching and mentoring is in place with 4 trained mentors across the partnership. We currently have 8 Officers studying apprenticeship qualifications with a further 6 due to start June/July 2024.	
Maximising taxbase NDR	Relationships Sustainability	Perform periodic review of Reliefs and exemptions and exercises to identify hereditaments that are missing or altered	To identify hereditaments not in the lists or, with reduced charge that should be charged none Business Rates.	Budget monitoring and Quality, Audit	SBRB review underway. Timetable for review of reliefs and exemptions.	Planning and ARP	Data to be shared so that taxbase is maximised and reasons for properties being empty are recorded and reviewed periodically	During the year cases are reviewed before the NDR tax base is calculated by DLUHC. The outstanding Internal Audit actions were cleared on schedule.	
Maximising taxbase Council Tax	Relationships Sustainability	Ensure all relevant properties are included on a Valuation List and to bring properties back in to use and /or understand why they remain empty - campaigns to encourage owners to get properties occupied - to maximise income	To identify properties not in the lists or, with reduced charge that should be charged more Council Tax. To maximise use of Total Movable to improve efficiencies in visits	Budget monitoring and Quality, Audit	Consider continuation of new risk based approach for Empty Home Review. Monthly timetable for review of discount and exemptions.	Planning, Housing Teams and ARP	Data to be shared so that taxbase is maximised and reasons for properties being empty are recorded and reviewed periodically	Throughout the year cases have been reviewed and in addition an annual exercise was started in the Summer, in collaboration with partner Housing teams, to review long term empty properties before the Council Tax Base is calculated for DLUHC. A new risk based approach has proved successful during 2023-24.	
NDR Revaluation 2023	Relationships Sustainability	To implement the 2023 NDR Revaluation for the new List.	Maintain two NDR list from Jan to Mar ensuring they are in balance. Make necessary arrangements for communications to Ratepayers, implement any required software enhancements.	Maximising Taxbases	January to completion	Valuation Office and Capita	VDA and software supplier	Draft Revaluation list received December 2022 was reconciled to enable Annual Billing April 2023 to be completed on time.	
Performance management	Colleagues Customers Digital Relationships Sustainability	To ensure that customers receive prompt accurate service by ensuring that the correct individual, team and organisational performance measures (and reporting) are in place to manage service delivery across the ARP	Continually review the performance management framework available to enable a clear line of sight between planning, measuring, monitoring and reporting on performance and support SMT in performing their role through ensuring effective performance reporting arrangements are in place	Integral to all activities	Dec-23	OIB, SMT, Function Support Teams	KT (WS)	Dashboards are in place and shared; these have been expanded throughout the year to include cost of living indicators and further breakdown of data for data breaches, complaints and DHPs. We have also extended the dashboards to our Customer Tactics team and Joint Committee and plan further enhancements to include automation and e-billing take up during 2024-25. Dashboards are also shared with ARP management team	
Quality/GDPR/Audit	Customer Relationships Sustainability	Ensuring that the correct checks and balances are in place to provide security of data and efficient processes	Ensuring that Internal Audit Plan recommendations are followed up and completed within agreed timeframe and applying risk based quality assurance work to ensure processes are followed and error is minimised	Integral to all activities	Annual audit plan agreed with audit partnership/SLA	SMT and Ops mgmt, ARP Trainers & Resilience Officers and L&D teams	Link to Partnership audit requirements and advice	Quarterly updates are provided to OIB and a new summary report was introduced during 2023-24.	
Resourcing Strategy	Colleagues Customers Sustainability	Continue to review our approaches to recruitment and retention, to make sure that we attract and retain valued employees.	Develop a brand strategy to include social media presence and approach to engaging prospective employees.	Workforce Planning	January 2023 to December 2023	KT (ARP) & ARP Corporate Comms	Links with partnership website remain unchanged and HR SLA arrangement	Assessment tools to test candidates shared with partner HR teams. Most recent recruitment exercise in collaboration with all partner HR teams with ES leading.	

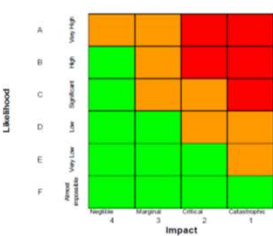
Team Cohesion	Colleagues Customers Relationships Sustainability	Continue to develop an improved understanding of each service area within ARP, build team work through projects, cross cutting events and well-being initiatives.	Service area awareness events and cross-skilling opportunities through job shadowing	ARP Communications Strategy, HR Strategy & Operational Service Plans	Throughout 2023	All Ops mgmt.	Operational teams	A programme is in place for teams to share team knowledge within their service area to increase cross team understanding. Job shadowing is promoted and encouraged.
Universal Credit Implementation and other Welfare Reform	Customer Relationships Sustainability	Ensuring that customers receive, as far as possible, a seamless change to Universal Credit and other future welfare reforms by managing skills and knowledge of officers	Continue review of Revenues & Benefits service provision in the light of the introduction of Universal Credit and other future welfare reforms once migration timetable communicated by DWP	Workforce Strategy and Learning and Development Strategy	ongoing - current managed migration plan for UC is 2025, although DWP asking customers naturally migrate without a defined timetable. A pilot 'move to UC' project has commenced with gradual roll out to different demographics before a full a roll out program is devised.	DWP	DWP are managing this process, we must understand the implications to us as the information concerning migration timetables become available	Head of Billing, Benefits & Systems attends national DWP group and keeps ARP informed as well as directing DWP to address IA issues. All ARP Councils have been in Working Age full service (for new claims) since 2018. Whilst Tax Credit cases are migrating in 2023/24, DWP intend to start migrating non ESA legacy cases during 2024/25 and a plan linked to benefit type has now been implemented. Completion date is still intended to be by the end of 2028 when ESA cases scheduled to migrate. No further clarity on plans for Pensioner HB.
Well Being Strategy	Colleagues Customers Sustainability	To continue to pulse survey and support staff through well-being initiatives, with good physical, mental and financial health info on the ARP HUB, EAP's, OH and benefits available	Promote virtual events and good practice to support H&WB at work. Promote EAP and benefits packages (i.e. financial & non financial benefits. Staff Forum Annual survey and / or mini pulse surveys to include ARP culture and acting on areas which prohibit a healthy and positive workplace culture	Health & Well-Being Strategy	Throughout the year	External Well-being providers, HRBP's, OIB, SMT and Ops mgmt. All Staff, ACAS/legislation/casework/Union Well-Being Champions & MHFA's	Funding to support well-being initiatives and suitable facilities to delivery them	A significant amount of material and workshops continue to be available to staff and kept under review. The Staff Forum play an active part in initiatives alongside our team of wellbeing champions.
Work Force Strategy	Colleagues Customers Sustainability	To provide operational HR metrics to manage and monitor people performance, budgeted headcount and be pro-active in identifying operational needs in line with agile working	Review ARP and operational workforce organisational structures & service reviews to support achievement of ARP key projects, agile/flexible working and customer service level agreements	Operational resource strategies Operational project timelines Customer service level agreements Staffing Budget	Dec-23	OIB, SMT & Operational Mgmt. team Financial team across ARP HRBP's	Organisational structure and establishment kept under review along with workforce planning. LA's policies across partnership with regard to workforce planning strategies	Vacancies are reviewed on an operational basis and to meet budget requirements. Rising demand due to the cost of living is taken into account in vacancy filling. A tighter bulk recruitment timeline has been implemented during 2023-24 which has successfully removed the requirement for more costly agency back fills. HR metrics are shared within our quarterly dashboards and with partner HR teams at regular ARP wide HR group meetings.

Ref.	Risk Title	Risk Description	Consequences	Opportunities	Risk Owner	Risk Manager	Current Controls	Mitigating Actions	Date added	Date Updated	Curr. Score	Tgt Score	Trend
	A partner or partners leave the partnership	A reduction in partners could result in a number of reasons in the future such as Local Govt reorganisation	Possible loss of key staff and T/UE implications - loss of resilience - also leading to increased cost of services and reduction in VFM	Develop trading opportunities to carry out some functions for other Councils	Head of ARP	Head of ARP	Partnership agreement includes notice period for cessation of partnership.	Opportunities for trading to be considered and business cases developed	01/04/2014	02/11/2023	E3	E3	Reached target score
	Annual Council Tax and NDR Billing and Benefits letter production	External printer does not issue daily or annual bills and letters within legal timescale	Bills may have first instance date later than 01/04/2023 which could result in loss or delay in collection of Council Tax and Business Rates	The contract will continue to offer significant savings to the Councils	Head of NDR, Recovery & Systems	Head of NDR, Recovery & Systems	2019/16 to 2022/23 annual billing process successful and daily bills and letters designed and active with current printers	The process was carried out successfully for the 2023/24 year. Issues learnt have been gathered	01/04/2014	02/11/2023	E2	E2	Reached target score
	Business continuity	Loss of key staff due to welfare reform and potential reduction in regulated resource	Inability to meet statutory requirements and to deliver services according to performance targets	With the expanded partnership we can ensure that skills are more widely held	Head of ARP and Heads of Service	Head of ARP	Staff are encouraged to take IRRV exams and NVQs and management qualifications and internal structures allow for career progression and updates systems with new patches and protection	Transformation programme continues to identify opportunities for training and staff development. We continue to monitor reasons for staff leaving	01/04/2014	02/11/2023	O4	O4	Reached target score
	Business continuity	Loss of premises, loss of power/internet and/or loss of systems must be placed on loss of systems in relation to cyber attack	Difficulty in finding some members of staff access to systems or, loss of systems	Shared services mean that we operate from 4 centres and work can be carried out from 6 sites as well as home working	Head of NDR, Recovery & Systems	Head of ARP	Systems mirrored at 2 sites enabling work to continue. All staff can work securely from home. West Suffolk IT updates systems with new patches and protection regularly and systems are PDR compliant	Access to mirrored servers in Midland regularly tested. Business Continuity plan agreed with partners - fail testing carried out and lessons learned applied. West Suffolk IT have verified on specific mitigation of cyber attack which reduces risk	01/04/2014	02/11/2023	E2	E2	Reached target score
	Cost of Living	Increased demand due to economic impact of inflationary pressures, could impact enforcement income.	Increased demand upon the service and reduction in collection/income.	To continue to engage with DWP & DLJHC at a national level as an early warning system and to shape implications.	SMT	SMT	Dependent upon Government management of rising cost of living pressures	To use overtime and agency where demand means that there is a risk to customer service standards, income and subsidy.	07/11/2022	02/11/2023	O3	O3	Reached target score
	Fraud and Error	Risk of Fraud entering the system if retained fraud team are not kept LC/TRS Fraud and Council Tax fraud will not be investigated by the DWP - retained service has to be self funding	If no service is retained by the partnership then Fraud will not be identified in cases.	Funding to resource interventions in cases currently receiving benefit and to retain joint funding from County and Police	Principal Fraud and Enforcement Manager	Principal Fraud and Enforcement Manager	Team retained to investigate LC/TRS, Tenancy, Clax, discount/exceptions and NDR since 01/04/19	Both Norfolk & Suffolk County Councils agreed funding for Fraud team 31/03/24. Cambridgeshire County Council now agreed to fund a Fraud hub from April 2023. Quarterly reporting continues to County Councils to demonstrate the impact of the Fraud team.	11/12/2014	02/11/2023	O2	O2	Reached target score
	Housing benefit subsidy shortfall	Overpayments that are a local authority's fault can be claimed back as income if the value is less than 0.48% of the overall HB expenditure. Extrapolation by External Audit teams can take Councils over the threshold	If LA error is not kept below this level it can have a significant financial impact on councils	To ensure that processes and procedures are correct and are followed and to ensure that backlogs do not reflect LA error and that error is kept to a minimum so that Audit do not have to extrapolate subsidy overpayments	Principal Benefits and Council Tax Billing Manager	Principal Benefits and Council Tax Billing Manager	Rigorous procedures and high level of professional training. We have a quality assurance programme designed to test accuracy levels and looks for and at areas of weakness. All councils were kept below LA error levels for audited claims from 2013/14 to 2020/21. 2021/22 audits have not been completed due to nationwide external audit resource issues.	To continue to use overtime and agency where vacancies mean that there is a risk to subsidy. To continue to apply QA to areas identified in audits and random testing to identify other areas of risk / error	11/12/2014	02/11/2023	O3	O3	Reached target score
	Income from retained Business rates and Council Tax	Income from NDR and Council Tax do not meet budgeted amount, in part due to impact of pandemic on businesses and individuals and potential appeals against rateable value	The income available to the Councils is insufficient to meet needs	Income may exceed projected budget	Head of NDR, Recovery & Systems	Head of NDR, Recovery & Systems	Monitoring will continue for 2022/23. Revaluation 2023 appeals adds risk for life of 2017 set.	The NNDR1 and Taxbase calculations include provision for bad debt and appeals outcomes for 2022/23 reported to partners, OIB & JC	11/04/2014	02/11/2023	O2	O2	Reached target score
	Localised Council Tax Reduction Scheme	Unemployment levels rise to a level that make the scheme unaffordable - this risk has risen due to cost of living factors	Customers are asked to pay more than they can afford and areas accurate	Increased income from Council Tax could be achieved	Principal Benefits and Council Tax Billing Manager	Principal Benefits and Council Tax Billing Manager	Current scheme has set payment levels at or below Attachment of Benefit levels for all but one Council which gives realistic opportunity to recover	Annual review for 2023/24 schemes completed, one partner introduced 100% support scheme for 2023/24 year. Review of 2024/25 schemes underway.	01/04/2014	02/11/2023	O3	O3	Reached target score
	NDR Revaluation	Risk the Value Office Agency might delay releasing property data in time for annual billing	Inability to meet annual billing deadlines to collect NDR from April 2023.	To continue to engage with VOA & DLJHC at a national level as an early warning system and to shape implications.	Head of NDR, Recovery & Systems	Head of ARP	Liaison with VOA, DLJHC & IRRV for updates.	The Team recompiled new revaluation lists in time for 2023/24 annual billing	07/11/2022	02/11/2023	O3	O3	Reached target score
	Universal Credit Implementation	Uncertainty over future funding from DWP and DLJHC. Affect upon customers currently receiving HB and resultant impact on customer teams	UC has been rolled out to new districts with 'Move to UC' pilot underway - the impact on customers and social landlords will be significant if the migration falters	To continue to work with the DWP and Stakeholders to jointly offer customers assistance in making the transition	Principal Benefits and Council Tax Billing Manager	Principal Benefits and Council Tax Billing Manager	DWP reconvened migration in 2023/24 with Tax Credits cases migrating and a timetable has now been released for the rollout of other legacy benefits including HB starting 2024/25. The rollout of ESA cases has been brought forward from 2025 to 2023 but we are well prepared and are planning future training and recruitment to reflect the reduced caseload. We will continue to monitor the position. Plans for migration of Pensioner HB remains deferred.	Continue to assess the impact of claims moving to the DWP - modelling is undertaken regularly to gauge progress against DWP plan and to inform recruitment and training programmes.	11/12/2014	02/11/2023	O3	O3	Reached target score

Risk management process and toolkit

Step 3 – Prioritisation using the matrix below

- How likely is this risk?
- How big an impact will this risk have?



Steps 4 & 5 – Mitigation and monitoring

- | Mitigation | Monitoring |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess current actions and controls. Adequate or more needed? Within your Service Plans, develop specific SMART actions that will reduce the likelihood of the risks or minimise the impact. What should the score be after you have taken action? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the Risk Register with colleagues (at least quarterly) Risks changed? New risks? Need to report of escalable risks? Risks raising changed? |

Labelhood	Impact	Example Descriptions
Very High	90%	Financial impact below £10k, no effect on partnership / service provision or reputation, minor delays to project, limited physical consequences
High	55% - 90%	£10k - £200k, service slightly reduced / broken / unreliable, significant if one team not met, minor adverse local media, impact on an external project (1)
Significant	15% - 55%	£200k - £500k, service suspended short term / reduced, loss of 3rd party assets, service adversely not met, substantial action, adverse national publicity
Low	5% - 15%	£500k - partnership / service suspended long term, statutory duties not delivered, major loss of 3rd party assets, significant adverse local media, some staff non-compliance to affect staff performance or quality of service taken over temporarily
Very Low	1% - 5%	
Almost impossible	0% - 1%	

By virtue of paragraph(s) 2, 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Agenda Item 15

Document is Restricted