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, 9 June 2026 at 10.30 am in the
Room 102, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford. IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Cllr Philip Cowen (Chairman)
Cllr Keith Horgan (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Diane Hind
Cllr Vince Langdon-Morris
Cllr Jan French

In Attendance

Jude Antony	-	Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer
Phil Butler	-	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager (Support)
Alison Chubbock	-	Section 151 Officer & Assistant Director Finance
Anna Goodall	-	Assistant Director
Lorraine King	-	Head of ARP
Theresa Mann	-	Head of Billing, Benefits and Business Rates (ARP)
Katey Mills	-	Head of Fraud, Enforcement and Recovery (ARP)
Danielle Patterson	-	Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Tanya Sturman	-	Head of Service - Customer and Digital
Teresa Smith	-	Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer

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12/26 CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

The outgoing Chairman, Councillor Phil Cowen (Breckland), in the Chair.

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

RESOLVED that Councillor Keith Horgan (East Cambridgeshire DC) be appointed as Chairman for the ensuing year.

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

RESOLVED that Councillor Jan French (Fenland DC) be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

13/26 TREASURER

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

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RESOLVED that Breckland Council be appointed as Treasurer for the ensuing year.

14/26 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2026 were confirmed as a correct record.

15/26 APOLOGIES

An apology had been received from Lorraine Rogers (East Suffolk) and Danielle Patterson was present as substitute.

16/26 URGENT BUSINESS

Whilst it was not Urgent Business, Councillor Horgan asked for clarity around the fire procedures at Breckland House and suggested that it would be useful, as Chairman, to have reference on what to do in case of an emergency.

17/26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

18/26 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM)

Phil Butler, the Revenues and Benefits Service Manager (Support) provided Members with an update on the Quarter 4 and the full year to 31 March 2026 providing an overview of activity and performance across the partnership.

Overall, year-end performance remained strong:

- Business Rates collection reached £292.3m against a £294.1m target (within tolerance).
- Council Tax collection reached £612.6m against a £615.2m target (within tolerance).
- Electronic forms usage grew significantly to almost 217,000 for the year, well above last year's total.
- Fraud and Compliance exceeded target, identifying £4.84m against a £4.5m target.

Katey Mills, Head of Fraud, Enforcement and Recovery added that Enforcement performance remained strong, with over £6.4m in debt collected by year end, around £300k more than in 2024/25. Fee income totalled £1.573m at the end of Q4, broadly in line with last year and 28% higher than the same period in 2023/24. The team continues to focus on early customer engagement and has introduced a suite of e-forms to support this. Open Banking went live late in Q4, with 30 successful transactions recorded in March 2026.

The team identified over £4.8m in fraud and error by year end. Four successful prosecutions were completed, with a further nine sanctions issued as alternatives to prosecution. Six cases were currently being progressed through the courts, and 52 live investigations remained ongoing. Work continued with external partners, and planning was underway to onboard two Lincolnshire authorities once governance requirements and the Section 113

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agreement had been finalised.

The Further Recovery team collected over £2m in debt from the most challenging Council Tax and Business Rates cases. Performance was lower than in 2024/25, largely due to improved triaging within the Business Rates team, which has resulted in more debt being collected earlier in the recovery process.

Theresa Mann, Head of Billing, Benefits and Business rates informed Members that at the end of Quarter 4, four partner councils were on target or within tolerance for Council Tax collection, with East Suffolk falling below target.

A range of factors continued to affect collection, including the move to 12 instalments, Valuation Office Agency (VOA) delays and the introduction of Council Tax premiums. Benchmarking showed most neighbouring authorities also saw a slight dip in collection in 2025/26, however monitoring would continue throughout 2026/27.

Work volumes within the team remained high. Resource allocation and processes were being reviewed to maintain efficiency, supported by focus days and other performance initiatives.

In terms of Benefits, Council Tax Reduction processing times were within tolerance for all authorities at the end of Q4. Universal Credit migration had significantly reduced the Housing Benefit caseload, leaving more complex cases. The targets for 2026/27 had been adjusted accordingly.

Business Rates collection was above target for East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and West Suffolk, and within tolerance for Breckland at Q4. East Suffolk was below target, partly due to large rateable value amendments. Implementation of the 1 April 2026 Business Rates changes was successful, with customer contact levels similar to previous years. Ongoing monitoring will assess the impact on collection and recovery.

Phil Butler advised Members that Quarter 4 for the ARP systems and Digital and been a busy and successful period. The team delivered annual billing across all partners, including full testing, validation and system upgrades, issuing around 380,000 Council Tax and 30,000 Business Rates bills on time.

E-billing uptake continued to grow, with over 180,000 Council Tax customers and 11,000 businesses receiving bills electronically, supporting channel-shift and reducing print and postage costs.

The Year-end processing was completed, including Housing Benefit payment runs, reconciliations, statutory returns and performance reporting.

Social media activity increased across all partners to support key operational messages, including change-of-circumstances reporting, valuation changes, Renters' Rights reform, penalties, annual billing and e-billing promotion.

Early work had also begun with system supplier MRI to understand technical requirements linked to Local Government Reorganisation.

The Better Customer Experience Programme continued to show strong progress. Online form usage reached 217,000 for the year, an increase of

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39% on last year.

E-billing continued to expand, supported by opt-out campaigns. Since 2024, around 140,000 new paperless sign-ups had been achieved across Council Tax and Business Rates and by the end of Q4, 47% of Council Tax customers and 37% of Business Rates customers were signed up to e-billing.

The Chairman thanked the team for the comprehensive update which had seen a solid year in performance.

Councillor French thanked Katey Mills, Head of Fraud, Enforcement and Recovery for providing a fantastic presentation to the Audit and Risk Committee at Fenland District Council. She asked if there had been further updates on the convictions within the Fenland area.

Members heard that the publications of the successful prosecutions had had an impact, but that further monitoring would be required once the data matching exercise had been completed.

Councillor Langdon-Morris asked if all residents were moving to a 12-month collection period for Council Tax. It was confirmed that as part of the Government changes, everyone would move to a 12-month collection period unless you opted for a 10-month collection period.

Lorraine King, Head of ARP also added that the team had reached out to the software provider to see if the option could be explored to give people the option to remain on 10-months before it automatically transferred to the 12-month period. It was also noted that anyone who changed address from April 2027 would automatically go to the 12-month collection period.

19/26 JOINT COMMITTEE SERVICE PLAN AND RISK REGISTER UPDATE REPORT JUNE 2026

Lorraine King, Head of ARP, explained that the service plan and risk register, as set out in Appendix A of the report, were reviewed every six months, with progress updates also being provided to the ARP Board.

Performance and work volumes were discussed, noting that manual work items had risen to 8.7k, while automated items had increased significantly to 30k in 2025/26 compared with the previous year.

Council Tax Support claims remained more than 30% higher than last year, and all migration notices had now been issued, with only three ARP cases still to move to Universal Credit.

Around 12,000 migration notices were sent over the year for employment support and vulnerable customers. Despite the increased workload, billing volumes remained high, and teams were taking longer to recover from the annual billing peak. Billing, collection and benefits processing performance had already been covered, with a marked improvement in benefits processing over the past year.

Audit and GDPR activity was reviewed, with all audit recommendations from the 24-25 audit completed except one which was in progress, and the 2025/26 audit had recently been received. There were 97 data breaches during the year, compared with 95 the previous year; all were low-risk and

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non-reportable.

The first ARP arrears-reduction campaign, delivered through the LIFT project for West Suffolk, reduced arrears by £49k and will now be extended to other authorities. New vulnerability guidance had been produced, and further work was underway to strengthen the wider approach. Recruitment pages had been reviewed for accessibility compliance, and plans were progressing to introduce bitesize videos supported by social media, with a third-party provider being explored. Online forms now accounted for 80% of digital customer contact.

Partnership working continued to grow, including close collaboration with the DWP, and fraud and enforcement services have expanded, with Maldon Local Authority joining the partnership.

The ARP Senior Management Team had welcomed Phil Butler as the new Revenues and Benefits Service Manager. The All Ideas Matter (AIM) staff suggestion scheme continued to be successful – a member of staff suggested a video was added to the website to show how to upload evidence which had been a great success.

ARP’s first apprentice had passed and secured a permanent role, and the leadership programme continued to provide hands-on development and support the one-team culture.

ARP were winners of the IRRV Partnership Award in October and was a finalist for the LGC Public Partnership Award.

All initiatives from the transformation programme had been completed. Automation continued to deliver strong results, including improvements to Direct Debits, refunds and moves.

The introduction of second-home premiums across three partners had reduced the number of properties classified as second homes by 4.1%. and civil penalties were now being used as a preventative tool for failure to declare changes to single occupancy status.

Finally, the risk register for 2025/26 had been reviewed and aligned with the 2026/27 service plan. Work linked to Local Government Reorganisation continued, with all projects under review. Some may need to pause during the transition, while others could progress where quick wins were possible.

Councillor Langdon-Morris said it was good to see benchmarking locally but asked how it feels to benchmark nationally. The Head of ARP said that the team were always looking to improve and would reach out to those who were over-performing to see what lessons could be learned and brought back to the Anglia Revenues Partnership.

The Chairman asked if there was a risk management team who reviewed all the risks within the business. Lorraine King said that the Senior Management Team reviews all risks on a quarterly basis.

The Chairman suggested that it would be helpful to include the date when the risk management report was last reviewed. Members were advised that dates were only updated when a risk had changed, but the feedback was noted and it was agreed that this could be incorporated going forward.

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Members of the Joint Committee noted the progress in respect of the December 2024 Service Delivery Plan at Appendix A and detailed in Appendix B of the report.

20/26 2025-26 ARP FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OUT-TURN REPORT

Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director Finance (Breckland) presented the ARP full-year outturn report that showed a positive variance of £586k across ARP, largely due to salary savings and higher-than-budgeted income. This was partly offset by additional costs, including investment in email automation. The underspend figure is after allowing for a fixed-term post, which has now closed.

Looking ahead, it was noted that this level of underspend was not expected in 2026/27, as maintaining performance levels and supporting Local Government Reorganisation would require sustained resourcing. This year's position was considered exceptional, and similar savings are not anticipated next year.

Councillor Cowen endorsed the savings given the challenges the team had faced relating to the Local Government Review.

Members noted the contents of the report along with the appendix.

21/26 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM)

Theresa Mann, Head of Billing, Benefits and Business rates provided the latest updates to Members on Welfare Reform.

The Managed migration to Universal Credit scheduled to conclude by March 2026, and was pleased to report that only three claimants across the partnership were still to migrate.

Work continued on the new Crisis Resilience Fund, replacing the Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments from 1 April, with coordination underway with county councils.

The Housing Benefit Award Accuracy initiative continued, with full case reviews for pensioners expected this year.

Recent welfare changes include removal of the two-child limit for Universal Credit claims and changes to Statutory Sick Pay (removal of the waiting period and lower earnings limit).

The Government remained committed to aligning administration of Pension Credit and Housing Benefit, with a timetable expected in the autumn.

Phase 1 of the Renters Rights Act began on 1 May, introducing the end of no-fault evictions, limits on rent increases and rights for tenants to keep pets. Further phases from 2028 will include a new Ombudsman for the private rented sector.

Councillor Langdon-Morris noted that the Crisis Resilience fund should continue to be considered in a broader, long-term context, recognising that more "ordinary" households may be affected by events such as flooding over

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the next 5–10 years. Members were asked to keep this wider perspective in mind as the fund develops.

Members noted the content of the report.

22/26 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Langdon-Morris said that East Suffolk District Council had developed a mobile phone app which had been well received and wondered if the ARP partnership would see this as an opportunity to link to that.

Lorraine King said that this was something that could be explored and considered in the future.

The Chairman gave his thanks to the previous Chairman, Councillor Philip Cowen.

23/26 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next virtual meeting on Tuesday 22 September 2026 at 10am via Teams were noted.

The meeting closed at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN