

MINUTES of a meeting of THE LEICESTERSHIRE PARTNERSHIP REVENUES AND BENEFITS JOINT COMMITTEE held in the Atkins Building, Lower Bond Street, Hinckley on THURSDAY, 14 APRIL 2016

Present: Councillor J Hallam (HDC) (Chairman)

Councillors R D Bayliss (NWLDC), M Hall (HBBC), P King (HDC), T J Pendleton (NWLDC) and M Surtees (HBBC)

Chief Executives: Mr S Atkinson (HBBC) and Ms C E Fisher (NWLDC)

Officers: Mr S Coope (Leicestershire Partnership - Revenues & Benefits), Mrs C Hammond, Mr A Hunkin (NWLDC), Ms B Jolly (HDC), Mrs J Kenny (HBBC), Mrs S O'Hanlon (Leicestershire Partnership - Revenues & Benefits) and Mr A Wilson (HBBC)

The Chairman welcomed Mr A Hunkin, Interim Director of Resources at North West Leicestershire District Council to his first meeting.

### **31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr S Kohli.

### **32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no interests declared.

### **33. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2016.

Mrs S O'Hanlon advised that in relation to minute number 25 – November 2015 Performance Report she had informed Members that the forecast for yearend NWLDC was also 1 day behind on new claims targets.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2016 be approved and signed as a correct record.

### **34. RISK BASED VERIFICATION POLICY**

Mr S Coop presented the report to Members and advised them that the software would analyse the level of fraud risk on each application received allowing more time to verify the higher risk applications and in turn should help to reduce the amount of evidence that customers have to submit.

Councillor T J Pendleton stated that it was a super piece of software to bring in but sought assurances that officers would still be able to check applications if they felt that they did not look right using their knowledge of the application procedure.

Mr S Coop advised Members that the software would analyse the application in a minute and if a fraud risk was detected officers would carry out further assessment before payment was made.

Chairman's initials

Councillor P King expressed concerns that staff could become over reliant on the system leading to a degree of complacency which could increase the risk of further problems. He stated that he was not sure what the Partnership would gain from the policy.

Mr S Coop stated that historically all claims were treated the same, but the new software would allow low risk applications to be prioritised and processed immediately. Officers' time could then be used to verify higher risk claims.

In response to a question from Councillor J Hallam, Mr S Coop advised Members that the software would assist in making savings in fraudulent payments.

In response to a question from Councillor M Hall, Mr S Coop advised that the system had not been trialled, but the baseline would be monitored and compared through benchmarking, adding that the Partnership would see a difference in the number of applications approved.

Following a questions from Councillors P King and T J Pendleton, Mr S Coop advised Members that once the system had been developed quarterly reports would come to this Committee

Mrs S O'Hanlon advised Members that the implementation of RBV and the creation of the policy had arisen from the recommendations following the service review ratified previously by Joint Committee, and that some lower risk claims would be put into a higher risk group (without knowing ) to test and challenge the risk group.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The process of the Risk Based Verification for verifying Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims be adopted.

### **35. PERFORMANCE REPORT (FEBRUARY 2016)**

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the report to Members. She advised that in relation to year end collection rates both HBBC and NWLDC were slightly below target for Council Tax, with HDC meeting target and for NNDR NWLDC had met its target and both HBBC and HDC met and exceeded theirs, adding all other benefit processing targets had either been met or exceeded. She informed Members that responsibility for investigating Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit fraud had now moved to the DWP and the Partnership had retained in employment 1.5 FTE fraud and liaison officers who would act as single points of contact for the DWP and to investigate suspected council tax support fraud.

Following a comment from Councillor P King, Mrs S O'Hanlon advised that 1.5 FTE was between all three authorities and OWBC and that four staff had transferred over to the DWP.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Performance Report (February 2016) be noted.

### **36. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE TO FEBRUARY 2016**

Mr A Wilson presented the report to Members. He advised Members that the budget was in a healthy position and that the overspend on the virtual mailroom had been offset by the savings resulting from current vacancies. He also informed Members that the £74,000 external funding that had been secured could be carried forward.

Chairman's initials

RESOLVED THAT:

The financial performance of the Partnership be noted.

### **37. CIPFA BENCHMARKING CLUB 2015**

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the report to Members. She advised that the data provided was for 2014/15 before the restructure; therefore, it was not relevant, but provided a good starting point for benchmarking. She informed the Committee that all three authorities were compared in relation to NNDR and the results were very positive, but there was still work to do. She highlighted to Members that in relation to Council Tax the FTE staffing was low in comparison to the number of properties and in relation to Benefits the partnership fared well against the average time taken to process changes and claims. She added that the Management Board would look again at the data using 2015/16 figures (following the restructure) for comparison.

Councillor T J Pendleton stated that he was delighted with the coverage and progress, but felt that the report did not outline the direction of travel for the Partnership.

Mrs S O'Hanlon stated that the report should have been considered by the Committee at an earlier meeting and that officers were about to undertake a review for the next cycle and the results would be brought back.

In response to a comment from Councillor M Hall, Mrs S O'Hanlon stated that the Partnership had fared favourably and would take on board intelligence that had been received on how other authorities performed.

Councillor P King stated that it would be very useful to see the data for 2015/16 to get an idea of how the Partnership fared following the restructure.

Mr S Atkinson advised that the September/October meeting would be a good time to pull together the work plan for Members to consider.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The many areas of good practice that had been identified as part of the benchmarking exercise be noted.
2. The areas of identified as performing at a lower level, compared to other comparator Authorities, are noted, together with the work being undertaken to secure an improved performance against comparators both for the partnership and for the individual authorities.

### **38. UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE**

Mrs S O'Hanlon updated Members on the current position. She advised that she had hoped to have more information and that it was planned for Harborough to go live in November. She informed that the partnership had asked a lot of questions from DWP and received very little response, adding that there was no assurance on the transition on changes to benefit claims and gave an example that the DWP had not confirmed if rent increases would be classed as a change.

In response to a question from Councillor P King, Mrs S O'Hanlon advised Members that the current claim in payment was low, but would ask for national data with regard to those that had not been put into payment post application.

Chairman's initials

In response to questions from Councillor P King, Ms B Jolly stated that support would be offered to the most vulnerable, as most of the applications were online, but reiterated to Members that officers had asked a lot of questions at the meeting with the DWP and had not got many answers.

RESOLVED THAT:

The update be noted.

### **39. FORWARD PLAN**

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the Forward Plan to Members.

Ms C E Fisher requested that the Forward Plan included all the items for the financial year that the Joint Committee would be considering.

Following a comment from Councillor P King, Ms B Jolly stated that local authorities were waiting for further information on how the full retention of business rates would work and that a report would be brought to a future meeting.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Forward Plan be noted.

### **40. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chairman advised that the next meeting will be held on Thursday, 9 June 2016 and will be held at the Hinckley Hub, Rugby Road, Hinckley.

Councillor R D Bayliss left the meeting at 5.00pm.

The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 5.20 pm