

# **Minutes**

of a meeting of the

## **Ridgeway Shared Service Partnership Strategic Board**

held at the Conference Room 1, The Abbey House, Abingdon  
on Monday, 2 November, 2009 at 8.30am

### **Open to the Public, including the Press**

#### **Present:**

Members: Councillors Mary de Vere (Chair), Rodney Mann (Vice-Chair), Ann Ducker and Jerry Patterson

Officers: Steve Bishop, Steve Culliford, Paul Howden and William Jacobs

Capita representatives: Phil Brown, Darren Keen, and Sue King

Public: Nil

### **1. Apologies for absence**

None

### **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the strategic board held on 3 August 2009 were adopted and signed as a correct record.

### **3. Declarations of interest**

None

### **4. Urgent business**

None

## 5. Minutes of the Operations Board

The strategic board received the minutes of the operations board meetings held on 24 August, 21 September and 19 October 2009.

Members noted that performance of exchequer services had reduced since Capita had transferred operations to Shepton Mallet at Mendip District Council's offices. Capita had appointed David Firth as the new exchequer services manager. He had just started in post. An action plan to improve performance had been agreed with Capita; Phil Brown and Craig Richmond would be responsible for implementing it, whilst David Firth would manage the everyday "business as usual" exchequer services team. Most actions should be completed by Christmas.

One action was for the councils to increase the use of purchase orders through the financial management system. This would speed up payment of invoices. Training would be given to relevant council staff. This would help Capita's performance and was in the interest of both councils.

The councils' client manager would be undertaking some benchmarking comparisons with the Capita's performance at Shepton Mallet compared with other Capita sites such as Blackburn, where Cherwell District Council's operations were based. He would also be undertaking ad hoc visits to the Shepton Mallet offices to check on performance.

It was recognised that better performance was needed by Capita. It had been reminded that the contract was now in its second half and the councils would be looking to a new contract thereafter. Good performance was therefore essential from Capita to be considered for the new contract.

It was noted that progress was being made on the brown bins service, in particular in reconciling the database with the financial management system. Once this was completed, the officers would write to all service users with arrears to enforce debt recovery. The portfolio holders would be consulted before debt collection commenced.

### **RESOLVED**

*that the minutes of the operations board meetings and the further progress on outstanding tasks be noted.*

## 6. Performance monitoring

The strategic board welcomed Capita representatives to the meeting to receive the performance report.

Capita reported that:

- Council tax collection rates were up compared to last year, including payments by Direct Debit. However, the performance was slightly behind the target for the first time this year. The target had been raised in April when monthly income targets were profiled.
- One late payment of an account from a business in the Vale had resulted in the business rate collection percentage being slightly down on last year, but South Oxfordshire's was higher than last year.

- The performance in dealing with new benefits claims was improving and performance on dealing with changes to benefits (changed events) was improving also. A new target for changed events had to be agreed with Capita; 10 days appeared to be acceptable to the councils and Capita.
- The number of outstanding benefits claims was also reducing.
- Outstanding debt on overpayment of benefits was increasing for both councils.

The strategic board discussed overpayments of benefits with Capita. Members of the board expressed concern that the level of debt was increasing and asked how this was being tackled. Capita reported that it looked at each case and where possible, it sought arrangements for repayment through the courts. Almost 60 per cent of overpayment cases were being repaid by court arrangement. Capita and the councils' client manager would be reviewing the older cases to see if any action could be taken and all cases would be reviewed by 31 March 2010 at the latest.

Members were concerned that there was a general misunderstanding of the term overpayment. There were some occasions where overpayments had been made by Capita and the council following mistakes made by benefits staff. However, most overpayments were caused by incorrect claims. Members asked Capita to analyse overpayments between claimant-caused overpayments and Capita/council-caused overpayments and report back to the board or to councillors generally through the councillors' information bulletins.

Capita continued reporting on performance in other areas:

- The benefits accuracy figures had not been submitted to the strategic board for consideration. The board reported that it needed to monitor these to see if there was an accuracy issue. Capita also agreed to report its own accuracy checking figures to the next board meeting.
- The number of benefits claims for the Vale was reducing, but was increasing in South Oxfordshire.
- Exchequer services had been moved to Shepton Mallet and some problems had occurred in the transition. An action plan had since been agreed with the councils and a new manager, Phil Brown, had been appointed by Capita to oversee its implementation. An issues log was being maintained to capture, track and manage all known errors or problems through to resolution.
- Progress was being made against the exchequer services action plan. The aim was to resolve all issues by Christmas.
- Capita suggested that council staff should be trained to use goods received notes to log the receipt of goods so that the invoice could be paid by Capita when received without the need for council staff approval. All invoices would have to be sent to the Shepton Mallet PO Box. This would improve the performance in the payment of invoices within 30 days. The board members agreed that council staff should be trained to help this process.
- The regular aged debt monitoring report had not been submitted to the strategic board for this meeting. Capita agreed to submit this in early November.

## **RESOLVED**

- (a) *that the client officers be requested to agree with Capita a new target for benefits changed events for introduction in 2010/11;*
- (b) *that Capita be requested to analyse overpayments between claimant-caused overpayments and Capita/council-caused overpayments and report back to the board or to councillors generally through the councillors' information bulletins;*
- (c) *that the latest benefits' accuracy figures be submitted to the next meeting of the strategic board;*
- (d) *that the councils' staff be trained to use goods received notes so that invoices can be paid by Capita without the need for council staff approval; and*
- (e) *that Capita be requested to submit the aged debt monitoring report to the strategic board members in early November.*

## **7. Dates of forthcoming meetings**

It was noted that the next meetings of the strategic board would be held on Monday 1 February and Tuesday 4 May 2010.

The meeting rose at 10.10 am