

# **Minutes** of a meeting of the **Ridgeway Shared Service Partnership Strategic Board**

held at the Conference Room 1, The Abbey House, Abingdon on Monday 10 May 2010 at 9am

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

PRESENT:

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

OBSERVER MEMBER: Councillor Richard Webber (Vale)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Steve Bishop, Steve Culliford, Paul Howden, and William Jacobs

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Nil

## **16. Apologies for absence**

None

## **17. Minutes**

The minutes of the Strategic Board's meeting held on 1 March 2010 were adopted as a correct record.

## **18. Declarations of interest**

Councillors Ann Ducker and Jerry Patterson both declared personal interests in that they had attended the Local Government Chronicle's annual awards evening that had been sponsored by Capita.

## **19. Urgent business**

None

## **20. Minutes of the Operations Board**

The minutes of the Operations Board meeting held on 19 April 2010 and the minutes of a briefing meeting held on 29 March 2010 were noted.

The officers updated on progress as follows:

- Concessionary fares would be a county council function from 1 April 2010. Officers from the county and the districts were liaising over implementation
- Progress was being made in reclaiming outstanding debts from brown bin customers
- Work was progressing on arranging Capita surgeries in Wantage
- Capita had still to produce an analysis of the reasons behind its poor performance in processing benefits claims accurately. Although the Department for Work and Pensions was providing advice, no conclusions had been formed and this work could take several months
- The Department for Work and Pensions had asked the Audit Commission to investigate the councils' performance on benefits in 2008/09. It had found that South Oxfordshire District Council had failed to meet both the lower and upper thresholds and therefore would be penalised £370K. It was likely that the Vale of White Horse District Council had also failed to meet the thresholds and a similar penalty was to be expected.
- It was likely that the councils would be penalised for their benefits performance for 2009/10 also
- The councils would claim these penalties back from Capita under the contract
- Capita had the opportunity to provide evidence to mitigate these penalties, thereby hopefully reducing the penalty to the councils and Capita
- The councils' officers were asked to check the contract details to ensure they were confident of the councils' position in the event of any necessary action against Capita

## **21. Performance monitoring**

Sue King and Darren Keen from Capita joined the meeting.

The Strategic Board noted the successful performance of Capita in providing many services under the contract but did not discuss these in detail. However, the Board members asked the Capita representatives to report on progress in improving its performance of processing benefits claims accurately.

Firstly, Capita reported that it disputed the conclusions made by the Audit Commission and would challenge these. Capita believed that performance had been above the lower

threshold but had not exceeded the upper threshold. It would be providing mitigating evidence by the end of May to challenge the Audit Commission's assumptions.

The Board members had seen no evidence of any improvement from Capita in the weekly statistics they had received. They asked why performance was so much lower for South Oxfordshire and the Vale compared to that of Havant, whose benefits claims were administered by the same office. Capita believed that improvements would soon be evident. Capita also believed that there was no single reason for the low level of performance. It was managing the benefits team performance and was identifying areas for closer monitoring or further training. The Department for Work and Pensions had also started investigating Capita's processes; this work was ongoing and could take several months.

The Strategic Board was dissatisfied with the explanations given by Capita and urged it to improve its benefits accuracy performance. Capita reported that it hoped that the new controls it was introducing, together with the action plan and the advice of the Department for Work and Pensions would make the improvements the councils required.

Turning to other areas of benefits performance, the Board noted that benefits overpayments should reduce next month and Capita was confident it would meet its target to process changes in claimants' circumstances, known as changed events. The Board also noted progress against the action plan.

## **22. Dates of forthcoming meetings**

Members noted that the next formal meeting of the Strategic Board would be held on Monday 2 August 2010 at 8.30am. From that meeting, the chairmanship and administration would pass to South Oxfordshire District Council for a two-year period. The meetings would also be held at South Oxfordshire's offices.

The meeting rose at 11am