

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
OF THE RIDGEWAY SHARED SERVICE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC  
BOARD**

**HELD AT THE CONFERENCE ROOM 1, FIRST FLOOR, THE ABBEY HOUSE, ABINGDON  
ON MONDAY, 28TH JULY, 2008 AT 8.30 AM**

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

PRESENT:

MEMBERS: Councillors Ann Ducker (South Oxfordshire District Council), Mary de Vere and Jerry Patterson (Vale of White Horse District Council)

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

CAPITA: Lisa Galvani and Graham Hodges

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Nil

1. **ELECTION OF A CHAIR/CHAIRMAN**

The Ridgeway Shared Services Partnership Strategic Board was asked to elect a Chair. In accordance with the Partnership's Constitution, the Chairmanship rotated between the partner authorities every two years and from the Annual General Meeting in 2008 the Chair would pass to a Board Member from the Vale of White Horse District Council.

*RESOLVED*

*that Councillor Mary de Vere be elected as Chair of the Ridgeway Shared Services Partnership Strategic Board until the Annual General Meeting in 2010.*

2. **ELECTION OF A VICE-CHAIR/CHAIRMAN**

The Board was asked to elect a Vice-Chairman and in accordance with the Partnership's Constitution, the post should be held by a Board Member for the other partner authority.

*RESOLVED*

*that Councillor Rodney Mann be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Ridgeway Shared Services Partnership Strategic Board until the Annual General Meeting in 2010.*

3. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Rodney Mann.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the Board meeting held on 12 May 2008 were adopted and signed as a correct record.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

6. MINUTES OF THE OPERATIONS BOARD

The Strategic Board received and noted the minutes of the Operations Board meetings held on 28 April and 16 June 2008. Members commented and raised various questions as follows:

- Council Tax write-offs would now be included in the Vale's performance statistics. A concise method of reporting had been established and would be shared with Councillor Patterson and distributed in due course. It was noted that only a very small percentage required writing off
- The performance of Capita on Council Tax and Business Rates collection was praised
- There was a need to rectify a problem with Council Tax payment slips at South Oxfordshire. The bar codes printed on the slips had not been tested prior to being sent out to taxpayers. Capita was working to correct the problem and would bear the difference in cost
- There were no bar codes on the bills at the Vale but this would be introduced at a later date
- South Oxfordshire's benefits' performance as measured by Best Value Performance Indicators was better than last year
- Problems were being overcome in charging for the brown bins service. The backlog of Direct Debit mandates at South Oxfordshire was reducing and staff had caught up on the backlog in invoicing at the Vale. The procedure had recently been automated and the problems experienced should not reoccur
- Members asked the Joint Head of Finance to investigate the differing costs of brown bin collection between the two authorities
- The possibility of an event to celebrate the second anniversary of the Capita contract was discussed. It was concluded that in September the Leaders of the two Councils could jointly issue a media release to mark the anniversary. Capita would carry out its own event as part of its annual review with staff
- The Vale's assisted travel scheme service would continue to be administered by Capita following the evaluation of quotations
- IT facilities for the shared service team were discussed. This largely involved integrating the systems of the two Councils. The Joint Head of Finance was piloting changes. It was hoped that differences between the systems would be resolved shortly
- With regard to the potential performance notice no.4, South Oxfordshire had been fined £700 for a late payment to the Revenues and Customs office. Investigations were being made into the responsibility for the error

- Problems with the implementation of the Agresso bank reconciliation module had been due to a lack of process mapping at an early stage. This would be carried out by the end of August
- Responsibility for bank reconciliation at South Oxfordshire was under discussion between the Joint Head of Finance and Capita. The two parties had interpreted the contract differently but it was hoped that agreement could soon be reached
- The Housing Benefit interface with Academy software had been completed
- There were differences between the cash receipting systems at the two Councils. Investigations were being made to harmonise these

*RESOLVED*

*that the minutes of the Operations Board be noted and the actions arising, as referred to above, be agreed.*

7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Strategic Board received and considered the performance monitoring reports on the functions carried out by the partnership.

Vale of White Horse District Council

The Board noted the highlights of performance affecting the Vale. The number of Council Tax payments made by Direct Debit continued to increase and was fractionally higher than at the same date last year. Correspondence figures remained low at the end of June with 545 items outstanding. The Council Tax collection rates for 2006/07 (99.34%) and 2007/08 (98.88%) confirmed the commitment to vigorously pursue arrears. The June collection figure for Business Rates was 0.2% lower than last year—a small variation that could be explained by the impact of the economic downturn and/or the new inclusion of empty properties.

The method of reporting performance on changes in circumstances (Best Value Performance Indicator 78b) had changed. Data required by the Department of Work and Pensions was now recorded over five week periods and therefore this performance indicator was no longer reportable. It was noted that methods to measure the new National Performance Indicators had not yet been determined.

South Oxfordshire District Council

The amount of outstanding correspondence was decreasing but was still higher than at the Vale. Collection of Business Rates was lower than the target. Two late payments had affected this figure.

General

Members asked that for future meetings, the performance reports for the two Councils should be amalgamated into one report with a column for each authority and the differences between the Council's should be highlighted. Officers were to review the layout to see how comparative performance could most efficiently be reported.

Members noted the aged debts data. They asked for the graphs to be made clearer with better scales.

#### Capita Contact Centre

It was noted that all statistics within this report were within the service level agreement targets. However, Members asked that the data should be clearly labelled to show which Council it applied to.

#### Internal Audit

It was noted that the Internal Audit team was performing well against its Internal Audit Plan. It had been only a year since the new Internal Audit Manager had been appointed, yet the team had worked well together, making good progress and introducing new, robust processes. It was noted that Mazars, a contractor, was undertaking its first planning audit for the Ridgeway Shared Service Partnership. This was an audit of services provided by SOLL Leisure.

#### Accountancy

It was noted that the operation of the accountancy service was settling down. The managers at South Oxfordshire and the Vale were progressing well and the accounts for 2007/08 had been closed. Budgets had been uploaded to Agresso. Both accountancy teams were looking at further harmonisation of the back office elements of the budget setting process for 2009/10.

#### Investigations Team

Members noted that a tagging order had been achieved following a benefit fraud case. The National Fraud Initiative was now in progress to allow matching of data between payroll, benefits, credit, licensing and pension records. This would extend to Council Tax and electoral register records in 2009.

It was noted that the team was currently under staffed by 50%. Members were warned that due to this and other influences such as the economic downturn benefit fraud targets might not be met this year.

A concern was raised about the accuracy of data from Capita. This had escalated to a level where the Chief Executives of the two Councils had met with Capita's director to stress the problems this caused. Despite contract incentives and penalties being in place to regulate this, problems still occurred. Members expressed concern at this and asked for an update at the next meeting.

#### *RESOLVED*

*that the performance monitoring report be received and the actions set out above be approved.*

8. **BANKING CONTRACT**

It was reported that at South Oxfordshire, the banking contract was with the Legal Department to finalise. The contract had not been signed but there were no financial issues. The Vale's banking contract had been agreed and was in place.

9. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None

10. **DATES OF FORTHCOMING MEETINGS**

It was noted that forthcoming meetings of the Strategic Board would be held at 8.30am at the Vale of White Horse District Council's offices at The Abbey House, Abingdon:

- Monday 3 November 2008
- Monday 2 February 2009
- Tuesday 5 May 2009 (avoiding May Day Bank Holiday Monday)

The meeting rose at 10.10 am