

**MINUTES OF A MEETING
OF THE RIDGEWAY SHARED SERVICE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC BOARD**

**HELD AT THE CONFERENCE ROOM 1, THE ABBEY HOUSE, ABINGDON ON MONDAY,
3RD NOVEMBER, 2008 AT 8.30 AM**

Open to the Public, including the Press

PRESENT:

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

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

CAPITA: Simon Cockayne and Sue King

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Nil

11. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None

12. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2008 were adopted as a correct record.

The Chair sought updates on several items that appeared in the minutes:

- In relation to brown bins, it was reported that reconciliation of account details between the customer relationship management system and the Agresso financial management system had to be completed, then all the processes documented to establish responsibilities. This work should be completed by the end of November
- South Oxfordshire was considering an improved automation system for Direct Debit payments for brown bins. The aim was to use the same system at both councils. It was suggested that similar automated systems should be rolled out across both councils for all Direct Debit payments, billing and invoicing, potentially resulting in savings for the two councils and Capita
- Shared e-mail systems between the two councils were being considered
- On the Capita contract, negotiations were proceeding on a revised pay and performance structure

13. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

14. MINUTES OF THE OPERATIONS BOARD

The minutes of the Operations Board meetings held on 15 July, 18 August, and 22 September 2008 were received and noted.

It was reported that no flooding money had been received but was due shortly. The Government had written to affected councils seeking further details; this had delayed payments.

15. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Strategic Board received several performance monitoring reports from Capita and council officers.

Vale and South Oxfordshire Financial Services Contract September 2008 Summary

Sue King from Capita highlighted the main points from her report. The benefits improvement plan was being implemented and the performance in processing new claims during September was inside the 24 day target for both councils. Capita was reviewing its management of benefits at its off-site locations to see whether further service improvements could be made. Members asked that monthly monitoring statistics against targets were compiled and sent to each Board Member in future. Benefits administration was considered to be a critical area requiring close management.

Council Tax collection rates were over 75% at both councils, up on last year. However, Capita expressed concern at impending parish boundary changes in the Vale and the problems this might cause in adjusting bills.

Business Rates staff had been concentrating their efforts on collecting rates for empty properties. However, it was considered that a change of focus to properties where there had been no payment might improve collection performance.

Payment of invoices by the councils within 30 days had been improving. Members considered that payment of all invoices should be made within 30 days; the councils should not accept a lower performance. Members asked to be presented with information of where the problems lay at the next Board meeting.

Consideration was given to the best way to manage telephone calls during peak times to the Contact Centre. Currently callers were held in a queue and at busy times a Capita call handler arranged a call back by Capita later, at a less busy time. Members had asked about alternatives. Capita suggested an engaged tone or a recorded message could be used when the telephone lines were busy. Capita asked to carry out an additional month's monitoring at its Swindon centre where a trial was being conducted to find the best method. Members agreed to Capita's suggestion.

RESOLVED

- (a) that additional monitoring data be provided for the Strategic Board Members on a monthly basis to allow more detailed assessment of benefits performance; and*
- (b) that data relating to the non-payment of invoices by the councils within 30 days be presented to the next Strategic Board meeting.*

Aged Debt Analysis

With regard to management of debtors, Capita was congratulated for the progress it had made in improving the service. Members agreed but warned against complacency as there were further improvements to make. It was suggested that better profiling of debt would show a more accurate picture. For example, mobile home park rents were not profiled across each month of the year but showed as a single large debt at the beginning of the year. It was noted that management of cost centres was improving all the time.

Internal Audit

It was noted that Internal Audit was on track to meet its Plan for 2008/09. However, there had been a number of unplanned audits this year which had taken more time than expected.

Investigations Team

An appointment had been made to the vacant Investigations Officer post. The Vale and South Oxfordshire's joint team was the best performing in the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire benchmarking group in 2007/08 and were currently aiming to complete 33 cases per officer for 2008/09, a high target compared to other authorities.

Accountancy

Both councils had been affected by the economic downturn and had investments in Icelandic banks. These investments had been made some time ago and until recently the banks in question had been given the highest ratings. The councils were now working to more stringent criteria when they lent money.

The two Chief Accountants were reviewing the structure of accountancy across the two councils to see if a better structure could be employed. This would also be affected by the outcome of the new shared senior management structure.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

17. DATES OF FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

It was noted that forthcoming meetings of the Strategic Board would be held on:

- Monday 2 February 2009

- Tuesday 5 May 2009 (avoiding May Day Bank Holiday Monday)

All of these meetings would be held at the Vale's offices at The Abbey House, Abingdon, and each meeting starting at 8.30am.

The meeting rose at 9.42 am