

MINUTES OF A MEETING
OF THE RIDGEWAY SHARED SERVICE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC BOARD
HELD AT THE CONFERENCE ROOM 1, THE ABBEY HOUSE, ABINGDON ON
TUESDAY, 5TH MAY, 2009 AT 8.30 AM

Open to the Public, including the Press

PRESENT:

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

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

CAPITA: Sue King

25. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Darren Keen form Capita.

26. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the formal meeting of the Ridgeway Shared Services Partnership Strategic Board held on 2 February 2009 were adopted and signed as a correct record.

27. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

28. **URGENT BUSINESS**

None

29. **MINUTES OF THE OPERATIONS BOARD**

The Strategic Board received and noted the minutes of the Operations Board meetings held on 16 February and 23 March 2009. The draft minutes of 20 April 2009 were also circulated to bring Members up to date.

The Strategic Board called for copies of the Strategic Board's minutes from its informal meeting on 6 April 2009 and the Operations Board's draft minutes of 20 April. Members reviewed progress against the matters discussed at these meetings.

Brown Bins

At South Oxfordshire there was a backlog in reconciling the brown bin records with the unpaid accounts. A deadline of 30 June was set to complete this work. As part of this work new procedures would be put in place. Capita had accepted this deadline. However, it was noted that the new waste contractor, Verdant, might wish to use a different database to manage brown bins, which would need to be properly implemented.

Action was being taken to recover unpaid accounts. Where there was a refusal to pay, consideration would be given to reclaiming the bins. The Strategic Board Members asked that local Members were informed of the properties where this was likely so they could talk to the occupiers direct. Members also asked that if the bins were reclaimed, a note should be left for the occupiers explaining the action taken. The officers agreed to advise the Strategic Board Members and the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder/Cabinet Member of the scale of the unpaid accounts.

RESOLVED

- (a) that where action is being contemplated to recover unpaid accounts for use of the brown bins service, consideration be given to reclaiming the bins;*
- (b) that before brown bins are reclaimed, every attempt be made to achieve settlement of the account, and if this fails local Members be informed of the properties where this is likely so they can approach the occupiers direct;*
- (c) that where a brown bin is reclaimed, a note shall be left for the occupiers explaining the action taken; and*
- (d) that the Strategic Board Members and the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder/Cabinet Member be informed of the scale of the unpaid accounts.*

Payroll

It was reported that an action plan was being completed for further improvements to the payroll service. The improvements would include documentation of processes, systems mapping, and definition of roles and responsibilities.

Accommodation Costs with Capita

It was noted that Capita was looking to site its operations staff for the Vale and South Oxfordshire contract at one location, either Abingdon or Crowmarsh. Capita was due to propose its preferred solution. The Strategic Director agreed to follow this up.

Pay and Performance Mechanism

The new pay and performance mechanism for Capita had been agreed and was with Capita for signing off.

Outstanding Invoices

It was reported that all outstanding unpaid invoices had been investigated, several had been cancelled as being unenforceable and the remainder were with Capita for payment.

Council Tax and Business Rates Collection

The Strategic Board noted the figures for Council Tax and Business Rates collection performance. Council Tax collection rates had been higher in 2008/09 than ever before for both councils. They were 98.33% for South Oxfordshire and 98.44% for the Vale.

At the request of the two authorities, Capita had provided Business Rates collection figures separately for occupied and empty properties. The collection figures for 2008/09 were:

Business Rates Collection 2008/09				
Council	Occupied properties	Empty properties	Total	Compared to 2007/08
South Oxfordshire	99.0%	88.0%	98.44%	- 0.85%
Vale of White Horse	98.8%	94.3%	98.57%	- 0.75%

Payment of Invoices

It was noted that there had been improvement in the time taken to pay invoices. The time had reduced in most cases. The average was well below 30 days but still some invoices were paid outside of this period. Performance would be monitored on a service by service basis in 2009/10 so poor performing services could be identified and helped to improve.

Benefits' Accuracy

Capita had submitted an improvement plan graph showing its planned improvement in reducing the number of days to process benefits applications accurately. In March 2009 it had taken an average of 44 calendar days for South Oxfordshire applications and 41 days for Vale. The intention was to equalise performance across the two Councils and reduce the number of days to 24 by January 2010.

It was noted that the performance had improved for Vale applications since the administration of these had been moved to Capita's office in Havant. South Oxfordshire's applications were being administered at Capita's Mendip office.

The Strategic Board believed that the performance should be the same as the processes were the same. It was suggested that the worsening benefits administration performance by Capita should be the subject of further discussion between the Councils' Chief Executive and the chief officer at Capita. Members

welcomed the improvement plan but were not content with the recent performance by Capita.

RESOLVED

that the poor benefits administration performance by Capita be escalated to the chief officer at Capita.

Cash Receipting Software

Members noted that new security standards had been imposed by the Government for receiving payments by credit or debit cards. The system at South Oxfordshire was not compliant with the new standards but investigations were being made to find an appropriate solution.

Customer Service Standards

Capita had submitted its response to proposed customer service standards. This would be analysed by the client officer.

Government Connect

A new Government standard had been introduced called Government Connect. This provided an accredited and secure network between central government and every local authority in England. To meet this standard, the two Councils and Capita had been given a time extension to 30 September 2009; all three organisations were on track to meet the new deadline.

30. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

At this point in the meeting Capita's representative, Sue King, was invited into the meeting to report on Capita's performance under the contract with the two Councils and to answer Members' questions. She reported that:

- the remaining queries concerning outstanding invoices would be raised later that day
- improvements were planned in benefits performance to reduce the number of days to process new claims. Sue King confirmed that the projected 'number of days to process benefits applications' performance of 24 by January 2010 was for the cumulative performance for the year at that point and not the performance for the month alone
- the reasons behind the apparent step change in planned performance from July to August 2009 would be investigated
- Council Tax collection rates had improved and there had been an increase of the take up of Direct Debit payments
- Business Rates collection rates had reduced slightly due to economic pressures
- a list of the top fifty business rates amounts would be supplied to the Strategic Board Members
- payment of invoices within 30 days had improved

- Capita was working with the Councils to help deliver the payroll service improvement plan
- in relation to the contact centre, a definition of abandoned calls would be sought
- by the end of May the exercise would be resolved to sort benefits local authority errors from client errors to meet the Government's new reporting standards and a monthly check would be introduced and would be reported to the Strategic Board
- by mid-May a programme and deadline would be set to resolve the performance discrepancy
- in relation to the percentage of benefits overpayments outstanding recovered in the year there had been a drop in performance from February to March but the incentive to collect overpayments would benefit the Councils as well as Capita

The Strategic Board was not content with the discrepancy between the benefits' administration performance of Capita for South Oxfordshire and the Vale. The Vale's benefits claims were administered at Capita's Havant office in Hampshire; South Oxfordshire's claims were administered at Shepton Mallet in Somerset. The Havant office was proving to perform better. Sue King reported that a test would be carried out to identify discrepancies in benefits' administration performance between Capita's two offices and solutions would be found to improve the performance for South Oxfordshire's benefits' administration. The Strategic Board agreed to continue to monitor benefits' administration closely.

The Strategic Board thanked Sue King for her report.

31. **DATES OF FORTHCOMING MEETINGS**

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

- Monday 3 August 2009
- Monday 2 November 2009
- Monday 1 February 2010
- Tuesday 4 May 2010 (avoiding May Day Bank Holiday Monday)

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

The meeting rose at 10.46 am