

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Ridgeway Shared Service Partnership Strategic Board

HELD AT 9.00 AM ON MONDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2011

AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, CROWMARSH GIFFORD

Present:

Mr R Mann (Chairman)
Mrs A Ducker, Mrs M de Vere, Mr R Webber

Officers: Mr S Bishop, Mr P Howden, Mr W Jacobs, Mrs J Thompson

CAPITA representatives: Mr D Keen and Mrs S King

11. Declarations of interest

Mrs Ducker declared a personal interest as she had attended the Local Government Chronicle's annual awards evening in 2010 sponsored by Capita.

12. Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2010 as a correct record and that the Chairman sign these as such.

13. Minutes of the Operations Board meetings

The Board noted the minutes of these meeting held on 22 November 2010 and 24 January 2011 and discussed the issues arising.

Concessionary fares

Officers reported that:

- The legal agreements with Oxfordshire County Council and the contract for the supply of software were progressing. The County Council's intention to complete the agreement was clear and the risks were therefore limited to possible challenges that

after 1 April passes were not validly issued as neither district council had the delegated authority to issue them.

- Regardless of the progress with the legal agreement, both councils aimed to issue new cards in time to replace those expiring on 31 March.

Rejected direct debit payments and council tax arrears

The committee asked that they see all information released to the press about rejected direct debits and about council tax arrears prior to its release under Freedom of Information rules.

Benefit Subsidy Audits

Officers reported that the 2009/10 audit had concluded that both councils had again provisionally exceeded the subsidy thresholds.

Brown bins/ garden waste service

Officers reported that while overall responsibility for the waste service had transferred to the Head of Corporate Strategy, Mr Bishop was retaining responsibility for the garden waste service. A comprehensive procedure manual would be issued shortly. Although the backlog of payments had been cleared, the reconciliation of payments for 2010/11 now had to be completed as a matter of urgency before the payment requests for 2011/12 could be issued. The reconciliation of outstanding unallocated charges, payments, bins, and service users was too time-consuming for the waste team to complete within their existing resources. An additional member of staff would be allocated to this work. The total amount to be reconciled for 2010/11 had reduced to £30,000 from £145,000 although this was made up of numerous individual debts. Verdant would be prepared to take full responsibility for the service as it stood but would have to charge VAT, increasing the cost, and officers needed to assess the effect on the council's budget.

The committee asked officers to prepare an action plan for progress on reconciling payments and clearing all debts to be discussed at the next meeting.

Parish boundary review

The boundary changes listed in the minutes would either not create changes in the council tax database or were to correct previous errors. The committee asked for an update on ongoing boundary reviews.

Payroll

Officers explained that a review of options for delivering payroll services to both councils had been completed. Based on a weighting of 60% financial benefit and 40% customer service benefit, the review showed that a fully outsourced service was the best option. Officers had started to prepare a tender for the delivery of payroll services from the end of the financial services contract in 2013, and were discussing with Capita the option of delivering a full payroll service before then.

A lack of qualified managerial support for the payroll staff led to numerous minor errors which the current staff could not be expected to avoid. A full-time qualified payroll manager was required, and in the short term part-time cover would be provided. A

comprehensive procedure manual would be produced to assist staff. Officers and Capita would be involved in preparing an improvement plan for the service.

The committee requested a briefing paper for the next Operations Board meeting and a report for the councils' Cabinet and Executive setting out the options for delivery of the payroll service.

14. Performance Monitoring

Officers reported that they were discussing a number of options for the next three years of the contract and for options if the contract were to be extended. Any proposal to take the option of a three-year extension allowed in the terms of the contract would be taken to the Strategic Board and Executive and Cabinet for approval.

Capita representatives Mr Darren Keen and Ms Sue King joined the meeting.

They reported that:

- Overall, collection of council tax was expected to be slightly better than in 2009/10 by the end of the financial year. There was a lead time between council tax liabilities being raised and collected for new homes which delayed the rate of collection but not the amount collected.
- A Freedom of Information request about the amount of uncollected council tax was likely to be a data trawl across all collecting authorities.
- Business rate collection was affected by the outstanding debt owed by a small number of large firms, some of whom were in liquidation or difficult to pursue. Some of the debt may have to be written off.
- Capita was now starting work on appeals on the day these were received and were working to improve the processing of these.
- There was currently no backlog on setting up recovery for or writing off new overpayments, other than the necessary delay to get approval to write off amounts over £5,000, or where appeals had been lodged with the tribunal. Staff were dealing with overpayments from 2005 and moving onto those arising in 2006.
- New benefit claims were checked on the day they were lodged and either sent for assessment or the claimant contacted about missing information. Accuracy of processing remained above 90 per cent.
- More surgeries were planned at Wantage (with Sovereign Housing) and at Faringdon.
- Capita required confirmation that they would have a contract to provide the concessionary fares work requested to be able to plan to continue this work past 31 March, as the uncertainty affected their ability to allocate staffing.
- The planned update to Agresso affected the user interface not the database. The updates would be tested; documentation provided; and training given to ensure the new system was operating correctly by 1 April.
- Payment of invoices was slightly below target but the numbers involved were small and performance was generally good.

The committee:

- requested a copy of the information supplied in response to the Freedom of Information request, with additional information to show the year the liability arose and collection arrangements;
- requested a copy of the project plan for implementing the Agresso update;
- noted the performance monitoring report and the verbal updates provided by officers and Capita's representatives.

The meeting closed at 10.35am.

Chairman

Date