

THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL AND WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Three Rivers and Watford Shared Services Joint Committee** held in the Town Hall, Watford, on 24 September 2012 7.30 pm to 9.13 pm

Present: Councillors M Watkin (Chair), B White (Vice-Chair), G Derbyshire, A Khan, S Nelmes and R Sangster

Also present: Councillor N Bell
Robin Davis, Actica Ltd
Richard Lawson, Grant Thornton

Officers:

Steven Halls	Chief Executive, Three Rivers District Council
Bernard Clarke	Head of Strategic Finance, Watford Borough Council
Phil Adlard	Head of Revenues and Benefits, Shared Services
Terry Baldwin	Head of HR, Shared Services
Stephen Exton	Finance Manager, Shared Services
Avni Patel	Head of ICT, Shared Services
David Gardner	Director of Corporate Resources and Governance, Three Rivers District Council
Elwyn Wilson	Democratic Services Manager, Three Rivers District Council
Dot Reynolds	Finance Manager, Shared Services
Howard Hughes	Procurement Manager, Watford Borough Council

JSS19/12 **DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

None received

JSS20/12 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Shared Services Committee held on 2 July 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

JSS21/12 **NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman ruled that the appendices to this item, which had not been available for five clear days before the meeting, were of sufficient urgency to be considered by the Committee for the reason indicated;

Item 5 – External Auditors Report to those Charged with Governance – ISA260 – (September 2012) and Approval of the Statement of Accounts for 2011/12

To enable the statutory deadline for the closing of the accounts to be achieved.

JSS22/12 EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE - ISA260 - (SEPTEMBER 2012) AND APPROVAL OF THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2011/12

This report allowed the Committee to ask questions of the external auditor concerning his 'Report to those charged with Governance (ISA260)' and to approve the Statement of Accounts for 2011/12.

In reply to questions the Joint Committee noted:

- That systems are in place to report variances to the original budget throughout the year although they were not the same process for each Council.
- There were processes in place for each Council to authorise additional expenditure.

The significant weakness within ICT which were being addressed did not impact on financial statements.

RESOLVED –

1. that the external auditor's 'Report to those charged with Governance' be noted;
2. that the Committee confirms that it is satisfied that the accounting policies adopted are the most appropriate; and
3. that the Statement of Accounts for 2011/12 be approved.

JSS23/12 BENEFITS UPDATE

This report proposed action to achieve and sustain a high level of performance in administering housing and council tax benefit.

A letter received from Unison was circulated to the Members of the Committee.

The Director of Corporate Resources and Governance introduced the report and confirmed that Staff would be consulted before any decision was made on outsourcing the Revenues and Benefits Services.

The Committee noted:

- That facilities to enable taxpayers and benefit claimants to 'self – serve' were expected to be going live the next day.
- There had been improvement since the meeting of this Joint Committee on 2 July 2012 in respect of outstanding new claims. Update figures indicated that Three Rivers had 67 outstanding claims of which 54 were awaiting further information from claimants. Watford

had 130 outstanding claims of which 112 were awaiting further information from claimants.

- That change of circumstances needed to be dealt with urgently as this had an impact on the claimant and each council's reimbursement from the government if an overpayment of benefit was made.
- Council Officers had been meeting local Social Housing partners to discuss changes to housing benefit relating to the size of properties in which the claimant lived.

Members made comments that they were not in favour of outsourcing 100% of the service especially as there would be changes through universal credit introduced next year and the fact that the service should concentrate on improving service especially in respect of change of circumstances. Members agreed however that research into outsourcing (soft market testing) should be undertaken by the Director of Corporate Resources and Governance. The Head of Revenues and Benefits stated that any contract with a private company to provide additional resource would be closely monitored.

RESOLVED –

that the Joint Committee: -

1. notes the report;
2. confirms that it wishes to see new claims processed within 22 days, and changes in circumstance processed within 8 days;
3. agrees the action taken by the Director of Corporate Resources and Governance and the Head of Revenues and Benefits, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Committee, in procuring additional 'one-off' support from the private sector to reduce the backlog of changes in circumstances;
4. seeks a contract with a suitable supplier that gets the service to the position where it: -
 - Can pass work over to the successful contractor on a flexible 'top-up' basis depending on the recession (ongoing increases in workload) and allowing for changes (i.e. reductions in workload) as universal credit is introduced.
5. seeks a total additional budget from the two councils of £285,000 for 2012/13, to be shared in accordance with the Delegation and Joint Committee Agreement; and
6. an appropriate growth bid for additional funding as part of the service and financial planning process for 2013/14 be agreed.

JSS24/12 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED –

that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if the press or public were present during consideration of the item(s) there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

JSS25/12 ICT - EVALUATION OF INVITATION TO TENDER

This report set out the results of the evaluation of the bids to provide an outsourced ICT service to the Councils.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Joint Shared Services Committee acknowledges the thorough and systematic approach taken to evaluate and moderate the ICT Services Tender;
2. that the Joint Shared Services Committee approve the recommendation that Capita should be awarded preferred supplier status and that Northgate be kept in reserve. It to be noted that a further report will be presented to a future Joint Committee meeting detailing the final terms to enable a contract to be signed off;
3. that the due diligence process commence with immediate effect;
4. that further staff consultation be held immediately after this meeting; and
5. that the extent (and composition) of the client function be reported to the next meeting of the Joint Committee for consideration/approval.

CHAIRMAN