

Valuation Tribunal Service



Valuation Tribunal Service

Business Plan 2009-10 and Corporate Plan 2009-12

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Foreword by the Chairman

It is a particular pleasure to be presenting our Corporate Plan for 2009-12, incorporating our Business Plan for 2009-10, as this year will mark the establishment of the new single Valuation Tribunal for England (VTE). This will inaugurate a new era for our staff and for the members of the new Tribunal, and it represents an exciting opportunity to forge a strong partnership with the President of the single Tribunal to work together to enhance the independence and customer focus of the Tribunal.

In this year of historic and significant change, there is also an important programme for the VTS in continuing to provide an effective support service to members of the current tribunals, and the VTE once established. We recognise that communication with tribunal members will be more vital than ever to ensure that they are familiar with the changes that are taking place, and supported in becoming accustomed to the new environment. We feel confident that we can provide that support, and can reassure members that they will be hearing the same types of cases in venues they are familiar with, dealing with the same range of appellants and enjoying the same decision making powers.

An important part of the role of the VTS is to support appellants effectively in the end to end process of their appeal. We need appropriately skilled staff and appropriate supporting technology to do this effectively. If we can play our part successfully, we are confident that the President of the VTE will be better able to provide the high standards of justice, delivered with fairness and courtesy, which are so important for achieving high levels of user satisfaction.

This is a significant milestone year, a challenging year and a truly exciting year for the VTS.

Anne Galbraith OBE
Chairman, Valuation Tribunal Service

Vision and Aspirations

The VTS is the independent statutory body responsible for serving and supporting the current 56 Tribunals and the VTE which hear appeals in respect of council tax and business rates. The VTS is committed to supporting the VTE in aiming to be among the best in the Tribunal world. The VTS will improve service delivery by a firm commitment to the following aims and aspirations:

1. Staff will be provided with the necessary experience, skills and expertise to support the work of the Tribunal.
2. A shared ethos of a commitment to justice, high motivation and satisfaction will be encouraged between staff and members.
3. Appropriate technology will be used and the best use made of resources in order to promote efficiency and productivity.
4. Members of the Tribunal will experience administrative support from the VTS of the highest quality.
5. Constructive and fruitful working relationships will be promoted between members, staff and stakeholders.
6. In support of the VTE, the VTS will assist in ensuring that
 - Potential appellants will have easy and unhindered access to the Tribunal at the appropriate time.
 - Appellants will at the end of the appeal process have a high level of satisfaction with the service received and in particular feel that they have had a full opportunity to present their case and have been treated with conspicuous fairness and courtesy.
 - Members will be supported in acquiring the necessary training and expertise so that they are equipped to carry out their judicial duties across the range of Tribunal business to the highest standards.

Strategic Objectives for the year ahead

Our objectives for the year ahead are as follows:

- *Strategic Objective 1:* Continue to improve our service delivery to all the parties to an appeal (the tribunal users);
- *Strategic Objective 2:* Support the VTE President and the Department in the preparation and set up of the Valuation Tribunal for England to ensure successful implementation scheduled for 1 October 2009;
- *Strategic Objective 3:* Deliver an efficient and effective service that provides excellent value for money;
- *Strategic Objective 4:* Develop our IT to improve service delivery.
- *Strategic Objective 5:* Develop our valued staff to provide a motivated workforce and excellent service to users.

Background

Set up by the Local Government Act 2003, established as a non-departmental public body on 1 April 2004 and sponsored by Communities and Local Government (CLG), the VTS supports the operation of valuation tribunals by providing the following services:

- Accommodation.
- Staffing (including clerks to tribunals).
- Information technology.
- Equipment.
- Training for members and staff of (including clerks to) tribunals.
- General advice about procedure relating to the proceedings before tribunals.

There are currently 56 valuation tribunals in England, established under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and currently administered out of 11 offices across England, reducing to eight by July 2009.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 contained provisions to bring the 56 valuation tribunals together as a single Valuation Tribunal for England (VTE). In January 2009 Professor Graham Zellick was appointed as President of the VTE by the Lord Chancellor, following a recommendation from the Judicial Appointments Commission. The President will provide judicial leadership and guidance to a volunteer membership when the VTE is established, currently planned for 1 October 2009.

Valuation tribunals have a statutory duty to hear and determine appeals against valuation for non-domestic (business) rates, council tax and drainage rates. Other types of appeals within valuation tribunals' jurisdiction are those against council tax liability, completion notices and certain types of penalties imposed by billing authorities (councils) or the Valuation Office Agency (VOA). The tribunals are independent of the VOA, which sets rateable values on non-domestic properties and council tax bands for homes, and the councils that send out the rates and council tax bills.

The VTS currently employs 102 members of staff, supporting a lay and volunteer tribunal membership of approximately 750 members. Members of valuation tribunals come from all walks of life and receive training to support them in their statutory role. They are unpaid, but entitled to reimbursement of expenses and financial loss allowance in accordance with a scale determined by the Secretary of State.

Some members serve on more than one valuation tribunal. A chairman and a maximum of two members preside at tribunal hearings, and they are supported at hearings by a clerk who is responsible for providing procedural and technical advice.

Management Framework

Our Management Statement, incorporating the Financial Memorandum, is agreed with and issued by our sponsoring department. It governs the relationship between the VTS and our sponsoring department and sets out the broad framework within which the VTS operates, to

- Establish a cohesive national structure for the VTS within which policies on training, information technology, accommodation and staff terms and conditions are applied consistently.
- Improve customer understanding of, and satisfaction with, the work of the valuation tribunals.
- Work with valuation tribunals and other stakeholders to improve the appeals process from lodgement to settlement.
- Secure improvements in the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of service provided by valuation tribunals.
- Offer general advice to valuation tribunals in relation to proceedings before hearings.

Operating within the framework of the Management Statement, we will continue to focus on:

- Working in partnership with the President and the sponsoring department in implementing modernised tribunal procedure
- Working in partnership with the President and the sponsoring department for the successful introduction of the VTE.
- Enhancing the tribunal's independence within the appeals process. We will do this by listening to tribunal users and piloting new service initiatives.
- Support the President in providing a customer-centred service that demonstrates fairness at valuation tribunal hearings, so that we enhance public confidence in the process. This will involve listening to customers' opinions and responding appropriately, with improvements in both how we communicate and what we communicate.
- Liaising between staff, the President and valuation tribunal members on policies and guidance, with the aim of delivering greater consistency in practice and procedure at hearings.
- Making better use of existing tribunal resources, through the pursuit of our estate strategy and the IT strategy.

Much of this focus is contained within our strategic priorities and translated into our business objectives for the financial year (Appendix A).

Through these activities we aim to contribute towards our sponsoring department's Public Service Agreement (PSA 21) to "*build more cohesive, empowered and active communities*", and the Departmental Strategic Objective (DSO1) "*To support local government that empowers individuals and communities and delivers high quality services efficiently*".

Organisational Structure

The VTS carries out its administrative functions from 11 offices operating out of four regions (North, Central, East and South). The Whitechapel office, located in London, spans two regions (East and South). In addition, the Head Office functions are carried out in Whitechapel. The

table below shows the breakdown of offices within each region and the number of staff currently employed within the regions¹:

Region	Office locations	Total head count of staff	Numbers shown as full-time equivalents
North	Doncaster, Preston, Bolton	28	26
Central	Stafford, Nottingham, Leamington Spa	19	17
East	Peterborough, Whitechapel, Witham	24	23
South	Horsham, Plymouth, Whitechapel	19	18
Head office	Whitechapel	18	18

We remain committed in developing our staff and retaining them wherever possible: where offices have closed we have sought to provide alternative working arrangements for staff. This has included more flexible working.

Workload

As an appeals service, our workload is naturally determined by the number of appellants dissatisfied with the decision provided by the body being challenged.

Valuation tribunals are currently dealing with non-domestic rates appeals from the 2005 rating list. Around 600,000 appeals have been received by valuation tribunals since this list was introduced on 1 April 2005 (100,000 of these during 2008-09). Annual movement in the number of appeals is very largely dependent on economic market conditions and any regulatory changes introduced by government (for example, the change to Empty Property Rate Relief in 2008).

The next revaluation will result in a new rating list, effective from 1 April 2010. We are currently working with the VOA, the sponsoring department and the professional bodies (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation, and the Rating Surveyors' Association), in reviewing processes to provide a more equitable and transparent system for dealing with any appeals against the new list. We are working with the VOA to establish the range of the workload projections that are likely to emerge from the revaluation.

The number of council tax banding appeals received on an annual basis formerly averaged about 30,000, although the number finally requiring a tribunal decision was more within the region of 5,000 appeals per year. This was because almost all proposals received by the VOA were automatically transmitted to valuation tribunals as appeals. This year, tribunals received 4,500 appeals by this route before the new Appeals Direct system came into effect. This system has eliminated a lot of unnecessary administration of appeals that did not require a hearing, and created a two-stage process, clearly separating the role of the VOA from the role of valuation

¹ Figures as at 1 April 2009.

tribunals by removing the automatic transmission of appeals and requiring the appellant to make a conscious decision about whether to appeal.

Estate

Since its inception, the VTS has ensured that the needs of users of the service are a dominant influence on our strategy. In order to focus greater resource on customer care initiatives, we have sought to deliver efficiencies in how we operate. Some of these efficiencies have already been achieved from rationalising our estate, a process which also contributes towards the Government's High Performance Property Agenda of achieving 10m² workspace per full time equivalent member of staff.

Last year the VTS Board developed the first stage of its strategy plan and considered that, in outline, the long term aim of the VTS should be for a maximum of one main administrative office in each of the four regions, with the possibility of up to two satellite offices in each region (as bases for professional staff only). The strategy envisaged that there would be no acquisitions and the organisation would slowly rationalise when leases came to an end, gradually creating the regional set up outlined.

The VTS Board as part of its Estates Strategy agreed to set up a 'flagship' Tribunal centre at Whitechapel which would house Head Office and the President. The setting up of the flagship centre led to the closure of offices in Croydon, Harrow and Angel and moving the administrations into the enlarged Whitechapel office.

The Board also took the opportunity to review the overall estate, in particular the need for offices where leases were coming to an end. The board's review was influenced by its desire to free up resources which could be utilised to provide better services to users and members. The board was particularly keen to fund high quality hearing rooms close to the users. A significant factor in enabling the strategy to move forward more rapidly has been the availability of additional IT funding, enabling the VTS to begin to develop a viable remote and mobile working solution which will reduce the need for a permanent office base for Professional Tribunal Officers (PTOs) and lessen the risk of redundancy when offices close.

Recognising the need to achieve greater progress towards the target workspace, further work on the estates strategy was undertaken to review the possibility of an accelerated programme of rationalisation.

Decisions were therefore taken to close several offices. Winchester was closed before the end of 2008. Weston and Durham both closed at the end of February 2009 and, in the first quarter of 2009-10, Nottingham, Leamington Spa and Horsham will also close.

The table below illustrates offices where leases are coming to an end, whether through natural breaks or inter-governmental MOTO (Memorandum of Terms of Occupation) agreements, over the next four financial years.

Year	
2009-10	Horsham, Nottingham, Leamington Spa
2010-11	Stafford
2011-12	Preston, Werrington
2012-13	Plymouth, Doncaster

All our offices provide in-house hearing rooms and fully meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, except Bolton. The Bolton Office is not fully DDA compliant as the physical design of the building is such that improving access is limited. In addition to providing in-house hearing rooms, we also hire a range of venues across the country so that we can provide more local hearings for our users.

We continue to be committed towards modernising tribunal support processes and further enhancing the facilities valuation tribunals provide to users. This is done through active venue management and monitoring to ensure that the venues used by tribunals:

- are easily accessible (in identifiable buildings and easy to travel to);
- demonstrate appropriate independence from the Valuation Office Agency and Billing Authorities;
- meet user expectations;
- comply with Disability Discrimination Act provisions; and
- provide value for money.

IT Developments

The key business functions rely on:

- SAP Accounting - provided by Financial Services Support Department on behalf of our sponsoring body, through a service level agreement;
- the Appeals Database - a bespoke development maintained by Capgemini under a set of framework agreements with Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs and the VOA. The VTS part of this database is separate from that of the VOA.
- ASR – an HR application database.

The VTS has capital funding available each year that allows some minor enhancement of the IT system. In 2008-09, the Department approved a strategic business case for larger IT projects.

Five IT projects were identified as either essential (because of legislative changes) or high priority:

- Identity (including the merger of 56 valuation tribunals to a single VTE; the name for the new organisational structure;

- Remote and mobile working capability, allowing secure access to the administrative intranet, emails and appeals database ;
- Upgrading the secure intranet from GSX to GSi;
- An accurate, automatic Management Information System (MIS);
- Upgrade to the central database to reflect the revaluation for non-domestic rates in 2010.

Resources

Expenditure plans for the next three years reflect the needs identified to provide for the operation of valuation tribunals. This expenditure can be categorised as:

- Revenue - includes staff, members' and board costs, customer services, stakeholder communications, telecommunications, office supplies and training.
- Capital - includes the costs of major IT purchases, IT software enhancements and estate improvements.

The establishment of the VTE, scheduled for 1 October 2009 will create a new cost centre within the overall VTS budget. The funds' allocation acknowledges that the President will be assisted by four part-time Vice Presidents from summer 2009.

The current spending review has yet to indicate funding measures beyond 2011 and therefore the figures for 2011-12 are shown at indicative levels only. For 2011-12 assumptions have been made on availability of funds at current staff and operational base levels.

As the Accounting Officer for the VTS, the Chief Executive – together with the CLG Accounting Officer - is responsible for safeguarding public funds, for ensuring propriety and regularity, and submitting the VTS accounts for public scrutiny. The table below shows the financial resource sought to fund activities:

Type of Expenditure	2009-10 £k	2010-11 £k	2011-12 £k
Revenue	10,639	10,535	10,535
Capital	800	400	400
Total	11,439	10,935	10,935
Comprising:			
Grant in aid	11,439	10,935	10,935
Other income	0	0	0
Total	11,439	10,935	10,935

Resources are set aside in 2010-11 to implement the delayed management information system (MIS) from the previous year and to further extend IT project work to other areas through to 2011-12.

In 2010-11, following the introduction of the single tribunal scheduled to take its jurisdiction in October 2009, resource allocation is maintained for the following two years. The table below provides a breakdown of the expenditure by main areas of spend.

Main areas of spend:	2009-10 £k	2010-11 £k	2011-12 £k
Staff costs	5,099	5,260	5,392
Estates	998	1,050	950
Professional services (including IT)	1,303	1,355	1,350
General Administration	1,291	1,150	1,345
Members' costs	222	235	250
Capital purchases (includes IT strategic development)	1,166*	400	400
Board costs	154	155	165
VTE (single tribunal)	719**	750**	725**
IT strategy – revenue & other	487	580	358
Total	11,439	10,935	10,935

*Year 2009-10 acknowledges that a separate tranche of funding approved in 2008-09 has been allocated to develop certain IT projects, planned to be completed through 2009-10.

** reflects the implications of the VTE planned for 1 October 2009 and for its pre-implementation from 1 April 2009. The staff cost allocation assumes the roles of the national president (as a Board Member); the vice presidents and the statutory clerk (“Registrar”) are absorbed within the VTE costs.

The introduction of remote and mobile working in 2009-10 for a number of professional tribunal staff connected with the closure of their respective office does not presuppose that the total staff complement will decrease over the following two years. However in comparison, the estates rationalisation programme first implemented in 2007-08 will show efficiency gains by way of cost reductions in the latter two years to 2012, taking account of further dilapidation provisions possible at March 2010. The completion of the IT strategic development programme through 2009-10 will inevitably increase the accounting for depreciation charges on the software brought into use.

Projected Workloads

The projected workloads for the VTS are shown below and are based on the assumptions that there are no regulatory changes or reinterpretation of existing regulations.

	Appeal Type	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
APPEALS RECEIVED	Non domestic rating	120,000	200,000	100,000
	Council Tax	3,750	3,750	3,750
	TOTAL	123,500	203,750	103,750
APPEALS LISTED	Non domestic rating	78,000	100,000	100,000
	Council Tax	3,200	3,200	3,200
	TOTAL	81,100	103,100	103,100
WRITTEN DECISIONS	Non domestic rating	1,200	1,500	1,500
	Council Tax	1,600	1,600	1,600
	TOTAL	2,800	3,100	3,100
ALL TRIBUNAL DECISIONS	Non domestic rating	12,000	15,000	15,000
	Council Tax	2,100	2,100	2,100
	TOTAL	14,100	17,100	17,100

Delivering Efficiency

As with all public bodies, the VTS is required by our sponsoring department to seek efficiency gains and we are expected to contribute savings of at least 3% year on year. Therefore, ensuring value for money remains a key objective for us, and our continuing scrutiny of expenditure on estates and IT will reflect our aim to improve our effectiveness in these areas.

Whilst delivering efficiency is an important goal, other essential principles include:

- Greater customer focus.
- Enhancement of independence.
- Tribunal partnership working between the VTS and VTE
- Fairness and effectiveness.
- Consistency of practice and procedures.
- Streamlined and responsive management structures.
- Greater utilisation of people and resources.
- Improved stakeholder engagement with the Valuation Office Agency and Billing Authorities

Risk Management

We maintain a risk register to identify the risks associated with achieving our strategic and business objectives. Major risks are evaluated regularly. We separate our strategic risks from our operational risks and will be managing these at different levels. Strategic risks will be reviewed and monitored quarterly at Board level whilst operational risks will continue to be monitored by the Corporate Director. The Audit Committee continues to assess the effectiveness of the processes for managing risks.

This process of reviewing the risk register ensures that corrective action is taken to eliminate or reduce potential risks.

Recent Developments

In implementing changes and conducting business we are mindful of our external and internal environment. Some key factors are outlined below:

The Tribunal Service

The Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 provided the judicial and legal framework to complement the common administrative arrangements of the Tribunals Service. On 3 November 2008 the Tribunals Service launched a new unified tribunal structure under the Act to establish a two-tier structure comprising a First-tier Tribunal and an Upper Tribunal, each of which is divided into chambers. Each chamber brings together jurisdictions dealing with similar work or requiring similar skills.

Of particular interest to us is the Land Chamber. Valuation tribunal decisions in respect of non-domestic rating appeals can be challenged in the Lands Tribunal. From June 2009, subject to Parliamentary approval, the Lands Tribunal will become the Land Chamber of the Upper Tribunal. The judicial functions of the Lands Tribunal will not be changed.

Leasehold Valuation Tribunals and Residential Property Tribunals, from whom the Lands Tribunal also hears appeals, continue in their present form, although it is expected that in due course both will form part of a new First-tier Land Chamber.

Data security

This topic has assumed growing importance on the public agenda, and the VTS, along with all government bodies, is charged with meeting increasingly stringent requirements, laid down by the Cabinet Office. The VTS must therefore be constantly vigilant about our obligations in this area, and maintain liaison with the Cabinet Office and our sponsoring department to keep abreast of developments.

Information is a key asset, and we recognise that its proper use is fundamental to the delivery of public services, in protecting privacy and in the use and handling of information professionally. We are well placed to understand its information and to protect it, and aims to do so within the context of clear minimum standards ensuring protection of personal information.

The Government has put in place a core set of mandatory minimum measures to protect information, to apply across central Government. As an NDPB, the VTS is obliged to comply and assess its own risk, which can be at a higher protection level. As requirements change and

lessons are learnt, the VTS will update and accommodate new developments liaising regularly with the sponsoring department

The Valuation Tribunal for England

Over the course of the financial year, four Vice Presidents will be appointed to assist the President on judicial matters. In addition a clerk to the VTE (the title to be known as the Registrar), a statutory position, will also be appointed.

Appeals Direct

The new appeals system is still in its early days and the VTS, together with our sponsoring department and the VOA, continue to monitor the implementation, communication and effectiveness of the system, to digest any lessons learnt, and to be ready to respond quickly to implement solutions to identified problems.

User Survey

At the end of 2008-09, instead of our annual, independently-conducted telephone survey of appellants who have attended a hearing, the VTS is carrying out a more detailed exercise with different types of council tax appellants. The VTS will also be obtaining the views of those who have decided to withdraw their appeals before the hearing takes place to find out more about the reasons for this.

Results of this research will inform both our customer service initiatives and our future plans for customer research, for example by developing the interview questionnaire that would be used in a regular, annual survey.

It is planned that a summary of the results will be incorporated in our Annual Report and Accounts, to be published in July.

Sustainability

In recognising the impact the organisation can have on the environment through the use of energy, resources and production of waste (including CO₂), we will seek to reduce the impact it has on the environment, through the promotion and delivery of good practice. We aim to reduce our carbon footprint by reducing the consumption of utilities (energy and water), and printed material where possible, and we make increased use of recycling for office waste.

We recycle all redundant furniture and IT equipment through the use of recognised specialist contractors, resulting in negligible landfill. All paper waste, used printer cartridges and packaging is recycled where possible.

We recognise the impact that travel can have on the environment. The nature of our business involves our staff and our lay members travelling to hearing venues so that appeals may be heard at a venue local to the appellant. However, we encourage the use public transport wherever possible to minimise car travel. If there are multiple members of staff travelling and use of a motor vehicle is unavoidable, we encourage 'car-pooling' when circumstances allow. Loans for railway season tickets are provided and travel rates paid to members and staff who travel by bicycle.

This section reflects briefly on some of the key activities we undertook in working towards our objectives last year. The headline achievements relating to the strategic objectives are:

To make significant improvements in our customer service delivery, reinforcing the independence of the tribunals

- Appeals Direct for council tax was implemented on 1 April 2008 to advance the perception of the independence of valuation tribunals and the fairness of the system. This system requires the individual to make a conscious decision to appeal direct to the valuation tribunals.
- We introduced a Members' Training Strategy Group to monitor and steer the training delivered to and received by valuation tribunal members, ensuring that the training delivered is appropriate. We have also enhanced the Members' Appraisal system, monitoring competences against those identified by the Judicial Studies Board.
- We introduced the option of electronic communication with appellants and ratepayer representatives for business rates. We have also introduced the possibility of completing via our website an on-line form for council tax appeals. In embracing the Government's Electronic Communication agenda, this has reduced the number of notices sent in the post and has removed any delay regarding the service of such notices.
- We have commissioned an independent company to carry out in-depth interviews with council tax appellants to gain their views about the appeals process, helping us to identify where improvements could be made.
- We begun a programme of work on the 'user experience', building on the active case management that tribunal staff carry out, and around the service appellants find at the external hearing venues we use.

To work effectively in partnership with the valuation tribunal presidents and the membership

- We commissioned a detailed survey of the views of valuation tribunal members to find out in what further ways we could support their needs; to understand fully what motivates members and what aspects of the voluntary role they find rewarding; and develop an understanding about the limitations and constraints that they may feel is placed on their involvement. We have drawn up an action plan to address the recommendations of the report. The findings continue to assist the President and improve partnership working between the judicial and administrative arms of the organisation.
- A major residential conference was held in February for presidents and chairmen of valuation tribunals, with a programme that included a speech from the Minister and the President of the Lands Tribunal.
- Our staff have supported the development and implementation of a revised appraisal system for chairmen of valuation tribunals.

- A mentoring scheme for new members (during their first six month's of membership) is being piloted by Manchester North valuation tribunal.

Deliver an efficient service that provides value for money

- The development of the estate has reduced the number of offices from 16 to 11, and decreased staff numbers by about 10%. We have improved the allocation of budget for front line activity this year to ensure more efficient and effective delivery of core services in the future.

To develop our people, processes, and technology to improve service delivery

- Changes needed to the IT system to deliver improvements and efficiencies over the coming year have been explored and defined.
- Performance measures including Key Performance Indicators have been identified, subject to agreement with our sponsoring department.
- We have trained staff in project management skills. This has allowed us to co-ordinate and deliver a wide range of projects relating to the implementation of the VTE, IT changes and customer service improvements.

There are some objectives that we were either unable to achieve fully during the year or where the objective changed during the course of the year. These included:

- Carrying out the annual telephone survey of appellants who attended a hearing;
- Reviewing work undertaken on developing a coherent performance management system and developing an appropriate staff appraisal system for 2009– 10;
- Developing and implementing action plans based on outcomes from the staff survey with a view to working towards Investors in People accreditation;
- Carrying out an independent review of our organisational structure.

Delivering the Business Plan

The delivery of this Plan will be monitored at three levels, each on a quarterly basis. The delivery of targets will be monitored by the Board; the Chief Executive will monitor the achievements of the Plan; and we will share our achievements with the sponsoring department, through the regular liaison meetings.

The Board reviews achievement against the Business Plan on a Quarterly basis.

The Strategic Plan is developed as an iterative process by the Board, with the Executive Management Team providing advice on policy and direction. Policies and principles are discussed with the Senior Management Team prior to implementation and then presented to staff for discussion at regional events.

In line with our business objectives for 2009–10 (Appendix A, the Strategic Objectives) we also look to further develop our key performance indicators (outlined in Appendix B) within a balanced scorecard framework.

The creation of the VTE and the ongoing development and modernisation of the VTS provide a significant catalyst for change this year and for the two subsequent years to 31 March 2012.

Both statutory bodies, working in close partnership, will provide a united focus on improving judicial expertise, enhancing the user experience and delivering exceptional value for money. The spotlight will be on robust and measurable quality improvements which provide lasting benefits to tribunal-users, stakeholders, members and staff alike.

2010-11

Our aims will be to:

- To support and assist the President in the vision he has articulated for the VTE by the effective management and deployment of resources, the provision of training, and the utilisation of good quality venues. That vision encompasses:
 - develop a harmonious and purposeful relationship between the VTE and the VTS, providing synergy for a raft of quality improvements;
 - preserve and enhance the voluntary status of the lay membership, aspiring to high standards of judicial service and expertise;
 - command respect amongst the members, staff, tribunal-users and stakeholders, in the independence, integrity and professionalism of the VTE;
 - provide exemplary local justice at good venues which are located as conveniently as possible for tribunal-users and the members.
- develop a strong bond between the judicial and administrative processes to ensure that the tribunal-user journey from initial appeal to final decision is dealt with in a consistent, courteous and helpful manner;
- provide better assistance and support to tribunal-users so that they are sufficiently informed to present their cases effectively at a hearing;
- develop the estates strategy to meet the future organisational needs with fewer, strategically placed offices;
- improve our portfolio of venues to ensure they meet the needs of tribunal-users and the members;
- monitor and review performance, information and management systems to ensure appropriate resources are available to deal efficiently with any fluctuations in workload;
- ensure that the administrative and technological processes required for appeals arising from the 2010 non-domestic rating revaluation operate efficiently and effectively;
- determine the requirements of all those who interface with our service, implementing appropriate enhancements to our processes and researching other methods for strengthening our relationship with all stakeholders.

- develop a strategy for improving back-office functionality to provide cost benefits where appropriate;

2011- 12

Our aims will be to:

- Support and assist the President in order that he may refine and develop the organisational requirements of the VTE in terms of member complements, business arrangements and enhanced judicial processes;
- advance the estates strategy, utilising prudent investment to provide long-term savings;
- implement the strategy for improving back-office functionality to provide cost benefits where appropriate;
- undertake a comprehensive review of the workload cycle and the information technology requirements to ascertain long-term resource needs and the commensurate management structure;
- develop further improvements to user service; ensuring resources are focussed on the deliver of the front-line service.
- facilitate dialogue and negotiation, if necessary, for possible transfer of VTS management and administrative functions to the Tribunal Service.

APPENDIX A
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2009/10

Strategic Objective 1:

Continue to improve our service delivery to all the parties to an appeal (the tribunal users)

Our focus is on delivering the best possible service to all the parties to an appeal. During 2009-10 the VTS expect to process over 120,000 appeals and determine 20,000 cases. These will be heard at over 1,500 hearings, held at nearly 200 different venues across England. With the judicial and administrative arms working in close partnership, the VTS will aim to ensure that our end-to-end processes are joined up and deliver consistently high standards of service to tribunal users.

STRATEGIC AIMS

- Potential appellants will have easy and unhindered access to the Tribunal at the appropriate time.
- Appellants will at the end of the appeal process have a high level of satisfaction with the service received and in particular feel that they have had a full opportunity to present their case and have been treated with conspicuous fairness and courtesy.
- Members of the Tribunal will experience administrative support from the VTS of the highest quality.

1	We will benchmark and monitor our levels of tribunal-user satisfaction against other relevant public bodies, and our own past customer survey results. We will seek to implement best practice initiatives by a gap analysis of satisfactions levels to identify areas of improvement.	QUARTER 2	Corp. Director
2	<p>Working in partnership with the President, we will undertake a wide range of initiatives and pilots to realise measurable improvements in the tribunal use experience by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ providing improved support, advice and guidance for any parties who are unfamiliar with the hearing process ➤ giving clarity about the tribunal's role in the appeal process and its distinction from the Valuation Office Agency by improving our literature and website. ➤ developing a clear understanding for the reasons why parties withdraw an appeal prior to a hearing, and whether initiatives should be taken to assist them in taking the appeal forward ➤ undertaking a comprehensive workflow analysis to improve our front-line services and enhance our working practices accordingly ➤ improve our correspondence, website and literature to meet the needs of all Tribunal users ➤ providing Tribunal-user choice about hearings to enable them to select a preferred date or venue ➤ raising the standard of venues used, to provide a range of conveniently located venues. ➤ developing a greater awareness of the VTS/VTE amongst organisations who provide impartial advice to potential Tribunal users such as Citizen Advice Bureau and billing authorities 	QUARTER 3 QUARTER 3 QUARTER 3 QUARTER 3 QUARTER 3 QUARTER 3 QUARTER 3 QUARTER 4 QUARTER 4	Corp. Director

Strategic Objective 2:

Support the VTE President and the department in the preparation and set up of the Valuation Tribunal for England to ensure successful implementation planned for 1st October 2009.

The VTE is scheduled to take over its jurisdiction on 1 October 2009. The President will be working closely with CLG, the VTS and the Members to bring about the statutory change. It is a challenging change and reform agenda which will deliver strategic transformation and modernisation after nearly 60 years of being 56 separate valuation tribunals. The focus will be on setting up the appropriate judicial structure and transferring the Members to the new organisation, ensuring they are effectively supported and well-trained.

STRATEGIC AIMS

- Potential appellants will have easy and unhindered access to the Tribunal at the appropriate time.
- Appellants will at the end of the appeal process have a high level of satisfaction with the service received and in particular feel that they have had a full opportunity to present their case and have been treated with conspicuous fairness and courtesy.
- Members will be supported in acquiring the necessary training and expertise so that they are equipped to carry out their judicial duties across the range of Tribunal business to the highest standards.
- Constructive and fruitful working relationship will be promoted between members, staff and stakeholders.
- A shared ethos of a commitment to justice, high motivation and satisfaction should be encouraged between staff and members.

3	We will work in partnership with the President to identify clear parameters for the VTE and VTS which will deliver effective joint working arrangements, embracing the judicial and administrative processes of the Service as a whole for the benefit of our users	QUARTER 1	Chief Executive
4	<p>We will support the President in working closely with the sponsoring department to provide a robust framework for the successful establishment of the VTE and its operational requirements (including transitional arrangements). This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ introducing a competence-based appointment framework for valuation tribunal members ➤ developing and implementing terms and conditions for tribunal members ➤ reviewing member numbers in the period leading up to the establishment of the VTE to ensure the continued effective operation of the tribunals 	QUARTER 3 QUARTER 3 QUARTER 3	Chief Executive

Strategic Objective 2 (continued):

Support the VTE President and department in the preparation and set up of the Valuation Tribunal for England to ensure successful implementation planned for 1st October 2009.

5	<p>We will support the President in the delivery of improved judicial processes which may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ introducing model rules for the Valuation Tribunal to ensure consistent and fair processes at hearings and the implementation of appropriate guidance on judicial processes for stakeholders ➤ producing a members' training strategy and implementation of a members' training and development programme ➤ enhancing the member appraisal system ➤ a survey of Tribunal users on their expectations and perceptions of the judicial process ➤ agreeing the training and development needs of our professional staff 	<p>QUARTER 4</p> <p>QUARTER 4</p> <p>QUARTER 4</p> <p>QUARTER 4</p>	<p>Corp. Director</p> <p>HR. Director</p> <p>HR. Director</p> <p>Corp. Director</p> <p>HR. Director</p>
6	<p>We will assist the President in his first year by identifying issues and supporting him in their resolution.</p>	QUARTER 1	Chief Executive
7	<p>We will support the President in initiatives to motivate, retain and develop the tribunal members by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ identifying the organizational arrangements for members, including their representation by a senior and experienced colleague member ➤ implementing the findings of a member survey 	<p>QUARTER 4</p> <p>QUARTER 4</p>	<p>HR. Director</p> <p>HR. Director</p>

Strategic Objective 3: Deliver an efficient and effective service that provides excellent value for money

The VTS is committed to developing an efficient and effective service in three main areas: improved financial controls, estates rationalisation, and the development of a comprehensive set of Key Performance Indicators.

STRATEGIC AIM

- Appropriate technology will be used and the best use made of resources in order to progress efficiency and productivity.
- Constructive and fruitful working relationship will be promoted between members, staff and stakeholders.
- A shared ethos of a commitment to justice, high motivation and satisfaction should be encouraged between staff and members.

8	<p>We will improve our financial effectiveness and efficiency by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ closer budget monitoring and review, longer-term financial planning, enhanced management reports, and progress towards the centralisation of regional accounts in the CEO's Office ➤ investing savings from the estate's optimisation programme in the further development of the Tribunal user service and VTE implementation programmes 	<p>QUARTER 2</p> <p>QUARTER 3</p>	<p>Res. Director</p> <p>Chief Executive</p>
9	<p>We will work actively towards the High Performing Property agenda, making effective use of the VTS estate, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ developing a long-term VTS management plan ➤ reducing the number and size of offices to move in the direction of fewer strategically placed offices ➤ proactively engaging the CLG Property Asset Management Board in our estate's plans ➤ creating a detailed database of our national portfolio venues and the facilities provided ➤ investigating options for the organization of back-office functions 	<p>QUARTER 2</p> <p>QUARTER 2</p> <p>QUARTER 2</p> <p>QUARTER 2</p> <p>QUARTER 3</p>	<p>Dev. Director</p> <p>Corp. Director</p> <p>Corp. Director</p> <p>Corp. Director</p> <p>Dev. Director</p>

**Strategic Objective 3 (continued):
Deliver an efficient and effective service that provides excellent value for money**

10	The VTS will develop clear roles and responsibilities for senior managers providing the flexibility to adapt to organisational change.	QUARTER 2	Chief Executive
11	Working in partnership with the President and the department, the VTS will develop a comprehensive set of Key Performance Indicators, linked to a VTS/VTE balanced scorecard, which will measure all aspects of our performance, outputs, and efficiency. These will cover operations, financial indicators, tribunal user service performance, staff/ member performance and training, and staff satisfaction and absenteeism.	QUARTER 4	Dev. Director
12	<p>Working in partnership with the President the VTS will develop a comprehensive, inclusive and effective communication model for the staff, Members and stakeholders to include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ a range of interfaces to provide meaningful engagement between the administrative and judicial structures ➤ the proactive engagement of all stakeholders in improving the service and providing value for money 	<p>QUARTER 2 QUARTER 2</p>	<p>HR. Director HR. Director</p>

Strategic Objective 4: Develop our IT to improve service delivery

The development of our IT system is a primary objective in the year ahead to ensure the organisation is proactive in delivering an effective and efficient service in a challenging financial environment.

STRATEGIC AIM

Appropriate technology will be used and the best use made of resources in order to progress efficiency and productivity.

13	<p>We will work in partnership with the President to improve our IT Systems in support of our change agenda by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ developing an appeals and hearings database, and professional web presence, which presents the VTS/VTE as a fully 'joined-up service' to Tribunal users ➤ moving from the 'GSX' to the 'GSI' framework to ensure the VTS meet the high security standards of a non departmental public body and a judicial body ➤ developing IT changes reflecting the introduction of the 2010 non-domestic revaluation, ensuring the system incorporates improved programming processes and an increased focus on electronic communication with users ➤ developing a remote and mobile working solution for our Professional Tribunal Officers affected by office closures ➤ developing and implementing an effective and flexible management information system to enable the VTS and VTE to produce comprehensive, accurate and timely reports across a wide range of performance indicators. 	<p>QUARTER 3</p> <p>QUARTER 3</p> <p>QUARTER 3</p> <p>QUARTER 3</p> <p>QUARTER 4</p>	<p>Dev. Director</p>
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Strategic Objective 5:

Develop our valued staff to provide a motivated workforce and excellent service to users

The VTS already have loyal, knowledgeable and long-serving staff and members and the VTS will improve our organisational culture in line with our vision and values. Our aim is to create an environment in which our staff are fully supported, developed, and engaged to deliver a high quality tribunal user service. The VTS will further refine the leadership and management capability of our leaders and potential leaders, creating a supportive environment for continuing professional development. The VTS will provide learning opportunities, and facilitate sharing and learning from good practice, to ensure our people are best placed to meet the business needs and demands of a modern tribunal body.

STRATEGIC AIMS

- Members of the Tribunal will experience administrative support from the VTS of the highest quality.
- Staff will be provided with the necessary experience, skills and expertise to support the work of the Tribunal.
- Constructive and fruitful working relationship will be promoted between members, staff and stakeholders.
- A shared ethos of a commitment to justice, high motivation and satisfaction should be encouraged between staff and members.

14	<p>We will motivate, retain and develop our staff by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ implementing a pay and reward system that enables the retention and attraction of quality personnel within the Service to maintain high levels of Tribunal user satisfaction ➤ introducing an improved staff appraisal system that provides a motivational performance management system and a focus on team rewards ➤ adopting a CPD (continuing professional development) approach to developing our staff ➤ arranging a National Conference for staff to provide a fuller understanding of the VTE and their role to provide support ➤ undertaking a staff survey to ascertain their views, needs and expectations 	<p>QUARTER 4</p> <p>QUARTER 2</p> <p>QUARTER 3</p> <p>QUARTER 3</p> <p>QUARTER 3</p>	HR. Director
15	We will trial a 'pathfinder' exercise on a remote and mobile working solution in order to learn the most effective arrangements and provide greater flexibility.	QUARTER 2	Corp. Director
16	We will commence a review of our governance processes to ensure they continue to meet the standards required of a non departmental body.	QUARTER 2	Dev. Director
17	We will carry out a review of its organisational structure	QUARTER 3	Chief Executive

APPENDIX B Key Performance Indicators

	Performance Measure	Target
Customer Service	The percentage of reasoned decisions issued within one calendar month from the valuation tribunal hearing	90%
	The percentage of council tax appeals listed for a first hearing date that fall within 5 months of the date of receipt	95%
	The percentage of 2005 business rate appeals listed within 10 weeks of the programmed target date	95%
	The percentage of settled pre 2005 Rating List appeals	98%
	The percentage of non-domestic civil penalty appeals listed within 3 months of receipt	100%
	The percentage of responses to complaints issued within 10 working days	95%
	Increase in the percentage on the overall satisfaction levels compared to the last (2007) Customer Survey, subject to a new baseline	3%
Value for Money	Build on CSR efficiency savings by working to a savings in operating costs of up to	3%
	Using the 2008/9 baseline, reduce the working time lost to sickness absence by	3%

Due to the substantial changes to the organisation in terms of office closures, staff reductions, and the setting up of the VTE, the Board have determined that the KPIs should remain the same as last year with a view to developing revised KPIs over the course of the year, in consultation with the President of the VTE.