

SUMMARY MINUTES of the VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE BOARD

102nd Meeting, held on 27 September 2017 at 10:30am

Present: John O'Shea (Acting Chairman), Gary Garland (VTE President and ex-officio member), Martin Allingham, Lola Moses, Robin Evans. **In attendance:** Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer), Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development), Mark Duly (Head of Finance, item 4), Diane Russell (Board Sec)

WELCOME, APOLOGIES, DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

There were no apologies and no declarations of interest. The Minutes of the meeting of 26 July 2017 were accepted as an accurate record. The actions had been completed as necessary. There were no matters arising.

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The back-office appeals management system had gone through the final stages and testing. The external interfaces were to be developed next, with intelligence from user research which was being undertaken. Fees remained an issue in terms of accounting treatment.

The first phase of development for an Electronic Document & Records Management System (SharePoint) was working well; training was about to be carried out before 'go live'. The second phase would be to move council tax reduction appeals to the Cloud. The third phase, encompassing 2017 list CCA appeals, would bring together the Sharepoint and Dynamics systems, allowing appellants and agents to deposit their information directly in to the system. This would bring considerable benefits in terms of efficiency and staff time, as well as providing a good solution for tribunal users.

The current contract for the central database would end by September 2019, with plans in place to migrate data. Council tax appeals would be migrated to the new system first because of the relatively low volumes. Regulations state that decision records must be kept for six years, so, particularly with the GDPR in mind, the opportunity would be taken to cleanse the data and delete records for which there was no basis to retain. The Board approved the Executive's direction of travel.

FINANCE

Detailed reports had been presented to and discussed at the Finance Committee (draft minutes for which were tabled). The intention remained to use forecast underspend towards paying the VTS's pension deficit, subject to DCLG's approval. There would be a formal, half-year budget review with each budget holder in the coming days. The expectation was that all of the capital budget would be used.

Member expenses were being paid more quickly, especially to those using the electronic system. The VTS was in negotiation with Treasury and DCLG about the accounting treatment of fees paid to make appeals under Check, Challenge and Appeal. Even though no appeals had been received yet, clarity was needed on several matters so that a system was ready in place when appeals and fees started to come in.

SIRO UPDATE

The Board received this biannual report, which described the composition and work of the Data Handling & Information Security Group. There had been discussions at the ARAC meeting the previous day about cyber security: this needed information input from DCLG. The VTS had no visibility as yet of the overarching policies for the security of the Connect environment and this was crucial to ensure the VTS framework was as it should be and to enable the SIRO to make his assurance statements to the Accounting Officer and to Cabinet Office. It was also important in the context of the GDPR. The VTS would be commissioning penetration testing on its internal systems in October.

A paper was presented on preparation for the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018. It explained the steps already taken to comply and the plan for further activity. A list of actions had been drawn up, assisted by the information audit returns from Information Asset Owners. This would form the basis of future work. Mazars were scheduled to audit this preparatory work in November.

ACTING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Interviews for the Board vacancies would be finalised on 9 October.

VTE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The President's proposal was to rationalise the PAC to three areas, with more events during the year to include training and open floor sessions. The aim was for more consistent and efficient training delivery. The plan for this would be finalised and put in place from 1 January 2018.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

The new process for NDR appeals appeared to be achieving its objectives. Settlements had increased (to 65% requiring no VT involvement) and postponements reduced, so clearances were increasing. The listed cases that required a full decision remained constant at 2%.

The financial delegation for 2017-18 had been confirmed by DCLG.

The CEO presented a "Changing environment" paper, charting the journey so far and how it was proposed that the VTS worked in the future. This had been discussed with managers, who were united in the suggested solutions, which would be brought in gradually. This document would form the basis of discussion at the Board's Strategy Day.

QUARTER 1 UPDATES: PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance against the published KPIs was largely good to 30 June 2017. The two targets being clearly missed related to a) reinstatement request clearances – but numbers would fall as strike outs fell, and b) cost per appeal decided – under the new arrangements, with multiple attendances, second panels were being arranged so doubling the cost. It was noted that cost was not everything; service satisfaction was key. Tribunal user satisfaction remained at a similar level to last year. Receipts of appeals were up signifying the closure of the 2010 list.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Finance Committee. Draft minutes were noted

Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. An oral report was given of the business of the meeting on 26 September 2017.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 25 October Strategy Day; regular meeting 29 November 2017.