



**SUMMARY MINUTES of the VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE BOARD**

**86th Meeting, held on 19 May 2015 at 10:30am**

**Present:** Anne Galbraith CBE (Chairman), Graham Zellick CBE QC (VTE President), John O'Shea (Deputy Chairman), Martin Allingham, Ronald Barham, Robin Evans, Ian Tighe

**In attendance:** Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer), Ann Batom (Director of Finance & Information Systems), Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development), Diane Russell (Board Secretary)

**ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no apologies and no declarations of interest.

**ITEM 2: CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES. MATTERS ARISING**

The Minutes of the meeting of 25 March 2015 were accepted and all but one of the actions had been completed as required; that related to the Board's skills audit and was discussed under Item 7.

**ITEM3: ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS UPDATE**

A recent draft of the document had been circulated to Board members for comment. The external auditors had started their audit on 20 April 2015. The final review from NAO was planned to take place this week. The Annual Report was on track to be signed on 10 June, with a laying date later in June. The VTS Finance team was congratulated on its work.

**ITEM 4: FINANCE**

**Finance overview.** An addendum to the business case on pensions' consolidation had been submitted to DCLG so that the required spend could be made in 2015-16 (rather than 2014-15).

**Year end position.** There was some unused funding that related to the pension consolidation payments, which were deferred to 2015-16 and also to the cancellation of the NDR project. The Director of Finance & Information Systems advised that she was looking at an improved budget process for 2015-16 to safeguard delivery on budget.

**Management accounts to 30 April 2015** were considered by the Board.

**ITEM 5: IT STRATEGY UPDATE**

The draft document was being finalised and would then be circulated to the Board, who would need to agree it as a strategy. The Business Analyst had now completed his work and given a presentation to senior managers. A meeting had been arranged with DCLG's IT unit to explore the practicalities of shared services. A meeting had been scheduled with the VOA's operational senior management team to discuss the future of the Central (appeals) Database and how the necessary data exchange could take place for the future.

**ITEM 6: REVIEW OF RISK REGISTERS**

**VTS Strategic Risk Register.** This showed 13 current risks, including a new risk regarding employment tribunal cases. The risk relating to affordability of pension deficit payments had been reduced in the light of progress on consolidation; the consultation had begun and the consolidation should be finalised by 31 March 2016. The risk relating to closure of the Doncaster office was closed as the new lease had been signed and completed.

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### **ITEM 7: CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

**Board effectiveness review and skills audit.** The templates to be used were now about to be circulated for completion. Discussion about the responses would then form a part 2 meeting in June. The matrix of Board members' skills would later be shared with DCLG, to assist in recruiting future Board members. These data might also prove useful for the Triennial Review team. This team had held its initial meetings separately with the President, the Chairman and the Chief Executive during purdah; information about the next steps was awaited.

**VTE member recruitment.** It was hoped that the new appointees would be in office by the end of November. Recruitment should be planned for in other areas where there were insufficient members, perhaps one exercise per year, now that the length of the process was understood.

**Information security.** In line with the VTS expectation for staff, ways for Board members to complete an e-learning module on handling data would be explored.

### **ITEM 8: PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

On the complaint against a VTE chairman, which had been upheld, and which had given rise to a claim in the County Court alleging disability discrimination, the Board agreed that a settlement figure should be offered as being the morally correct course even though it was thought that there was no liability in law. DCLG would have to be consulted.

The President presented his findings from an analysis of First-tier Tribunal (FTT) judges' decisions for council tax reduction appeals. He concluded that there was a good case for making more use of VTE senior members in these cases, subject to retaining the possibility of using the judges when appropriate.

The President was in the process of sending to the VTE membership a consultation paper on appraisal to replace the recent, suspended system.

### **ITEM 9: CEO'S REPORT**

The Chief Executive's report had been circulated and from it he highlighted –

- **Wide Area Network contract.** The VTS was now tendering through Crown Commercial Services for a provider.
- **NDR reform.** The CEO, Registrar and Director of Operations & Development were regularly involved in meetings with DCLG and the VOA as part of the business rates administrative review. There were a number of working groups. At the present time, there was some support for a three-stage process: Check, Challenge, Appeal (with only the last stage owned by the VTE).
- **Performance summary.** Analysis of the reasons for the increase in the number of complaints was being fed into staff training sessions.

### **ITEM 10: PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT GROUP (PMG) REPORT**

The Director of Operations & Development presented a revised format summary report, which was noted.

### **ITEM 11: OPERATIONAL UPDATES**

**Achievements towards objectives of the Business Plan 2014-15.** These had been circulated and were noted.

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**Workload statistics for Quarter 4 and year 2014-15.** The Board focussed on performance against the 'Chancellor's target' (to clear 95% of NDR appeals live on 30 September 2013 by July 2015). Of the 170,000 appeals, fewer than 18,000 remained (on 8 May 2015). Status reports for these appeals were being shared with DCLG and provision had been made for 14,000 additional cases to be listed. The VTS's realistic aim had been to list at least once any appeal that was capable of being listed, thus providing an opportunity for the appeal to be settled by the parties or determined. Only 27 appeals in this category remained unlisted and the Board agreed that the VTS had done all it could possibly do.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING** Wednesday 10 June 2015 at 11.00am.