



SUMMARY MINUTES of the VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE BOARD

84th Meeting, held on 21 January 2015 at 10:30am

Present: Anne Galbraith CBE (Chairman), John O'Shea (Deputy Chairman), Martin Allingham, Ronald Barham, Ian Tighe

In attendance: Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer), Jeff Cant (Interim Finance Director), Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development), Diane Russell (Board Secretary)

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1. There were apologies from Graham Zellick and Robin Evans. The Chairman welcomed Lee Anderson to his first Board meeting and thanked Jeff Cant for all his work in the interim position. Ann Battom would take up her appointment as the new Director of Finance and Information Systems from 2 February. There were no declarations of interest.

ITEM 2: CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES. MATTERS ARISING

2. The Minutes of the meeting of 26 November 2014 were accepted as an accurate record. Matters arising all featured on the agenda.

ITEM3: MATTERS FOR DECISION

The annual review of governance documents had been carried out and the changes proposed were highlighted to Board members.

3. **Revised Standing Financial Instructions and Procurement Policy.** The Audit & Risk Assurance Committee had also looked at those documents. Subject to an amendment clarifying the Board's requirement for a business case, the two documents were approved.

4. **Revised Board Standing Orders and Ways of Working.** The changes were approved.

5. **Code of Conduct for VTS Board Members.** No changes had been made this year.

ITEM 4: FINANCE

6. **Management accounts to 31 December 2014.** The Finance Committee had previously scrutinised these accounts. Following a half yearly review, the budget was reduced to £7.5m recognising that fewer staff posts could be budgeted for.

7. **Draft Budget 2015-16.** The £7,455k allocated was indicative funding provided by DCLG, a reduction of 10% from last year. This funding could be reduced further in the light of the upcoming general election. A balanced budget had been produced which addressed the financial restraints faced. The Board was content to sign off the budget.

8. The VTS had been required to prepare a paper showing what the impact would be with further cuts up to 40%. Severe reductions in budget would impact significantly on staff numbers

and hence service delivery. A workshop with DCLG was scheduled to discuss 2015-16 funding and beyond.

9. The Training budget had increased, as there would be a need to induct new VTE members. The induction exercise might come very late in the year so this would need to be monitored. It was agreed that one day's training would be offered as a minimum to each current VTE member.

ITEM 5: REVIEW OF VTS RISK REGISTER

10. The risk register was circulated showing 16 risks, two of which were at maximum (20) and seven required immediate action, although these were not within the VTS's control.

ITEM 6: CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

11. VTE Member recruitment. The exercise to recruit 25 Chairmen had now been included in the JAC programme with start date of May 2015. The recruitment programme was on the JAC website but the VTS would need to raise awareness in suitable places and publications.

12. The Chairman confirmed that the Directors' salaries had been through the Remuneration Committee as required and approved.

ITEM 7: PRESIDENT'S REPORT

13. The President circulated comments on the Triennial Review.

14. **VTE Risk Register.** The risk register showed 15 risks.

ITEM 8: CEO'S REPORT

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

- Strategic Management Team would be replaced with an Executive Management Team. Lee Anderson would chair operational meetings.
- DCLG had given a decision in principle for payment for deficit pensions' valuations.
- Doncaster office – The CEO had secured Cabinet Office approval, via an exemption, had given an exemption allowing the VTS to negotiate a further lease for a further two years and five months.
- IT – DCLG's involvement with an initial business case had led them to promote their shared services. Departmental approval in principle had been received to engage a business analyst.
- A draft Business Plan would be circulated to the Board before the March Board meeting with a deadline for comments.,

ITEM 9: PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT GROUP (PMG) REPORT

16. Responsibility for the PMG would now fall into Lee Anderson's role. The IT Strategy would lead to a programme of projects. The Business Analyst would make use of the business processes in drawing up the VTS's requirements for a specification for a database. To do this, the expectation of appeal volumes going forward needed to be clearer. Desktop internet and video conferencing had been recognised as worthwhile projects. An upgrade to the ASR system (HR and VTE member database) would be carried out and tested at the end of January 2015.

ITEM 10: COMMITTEE REPORTS

17. Reports were received from the Members' Training Strategy, the Finance Committee, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Remuneration Committee.

ITEM 11: ACTIVITY UPDATES

18. **Performance against Business Plan Objectives for Quarter 3, 2014-15.** Of the 20 objectives, 18 were scheduled to be achieved by Quarter 3; three had been completed and nine completed in part. Four objectives related to NDR Reform had been removed. An objective for Quarter 3 relating to the replacement of the accounting system had also been removed. The objective on new VTE members' induction, scheduled for Quarter 4 was certain to be delayed because the recruitment process would start in May 2015.

19. **Workload statistics for Quarter 3, 2014-15.** There had been a significant change in volumes of settled cases; postponements were also up. Amendment to Practice Statement A2, on listing NDR appeals, meant there was now more rigour around the necessity for parties to confirm before the hearing their intention to attend, so enabling the PCMO to arrange the hearing day appropriately.

20. The Board was assured that the focus on 'Chancellor's target appeals' was not impacting on council tax work. The number of appeals remaining to be cleared was now 33,626 (from a starting position of 169,855). This number included 1,800 already listed and 7,000 in forward programmes which could not be listed. An Upper Tribunal decision on surgeries had been issued the previous week; whether the cases could now be listed depended on whether the VOA appealed the UT decision. By July 2015, the VTS would be in a position to say that every appeal in the 'Chancellor's target' cohort that could have been listed had been listed, giving the parties the opportunity to settle.

39. A large influx of appeals was expected (possibly as many as 200,000) because the Department had set a deadline of 31 March 2015 for proposals against the 2010 list.

ITEM 12: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

40. There was no other business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING The next Board meeting is on 25 March 2015 at 10.30am.