

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

### **91st Meeting, held on 23 March 2016 at 10:30am**

**Present:** Anne Galbraith CBE (Chairman), John O'Shea (Deputy Chairman), Ronald Barham, Robin Evans, Ian Tighe, Martin Young (VTE Vice-President) **In attendance:** Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer), Ann Battom (Director of Finance & Information Systems), Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development), Diane Russell (Board Secretary)

### **ITEMS 1 and 2: APOLOGIES, DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

1. There were apologies from Martin Allingham and no declarations of interest. As this was Ronald Barham's last meeting, Anne Galbraith thanked him for his useful contributions to the Board and his service on the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. The Minutes of the meetings of 27 January 2016 were accepted as an accurate record. The actions had been completed as necessary. There were no matters arising which did not feature on the agenda.

### **ITEM 3: MATTERS FOR DECISION**

2. **Draft Business Plan and Corporate Plan 2016-19.** This incorporated the values of the VTS and the strategic objectives as discussed at the Board's strategy day. There was a commitment to list 150,000 appeals in 2016-17. Future workload from 2017-18 was estimated based on past experience and knowledge, though with changes to the business rates appeal system this was without certainty. The Board requested the addition of information about stakeholder impact on VTS planning, given that the service is demand led. Subject to the changes discussed, **the Board approved the Business Plan.**

3. **Draft budget 2016-17.** Although the Finance Committee meeting on 17 March had been inquorate, a full scrutiny of the budget had taken place, and the Chairman recommended it to the Board. Draft minutes were circulated. Budget holders had split their bids into contracted/committed costs and variable costs. Contingencies would be set up for business initiatives/developments and for IT. Revenue costs had been included for projects. Requests for 'contingency' and allocations would be reviewed quarterly by EMT. The budget was based on current staff + staff currently being recruited + vacant posts. Approval of the budget was a matter reserved to the Board, and **the Board was content to approve it.**

### **ITEM 4: IT DEVELOPMENT – AGILE APPROACH**

4. The current position and the drivers for change in a replacement appeals management database were explained, and followed on from the Board-approved IT Strategy. The VTS must move away from the platform provided by Aspire to both the VTS and the VOA before the platform is withdrawn. While the VTS would still have to interact effectively with the VOA, the eventual form of the new appeals system for those challenging their business rates was far from certain, so any solution had to be flexible. Discussions with Crown Commercial Services had demonstrated that the focus for the Government on IT projects and procurement was now on organisations meeting the standards of GDS, Cabinet Office. This was a different, iterative approach, using agile methodology and looking primarily at the requirements of the external user using government services. Though a DCLG-format business case had been approved by the sponsoring Department for the purposes of indicative funding, the Board required an outline business case at its May meeting to set out what it wanted to achieve strategically, beyond what was recorded in the IT Strategy.

### **ITEM 5: PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT GROUP REPORT**

5. A Project Summary Sheet was presented and there were no areas of concern. There was news of developments in the novation of contract with Aspire, to Fujitsu. Options would be presented, on which a decision would have to be made, in a paper for the Board's May meeting.

## **ITEM 6: FINANCE**

### **6. Finance overview..**

A second pensions' deficit payment of £390k, resulting in a small underspend at year end. Problems in recruiting suitable staff during 2015-16 had resulted in an underspend in staff costs; however, five professional grade people had recently been recruited.

**7. New finance system.** Work on this project was paused in October 2015, since when DCLG had asked further questions about the proposed replacement system. These had been addressed, and it was planned to resume the project with a live implementation date of 1 August 2016. The Board had previously supported the move away from SAP (at its July 2015 meeting) and gave its approval to resurrect the project.

## **ITEM 7: REVIEW OF VTS STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**

8. Updated on 9 March 2016 at EMT, the register showed eight risks, with the risk regarding the low VTE member numbers having increased; this remained a concern because of the protracted appointment process and the continuing retirements. The risk around pension crystallisation had reduced as all had now been transferred to the single provider, LPFA. The Board agreed that this risk could now be closed. The Board asked that consideration be given to adding a new risk around the agile process.

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

9. The VTS had just received a list of the 34 people who had been appointed. No formal date had yet been received for the next phase of recruitment for the west side of the country during 2016-17. On Board member recruitment, for Ronald Barham's replacement, the recruitment pack and form that were used in 2014 were again being reviewed. The Cabinet Office was concerned to increase diversity on boards.

## **ITEM 9: VICE-PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

10. The Vice-Presidents had held a meeting with DCLG, trying to prepare the ground for the new President coming in. The Vice-Presidents considered there was a need for a more qualitative KPI for VTE decisions, which it was felt had improved in recent times and few were being appealed successfully. In the interests of saving time for the Vice-Presidents it was suggested that clerks take responsibility for setting out the preamble of draft decisions and also that the criteria for designating a case as A10 (requiring a Vice-President to hear it) should be revised, as more could be dealt with by other senior members and their panels.

## **ITEM 10: CEO'S REPORT**

12. Discussions were ongoing about a proposed alternative office in Doncaster. A rent review on the London office, which was sublet to the VTS from the NHS, was likely to lead to a considerable increase; negotiations were underway.

## **ITEM 11: COMMITTEE REPORTS**

13. **Finance Committee:** draft minutes had been circulated and referred to above.

14. **Audit & Risk Assurance Committee:** The annual report of the Committee was presented. At its meeting the previous day, the Committee members had received a session on assurance mapping from NAO and Mazars; the VTS assurance map would be shared with the Board later in year. Adequate assurance had been given on the two most recent internal audit reports. Annual assurance statements had been presented from the SIRO and the Director of Finance & Information Systems and the draft Governance Statement of the Accounting Officer had been reviewed.

**ITEM 12: ANY OTHER BUSINESS** and **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** -. There was no other business. The next Board meeting is on Wednesday 25 May 2016 at 10.30am.