

SUMMARY MINUTES of the VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE BOARD

105th Meeting, held on 31 January 2018 at 10:30am

Present: John O'Shea (Acting Chairman), Gary Garland (VTE President and ex-officio member), Martin Allingham, Neil Buckley, Robin Evans, Lola Moses. **In attendance:** Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer), Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development), Mark Duly (Interim Finance Director), 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 29 November 2017 were accepted as an accurate record. The actions had been completed as necessary. Actions from the Board's Strategy Day were noted as progressing as planned. There were no matters arising.

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Sharepoint: developments to provide a cloud-based system for the existing NDR and a repository for appeals under check, challenge and appeal (CCA) had been completed. Discussions were being held with staff about the benefits and lessons learned exercises would be carried out. Appeals on council tax reduction (CTR) were moving from a server to an online version and this would be released in February.

Appeals management system: the first appeal had been registered and this was proving a useful test of the live back office system to manage appeals. Development of a portal for external users to make appeals was the next stage and a prototype would be taken to a meeting with Govpay shortly and then to users for research on usability.

Exit from the central database (CDB): the Board was reminded that the VTS needed to be off the system by September 2019 and to this end the migration of legacy data was being planned, to be completed ideally by October 2018. The VTS was working with the VOA and RCDTS on planning, options and timeline.

Connect contract: this MHCLG contract was ending in March 2019 and would have a direct impact on the VTS; guarantees of continuity of service were needed.

FINANCE

The Interim Finance Director was confident that the VTS would end the year within budget, though there was some uncertainty regarding the Connect charges, which were being chased. The Quarter 3 finances were well in hand. Some £42k capital remained available but this would be used. Savings had been used to reduce the pension deficit.

Draft budget 2018-19. A detailed review of the Pay budget had been carried out which identified that a larger sum was required than that indicated. The shortfall could be made up with unallocated Non-pay but this needed sponsor approval. This realignment meant that the total DEL would remain the same for the year at £7,037k, compared to £7,241k this year. The currently indicated capital allocation for 2018-19 was only £100k, when it was calculated that £500k was needed. The Board noted the draft budget, which would come back to the Board for approval at its March meeting.

Fees for CCA appeals. The Board was concerned that despite discussions spanning over two years, this matter was still not resolved between the Department and HMT. HMT had, however, confirmed there would be no accounts direction for this year; next year a Trustees report might be needed for the Annual Report & Accounts.

MATTERS FOR DECISION

IT Strategy. The document had been refreshed since the Board approved it in 2016. It explained, as then, that the VTS was supporting government initiatives for digitalisation while looking for flexible, scalable, off the shelf solutions. The programme of change was well under way now and the benefits were beginning to be evident. However, the VTS had been obliged to move to the Department's shared service, Connect, instead of moving to a cloud-based solution. As the Department itself would be doing that from 2019, the VTS would then reach its preferred solution, either alone or with MHCLG. The document aligned the IT strategic priorities to the VTS's

general strategic aims and highlighted work in the pipeline for 2018-20. The document was welcomed and approved by the Board.

Revised governance documents. The annual review of these had taken place and suggested revisions were approved by the Board for the Standing Financial Instructions, Standing Orders, including the Scheme of Delegations, Ways of Working and the Board's Code of Conduct.

CORPORATE PLAN AND BUSINESS PLAN

The latest draft was presented to the Board for comments. It reflected the discussions at the Strategy Day, incorporated the VTS's values and gave context for the plans. Targets and KPIs (current) were listed and the IT programme described. The current risks were explained and there was a forward look to the challenges of the next three years, including budget, estate, IT, staff and VTE member recruitment. Following Board comments, a final draft would be sent to MHCLG and come back to the Board for sign off in March.

REVIEW OF RISK REGISTERS

The VTS strategic register currently showed 14 risks and was noted by the Board. The VTE risk register listed four risks with two live. The Board noted the register.

ACTING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Recommendations for the post of Chairman had been put to the Minister, who had since been replaced. There would be a further delay while these were put to the new minister. The VTS had appointed a new Finance Director, Keung Wong, who would be commencing his duties on 1 February.

VTE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The President provided a summary of current judicial complaints. Member numbers had been analysed, to see when more recruits would be needed; it would be beneficial to have a small, focussed exercise at the end of 2018-19. The President's Advisory Council had now been dissolved. The training programme was being devised for the three new regions, which should result in savings of resources and more interaction between the membership. The President would be communicating with members shortly on the use of IT, careful use of social media and reasons for decisions.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Doncaster office move: The VTS had been expecting information about costs but nothing had been received yet from DWP. The existing office lease rolled over to the end of May.

DPO: Under GDPR the VTS had to have a named Data Protection Officer. The VTS's preference was for an in-house appointment that met the legal requirements for the post. The recommendation was that the Corporate Services Manager, who had led on GDPR implementation to date, be appointed to the post. The recommendation was accepted

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Finance Committee. Draft minutes of its meeting on 23 January 2018 were noted.

Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. The Committee had reviewed its terms of reference and the changes proposed were approved by the Board.

Remuneration & Terms of Service Committee. The Committee had reviewed its terms of reference and the changes proposed were approved by the Board.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Board decided that some form of staff survey should be undertaken to gain views on changes since the last survey.

There was no other business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 28 March 2018.