

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

**100th Meeting, held on 24 May 2017 at 10:30am**

**Present:** John O'Shea (Acting Chairman), Gary Garland (VTE President), Martin Allingham, Robin Evans. **In attendance:** Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer), Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development), Tracey Cheetham (Interim Finance Director), Diane Russell (Board Sec)

### WELCOME, APOLOGIES, DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

There were apologies from Lola Moses and no declarations of interest. The Minutes of the meeting of 22 March 2017 were accepted as an accurate record. The actions had been completed as necessary.

Matters arising: The appointment process for a Board Chairman and member had been extended because of the General Election and so new appointees were unlikely to be in place before November. The VirginMedia billing dispute was ongoing. The Business Plan had been signed off and published.

### ITEM 3: FINANCE

The final delegation from DCLG for 2016-17 was presented together with the outturn for the financial year. There was a small under spend on Pay (£46k) and Non-pay (£100k). On capital, £158k had been spent out of the budget of £761k approved by DCLG, largely due to delays and reduced costs for the move to Connect, over which the VTS had no control.

The Annual Report & Accounts had been checked by auditors and their comments addressed.

The General Election and purdah meant that the laying date would probably be 28 June.

There was little to be concluded from the management accounts at this early stage. In September a full scale review would take place; thereafter any underspend would be given up for to the special projects fund and/or returned to DCLG.

### MATTERS FOR DECISION – BUSINESS CASE FOR CAPITAL FOR THE DONCASTER OFFICE MOVE

A brief business case, in DCLG's format, for £72k of capital needed for elements of the Doncaster move was presented for the Board's approval. About £60k was required to create a hearing room at the new office and additional monies would be required for IT cabling before the move took place. The Board formally approved the business case. It would now be submitted to DCLG. The move was to comply with a requirement to take property in the central government estate. DWP's lease would end on 1 March 2018 but they proposed retaining the building as part of their estate. As a NDPB, the VTS could not move in on their lease on a MOTO; it needed a sub-lease in its own name. This meant that occupation could only be from 1 April 2018, whereas the current Doncaster office leases would end on 1 September 2017. However, the Chief Executive had negotiated a roll-over of the lease at the same rent. The eventual dilapidations was estimated at £104k.

### REVIEW OF VTS STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

There were 13 live risks. The Board agreed that the risk relating to outcomes of the Triennial Review should be closed as no outcomes had been forthcoming in the 18 months since it was conducted. A new risk had been added as a result of speculation that the VOA might be about to make changes to the CDB. This would have financial and also service implications for the VTS. The plan was to exit the arrangement as early as possible, having established what was feasible on Connect. A plan would be brought to the Board.

### CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

A meeting had been held with operational managers about future workflows. The expectation from the new consolidated practice statement was that there would be a greater focus on tribunal facing activity. A 'cradle to grave' approach, with technical staff managing cases from listing to hearing was agreed to be a better way forward as this would give create flexibility and encourage greater professionalism. Any changes made would result in no redundancy arrangements for

staff . Administrative staff would be upskilled to engage better in case management queries and the planning side of hearings. A paper was being drafted for the Board.

Analysis of VTE member numbers showed that retirements and other departures would mean that by 2020 numbers would be back at 2016 levels. There was some resilience for now but action would need to be taken by 2018-19 for the future. Another recruitment would be necessary but should be much more focussed on regions. With many of the new cohort being lawyers based in London, T&S costs would inevitably rise as hearings further afield were resourced. The VTE also needed a broader base of skills, such as valuers would bring. The economic argument against a standard JAC appointment process for the VTE should be made to DCLG.

During 2016-17, 22 complaints were received about the administration (32 in 2015-16). All were responded to within a month. Two complaints were investigated by the Chief Executive and maladministration was not found in respect of either of them. One complaint had been referred to and investigated by the Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman, however no further action was required of the VTS.

Health & Safety annual statement. During 2016-17 there were two recorded incidents in London and five recorded in Doncaster. None of these incidents resulted in absence from work. Fire risk assessments and health and safety audits continued to be carried out on an annual basis. There had been no substantial matters reported.

Ransom ware. The VTS's servers had been shut down on 12 May as a precaution to prevent any unauthorised access over the weekend, but were up and running on the next working day.

Of the 17 Business Plan objectives set for 2016-17, 12 were achieved, two partly achieved and three were ongoing, relating to the appeals management system and plain English guidance (delayed in part by the late release of the appeal regulations) and the tendering of IT contracts. These objectives should be completed by quarter 2 in 2017-18.

#### IT UPDATE

**Appeals Management System.** The first Agile sprint on the configuration of the system to receive and acknowledge appeals was concluding. Only small numbers of appeals were expected in the next six months, which could be dealt with manually initially. Sprint 2 would look at communications between agents and the VTS. A different route for making an appeal for unrepresented ratepayers/small agents would be via Gov.uk, for which GDS accreditation was needed.

**Connect.** Progress had not been straightforward and the implementation date had slipped. Daily calls were now being made to ensure progress was on track for the new date of 3-4 June. Both offices would be closed on 2 June as engineers would be on both sites and hardware removed.

#### PERFORMANCE SUMMARY FOR QUARTER 4 AND 2016-17

**KPIs and workload.** Eight of the 11 KPIs had been achieved last year. The exceptions were: reinstatement requests which had required Vice-Presidents' input until a recent change in process; cost per appeal decided, which had decreased but was higher than the target; the use of external venues costing less than £250 a booking in 80% of cases, which had been missed by 5%. The cost per appeal listed had decreased considerably because 150,000 cases had been listed, but this was not sustainable; next year 20% fewer appeals would be listed. However, this fact and the new procedures should result in better customer service. 2016-17 had been atypical as the VTS was listing high volumes, which put pressure on staff. Some of the internal performance measures set had proved very challenging, with some areas of concern; others had proved to be less than useful or based on unreliable data. These internal measures were being refined for 2017-18.

#### ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 7 June 2017 11.30.