

SUMMARY MINUTES of the VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE BOARD

102nd Meeting, held on 26 July 2017 at 11:30am

Present: John O'Shea (Acting Chairman), Martin Allingham, Lola Moses, Robin Evans. **In attendance:** Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer), Ed Clift (DCLG, Head of ALB Sponsorship), Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development), Tracey Cheetham (Finance Director), Diane Russell (Board Sec)

WELCOME, APOLOGIES, DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

There were apologies from Gary Garland. There were no declarations of interest. The Minutes of the meeting of 7 June 2017 were accepted as an accurate record. The actions had been completed as necessary.

Matters arising: The Annual Report & Accounts 2016-17 were laid in Parliament on 28 June 2017. The VTS was the first DCLG ALB to lay and Deloitte/NAO were pleased with how smoothly the process had gone. The Board congratulated all those involved.

MATTER FOR DECISION – Capital and Business Critical Business Cases Policy

The new Policy had been drafted as a consequence of a recommendation made by the internal auditors following their audit of Corporate Governance. The Policy confirmed the process that had been adopted for the last business case, which was presented to the Board for approval before DCLG's approval for funding was sought, using the DCLG template initially. **The Board approved the Policy.**

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Electronic Document & Records Management System (Sharepoint). The cloud-based system had now been modelled to work for NDR appeals; users were happy with it and the phase was virtually complete. Phase 2 would put existing CTR records into the cloud and should be in place in August; phase 3 would allow handling of NDR appeals against the 2017 list once the portals were in place.

Appeals management system. The CRM database back office application was progressing and currently in test so that by September it would be configured to deal with the complete appeal cycle for 2017 NDR appeals. Electronic fee management was a challenge but discussions with Govpay and Worldpay were going well and accounts had been set up with both of them. The portal for individuals and small agents to use required Government Digital Service (GDS) accreditation through their 'alpha assessment' process.

Fujitsu/Connect. The project was about to be signed off, with a 'lessons learned' exercise to be carried out. Overall, it had been a successful transition, albeit a few teething problems remained which had now been resolved. DCLG had advised that this contract would expire in 18 months as they moved to cloud-based solutions, which had been the VTS's preferred option.

Exit from RCDTS (the CDB). An exit strategy to move away from RCDTS arrangements was being drawn up, exploring the costs of migrating appeal data.

FINANCE

Quarter 1 outturn. There was currently £227k non-pay budgetary cover available under special projects. The pay budget was forecast to be used fully. A comprehensive review of budgets was planned in September, to identify any underspend that could go towards pension deficit payments or if there were any supplementary needs. The aspiration (led by HM Treasury) was for the forecast input at the end of Quarter 2 to be within 1% of the final outturn/budget.

Capital budget. This was being carefully managed as there were risks that the Connect budget would not be fully utilised and/or that the appeals management system would have increased costs to meet GDS accreditation. DCLG was being kept informed about the use of capital. There had been good progress in rolling out SAP and the associated new processes. Through the Connect service, budget holders now had access to SAP and training from Finance and FSSD was planned for the following week.

The Board thanked Tracey Cheetham for all she had done in building up the team and developing systems during her time with the VTS.

REVIEW OF RISK REGISTERS

VTE Risk Register. Five risks had been identified relating to the membership and the operation of the new Consolidated Practice Statement. Two risks had since been closed. It was agreed that recruitment through the JAC process led to a risk for both the VTS and VTE and should be added to the register.

Strategic Risk Register. This listed 14 risks, with two that the Board agreed should be closed. A new risk around using the capital allocation for 2017-18 had been added as had a risk regarding the loss of experience with the departure of the Finance Director.

ACTING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Progress was being made on the appointment of a new VTS Board Chair and Independent member, with shortlisting of applications in August and interviews planned for September 2017.

VTE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Board noted that Judicial Conduct (Tribunals) Rules 2014 did not apply to the VTE and that therefore the Ombudsman's remit did not extend to dealing with a complaint about an investigation conducted by the President. However, the President subscribed to the idea of the Ombudsman and would be endeavouring to follow his practice wherever possible.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Doncaster office. The business case had been amended as the capital requested might not be spent until 2018-19.

Although still early days, the new disclosure and exchange process appeared to be succeeding in its aim of clearing appeals more quickly now that it had been rolled out nationally.

Postponements were massively down due to a more robust policy and most of the cases that were 'decided' were dismissals. At 31 March 2017 on the closure of the 2010 list, the VTE received about 50,000 appeals, fewer than expected.

The government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper had set out plans to rebalance the economy away from London. Among the proposals was the requirement to relocate ALBs currently located in London to the regions. Data was being supplied to the Cabinet Office to assist in costing out this proposal.

Business Plan objectives, report on achievements in Quarter 1. Of a total of 16 objectives, four had been identified for completion by the end of Quarter 1 and three had been achieved and one delayed with a revised implementation date of August.

Tribunal user survey recommendations - action plan. Following the presentation of the survey findings for 2016-17, which had shown a general improvement in satisfaction levels, a new action plan of seven recommendations had been drawn up, relating to communications and administration. In addition, of 15 recommendations in last year's action plan, five had been implemented in full and four in part, with the remainder ongoing and carried forward to 2017-18. The Board noted that many of the processes were in place now to provide good service, but it was the variances in people's (staff and VTE members) behaviour that remained to be addressed.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Finance Committee. Draft minutes were noted

Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. Draft minutes were noted.

ITEM 11: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 27 September 2017 10.30.