

SUMMARY MINUTES of the VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE BOARD

107th Meeting, held on 23 May 2018 at 10:30am

Present: Robin Evans (Chairman), Gary Garland (VTE President and ex-officio member), Suzanne McCarthy (Deputy Chairman), Martin Allingham, Neil Buckley, Lola Moses. **In**

attendance: Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer), Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development), Keung Wong (Finance Director), Diane Russell (Board Sec)

WELCOME, APOLOGIES, DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Robin Evans as new Chairman welcomed Suzanne McCarthy. There were no apologies and no declarations of interest. The Minutes of the meeting of 28 March 2018 were accepted as an accurate record. The actions had been completed as necessary. The Corporate Plan/Business Plan had been approved by MHCLG and had been published. There were no other matters arising.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Doncaster office relocation. The efforts to co-locate with DWP, to meet Cabinet Office's requirement were not progressing quickly, despite the plan to have a hearing room in the space having been abandoned. The landlord at the existing office had agreed to a further extension of the current lease until 31 August 2018. It was recognised that certainty about the co-location should be provided in the six weeks that the lease was being drafted and that if it was not forthcoming, the CEO should revert to the Board so that a letter could be written to the Minister.

Other matters. The VTS Audit & Risk Committee would also discuss this as an agenda item. The Board was updated on progress towards compliance with the GDPR since the internal audit; few actions would remain outstanding at implementation date (25 May).

Eleven of 16 business plan objectives had been met and the detail of achievements was presented; MHCLG had been quite comfortable with this.

On budget allocation, MHCLG had agreed to the VTS having an overall budget allocation of £8,419k (net resource DEL of £6,724k) including a capital allocation of £500k, subject to business cases, and the movement of funds from Non-pay to Pay and vice-versa. The Board was content to approve the revised delegated budget.

Tribunal User survey. There had been a 5% reduction in overall satisfaction compared to last year. There had been more unsuccessful appellants taking part and more robust processes were in place; a focus of dissatisfaction was evidently at the hearing, as qualitative feedback referred to the panels and the perception of fair treatment. This had been used in panel member training.

Staff survey. The 83% response rate was good and better than in 2015-16. There were some slight improvements and actions from the plan seemed to have had a beneficial effect, but there was room for further improvement. On both surveys, the Board wished to see the full reports and action plans at its July meeting, with further discussion at the strategy day.

MATTER FOR DECISION: **Business case for enhancement of Advanced Open HR System.**

The business case was for £13,662 capital to develop a PDR module for use in the existing system. The system itself would implement recommendations from an internal audit and result in a beneficial, more automated system. The Board approved the business case.

FINANCE

Final outturn 2017-18. The VTS had managed within its funding resource expenditure of £7,563k against the budget of £8,236k. The under spend was primarily due to Pay, with a number of unfilled roles during the year and in Non-pay, an under spend on IT. The pension deficit had reduced to £16,500k last year, due largely to £2,000k being allocated by MHCLG for the purpose and the VTS's own under spend. On capital, of a budget of £500k the VTS had spent £486k.

For the first month of the financial year, £546k had been spent against a forecast of £504k. The report now showed details of CCA fees' receipts and outcomes as the VTS would need to produce a trustee's report next year end. The Board noted the accounts as at 30 April 2018.

OPERATIONS AND PROGRAMME REPORT

Projects. Appeals management system – A portal for appellants to make an appeal was at the prototype stage, ready for user testing and integration with GovPay, subject to an approved business case. Most Sharepoint project work was complete apart from integration with the appeals management system. The upgrade of VTS printers was completed and they were proving to be a great improvement. On exiting the central database, considerable background work had been done, but liaison with the VOA was necessary on their timing. A meeting was planned with the VOA and RCDTS. The VTS could move off the CDB independently, but there were currently some cross-overs of data with the VOA. Connect migration required discussions with MHCLG's CIO, as they planned for modernisation.

Performance data. Six of the last year's 10 KPIs had been met or exceeded. Full details would appear in the Annual Report and Accounts. The Board wished to review KPIs at its strategy day.

Workload data. In the Business Plan the pledge was to 100,000 appeals in the year; currently about 8,000 were being listed/month. However, the environment was changing quickly, with many business rates appeals held up for various reasons, such as the 50,000 dependent on an awaited Supreme Court decision, or the future target dates of the VOA, or VOA resources being diverted to the revaluation brought forward to 2021. This could result in requests for back-ending the listing programme, creating problems for the VTS in its ability to flex up resources.

VTE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The President's view was that the change to the way members' training was being delivered, in three regions, to larger groups, was a definite improvement. The chance for volunteer members to meet like that was useful and suggested a national event every 2-3 years would be beneficial.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. The Committee's draft minutes from its March meeting were noted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The NJC had reached agreement on a pay award of 2% this and next year. The impact for this year for the VTS would be £68k, to be met out of the pay budget. The Board was content for the CEO to approach MHCLG for their sign off.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 13 June 2018 at around 11.30 (following the ARAC meeting).