



# **Our Customer Charter**

**and**

## **Complaints Policy**

2018

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# Chief Executive's Introduction

## Our Mission

*To provide the fairest, most effective and efficient service we can to those involved in local taxation appeals.*

This charter sets out the standards of service we aim to provide in the administration of appeals and explains how you can let us know when you are not happy with the service that you receive.

We know that most people who contact our offices or attend a tribunal hearing for the first time are unsure about what to expect. We aim to reduce any concerns you might have by giving you a helpful, polite and professional service.

You will find advice on our website, [www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk). This includes guidance booklets which you can download or request from our offices.

Your opinion matters to us, and we will take every opportunity to improve the quality of our service to you. If you are happy or unhappy with our standards of service, we would like to hear from you.

**Antonio Masella**  
**Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer**

## How to contact us

On our website, click on 'Contact us'.

Alternatively, call our national phone number: **0300 123 2035**

### **Our address is:**

Valuation Tribunal Service  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
120 Leaman Street  
London  
E1 8EU

Phone: 020 7426 3900

For general enquiries: [vtwhitechapel@vts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:vtwhitechapel@vts.gsi.gov.uk)  
[vtdoncaster@vts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:vtdoncaster@vts.gsi.gov.uk)

Chief Executive's Office: [ceo.office@vts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ceo.office@vts.gsi.gov.uk)

For complaints: [complaints@vts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@vts.gsi.gov.uk)

**Our website address is:** [www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk)

## **Our aims, standards and targets**

We aim to:

- be polite, friendly, approachable and professional;
- ask for your views and listen to you;
- provide straightforward information about our services;
- correct things promptly when they are wrong, and learn from complaints that are made about us;
- promote equality and fair treatment;
- continuously improve our services;
- respond promptly to calls, letters, queries and emails;
- use plain English wherever possible;
- deal with complaints promptly and guarantee a full investigation and a considered response;
- list appeals for hearing as quickly as possible;
- contact everyone who is representing themselves in an appeal to explain the process and answer any questions;
- arrange suitable, local hearing venues that are accessible to all for those appellants who represent themselves;
- greet everyone who is involved in a case before the hearing starts and explain what will happen during the hearing;
- deal with as many cases as possible during each day, offering appointment times where we can do so helpfully;
- send written Tribunal decisions out promptly.

If we don't do what we say in this charter please tell us.

## **Service for all**

We aim to provide services and premises that are accessible to every customer. We also aim to treat everyone fairly. No-one making an appeal should receive less favourable treatment because of their race, colour, nationality, age, religion, ethnic origin, sex, sexuality, marital status or disability. We are able to provide the following when requested:

- information in large print, in Braille or audio format;
- translations of our booklets into other formats or languages;
- a hearing venue that meets your special needs;
- an interpreter;
- someone to help you communicate at the hearing, for example a signer.

**However, we cannot provide you with an advocate to present your case to the VTE panel.**

## Contacting us

You can phone or visit our offices between 8.30am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday. These are our aims:

- We will answer phone calls within five rings, politely, giving our name and the name of our organisation;
- We will reply to any email within three working days;
- We will send an acknowledgement or full reply to any letter within five working days.

We can provide general information on Tribunal procedures, but **we cannot give you legal advice or tell you how to present your case**. Also, we cannot say if your case is likely to succeed, or tell you what the Tribunal will decide.

## Our documents

We will aim to use plain English in everything we send to you, where we have to use a legal term we will explain it.

## Our expectations of you

To help us to improve the service we provide and to deal with your query or complaint efficiently please:

- give us the information we need to help you;
- treat our staff appropriately and with respect.

When you contact us, if you have already made an appeal, you can help by giving us the appeal number that appears on our letters and notices.

If you make an appeal, the Tribunal will expect you to have read the guidance we provide and any relevant Practice Statements and Directions. These can be found on our website, <https://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/preparing-for-the-hearing/>.

We also expect you to let us know if anything changes about your appeal or how you want us to deal with it.

## When you make an appeal

1. We will send you an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receiving your appeal, so you know we have registered it. This will be by notice and will be sent with a guidance booklet called '*Your appeal and preparing for your Valuation Tribunal hearing*', or a link to it on the website. For those appellants representing themselves in an appeal, we will also contact you by phone, to explain the

process and answer any questions you may have. (All other appellants may of course contact us for advice at any time).

2. We will list your appeal for hearing as soon as we can and send you a notice telling you where and when that hearing will be held. We will give you at least eight weeks' notice of the hearing date.

3. It is better for everyone if similar appeals are listed together in a sensible way (for example by type of property or location), though this may cause some delay. This is particularly the case for rating appeals; for council tax appeals, we will try to have these on a hearing that is within five months of receiving all the information we need from you.

4. For appellants who are representing themselves at a hearing, we will either phone you or send you a letter before the hearing, asking you:

- to let us know if you are still coming to the hearing;
- if you need any general advice about what happens at a Tribunal hearing;
- if you need any special arrangements for access or other facilities.

We do not send guidance literature or this letter to main rating agents as they use our service frequently and communication with them is through the case management process leading up to a hearing.

5. If you are given a postponement because you have a good reason for not being able to attend the scheduled hearing, we will try to give you a new date promptly.

6. Before the date of your hearing, you can come to any of our hearings to observe what happens. Lists of hearings are published on our website, <https://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/decisions-and-lists/> and can be seen at our offices. We cancel hearings if all of the cases have been settled, so you should contact us the day before the hearing to check that it is still going to take place.

7. Our hearing days start at 10.30am, but there are likely to be several cases to be heard on the day. Where possible, we will give you an indicative time for when your case is likely to be heard so that you do not have to wait very long.

8. You can help us by arriving in good time for your hearing. When you come to the hearing, you will find:

- polite and helpful staff who will be wearing name badges so that you may identify them;
- the names of the chairman and panel member(s) displayed at the hearing.

9. We will try at all times to deal with your case as quickly as possible, but delays can happen, for example, because the case before yours takes longer than planned. We aim to deal with all the cases scheduled to be heard on the day but we will tell you as soon as we can if a panel cannot hear your case that day.

10. We will send a written copy of the panel's decision within one month of the hearing, or we will contact you to let you know why we have been unable to do this and tell you when the decision will be issued. When we send you the written decision, we will enclose a booklet called '*The Valuation Tribunal's decision on your appeal*', or send you a link to it on our website. This explains how to apply for a review or appeal against the Tribunal's decision, and the relevant time limits.

## **Listening to you**

We welcome your comments, compliments and complaints. We pay attention to any feedback and carry out national surveys to improve our service. You can help us and other Tribunal users by telling us what you liked about our service and how we can improve. We publish anonymised information on your feedback in our annual reports.

## **Comments and suggestions**

Your suggestions are important to us so please let us know if you have any comments or suggestions for improving our services. You may do this through our website, <https://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/contact-us/contact-form/>.

We will acknowledge receipt of your suggestion within 10 working days of receiving it and respond within one month.

## **Compliments**

If you think that we have done well then please tell us, so that other colleagues or services can follow the example. You may do this through our website, <https://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/contact-us/contact-form/>.

Any compliments we receive will be recorded and passed onto the relevant member of staff and appropriate managers.

## **Complaints**

We are committed to providing a quality service and want to get things right, but recognise that sometimes they do go wrong. Wherever possible we will aim to settle complaints quickly and informally at your first point of contact, but we have introduced a formal process if this is not possible.

One of the ways in which we can continue to improve the service we provide is by listening to and responding to the views of our users. If you are not happy with our service, please let us know straight away.

We will:

- make the process of making a complaint as easy as possible;
- treat your complaint seriously;
- deal with your complaint promptly and politely;
- respond in a positive manner (for example, with an explanation, an apology where we have got things wrong, or information on any action taken);
- learn from complaints by using them to improve our service, and publish information on complaints in our annual reports.

**Please be aware that the VTS can only consider complaints about the administration carried out by our offices and our staff; this means the processes before and after a Tribunal hearing.**

**The complaints process cannot be used about the decision the Tribunal makes. This is a judicial matter that the VTS has no power to change. Our guidance with the decision notice explains how you can appeal against a decision of the Tribunal.**

#### **What you can expect from us:**

- we will acknowledge any written complaint within one week of receipt;
- we will investigate and reply fully to your complaint as soon as possible. If we are unable to do this within one month, we will let you know about the delay and the reason for it;
- you will receive a written response in which we will try to deal with all your points of concern and provide a suitable resolution wherever possible;
- if we have made a mistake we will apologise, tell you what went wrong and how the service is being put right;
- we monitor the complaints that we receive. Every complaint is logged and analysed to allow us to improve our service.

#### **How to complain**

We attempt to address any complaints **informally** first. If you complain in person or by phone about the administrative process associated with the handling of your appeal or enquiry, such as delay, lack of response or discourtesy, our staff will try to sort out your problem immediately. If you are not happy with our service at the hearing, please tell a member of staff who will try to sort out your complaint there and then.

If you are unhappy with the service we have provided you may make a **formal** complaint using our administrative complaints form. Our complaints process has two stages.

### **Stage 1**

Complete the complaints form and email it to our complaints inbox at [complaints@vts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@vts.gsi.gov.uk). If you are posting this form please mark your envelope 'COMPLAINT' and send it to Director of Operations and Development, VTS, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 120 Leman Street, London E1 8EU. You may also do this through our website, <https://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/contact-us/formal-complaints/>.

You will receive an acknowledgement within one week. The **Director of Operations and Development** will investigate your complaint and will send a full reply within one month. If for some reason this is not possible, he will let you know of any delay.

### **Stage 2**

If you feel that your complaint has not been properly considered or remedied by the Director of Operations and Development, you may ask the **Chief Executive** to investigate. You should email him at [complaints@vts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@vts.gsi.gov.uk) indicating that you have received a response from the Director of Operations and Development, and give reasons why you remain aggrieved in the handling of your complaint by him. The Chief Executive will investigate any maladministration.

You will receive an acknowledgement within one week. The Chief Executive will investigate how your complaint has been previously dealt with and will send a full reply within one month. If for some reason this is not possible, he will let you know of any delay.

### **What if I am still not satisfied?**

At any time you can ask your Member of Parliament to look into the matter or, having been through our complaints process, you can ask them to refer your complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman for investigation.

## Judicial Complaints

**The VTS's remit covers the administration and has no role in relation to the conduct of the members of the Valuation Tribunal for England (VTE), who hear and decide appeals at hearings arranged by us.** Their personal conduct is initially a matter for the President of the Tribunal and ultimately for the Lord Chancellor.

You cannot use the judicial complaints procedure if your complaint is solely about the decision made by the members or reasoning underlying the decision, as these are judicial matters that may be the subject of an appeal or an application for judicial review. There is limited scope for a review of a decision by the President on prescribed grounds. (Information about this is set out in the VTE Practice Statement <https://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/preparing-for-the-hearing/practice-statements/>).

Where your complaint is in relation to a Tribunal member or members having behaved improperly at a hearing, for example they have been discourteous, used offensive or inappropriate language, or have sat despite having a conflict of interest, you should write to the President of the VTE at the address below who will investigate the complaint and, if it is substantiated, will deal with the matter himself or refer it to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office for consideration by the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice. Matters covered include:

- the members' personal conduct in and outside the hearing room;
- comments made by a member in the course of proceedings which are not directly integral to the judicial decision or underlying reasoning and which might lower public confidence in the judiciary.

President of the Valuation Tribunal for England  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
120 Leaman Street  
London  
E1 8EU

Email: [president@valuationtribunal.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:president@valuationtribunal.gsi.gov.uk)

## Data Protection and Freedom of Information

The VTS is a data controller under the Data Protection Act 2018.

We will hold and use information about you and your appeal to carry out our duties and we will only share it as the law allows or requires us to do. Sometimes we may use your information for the purposes of statistical research, to learn how we might improve our services, but only in a way that will not allow you to be identified. We will not share any information about you or your appeal with any other organisations, unless the law allows us to or we have asked your permission.

We will apply high levels of care and security when using the data you have shared with us. You have rights in relation to the personal data we hold about you, including the right to see what information we hold about you. You can find out more about this from the Privacy Notice on our website, <https://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/privacy/>.

You also have a right under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to make requests for information that does not come within our Publication Scheme. The Scheme can be viewed at <https://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/about-us/publications-policies/>.

If you have a complaint about the way we have used information we hold about you or the way we have dealt with an information request, in the first instance please contact the VTS Data Protection Officer, [dpo@vts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dpo@vts.gsi.gov.uk).

If you remain unhappy with our response, you have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner in writing:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 4AF