

SUMMARY MINUTES of the VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE BOARD

135th Meeting, held on 26 January 2022 at 10:30 am

Present: Harry Rich (Chair); Suzanne McCarthy (Deputy Chair); Neil Buckley (Member); Paul Cammidge (Member); Stephen Chappell (Member); Kevin Everett (Member); Gary Garland (VTE President, *ex-officio* member); Alison Griffiths (Member) and Lola Moses (Member).

In attendance: Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer); Keung Wong (Finance Director) and Nicola Hunt (Board Secretary).

Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest, Confirmation of Minutes

Apologies for absence had been received from Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development) and Peter Bates (ALB Business Partner, DLUHC) as an observer.

There were no new declarations of interest.

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2021 were confirmed as accurate. Actions had been completed as required.

Chief Executive's Report

Tony Masella referred to the salient points in his report.

It was noted the Annual Report & Accounts 2020-21 had been laid before Parliament on 17 January 2022.

Following the recent Government announcement of the lifting of Plan B restrictions and the scrapping of advice to work from home, the VTS will remain cautious in its duty of care. No immediate changes would be implemented before 28 February 2022, when the plan is to return to Lemon Street on an initial two days per week basis, returning to a full working office presence by September.

The Rating (Coronavirus) and Directors Disqualification (Dissolved Companies) Act 2021 received Royal Assent on 15 December 2021. 50k COVID MCC challenge decision notices have been issued by the VOA reflecting this new legislation. These decision notices will trigger the four-month notice period should agents decide to appeal.

Finance

Management Accounts to 31 December 2021. The management accounts had been reviewed in detail by the Finance Committee on 21 January. Keung Wong reported that the position to 31 December was a projected full year spend of £6,265k against a budget of £6,962k, with a forecast underspend of £697k. He explained that £467k was surrendered in the summer supplementary return, which meant the residue is 3.3% of the total resource funding.

Risk Management

Strategic Risk Register. There are currently nine risks on the Strategic Risk Register, categorised as follows: three red, five amber and one green. The Board noted the risks. No further risks were identified.

Assurance Map. The Board noted the Assurance Map.

Draft Business Plan/Corporate (Forward) Plan

The Chief Executive introduced the draft Business Plan/Corporate Plan, setting out the priorities for 2022-23, the direction of travel and the funding in order to achieve this. He explained the document reflects and consolidates the ways of working introduced during COVID and in post COVID working processes.

The Board noted the challenges regarding clerk recruitment and VTE Member engagement. Meeting some of these challenges might require legislative change, but it is important that these matters are included in the Plan as COVID working has stimulated the VTS and VTE to work in ways not envisaged by our governing legislation.

The sponsoring Department will be invited to comment and the Plan will be presented to the Board for approval at the March meeting.

Draft VTS Budget 2022-23

The draft budget had been reviewed in detail during the Finance Committee meeting on 21 January. Keung Wong reported that the overall total resource funding is slightly over £7m.

The Board noted the 2022-23 budget and estimates for 2023-24 and 2024-25 and agreed that in the absence of any further information from the DLUHC it should be submitted in its' current form.

Member Engagement Survey Report

Steve King of Savanta presented the findings of the member engagement survey carried out in December to the Board. He outlined the background and objectives of the survey and advised that 135 members were contacted, 60 participated and 13 refused to take part. The remaining members were uncontactable. There was some distinction between the responses from newer members compared to those who have been members for a longer period of time.

The responses showed that remote hearings provided greater accessibility for all in terms of travel, reduced paperwork waste, more flexibility and increased time to prepare and read paperwork in advance of hearings. Negative comments related to poor internet and technology issues, WIFI, lack of social interaction and evidence bundles are too long.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for arranging the survey and advised he was keen to progress the matter. The Executive was requested to create an action plan of possible ideas to take forward to try and resolve the engagement and recruitment issues.

Council Tax appeals heard on papers

A paper was circulated outlining a proposal for regulatory change to provide the VTE with greater control of when Council Tax cases can be heard on papers. The Chair asked for his thanks to be passed onto Lee Anderson for providing the paper. In Lee's absence Tony Masella explained that this matter would require regulatory change and the paper details the merits, but also outlines the limitations of this change. Further discussion was required between the Executive and the Chair to agree if this should be pursued with the sponsoring Department.

Operations and Programme Update

Performance/KPI data. In Lee Anderson's absence Tony Masella outlined the salient points of the KPI Performance Report. He referred in particular to the CT appeals determined within six months of receipt and CT appeals resolved at the first time of listing. These targets were missed due to the volumes received during lockdown and the suspension of hearings at the beginning of the pandemic

Tony Masella was hopeful the NDR 2017 appeals determined within six months of receipt will improve. This was previously above target and there had been a 2% decrease since last month which may be because of several thousand appeals being stayed due to fit-out costs. There has been an increase in NDR 2017 appeals received and further increases are expected. It is estimated at the end of the financial year the books will close with circa 1,100 appeals outstanding for the year.

Approval of the Standing Financial Instructions

The VTS Standing Financial Instructions had been reviewed by the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) and the Finance Committee. The Board approved the amended SFIs.

Chair's Report

The Chair had nothing further to add to what had already been discussed during the meeting.

VTE President's Report

The President reiterated the ongoing problems experienced with the member recruitment process. The matter had been discussed with JAC and the Commissioners recently.

Committee Updates

ARAC. The draft minutes from the meeting on 20 December 2021 were previously circulated. The Board had no further comments to make.

ARAC Chair Forum – 16 March 2022. Suzanne McCarthy is unable to attend an ARAC Chair Forum on 16 March; she expressed her thanks to Lola Moses for agreeing to attend in her absence.

Finance Committee. The draft minutes from the meeting on 21 January were circulated. The Board had no further comments to make.

Any Other Business

The Board Strategy Day is scheduled for 19 April.

The Board Members were unanimous in preferring face-to-face Board meetings rather than online. The Chair confirmed that where restrictions allow all Board meetings will be held in person but Committee meetings will be up to the discretion of the Chairs.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 30 March at 10:30 am.