

SUMMARY MINUTES of the VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE BOARD

133rd Meeting, held on 24 November 2021 at 11:00 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) and Alison Griffiths (Member).

In attendance: Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer); Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development); Keung Wong (Finance Director); Steve Watts (Head of HR & Training) and Nicola Hunt (Board Secretary).

Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest, Confirmation of Minutes

Apologies for absence had been received from Lola Moses (Member) and Peter Bates (ALB Business Partner, DLUHC) as an observer. There were no new declarations of interest. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 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.

The Government's Business Rates Review had now been published following the Chancellor's recent Budget announcement. Tony Masella highlighted the relevant changes and any impact such changes may have on the VTS/VTE.

- NDR Revaluations will move to a three-yearly cycle from 1 April 2023
- The removal of the Check stage from the current Check, Challenge and Appeal system should potentially quicken the process as a stage is removed from the legislative timescale
- There is a new requirement being introduced in 2026 for information provision, and with this an accompanying penalty regime
- A three-month window will be introduced for making Challenges, which should assist in better forecasting workload and the resources required to clear this. In 2022 and 2023 rates payable on hospitality and leisure properties will be reduced by 50%

COVID working within Leman Street is going well and in view of the Omicron variant there are no current plans to change this arrangement pre 31 March 2022. The VTS will naturally adhere to whatever changes in advice are made regarding this.

Concern continues regarding the level of VTE Member engagement on hearings post COVID as this has resulted in a number of hearing days being cancelled since August. Whilst cancellations had been minimised, this has meant that already scheduled hearings have been impacted by additional cases being added, resulting in longer hearing days for VTE Members and clerks. An independent survey with all VTE Members will be conducted to gain a better understanding engagement issues.

Four clerks were recently recruited and are currently undergoing an intensive training programme. This virtual training programme had been introduced in 2020 when three

clerks were recruited. This new training programme had proved most successful, and this method will be used to train all future clerks. The aim is to have an optimum number of 30 clerks in post.

A recruitment exercise had been launched to recruit two recent vacancies in the Tribunal Support Officer Team.

Finance

Management Accounts to 31 October 2021. The position as at 31 October 2021 was £6.38m spend against a forecast budget of £6.96m, showing an underspend for the year of £597k. The underspend is higher compared to last month because the opportunity had been taken to capture as much savings as possible to include in the summer supplementary return.

Council Tax appeals heard on papers

The potential to progress Council Tax appeals on the papers to improve the turnaround time of cases from receipt to clearance was discussed. The current regulations allow the VTE to hear a case on the papers, but this must have the consent of both the appellant and the respondent, which was rare. At the start of the COVID pandemic staff had attempted to progress suitable cases on the papers whilst restrictions on travel were imposed, but this process was extremely time consuming and produced very limited results. It was agreed further discussion on the matter was required.

Risk Management

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

Operations and Programme Update

Performance/KPI data. The KPI Performance Report was circulated. There had been no significant changes to what was reported during the last meeting. The Exception Report provided narrative against various issues and a comparison between Q1 and Q2 targets.

Chair's Report

Harry Rich advised that he and Tony Masella plan to hold a strategy session in April 2022. A representative from the Department will be invited to attend.

The Chair thanked the Board Members for engaging in the recent evaluation survey, he was pleased to report the results were generally positive.

VTE President's Report

The President had nothing further to add to what had already been discussed.

Committee Updates

ARAC. Suzanne McCarthy advised the Annual Report & Accounts will not be laid before Christmas. The auditors had challenged the actuaries and requested an updated pension valuation report. An updated report had now been received and the expectation was that the Annual Report & Accounts will be laid in January 2022, after review by ARAC in December and subsequent Board approval.

Finance Committee. The draft minutes from the meeting on 19 November were circulated. The Board had no further comments to make.

Finance Committee Terms of Reference (TOR). The TOR are reviewed annually. Only cosmetic changes were required and a change in terminology to 'sponsoring Department' rather than using specific departmental names to ensure governance documents remain correct in the event of future name changes. The Board approved the TOR.

Any Other Business

There was no further business to discuss. The meeting dates for 2022 will be circulated in due course.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 26 January 2022 at 11:00 am.