

## **Summary Minutes of the Valuation Tribunal Service Board 136<sup>th</sup> Meeting held on 30 March 2022 at 10:30 am in Leman Street**

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

**In attendance:** Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer); Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development); Keung Wong (Finance Director) by telephone; Steve Watts (Head of HR & Training) for item 11 only and Nicola Hunt (Board Secretary).

### **Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest, Confirmation of Minutes**

Apologies for absence had been received from Kevin Everett (Member) and Peter Bates (ALB Business Partner, DLUHC) as an observer.

There was one new declaration of interest; Suzanne McCarthy is now a Non-Executive Director of the College of Policing.

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2022 were confirmed as accurate. Actions had been completed as required.

### **Chief Executive's Report**

Tony Masella referred to the salient points in his report. He drew the Board's attention to his recommendation for the appointment of Amy Dusanjh as the Data Protection Officer (DPO) for the VTS with effect from 1 April 2022. The Board endorsed the appointment.

The role of VTS Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO) will be carried out by Lee Anderson from 1 April 2022. The Board noted this appointment.

Tony Masella outlined his plan to formalise the office working pattern from 1 May 2022. This involved increasing office attendance to three days per week and moving to a hybrid working arrangement until 31 March 2023. This way of working will be closely monitored. The Board noted this arrangement.

VTS telephony had now been successfully migrated to MS Teams using broadband technology. All staff are now using this platform to make and receive external telephone calls at no cost.

### **Finance**

**Management Accounts to 28 February 2022.** The Chair advised that the management accounts had been reviewed in detail by the Finance Committee on 18 March 2022. Keung Wong reported that the position to 28 February was a projected full year spend of £6,117k against a full year budget of £6,962k, with a forecast underspend of £854k, including the £467k previously surrendered in the summer supplementary.

**Capital Requirements for 2022-23.** Keung Wong reported that the capital requirements for 2022-23 was £283k, which is slightly less than what was reported and discussed at the January meeting.

## **Risk Management**

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

## **Matters for Approval**

**Budget 2022-23.** The Finance Committee reviewed the final budget for 2022-23 in detail and recommended that the Board approve it for submission to the sponsoring Department. It showed a total resource funding of £7.1m, made up of £3.3m pay; £1.9m non-pay and £283k capital. It is slightly higher than the version discussed during the January meeting due to the AME valuation being increased because of the actuaries estimation of support and funding; it was noted this is purely an accounting adjustment. The main difference compared to the previous version is the pay budget assumptions to reflect a higher cost of living award to address the current economic situation and timing of recruitment. The Board approved the 2022-23 budget.

**Business Plan 2022-23.** Tony Masella advised that the Department had approved the Business Plan as presented. The Board approved the Business Plan for publication.

**Stakeholder Management Policy.** The policy presented identified stakeholders, the levels of engagement with each group and provided a high level benchmark. Lee Anderson explained while these tasks are currently carried out it is not clearly demonstrated, by creating an action plan, monitoring and reporting, stakeholder engagement will be more transparent.

**Board Standing Orders.** The updated Board Standing Orders was circulated for review. Several further amendments were suggested, the Board approved the Standing Orders subject to the agreed amendments.

**Board Ways of Working.** Minor amendments had been made to the document; Tony Masella invited the Board to make any further comments. The Board approved the revised Ways of Working.

**Code of Conduct.** Minor wording and formatting changes had been made to the document. The Board was invited to make further comments; the Board approved the Code of Conduct.

## **Operations and Programme Update**

**Performance/KPI data.** Lee Anderson referred in particular to the RAG Status Report. This showed similar performance to what had been seen quarter by quarter, but it was noted this was not the year end position because some figures will not be finalised until a month after year end once all decisions have been cleared. There are still issues around the timelines for dealing with CT appeals and cases resolved at the first time of listing. The figure for clearances at the first time of listing was still impacted by a significant number of cases postponed due to COVID.

## **Action Plan to Engage Current and Future VTE Members**

Tony Masella recognised the current way of working by VTE Members was not reflected in the current Determination of Allowances Order, but this is outside of the VTS's control. He presented a paper setting out some practical ideas that could be put in place internally to potentially encourage members to engage and requested further thoughts

from the Board to assist him in finalising an action plan. Once finalised Tony will discuss the action plan with the sponsoring Department.

The organisation was presently relying on the goodwill of circa 60 of the 135 VTE Members, and heavily reliant on some to sit two to three times per month. This would not be sustainable in the long run.

### **Member Recruitment Process Review and Proposals**

The Chair thanked Tony Masella for the paper which described the challenges of the current process and set out a potential way for future recruitment, informed by the recent internal audit field work on member recruitment, which received substantial assurance. This report referenced that the current process is not the responsive recruitment vehicle the VTE requires. It was recognised that any departure from the current process would require support for legislative change. The Board was in agreement that the recruitment of the VTE President and Vice-Presidents should remain with the JAC, but the non-paid part of the VTE Membership should be recruited under a non-JAC process.

### **Council Tax Appeals Heard on Papers Update**

CT appeals heard on papers was fully discussed at the last meeting during which the Executive was asked to take the matter forward. The focus is ultimately to provide the VTE with control over determining when appeals can be heard on papers. It was suggested that CT invalid appeals would be the ideal type of case to be heard on papers due to validity being the only issue for consideration.

### **Review of the HR Strategy Action Plan**

Steve Watts was invited to provide an update to the Board regarding the action plan on the HR Strategy published on 1 April 2021. He referred to the salient points and reported on the successes and progress delivering the objectives over the past 12 months and the challenges ahead.

### **Chair's Report**

The Chair informed the Board that Alex Skinner, DLUHC, was moving onto a new role and his replacement will be in post in the near future.

### **VTE President's Report**

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

### **Committee Updates**

**ARAC Draft Minutes.** The draft minutes from the meeting on 28 March 2022 were previously circulated. The Board had no further comments to make.

**ARAC Assurance Report.** The ARAC Assurance Report had been circulated. The Board had no comments to make.

**Finance Committee Draft Minutes.** The draft minutes from the meeting on 18 March 2022 were previously circulated. The Board had no further comments to make.

**Finance Committee Assurance Report.** The Finance Committee Assurance Report had been circulated. The Board had no comments to make.

**Any Other Business**

The VTS had been approached by the Planning Directorate at DLUHC in relation to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) as changes in the system resulted in new appeal requirements. There is a desire to have an independent process in place for the new Infrastructure Levy, initial discussions have taken place to find out if there is any interest in expanding our jurisdiction. The Board confirmed Tony Masella and Lee Anderson should continue discussions on the matter.

The Board Strategy Day is scheduled for Tuesday 19 April 2022.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 25 May 2022 at 11:00 am.