

Summary Minutes of the Valuation Tribunal Service Board 140th Meeting held on 30 November 2022 at 11:00 am in Leman Street

Present: Harry Rich (Chair); Suzanne McCarthy (Deputy Chair); Neil Buckley (Member); Paul Cammidge (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); Tracey Banham (Training Manager – item 9 only) and Nicola Hunt (Board Secretary).

Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest, Confirmation of Minutes

Apologies for absence had been received from Stephen Chappell (Member), Lola Moses (Member) and Peter Bates (ALB Business Partner, DLUHC) as an observer.

There was one new declaration of interest; Suzanne McCarthy had been appointed a member of the Labour Party Independent Complaints Panel. The Board noted this was not a political role.

Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2022 were confirmed as accurate. Actions had been completed as required.

Chief Executive's Report

Tony Masella reported that the VTS was successful in being awarded the IRRV *Excellence in Innovation (Service Delivery)* Award in October and received the highly commended award in *Excellence in Rating and/or Valuation*. Tony recorded his thanks to the Team in achieving this recognition and was pleased the VTS's innovation and forward thinking had been recognised by the rating industry. The Board endorsed these sentiments.

In referring to the salient points of his previously circulated report, Tony Masella informed the Board that the NJC pay award had been agreed for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and that this was being implemented in December. This had resulted in a 4.5% increase in the VTS pay bill.

The two highest risks to the VTS relate to VTE Member engagement and VTE Member recruitment. DLUHC had advised some further work on the initial proposal submitted was required. It was agreed the level of risk in the Strategic Risk Register should be increased, therefore further discussion will take place at the Accounting Officer meeting on 5 December. The Board Chair requested that the VTS Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) review this risk at their next meeting.

The level of VTE Members making themselves available for sittings was adversely impacting on the number of hearings being held, resulting in cancellations. The postponement rate had increased to 33%. Tony Masella had reluctantly come to the conclusion that listing levels will need to be reduced in order to avoid a high level of postponements. Providing data to assess customer satisfaction was also becoming difficult due to the reduced number of respondents eligible to participate in the post-hearing survey. Lee Anderson confirmed that reducing the amount of cases listed will not reduce the clearance rate, but there will be less postponements. However, it meant throughput would slow down and it is likely a backlog will appear.

A trial of half-day hearings is being carried out in the hope inactive members are encouraged to engage. However, feedback so far suggests that this has not stimulated the cohort of inactive members.

Review of Business Plan Achievements on Objectives (to Q2). Two of the outstanding aims relate to VTE Member engagement which had been fully discussed earlier in the meeting. It was noted the objectives categorised as amber are impacted by the level of member engagement. The new format evidence bundles and guidance had been issued; feedback was awaited.

VTS-VTE Protocol

Tony Masella had circulated the VTS-VTE Protocol for information. This had been agreed between the VTE President and himself and will form part of the governance between the two organisations. The Board noted the Protocol.

Finance

Management Accounts to 31 October 2022. The management accounts to 31 October 2022 had been reviewed in detail by the Finance Committee on 25 November. This reflected a total resource funding forecast of £6,847k against a full year budget of £7,174k, indicating a forecast underspend of £327k (which included £360k of surrendered savings). The surrendered savings were made up of £310k from the pay budget and £50k from non-pay, leaving a working budget of £6,814k.

Update on the Annual Report & Accounts 2021-22. Keung Wong confirmed the second draft of the Annual Report & Accounts 2021-22 had been circulated to ARAC for feedback following comments from NAO. Work had begun on the third draft with the aim of producing the final draft to ARAC for approval at the meeting on 19 December, and then submission to the Board at an additional meeting during the first week in January. It was planned to lay the accounts on 12 January 2023.

Risk Management

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

Operations and Programme Update

Performance/KPI data and revision of KPIs update. Lee Anderson referred to the KPI Performance Report which had been previously circulated. While the turnaround of appeals remained a concern, it is hoped the planned changes in reporting periods will present a wider, more contextual view of the position.

Update on Stakeholder Engagement

Lee Anderson provided an update on stakeholder engagement and referred to the action plan report. The VTS had a stand at the IRRV Conference which provided the opportunity to engage with stakeholders. VTS staff have also been speaking at a number of forums across the country. Regular meetings continue to be held with the rating agents, VOA and DLUHC.

Update on VTS Training Objectives for 2022-23

Tracey Banham presented a progress update on the Training Objectives for 2022-23; it was noted the green objectives had been achieved and narrative provided. She was

hopeful the staff training KPI would be achieved by the end of the year. Eight applications had been received for CMI Level 5 sponsorship. Presentations will take place in December and it was hoped to find two suitable individuals to work towards the qualification. It is important to keep the momentum going providing development of talent in order to have staff in place to ensure business continuity in future.

A partnership had been set up with IRRV to provide a professional accreditation to staff. It is a robust process where clerks have to study and submit a paper which is then marked by an independent body, if successful they are awarded IRRV accreditation. The process has been a huge success thus far.

Thought needs to focus on the member training programme as it is not reaching all members. Member engagement at events is particularly low at circa 20% to 25%. Virtual sessions seem to work better for many people. Contact events have been difficult to plan and obtain the required level of attendance.

Chair's Report

The Chair advised that an internal evaluation of effectiveness will be carried out this year and an external evaluation will be considered next year.

VTE President's Report

VTE Member engagement had been fully discussed earlier in the meeting. The President was pleased to report the number of substantive complaints received had reduced dramatically since online hearings had been introduced. People seem more comfortable attending hearings from their own environment without having to travel. The process is working well but kept under constant review in order that improvements can be made where necessary.

Committee Updates

Finance Committee draft minutes. The draft minutes from the meeting on 25 November were previously circulated. The pension fund and valuation was discussed at length as it had been suggested that contributions should be reduced to 5.4%. The Finance Committee expressed concern about the calculations and recommended the level of contributions should be maintained around 15%-16%.

The Board agreed that the current level of contributions should be maintained.

Any Other Business

The Chair expressed his thanks and appreciation on behalf of the Board to Paul Cammidge as this was his last meeting. Paul responded by paying tribute to the staff and members and wished them well for the challenges in future.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 25 January 2023 at 11:00 am.