

Summary Minutes of the 156th Valuation Tribunal Service Board Meeting held on Wednesday 26 March 2025 at 10:30 am in Leman Street

Present: Kevin Everett (Member – Acting Chair); Stephen Chappell (Member); Gary Garland (VTE President, *ex-officio* Member); Alison Griffiths (Member); Sarah Guerra (Member); Joanne Hadley (Member); Chiew Yin Jones (Member); Clive Quantrill (Member – via MS Teams) and Kevin Sadler (Member).

In attendance: Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer); Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development – via MS Teams); Keung Wong (Finance Director); Nick Pellegrini (ALB Business Partner, MHCLG as an observer) and Nicola Hunt (Board Secretary).

Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest, Confirmation of Minutes
Apologies for absence had been received from Suzanne McCarthy (Board Chair).

There were no new declarations of interest.

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2025 were confirmed as a true record.

Actions had been completed as required.

Chief Executive's Report

In referring to his previously circulated report, Tony Masella advised that the funding allocation for 2025-26 had now been confirmed and he was pleased to report an extra £492k had been secured following further representations. This additional funding would provide the opportunity to focus on recruitment of front-facing staff and the efficiency and performance regarding the challenges ahead. This revised budget would now set the tone for the next three years and it was important that this allocation was monitored very closely.

VTE Member engagement continued to fluctuate. There had been some improvement, but there remained challenges in reaching the required 12-15 sittings per year with many members preferring between 6-8 days per annum. Over 30 members were not sitting at all, some of which had been granted a formal leave of absence.

The VTE President stressed the importance of members sitting regularly in this jurisdiction to maintain their knowledge. It was noted that a few members do sit considerably more than others, with some sitting in excess of 15 days.

Following its development, the VTE Members' Engagement digital portal will be released in April which would allow members to self-manage their sittings, bookings and cancellations. It was envisaged that the rolling 12-month programme would make it easier for them to self-manage their own allocations and focus on meeting the obligation to their Terms & Conditions of appointment.

The Secretary of State had issued a revised Determination Order for VTE Member Allowances which will be effective from 1 April. This reflected an increase in the financial loss claim amount from the previous 2010 version.

The current model of JAC recruitment for VTE Members was not a good fit for non-paid volunteers and the length of this recruitment process remained a concern. The outcome of the 2024 recruitment exercise remained outstanding. A further recruitment exercise for 2025-26 had been secured.

The three-month consultation process prior to the move to 2 Marsham Street will commence on 1 April. Staff visits were planned to provide a tour of the office environment.

Draft Business Plan 2025-26

Tony Masella referred to version 7 of the draft Business Plan. This version reflected the revised funding allocation confirmed by MHCLG on 17 March. The plan highlighted the direction of travel and included the priorities and aims which were agreed at the previous Board meeting and would be circulated accordingly for the named managers to take forward this year. It also included a timeline of the progress of the strategic objectives and the measure of success. The main focus of the plan was on performance and efficiency. It was noted the membership figures would be updated post 31 March.

The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) section remained a placeholder while discussions continued with MHCLG, until the final KPIs were agreed by the Minister. The rationale in differentiating between KPIs for Council Tax (CT) and Non-Domestic Rating (NDR) appeals had been presented to MHCLG. Tony Masella opined that focus should remain on clearing CT appeals as soon as possible. Because of the nature of NDR appeals, there was little merit in listing them quickly. He advised that the current KPIs were set before the CCA regime was introduced and that the appeal landscape had changed since. A decision was now awaited from the Minister.

Progress on Public Body Review Discussions

Nick Pellegrini gave an update regarding the progress made on the public bodies review of the VTS and VTE. Discussions had progressed to stage 2 and the review will address key matters such as the JAC appointment process and the CCA framework.

Finance

Management Accounts to 28 February 2025. The management accounts to 28 February 2025 reflected a total resource funding forecast year to date of £6,112k, against a supplementary estimates budget of £6,118k, and an underspend of £5k. It was noted:

- Total resource funding was 99% vs the supplementary budget
- February cashflow remained within the £225k mark
- Total CCA fees of £2,148,750 had been received as of 28 February 2025
- 7,586 Appeals had been received to date
- Bank transactional costs for appeal refunds totalled £40,936 to date

Finance Risk Register. Keung Wong presented the risk register which reflected two live risks, categorised as yellow.

Draft VTS Budget 2025-26 and Capital Requirements. MHCLG had confirmed a total resource funding budget of £6,368k. This was broken down into £3,967k pay, £1,705k non-pay and £220k capital. This revised funding had been reviewed by the

Finance Committee at the meeting on 21 March, and it was agreed the draft budget should be submitted to the Board for approval as it formed a good basis for the next three years funding and provided some certainty.

The Board formally approved the budget reflecting £6,368k for 2025-26 following recommendation by the Finance Committee.

Operations and Programme Update

Appeal Workload Analysis. Lee Anderson presented the report for the period 1 April 2024 to 1 March 2025. The Board noted the following:

- 4,853 Appeals brought forward at 1 April 2024
- 7,680 Appeals received
- 7,731 Appeals cleared
- 4,802 Appeals carried forward at 1 March 2025
- 7,680 Total appeals received

Lee Anderson reported that the current position looked static unless NDR and CT appeals were separated. The outstanding workload for CT had reduced by 45%, whereas NDR volumes were building. There was circa 1,600 NDR cases which, due to higher litigation or national negotiations, could not be progressed. The newly formed Performance Committee will look at further analysis of CT and NDR appeals.

KPIs for Q3. The major contentious point remained the turnaround time for appeals, although there were incremental improvements in appeals determined within six months of receipt for both NDR (75%) and CT (65%) in Q3. Looking beyond that to appeals determined within 12 months, it improved further, 91% for NDR and 98% for CT.

Matters for Approval

Board Standing Orders (annual review). The document had undergone its annual review and no substantial changes were required. Minor amendments had been made to reflect the change from DLUHC to MHCLG, and the addition of the new Performance Committee. The Board approved the Standing Orders.

Board Ways of Working (annual review). This document set out how the Board functions and included a Workplan which was a live document showing what items were to be discussed at each meeting. The Board approved the updated document.

Code of Conduct (annual review). The Code of Conduct formed part of the Corporate documents. It had been reviewed and the Board agreed no amendments were required.

Finance Committee Terms of Reference (TOR). The revised TOR had been discussed during the Finance Committee meeting on 21 March and were now recommended for formal approval by the Board. The Board approved the revised TOR.

Performance Committee Terms of Reference (TOR). Following previous Board agreement and the establishment of a new Performance Committee, it was reported that Kevin Sadler had been invited to Chair this committee, with Chiew Yin Jones and Sarah Guerra becoming members. In developing TOR for this committee, it had been

agreed that two meetings per year would take place, one at the beginning of the year and one mid-year.

Risk Management

Strategic Risk Register. The register was presented by Tony Masella who referred the Board to the eight live risks categorised as four amber and four yellow. The register had been reviewed recently by EMT on 14 March. The Board noted the register.

VTE President's Report

The President had nothing further to report in addition to what had been discussed earlier.

Chair's Report

The Acting Chair had nothing further to add to what had already been discussed.

Committee Memberships

Finance Committee Draft Minutes (21 March 2025). The draft minutes of the Committee's meeting on 21 March had not yet been approved by the Committee but were circulated to the Board for information.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 28 May 2025.