

**Summary Minutes of the 159th Valuation Tribunal Service Board Meeting
held on Wednesday 24 September 2025 at 10:30 am
at the Tower Hotel, St Katherine's Way, London**

Present: Suzanne McCarthy (Board Chair); Stephen Chappell (Member); Gary Garland (VTE President, *ex-officio* Member); Alison Griffiths (Member); Sarah Guerra (Member); Chiew Yin Jones (Member); Clive Quantrill (Member) and Kevin Sadler (Member).

In attendance: Tony Masella (Chief Executive & Chief Operating Officer); Lee Anderson (Director of Operations & Development); Keung Wong (Finance Director); Felipe Espinosa-Camacho via MS Teams (Head of VTS/VTE Review, MHCLG as an observer for item 5 only) and Nicola Hunt (Board Secretary).

Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest, Confirmation of Minutes
Apologies for absence had been received from Joanne Hadley (Member) and Nick Pellegrini (MHCLG sponsoring Team as an observer).

Suzanne McCarthy reported that she had been appointed Chair Designate of the Regulations Board, ACCA, and Standards Investigation Panellist, IPSO.

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2025 were confirmed as a true record.

Actions had been completed as required.

Chief Executive's Report

Tony Masella advised that the migration to 2MS had gone to plan, and staff were adjusting to the new working environment of being in a high security building. He pointed out that given the smaller space occupied compared to the premises at Leman Street, accommodation costs had significantly reduced.

Tony Masella was pleased to report that four Clerks and five Trainee Clerks would be joining the VTS in October/November, and that an induction and training programme was in place.

VTE Member engagement had improved. The Volunteer Management System (VMS) had changed the landscape and VTE Members were being more proactive in booking themselves onto hearings and self-managing their diaries. In August only three hearings had been cancelled because of no available members, and four due to the lack of Clerk resources which reflected recent resignations and retirements. This gap in Clerk resources had necessitated a reduction to 60 hearings per month, but it was expected that number would increase once the new starters were ready to act at hearings. Stephen Chappell felt it was disappointing it had been necessary to cancel hearings in August following the changes to the Consolidated Practice Statement to address late cancellations. Tony Masella explained that those changes were effective from August, so it was too early to see their impact. Lee Anderson added that when cancellations occurred, work across all outstanding tribunals on the day was reviewed and appeals or members moved to maximise efficiency. Although this appeared as a negative statistic, in reality it was not. It was hoped that once the

new staff were onboarded it may be possible to increase the number of hearings towards the end of the year.

Business Plan Achievements in Q1

Tony Masella referred to the 11 priorities in the Business Plan 2025-26, of which four were due in Q1. He advised that two had been completed and two were still ongoing.

Progress on VTS/VTE Review

Felipe Espinosa-Camacho attended the meeting for this item only, via MS Teams. He advised that this internal review would conclude at the end of October, but it was not clear how long the Ministerial involvement would take.

Finance

Management Accounts to 31 August 2025. The management accounts to 31 August 2025 reflected a current total resource funding forecast year to date of £6,331k, against a budget of £6,612k, and a forecast underspend of £281k. It was noted:

- Total resource funding was 96% vs the budget
- August cashflow remained within the £200k mark
- Total CCA fees of £2,437,200 had been received as at 31 August 2025
- 8,578 Appeals had been received to date
- Bank transactional costs for appeal refunds totalled £46,429 to date

Finance Risk Register. Keung Wong presented the Finance Risk Register which reflected three live risks, categorised as two yellow and one amber.

Commission on 10% Budget Reduction in 2028-29. The sponsoring Department had requested the exploration of a further 10% reduction in the budget over the next three years. The Executive were meeting on 30 September to review if the organisational structure remained the appropriate operating model and where any savings could be identified.

Operations and Programme Update

Appeal Workload Analysis v Expectations. Lee Anderson was pleased to report a better position indicating that the VTS would deliver against the target of 800 hearings set out in the Business Plan. Compared to previous financial years, the VTS was doing more with less following the reduction in Clerks.

KPI Report (Q1). The position for Q1 looked positive. A couple of targets were amber, but there was no reason for concern. The measure for decisions issued within one month was amber, reflecting the current pressure on clerking resources. It was likely that this would flow into Q2, although the position was expected to improve as the new clerking cohort started to impact. The NDR six-month measure was not currently being met, although it was being achieved by month 9 which reflected the reality of the CCA regulatory framework. The position with Council Tax was positive.

The target for processing undisputed invoices within five days was not met in Q1. This was not uncommon due to year end processes and it was expected that this would improve going forward. The target for staff training was currently amber, but it expected to improve during the year.

Lee Anderson reminded the Board that whilst very few Council Tax appeals were stayed (i.e. unable to proceed due to external control), there were a number of NDR appeals where listing was not possible due to superior court litigation, or parties were not ready to proceed. He referred to a table showing NDR determination timelines which illustrated a comparison between the turnaround times including and excluding 'stayed' appeals. This highlighted a significant difference between appeals determined within six months when 'stayed' appeals were excluded – 36% (including 'stayed' appeals) to 74% (excluding 'stayed' appeals). Lee reflected that whilst prima facie, KPIs on NDR turnarounds may look poor, but the reason behind them being so was sound.

Strategic Risk Register

Tony Masella presented the risk register and highlighted the eight live risks, categorised as two green, two amber and four yellow.

Feedback from Board Effectiveness Survey

The Chair was pleased to report that feedback from the recent survey confirmed Board Members felt able to confidently engage with the Executive. It was recognised that this was a new Board and feedback had been positive in respect of the induction training received. There was a general consensus that Board Members were content with working practices and governance issues, and meeting papers were received in a timely manner.

In addressing the composition of the Board, the Chair explained that this was dictated by statute in requiring no less than six but no more than 10 Board Members, with the majority being VTE Senior Members (Chairs). The Board were generally content with the number of meetings, and where necessary exceptional Board meetings could be arranged. While the diversity of the Board was generally thought to be good, the Chair explained that this was dependent on who applied for vacancies and was outside of the direct control of the Board.

Tony Masella thanked the Board for the feedback regarding the Executive. He confirmed that the Executive were there to support Board Members and to keep them informed and updated and were always happy to assist.

Chair's Report

The Chair was pleased to report that she had attended an extremely useful meeting with Baroness Taylor on 15 September, and the Baroness had invited her to another meeting at the end of October. The Chair would also be meeting with Michelle Warbis (MHCLG) on Friday. She was pleased to have received the timetable for the appointment process of new VTE Board Members.

The Chair informed the Board in the Ministerial reshuffle Steve Reed had been appointed Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Alison McGovern was the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness.

VTE President's Report

The President informed the Board that an onboarding session took place last week for the first tranche of VTE Members, and another was planned for October. He hoped the majority would be ready to sit by the end of January. He had advised them of the importance of actively engaging and the consequences of not doing so (i.e.

referral to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office), and that if they were removed from the VTE it could affect other judicial roles held.

The President confirmed he would be retiring on 28 February 2026, so the January Board meeting would be his last.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 26 November 2025.