

VALUATION TRIBUNAL FOR WALES

FORWARD PLAN 2011/14

INCORPORATING 2011/12 OPERATIONAL PLAN

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Introduction by the Chief Executive

Welcome to the Valuation Tribunal for Wales' (VTW's) Forward Plan which brings together the Operational Plan for 2011-2012 and our Corporate Plan for 2012-2014. These plans set out the VTW's drive towards effective management of resources and efficiency improvements.

Recent years have seen significant changes to the organisation of valuation tribunals in Wales. The Valuation Tribunal Service for Wales (VTSW) was established by the Valuation Tribunals Wales Regulations 2005. From January 2006, it effectively operated as the umbrella management forum, under the direction of its Governing Council, and was tasked with developing and leading a comprehensive unified and customer focused Valuation Tribunal Service in Wales under which the long established four component Tribunals could function with judicial independence.

Following a consultation exercise that took place in 2008, the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government, decided to adopt one of the substantive recommendations within the internal Rolph Report (published in 2007); that being to introduce a single Valuation Tribunal for Wales (VTW). The Valuation Tribunal for Wales Regulations 2010 partly came into effect on 1 April 2010, enabling the election of the Governing Council, and became fully operational on 1 July 2010.

Under the regulations, the functions of the VTW are performed on its behalf by its Governing Council. The Valuation Tribunal for Wales' Governing Council and its Chief Executive have a duty to strategically manage the administration by providing leadership and direction, and in doing so further develop a unified administration for the VTW and thus enable the delivery of an efficient and effective service. The President and Chief Executive have dual roles: the former being the statutory judicial head and also one of the Chairs of the VTW and the latter being the administrative head and also holding the position of statutory Clerk to the Tribunal.

The work streams of the VTW mirror those of its predecessor Tribunals and primarily cover the hearing of Council Tax and Business Rate appeals. The VTW strives to continue to provide an effective, customer-focussed independent service to citizens, which results in the timely resolution of appeals and commands public confidence.

Preparation for the successful introduction of the single Tribunal formed a very significant element of last year's plans. Now that the new structure is in place, the VTW is keen to continue to pursue further improvements in its service to users in ways which reinforce and emphasise its independence. The development of policies and internal guidance to promote consistency across Wales will form a large part of its future plans.

The VTW will continue to develop its members, staff, processes and technology to support its modernisation aims. These aims must also take full account of the developments across the world of tribunals generally. The importance of maintaining effective communication with its voluntary membership, so that members are kept up to date with the impact of the various changes and how they may be affected, must not be forgotten by the VTW. Understanding members' needs and their motivation will be an important element of maintaining their interest and commitment over the forthcoming years.

1. The VTW's Main Functions

1.1 The VTW's administrative functions revolve around basic statutory requirements set out in 'the regulations' and its functions include:

- the provision of accommodation;
- the appointment of staff including the Chief Executive/Clerk of the Tribunal;
- the provision of information technology;
- the provision of equipment;
- the provision of training for members and staff;
- the co-ordination of the provision of general advice on procedure relating to VT proceedings; and
- the active management of issues of compliance.

1.2 The VTW is administered from three regional offices situated on the M4 and A55 corridors. Offices are currently located at Carmarthen, Newport and Llandudno Junction. The latter office re-located from Colwyn Bay in late 2010.

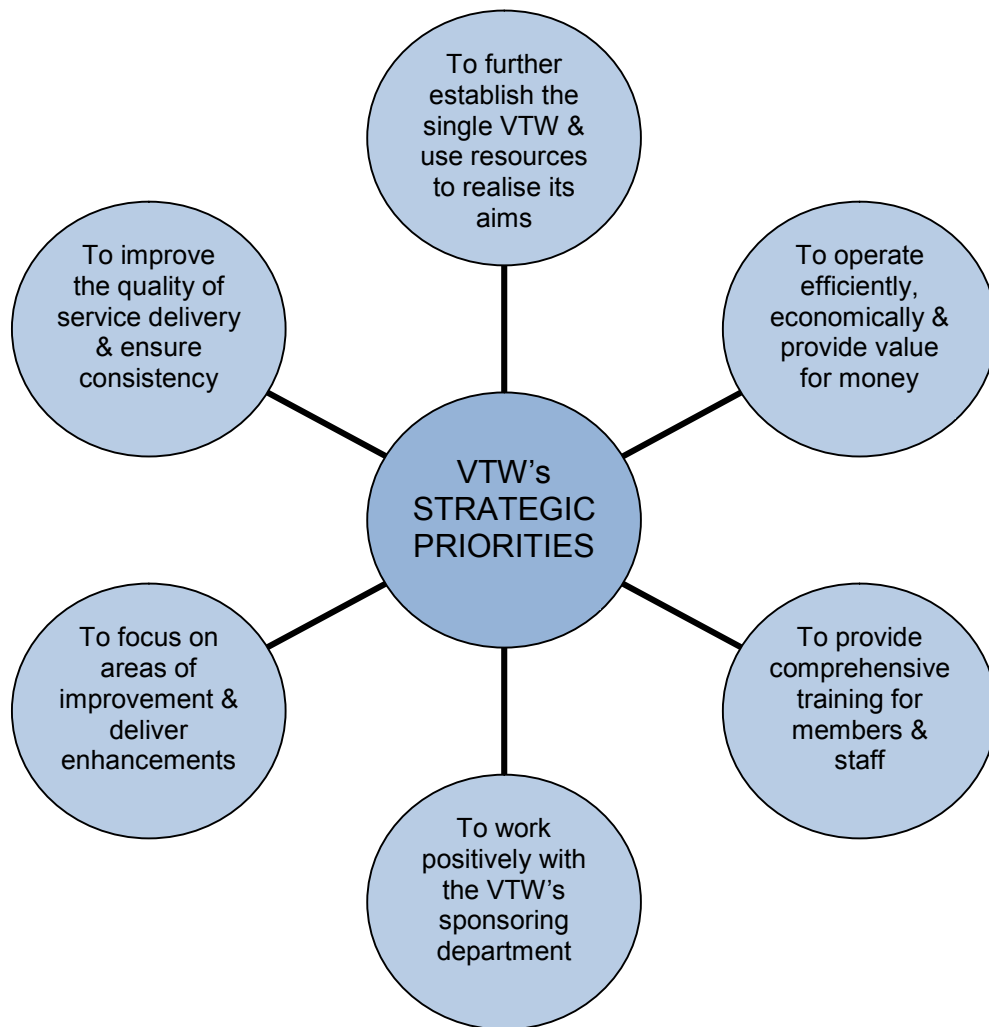
1.3 The VTW has a statutory function to hear and determine appeals against valuation for Non-Domestic (Business) Rates, Council Tax and Drainage Rates. Other types of appeals within the Valuation Tribunal's jurisdiction are those lodged against Council Tax liability, Completion Notices and certain types of penalties imposed by billing authorities (Councils) or the Valuation Office Agency.

1.4 The Valuation Tribunal is entirely independent of the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) which sets the rateable values on non-domestic properties and council tax bands for homes and the Councils that send out the rates and council tax demands.

2. The VTW's Strategic Objectives

2.1 The VTW's strategic objectives for the year ahead are:

- to further establish the single VT and to utilise resources to realise its aims;
- to improve the way in which the VTW works to ensure consistency and achieve the provision of a higher quality service to our customers;
- to operate in ways which are efficient, economic and provide value for money;
- to continue to provide a comprehensive programme for member training and staff development;
- to recognise areas of focus for improvement and develop programmes to deliver these enhancements; and
- to work positively with our sponsor department to ensure that legislation and the VTW's internal procedures are 'fit for purpose'.



3. The VTW's Management Framework

3.1 The Management Statement and Financial Memorandum, which were finalised last year, set out the relationship between the VTW and WAG and define the terms and conditions under which Welsh Ministers provide funding to the Tribunal. They specify the limits of delegation and other rules, regulations and guidelines relevant to the exercise of the VTW's functions and detail how the VTW will be held to account for these. Payment of funds to the VTW will be conditional upon the satisfactory performance of its obligations, as set out in the above documents and such other conditions and requirements as the Welsh Ministers may from time to time impose.

3.2 The Governing Council will need to continue to promote enhancement of management disciplines adopted by the VTW leading to a strong corporate governance culture, which will ensure that:

- proper process, propriety, scrutiny and accountability are demonstrated;
- policy and planning frameworks are established;
- comprehensive and robust accounting procedures are in place;

- clear guidance on effectiveness and efficiency are in place; and
- clearly supported compliance policies continue to be established.

3.3 In addition to the detailed statements regarding functions, compliance, responsibilities, policy framework, staffing and personnel management and periodic reviews of the service, the VTW considers that the aforementioned documents expect it to achieve the following key objectives:

- to establish a cohesive service within which policies on training, information technology, accommodation and staff terms and conditions are uniformly applied;
- to strive to improve customer understanding and satisfaction with the work of the Valuation Tribunal;
- to foster enhancement of the work of the VTW and its stakeholders to improve the appeals process;
- to seek to improve efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of service provided by the Valuation Tribunal; and
- to ensure that the Tribunal functions with absolute judicial independence, and is perceived as such by its 'customers,' so as to enhance public confidence.

3.4 The Governing Council and senior staff do not hesitate in accepting that progress in meeting its modernisation objectives over recent years has been slower than anticipated. This was primarily due to the organisational changes, required as a consequence of the 2005 regulations, arising at a time when Tribunals were dealing with the peak workload that emanated from the dual (Council Tax and Non Domestic Rating) 2005 revaluations. Progress has also been hampered by the consultation exercise leading to 'the new 2010 regulations', which impacted on limited staff resources and created a further period of uncertainty following previous short-lived organisational changes. Additionally, exceptional human resource matters have impinged on senior officers' time in recent years.

3.5 The administrative functions that are required to be performed by the VTW to provide support for its judicial functions are similar to those performed by the English Valuation Tribunal Service (VTS), which provides administrative support to the Valuation Tribunal for England (VTE). The availability of greater resources has enabled the English VTS to establish comprehensive administrative support, primarily out of its London head office. Its head office employs around 16 staff, many of whom have expertise in specific fields such as IT, HR, training, finance and compliance. The current VTW management structure is primarily dependent on its Chief Executive and Regional Clerks to perform senior administrative tasks that fall within the above fields. These personnel have dual roles and are actively involved in the day to day core business of processing appeals, whether as Clerk or overseeing Professional Tribunal Officers, in addition to their senior administrative duties. Such arrangements hamper the VTW's ability to make progress at the same rate as its English counterpart.

4. The VTW's Staff Structure

4.1 As stated earlier, the VTW carries out its administrative functions from offices operating out of four regions (North, South, East and West Wales). Each region has

a 'Regional Clerk' who provides local leadership and managerial direction. They also assist the President in his statutory duty to secure arrangements for the determination of appeals.

4.2 Currently, 19 people are employed by the VTW, although the established complement is 20 (full time equivalent) members of staff. The average age of members of staff stands at 46 years, 58% of the workforce is female and the average length in service of 15 years and 8 months.

4.3 Following the advent of the VTW, all members of staff were informed of their transfer of employment, from the Valuation Tribunal Service for Wales (VTSW), under the same terms and conditions. New staff contracts will soon be issued, together with updated job descriptions.

4.4 Employees belong to four different pension funds within the Local Government Pension Scheme (according to location) and 100% of the workforce is included in the pension schemes.

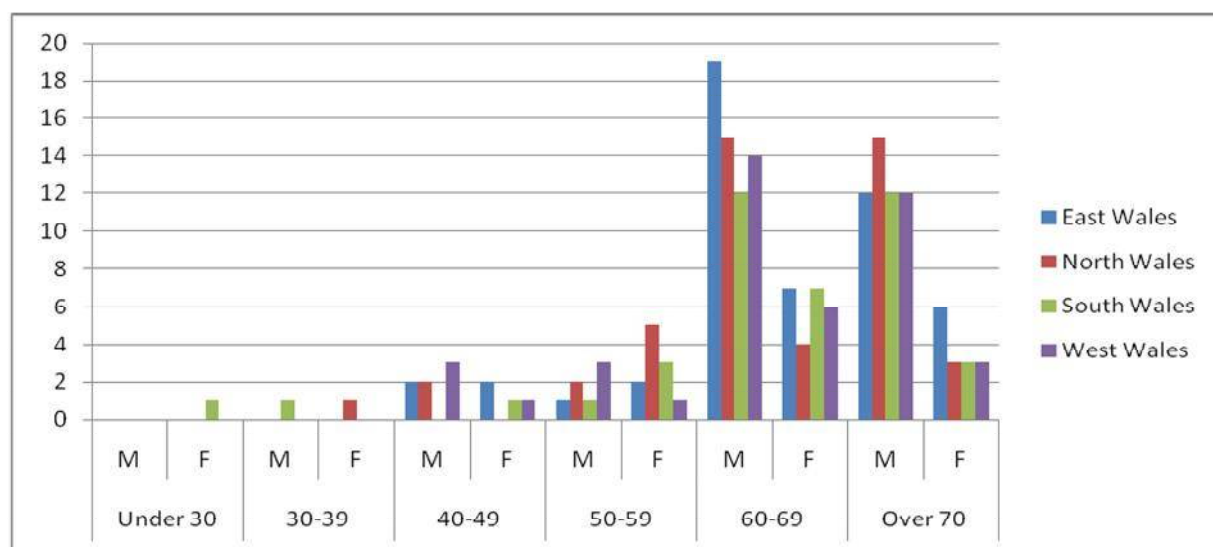
5. Membership of the VTW

5.1 Up to 31 March 2010, the maximum complement for the VTs in Wales was 238 lay members, which included a single WAG appointment to each tribunal. The membership will need to be reduced to comply with the revised VTW complements specified in 'the new regulations'. Transitional arrangements permit existing members to continue their terms of appointment but any new appointments to the VTW will need to reflect the new regional complements, which cannot be exceeded.

5.2 The Regional Complements from 1 April 2010 are:

East Wales	48	South Wales	48
North Wales	46	West Wales	44

5.3 The table below provides an analysis of the membership by age and gender as it stood at 31 March 2010.



5.4 The age profile, as has been the case for many years, shows members predominantly in the 60 years+ age bracket and the diversity of members in other respects, such as ethnicity and disability, is below 5%. Attempts have been made to address this disparity in membership, so as to reflect the diversity of populations within the respective regions, at times of recruitment. However, the voluntary nature of membership results in interest frequently emanating from the retired or semi-retired sectors of society. This is an area which needs to be addressed by the VTW and ways of encouraging applications for membership from under-represented groups will continue to be investigated.

6. The VTW's Organisational Structure

6.1 From 1 July 2010, the Governing Council comprises six non paid lay members and it is supported by VTW officers, being the Chief Executive/Statutory Clerk and the Regional Clerks who form the Management Team. The Clerks had hitherto managed their individual Tribunals and contributed to the former Council in its endeavours to strive for uniformity of administrative operations and joint training initiatives, which in turn contributed to consistency in practice across Wales.

6.2 The new Governing Council comprises the President, elected by the entire membership of the Tribunal, and Regional Representatives who were be elected by those members from within the East, North, South and West Wales Regions respectively. Welsh Ministers also make a single appointment to the Governing Council.

7. Workload

7.1 The Valuation Tribunal continues to actively process appeals brought about by the 2005 Revaluations in Wales for both Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates (NDR). Outstanding numbers of appeals initially fell during the first three quarters of 2009/10 but, as anticipated, several thousand NDR proposals were submitted in the final months of the life of the 2005 Rating List. The VTW did not receive these appeals until the first quarter of 2010/2011.

7.2 The 2005 Council Tax 'Banding' Revaluation continues to provide the VTW with a steady flow of appeals. Although the deadline for the submission of general appeals expired in September 2006, appeals may still be submitted on limited grounds.

7.3 In addition to the late influx of 2005 Rating List appeals, the VTW has received significant numbers of NDR appeals against the 'new' 2010 Rating List. This year, the VTW will begin to concentrate its efforts on the clearance of appeals lodged against the current Rating List.

7.4 The programming of appeals (non statutory) introduced for the Non Domestic Rating List that came into force in 2000 was to some extent useful in the early years of that List but with the 2005 Regulations allowing appeals to be lodged at anytime during the life of a Rating List, the weaknesses of the programming initiative were amplified and many aspects of it are no longer considered to be fit for purpose.

7.5 The VTW will closely monitor and consider whether any of the practices recently adopted by the Valuation Tribunal in England (VTE) can be introduced in Wales to improve the handling of appeals. However, differences in legislation in England will prevent the operation of identical procedures by the VTW.

8. The VTW's Estate

8.1 The administrative offices of the four regions of the VTW will, for the time being, continue to be situated at three strategic locations in Wales. Offices at two of these locations were subject to a WAG initiated Strategic Estate Review in late 2008.

The East and South Wales Administrative Offices are both located in a recently refurbished building situated at 22 Gold Tops, Newport. This building is leased until 2014 and is largely fit for purpose.

The West Wales Administrative Office is situated in a town centre 1st/2nd floor office building at 14 King Street, Carmarthen (the Court Service currently occupies the ground floor and will continue to do so until March 2012). The building is owned by Welsh Assembly Government. However, in the absence of a lift, this accommodation falls short of Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance.

The North Wales Administrative Office recently moved from a spur in the Government Building complex at Dinerth Road, Rhos-on-Sea, Colwyn Bay to the new Welsh Assembly Government Building in Llandudno Junction. The decision to re-locate was essentially based on the availability of space at the WAG building which entailed no additional cost to the exchequer.

8.2 The value for money aspect of engaging national companies for planned maintenance and minor works is a matter the management team feels should be robustly reviewed. At the time of writing, this issue was actively being pursued by the VTW in liaison with WAG. A solution, tailored to the needs of the VTW, is expected before the end of the financial year.

8.3 The VTW periodically hires premises as venues to conduct its judicial functions. Hearings need to be held at convenient locations and in suitable premises. The key elements that are required to be considered when sourcing suitable accommodation for hearing rooms are:

- ease of accessibility including the availability of car parking facilities;
- demonstration of appropriate independence from the bodies whose decision is being appealed;
- compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and Health and Safety (H&S) provisions;
- the meeting of user expectations; and
- the provision of value for money.

8.4 It is appreciated that it is quite a balancing act to meet all these requirements, particularly mindful of costs and the part-time use of hearing rooms; for example,

modern local authority facilities tick most boxes except there are reservations that they infringe upon the perception of the Tribunal's independence.

8.5 Each Tribunal and subsequently, each Region of the new VTW will continue to update its venue register incorporating reviews to ensure H&S/DDA compliance.

9. Information Technology

9.1 Each office has a number of personal computers (PCs) that provide access to a centralised database. These PCs run Windows XP software along with Office 2007 applications, including Outlook (e-mail facilities). The VTW, along with the VTS in England, recently achieved Government Secure Intranet (GSI) accreditation for its IT network.

9.2 Each office had access to multi-function printers that allow document scanning, fax, photocopying and e-mail facilities directly from the printer. The technological refresh of desktops, printers and servers has enabled the Welsh Service (in conjunction with the English VTS) to continue to enjoy unqualified support and maintenance for all its IT services. The refresh will enable the VTW to fulfil its ongoing business needs and introduce more powerful and valuable technological solutions.

9.3 The centralised database links all of the Welsh offices using a Wide Area Network (WAN). Network connections to all offices were upgraded during 2009, which has enabled staff to enjoy greater bandwidths and has also assisted in the GSI accreditation process, requiring greater levels of data security to be demonstrated. The move to a GSI accredited network will also result in the future possibility of remote access to the WAN and central database and should enable more flexible working practices to be adopted by staff.

9.4 The VTW (as part of a larger English VTS contract) sub-contracts support and development services in respect of the Central Database from Capgemini via the VOA, who in turn sub-contract Capgemini services as part of the much larger overarching contract with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

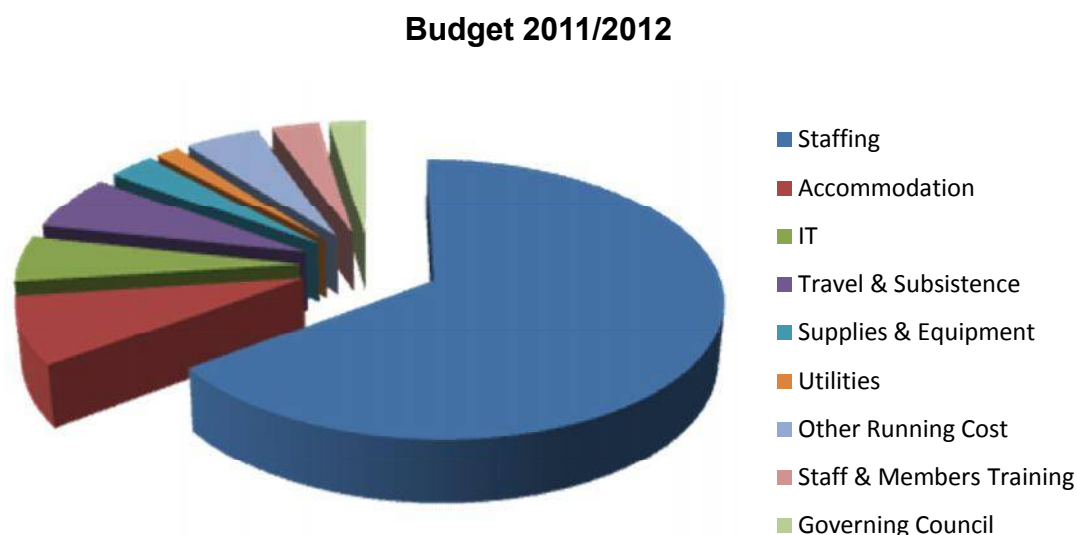
9.5 The VTW's website www.valuation-tribunals-wales.gov.uk was re-branded and re-launched in late summer 2007. The website is fully bilingual, more customer focused and adheres to current accessibility guidelines. It now features all VTW literature in PDF format, together with contact details for all the Regional VTW offices and the Chief Executive. The site is used to promote the VTW, including the recruitment of potential new members, and to publicise new initiatives as and when appropriate.

9.6 Future planned developments include the provision of dedicated members' pages, which will be used to inform members of new developments e.g. higher court decisions, changes to legislation, future events etc.

10. The VTW's Resources

10.1 The overall costs of running the VTW, averaging around £1.1M per annum in recent years, is funded by WAG. The expenditure heads vary little from year to year. The VTW is treated as an Assembly Government Sponsored Body (AGSB).

10.2 The current year's budget allocation is £1.122m. The predominant headers, being relatively fixed, are staffing costs, IT and accommodation which represent circa 80% of expenditure.



10.3 The Chief Executive on behalf of the Governing Council is the designated officer for safeguarding the VTW's public funds and has responsibility for ensuring the propriety and regularity for use of these funds. Such requirements run hand in hand with the need to seek efficiencies and to comply with WAG's "managing with less" agenda. The establishment of a Finance and Audit Committee is on the Governing Council's current agenda and will be implemented in the very near future.

10.4 However money saving should not be the sole driving force in seeking efficiency; the VTW in seeking such efficiency and value for money must in parallel:

- seek greater customer focus;
- seek enhancement of independence and the perception of such;
- seek to project a strong public image of fairness and effectiveness;
- seek to ensure training and dissemination of information translates into consistency of practice and procedure without infringing judicial independence;
- seek to streamline the internal management process; and
- seek to utilise people and resources effectively.

11. Training and Development

11.1 The Staff and Members Training sub-committee has developed an impressive and comprehensive training programme over recent years. This has included several members' training conferences, chairs' seminars and staff training events. Training

from specialist outside bodies has supplemented in-house training for staff and Governing Council members. This sub-committee is currently looking at training requirements for members and staff during the year ahead.

11.2 Members of staff have always been encouraged to engage in career development studies and are sponsored for attaining relevant qualifications. The VTW's objective to ensure that all Professional Tribunal Officers are fully qualified members of the Institute of Rating and Revenues and Valuation (IRRV), or an equivalent recognised qualification, has progressed to the extent that practically all tribunal taking officers are either fully qualified or have achieved the IRRV Technician grade.

11.3 Appropriate management training is an area in which focus is to be reviewed particularly for the management team and also, to an extent, for the lay members of the Governing Council. This is a training requirement that will need to be embraced by the VTW in the coming year.

12. Recent Developments

12.1 In implementing changes and conducting business, the VTW will need to be mindful of its external and internal environment. Some key factors are outlined below.

AJTC

12.2 The Administrative Justice & Tribunals Council emerged in the Autumn 2007 as the successor to the Council on Tribunals and within a year a Welsh Committee of the AJTC was established. The AJTC is an advisory non-departmental public body which keeps the overall administrative justice system under review.

12.3 The Welsh Committee has declared that it considers there is a need for a coherent policy for Administrative Justice in Wales encompassing a separation of powers in relation to policy, funding and administration of Tribunals in Wales. It issued its review of tribunals operating in Wales in January 2010, which may impact on the VTW over the coming years. The VTW suggests that all concerned be mindful that Valuation Tribunals, over a five year cycle, have the highest volume of appeals compared to other Tribunal bodies under the remit of the AJTC. Furthermore, the VTW consists of 100% lay membership which 'all in all' should attract special consideration.

Listing after Target Date

12.4 This initiative, in conjunction with the non statutory programming established some years ago (as referred to earlier) has been operated in Wales for the last three years but neither initiative has met anywhere near full expectations. Programming was intended to provide a defined period of time where appeals could be discussed by parties with a view to reaching settlement by a target date. Those appeals unresolved at target date would require listing to a hearing by a valuation tribunal. The non-statutory nature of programming has resulted in non co-operation of parties and the process has not met its intended aims. At worst, programming can be

perceived as a Valuation Office Agency (VOA) management tool for marshalling appeals into 'work streams'.

12.5 The VTW will continue to work with the VOA in its attempt to address the problems with programming and, as mentioned earlier, will investigate whether any of the procedures adopted by the English VT are suitable and able to be followed in Wales. However, the VTW stresses that any measures employed will not be at the expense of its own operational efficiency and meeting objectives for its 'customers' overall.

Public Finances

12.6 The VTW acknowledges that the economic recession has severe consequences for public finances and that these are times for restraint and sensitivity regarding the use of public money and for increased effort to operate efficiently and economically.

Audit – Control Environment Review

12.7 WAG Internal Audit carried out a Control Environment Review of the VTW in November 2010. The review focused on the following areas:

- Planning, Operational Monitoring and Governance
- Budget Setting
- Budget Monitoring
- Upkeep of the Website
- Protection of Assets
- Security
- Organisational Structure
- Welsh Language Scheme
- Health & Safety
- Risk
- Control for systems
- Procurement
- Records Management

12.8 The aim of the audit was to review the systems operating within VTW in order to ensure:

- commitment to competence and quality;
- an appropriate organisational structure;
- appropriate assignment of authority, responsibility and accountability;
- appropriate corporate aims, objectives and measures are in place;
- risks to achieving corporate objectives are identified and managed;
- sufficient, reliable and relevant information is provided to the right people at the right time through appropriate communication systems;
- effective day to day control of key business functions; and
- appropriate monitoring and corrective action systems are in place

12.9 The VTW accepted all but one of the recommendations made within the report and acknowledges that action needs to be taken to address those items that require attention. Several recommendations have already been fully implemented and the remainder will be addressed as part of this coming years' operational plan. Notwithstanding the recommendations made, the report identified areas of good practice within the VTW's operation.

13. Risk Management Overview

13.1 The VTW as part of its modernisation programme will need to develop its rather piecemeal risk management strategy into single policy and register conducive with the corporate governance best practice advocated within the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum and recommendations made within the recent Audit report.

13.2 The principal objective will be to provide the VTW and in turn WAG with a means to protect itself from potential adverse affects of risk and to enhance its organisational aims. The VTW will aim to ensure that the exposure of adverse risk is kept within tolerable limits and systems are in place to expose breaches.

13.3 Risk management will enable the VTW to:

- take a proactive approach, anticipating and influencing events before they happen;
- take a balanced view of opportunities and threats;
- facilitate more informed decision making and contingency planning;
- assist it in achieving performance targets; and
- increase efficiency/use of resources.

13.4 The setting of a Risk Management Strategy will be a priority for the new VTW's Finance and Audit Sub-Committee of the Governing Council. The initial focus will be to formulate a register containing those areas of particular importance where there is already 'risk' awareness:

- **Finance and Audit** - ranging from travel and subsistence payments to authorisation of expenditure;
- **IT** - ranging from data security to the possibility that the VTW may be faced with having to maintain its IT platform alone;
- **Compliance** - with emphasis on Health and Safety;
- **Personnel/HR** - ranging from the absence of a dedicated HR resource to the threat of insufficiently motivated and trained staff to meet potential need;
- **Training of Staff** – including multi-skill expectations in such a small service; and
- **VTW** - being able to stand alone as the VTS England moves away from common systems and legislation in England and Wales diverges.

14. Workload Statistics and Projections

14.1 The chart at Appendix A, based on the compilation of data from the four regions, gives a visual depiction of the VTW's peak and trough workload profile and

illustrates past performance and estimates for workload over the next three years. These estimates incorporate appeals against the current 2010 Rating Revaluation, which will create the main work stream for the foreseeable future.

14.2 Statistics should be considered with the caveat that numbers of appeals do not present the full picture, particularly insofar as NDR appeals are concerned, where the hearing of an appeal can range from a small workshop with a Rateable Value of less than £1000 to a large integrated steel works with a multi-million pound assessment.

14.3 A more detailed analysis of the VTW’s workload is conveyed in the table shown at Appendix B. The estimate for the current year combines actual figures for the first three quarters together with estimated figures for the final quarter. The projections for 2010 through to 2014 are based on the assumption that the appeal regulations will remain unchanged.

15. Delivering the Operational Plan for 2011/12

15.1 Delivery of the Operational Plan will be monitored by the Chief Executive on a monthly basis and will be reported to the Governing Council on a quarterly basis. The VTW’s achievements, measured against its aims, will be shared with WAG through regular liaison meetings.

15.2 The strategic objectives of the VTW were outlined in Section 2 of this Forward Plan. The way in which these will be delivered and how achievement will be monitored is outlined in greater detail in this section of the Forward Plan.

Strategic Objective: “To further establish the single VT and utilise resources to realise its aims”

What the VTW has already achieved in 2010-11:

- *A National postal ballot was held to elect the single President of the VTW.*
- *Centrally administered regional ballots were conducted to elect Regional and Deputy Regional Representatives for each of the four regions of the VTW.*
- *The Governing Council of the VTW, comprising the President, the four Regional Representatives and a Welsh Ministerial appointment was established on 1 July 2010 to provide single direction for the VTW.*
- *The Constitution/Standing orders of the Governing Council and the Code of Conduct for its members were developed and approved, ensuring that collective roles and responsibilities are identified, understood and documented.*

What the VTW aims to achieve in 2011-12

Objective	Measure
Promote communication within the VTW and provide staff and members with regular updates/ briefings	Chief Executive to provide regular updates on the VTW’s intranet and issue a minimum of two newsletters to provide information to members

Objective	Measure
Develop pages on VTW website to ensure that members are able to gain access to training material, recent case law and the latest developments	Implement by September 2011 and issue member satisfaction survey within 6 months of launch
Put in place an equal opportunity monitoring system for the membership	Provide statistical report on the make-up of the Tribunal annually
Support consistency across the VTW by identifying and using best practice on recruitment of members	Single recruitment process in place by 31 Dec 2011

Strategic Objective: “To improve the way that the VTW works to ensure consistency and achieve the provision of a higher quality service to our customers”

What the VTW has already achieved during 2010-11:

- *A management team comprising the Regional Clerks and the Chief Executive was established to ensure consistency in administrative practices across the offices of the VTW.*
- *Bi-monthly management team meetings monitor existing processes and discuss new initiatives and policies prior to Governing Council consideration and approval.*

What the VTW aims to achieve in 2011-12

Objective	Measure
Desk top instructions from each of the four regions to be reviewed and re-issued so as to ensure consistency in administrative procedures across Wales	Monitor regional offices’ adherence to new procedural guidance and gauge staff satisfaction with processes by encouraging feedback
Ensure all appeals in Wales are dealt with in a timely fashion	Quarterly monitoring of the number of appeals listed, appeals cleared (settled/decided), appeals deferred (postponements/adjournments), tribunals convened and tribunals cancelled
Develop a staff suggestion scheme for improvement in VTW processes and procedures	Monitor number of staff suggestions and success of those implemented
Issue decisions in a timely fashion	Monitor number/percentage of decisions issued within 21 days (one of the VTW’s KPIs)
Review local complaints procedure policies to ensure consistency across Wales by end April 2011	Single complaints procedure agreed with Governing Council and implemented by target date

Objective	Measure
Monitor customer satisfaction and act on feedback	Quarterly monitoring of number of reviews requested, number of appeals to Upper Tribunal/High Court, number of complaints received and number of referrals to PSOW
Develop customer survey to facilitate feedback on tribunal hearings	Act on feedback and report to Governing Council on a quarterly basis

Strategic Objective: “To operate in ways which are efficient, economic and provide value for money”

What the VTW has already achieved during 2010-11:

- *The VTW secured single supplier for stationery/office equipment to ensure maximum discount for bulk buying.*
- *The frequency of Governing Council meetings and management team meetings was reduced to save travel and subsistence payments and reduce the carbon footprint of VTW.*
- *VTW hearings were reduced in frequency but larger numbers of appeals were listed to hearings, thus optimising the overheads associated with holding hearings.*

What the VTW aims to achieve in 2011-12

Objective	Measure
Implement WAG Internal Audit recommendations by end June 2011, and ensure ongoing compliance	Governing Council to monitor VTW’s progress against recommendations made by Internal Audit on a quarterly basis
Reduce spend on travel & subsistence by using e-mail, teleconferencing & videoconferencing wherever practicable	Monitor number of meetings, teleconferences and videoconferences
Ensure expenditure is within budget	Monthly monitoring by Chief Executive and quarterly monitoring of budget by Governing Council; quarterly forecasting of expenditure (monthly forecasting in last quarter) to be supplied to WAG by Chief Executive
Reduce spend on heating, lighting etc by encouraging staff to be aware of energy waste	Monitor energy usage
Establishment of Finance and Audit Sub-Committee of Governing Council	Implement by end of 1 st Quarter of 2011-12
Reduce VTW’s expenditure on planned, preventative maintenance	Secure contract better tailored to VTW’s requirements
Make greater and more effective use of IT	Introduce better management information and produce quality reporting

Strategic Objective: “To continue to provide a comprehensive programme for member training and staff development ”

What the VTW has already achieved during 2010-11:

- *Staff and Members Training Committee (SMTC) continued following the establishment of the new VTW and its Governing Council and delivered a full programme of training for members, chairmen and staff.*
- *The VTW has encouraged the personal development of its staff and has provided financial support through its qualification sponsorship scheme.*
- *The VTW has encouraged and supported tribunal taking staff in attaining the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation professional qualification, recognised to be the most appropriate qualification for the skills and expertise that staff require.*

What the VTW aims to achieve in 2011-12

Objective	Measure
Staff performance management system to be implemented by end April 2011	Staff appraisals to be completed by end of April 2011; half-yearly review completed; end-year review completed
Staff training programme developed by end June 2011	Quarterly meetings of the SMTC to discuss and evaluate staff training needs; timely completion of skills/needs analysis; training programme agreed by Governing Council by June 2011
Chairs’ appraisal system to be in place by end June 2011; aim to roll out to full membership by end of year	Training to be arranged for appraisers and appraisal system agreed by Governing Council by target date; quarterly monitoring thereafter
Implement an effective training programme for Members/Chairs by end of June 2011	Identification of training needs; monitoring of members’ attendance at training events; evaluation of success by feedback forms
Ensure Governing Council members have the knowledge/expertise required to fulfil their roles by end Sept 2011	Identify relevant training needs by end Apr 2011; training arranged by end June 2011; monitor attendance and feedback
Promote “Champion” concept where staff with interest or expertise in specific areas of work are charged with analysing VTW processes and implementing improvement	Monitor success of projects; gauge staff satisfaction and achievements through staff appraisal; identify additional training that will benefit the VTW

Strategic Objective: “To recognise areas of focus for improvement and develop programmes to deliver these enhancements”

What the VTW has already achieved during 2010-11:

- *Work has progressed towards compilation of a strategic risk register but it is acknowledged that there is limited staff or Governing Council knowledge or experience with regard to risk management.*
- *Suitable Risk Management training for the management team and Governing Council is actively being investigated at the time of writing this report.*
- *The facility to provide real time statistical data for appeal processing has been developed but requires further refinement to tailor it to the VTW’s reporting and monitoring functions.*

What the VTW aims to achieve in 2011-12

Objective	Measure
Develop consistent desk-top instructions across the VTW by end April 2011, based on identification and application of best practice	Instructions agreed by management team and communicated to staff by target date; quarterly review and update
Identify Risk Management training for management team and Governing Council and develop a Risk Management Strategy by June 2011	Feedback on training; Risk Strategy implemented by target date; quarterly review of VTW’s central strategic register
Establish Finance and Audit, HR and Compliance sub-committees to take responsibility for reviewing and introducing new policies and practices within defined areas of responsibility	Quarterly reports to Governing Council to monitor progress
Further develop IT management information to provide better and more timely data on appeal processing	Act on management information to improve service offered to customers

Strategic Objective: “To work positively with our sponsor department to ensure that legislation and the VTW’s internal procedures are ‘fit for purpose’”

What the VTW has already achieved during 2010-11:

- *VTW Regulations received WAG approval in March 2010 and were successfully implemented during the year.*
- *Management Statement/Financial Memorandum signed, formally establishing the relationship under which the VTW is funded by its sponsor department.*

What the VTW aims to achieve in 2011-12

Objective	Measure
Work in partnership with WAG to review and identify regulatory and procedural requirements	Bi-monthly meetings between Chief Executive and WAG; feedback from Governing Council of VTW

16. Future Strategy (Corporate Plan 2012-2014)

16.1 The expectations on the management of the VTW have increased year on year and whereas the Governing Council and management team are enthusiastic to develop such, the availability of dedicated staff resources to implement change has been frustrating.

16.2 The future corporate strategy for the VTW can be summarised as follows.

Operational

- To promote a better understanding of the organisation with stakeholders and build relationships;
- To promote and facilitate effective internal stakeholder working relationships by promoting equal opportunities and diversity;
- To encourage continual professional improvement and learning as a core business activity; and
- To liaise with other organisations providing tribunal services – especially those which are devolved and fall outside the scope of the Tribunal Service in England and Wales to improve performance, effectiveness and efficiency.

Organisational

- To provide an exemplary public service to customers, stakeholders and the Welsh Assembly Government;
- To review organisational data so that it continues to support business planning; and
- To review current processes to ensure they continue to meet business needs and support potential reforms.

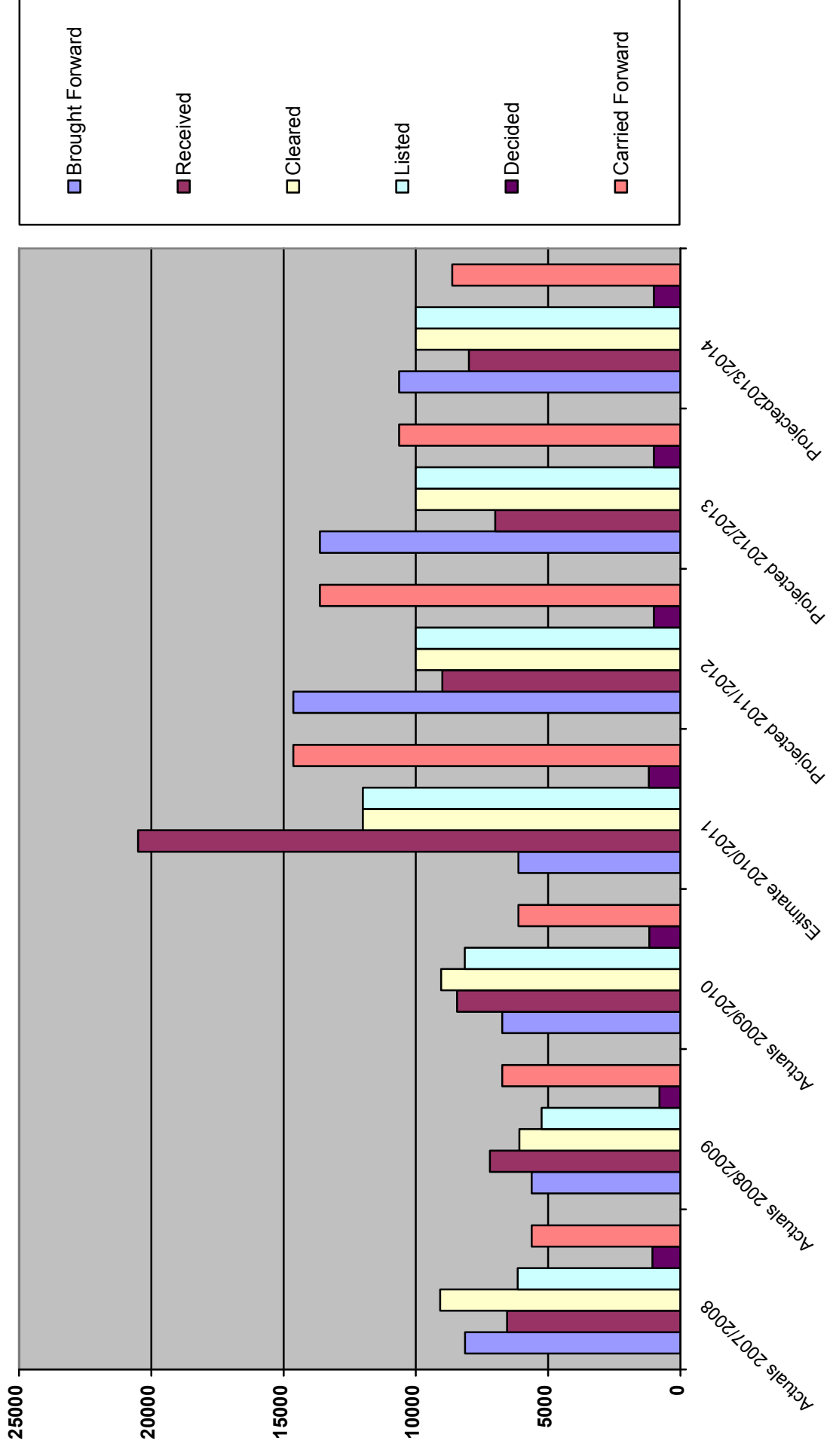
Tribunals

- Research and implement agreed better ways of working.

Financial

- To ensure the appropriate allocation of public funds in meeting the business needs and to consider the effective application of financial resources provided by the Welsh Assembly Government.

VTW Workload Summary – All Appeal Types



BASIC KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	TARGET
Council Tax Banding Appeals listed for hearing within 6 months of receipt	95%
Council Tax Liability/Completion Notices listed for hearing within 4 months of receipt	95%
Reasoned Council Tax decisions issued within 21 days of hearing (excluding large/protracted cases <5%)	95%
NDR Appeals listed for hearing within 12 weeks of target date (excluding large/protracted cases <10%)	90%
Reasoned NDR decisions issued within 28 days of hearing (excluding large/protracted cases <10%)	90%
No. Appeals in the year <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Lands Tribunal ii. High Court 	Less than 10 Less than 5
No. of registered complaints in the year	Less than 10
Average number of days training per member of staff	2 days
Days lost due to absenteeism/sickness, per member of staff	Less than 5 days
Average number of days training per member of Governing Council	3 days
Average number of days training per Chairman	2 days
Average number of days training per Member	1 day