



Valuation Office Agency
Forward Plan 2009-12

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OVERVIEW



We are now embarking on our 100th year as an organisation, since the Valuation Office was first established in 1910. Whilst many of our core values - not least integrity, impartiality and objectivity - have remained constant over that time, the context in which we work and the range of services we provide have changed radically. Our current day **challenge** is simply stated - to provide high standards of individual client and customer service whilst delivering excellent value for money for the public overall. So too is our current day **ambition** - to be recognised both nationally and internationally for our expertise, achievement and innovation in the valuation services we provide.

But none of this is simply realised. We have to focus relentlessly on constantly evolving customer needs and respond with continuously improving service and outcomes. To be successful depends above all on maintaining a highly skilled, well motivated and knowledgeable workforce. The Agency has made considerable progress towards its ambition over the last five years under Andrew Hudson's leadership. In taking over the reins I am conscious both of the significance of that progress and of the importance of maintaining our drive for improvement. We must never be complacent - and always be ready to learn, from our own experiences and from those of organisations with whom we compare. The Framework Review, now nearing completion, will provide an objective assessment of just how far we have progressed and also provide signposts for the next five years. Meanwhile, we are clear about our immediate tasks.

We have two particular priorities this year. The first is the 2010 rating revaluation. In our drive towards greater openness and transparency, we will issue summary valuations in October 2009 to an even greater proportion of ratepayers than in 2005 - some 1.6 million summaries in all, with most also being made available on our website. Our focus

in the second half of the year will move on to dealing with enquiries from ratepayers, taking the opportunity to ensure that the facts and information we hold about their property remain correct and that in turn they understand the basis of their valuation. We will seek to clear as many enquiries as we can before delivering the new rating lists on 1 April 2010, taking action to amend the lists where justified in order to avoid unnecessary formal appeals.

Our second priority is to ensure that, following transfer of Rent Officer functions in England to us from 1 April 2009, we deliver an excellent service to - what for us are - new clients and customers, conscious that the assessments we make impact on some of the least financially well off people in society.

Alongside this, we will continue to progress our change agenda to deliver further improvements in value for money. Shaping and streamlining the business to meet evolving customer requirements whilst containing costs within tight public spending parameters is vital. Working collaboratively with others in central and local government and the devolved administrations, we will focus on adopting working practices that deliver an effective and joined up service to our customers, supported by excellent corporate services. We will continue to:

- Migrate our hard copy records into secure electronic format.
- Bring together, into four network support offices (three in England and one in Wales), processing tasks where standardisation and bulk handling can bring efficiencies and ensure greater consistency.
- Rationalise our office accommodation and expand home or home-based working.

Customer satisfaction remains a key measure of our success. We are adopting a new indicator this year that directly benchmarks us against public sector comparators, ensuring we identify and strive for the best. We are encouraged by our success in achieving and maintaining the Charter Mark standard across all our Groups and for our head office customer service team, with some early successes in meeting the new, even more demanding Customer Service Excellence standard.

We are also very committed to maintaining our Investor in People status, recently renewed. We can only be truly successful by training and developing staff to a high standard, and supporting them with increasingly better technology. It is pleasing to see individual efforts recognised in some of the customer survey responses we receive - and also when individuals are expressly recognised for their skills and expertise.

The year ahead will be as demanding as any in recent times, not least because many of our customers will be faced with challenging circumstances themselves - here we must be understanding yet at all times objective in our decision-making.

By working together collectively and constructively ourselves, with a strong and shared sense of purpose, and also by working in partnership with others I am confident we will not only deliver but satisfaction we are.



David Park
Acting Chief Executive

“We are now embarking on our 100th year as an organisation, since the Valuation Office was first established in 1910. Our current day challenge - to provide high standards of service whilst delivering excellent value for money”

THE MANAGEMENT BOARD



- 1. David Park**
Acting Chief Executive
- 2. (To Be Appointed)**
Deputy Chief Executive and Director, Local Taxation & Housing Allowances
- 3. Colin Bailey**
Director, Finance & Planning
- 4. Steve Hartnell**
Director, Human Resources
- 5. Liz Hirst**
Director,
Commercial Services
- 6. Mary Morrison-Paton**
Head of Communications & Customer Insight
- 7. Paul Sanderson**
Director, Data Strategy
- 8. Niall Walsh**
Director,
National & Central Services
- 9. Jon Wrennall**
Chief Information Officer
- 10. Jane Earl**
Non-Executive Director
- 11. Dawn Johnson**
Non-Executive Director
- The Audit & Risk Committee**
Dawn Johnson (*Chair*), Mike Pears, Alison Porter, Gary Reader (*non-executive members of the Audit & Risk Committee*)
- The People Committee**
David Park (*Chair*), Steve Hartnell, Jon Wrennall, Jane Earl

GOVERNANCE

The Minister with responsibility for the Agency is the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who formally announces the Agency’s key targets to Parliament. Policy on local taxation issues for England is set by Ministers in Communities and Local Government, and for Wales by the Welsh Assembly Government. Policy on local housing allowance matters in England is set by Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

A Management Board of 11 members governs the Agency. The Board includes two non-executive directors and is led by a Chief Executive who is appointed by, and reports to, the Chief Executive of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). An Audit programme, conducted by HMRC’s Internal Audit Office, covers a wide range of management areas and business activities. This programme is agreed by the Agency’s Audit and Risk Committee, which is chaired by a non-executive director and includes representatives from the National Audit Office and HMRC’s Internal Audit Office. The Audit and Risk Committee also oversees work on risk management within the Agency.

THE KEY FACTS

STATUS

An executive agency of HM Revenue & Customs

NATIONAL NETWORK

83 offices across England, Wales and Scotland

Head Office

Wingate House, 93/107 Shaftesbury Avenue, London W1D 5BU

WEBSITE AND ASSOCIATED SITES

- www.voa.gov.uk
- www.mybusinessrates.gov.uk/wales
- www.businesslink.gov.uk
(for information about business rates in England)
- <http://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk>

SERVICES

The work of the VOA encompasses:

- compiling and maintaining lists of rateable values of the 1.7 million non-domestic properties in England, and 100,000 in Wales, to support the collection of around £24 billion* in business rates
- compiling and maintaining lists of bandings of some 23 million domestic properties in England and 1.3 million in Wales, to support the collection of around £25 billion* in council tax
- determining local housing allowance across 153 Broad Rental Market Areas in England, providing some 714,000 rental assessments for housing benefit purposes and registering some 78,000 Rent Act 1977 fair rents in England
- advising Ministers on property valuation matters
- providing valuation advice and services to the Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government
- providing valuation advice to HMRC in connection with capital gains tax, inheritance tax and other compliance work
- delivering a range of statutory and non-statutory valuation and estate surveying services to central and local government and the wider public sector

* Source: HM Treasury 2009-10 projections

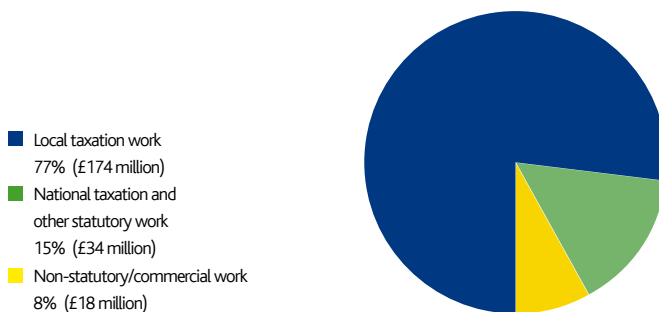
PEOPLE

4,260 people (full time equivalent as at 1 April 2009)

The VOA has Investors in People Accreditation, which was renewed in November 2008

INCOME

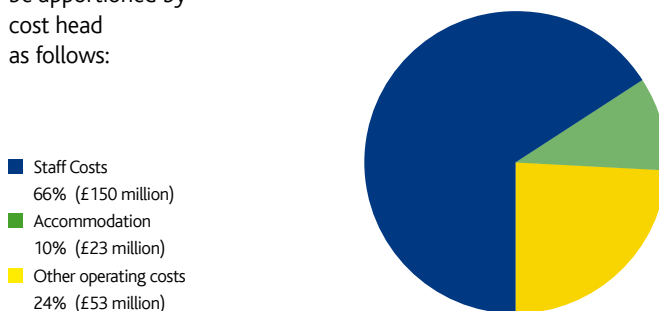
Income source to cover expenditure:



The local taxation work is carried out on behalf of Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Assembly Government. National taxation and other statutory work covers work for HM Revenue & Customs and for the Department for Work and Pensions. Non-statutory work covers services for clients including Highways Agency and Health Authorities.

EXPENDITURE

Planned expenditure for 2009-10 is around £226 million, which can be apportioned by cost head as follows:



OUR VISION

To be a world class organisation providing valuation and property services for the public sector

OUR PURPOSE

To provide a fair and robust basis for taxes which help to fund public services, for housing benefits, and to help drive better use of property in the public sector by:

- compiling and maintaining accurate and comprehensive valuation lists for local taxation
- making rental assessments and determinations for housing allowances, benefits and fair rents in England
- providing accurate valuations for national taxes
- delivering expert advice on valuations and strategic property management
- developing and maintaining a comprehensive and up to date property database
- advising policy makers on valuation and property issues

OUR COMMITMENT

To meet all our customers' objectives and maximise customer satisfaction by:

- developing a highly skilled and committed workforce that reflects the communities we serve
- developing better processes and exploiting new technology to maximise improvements in accuracy, quality and timeliness
- being open and accessible in the way we operate, while managing information securely in accordance with good industry practice
- working effectively with partners
- delivering excellent value for money, while covering our costs...
- ...and reducing our impact on the environment and supporting the communities we serve

OUR VALUES

We are committed to:

- focusing on customers and providing excellent value for money
- working effectively as teams and in partnership with others
- continuously improving, changing and adapting
- being clear and open in our communication
- respecting people and valuing difference

underpinned by the core Civil Service values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2009-10

Customer Satisfaction	To achieve overall customer satisfaction within the top 15% of public sector comparators
Operations	To enable prompt issue of correct bills by local authorities through clearing all reports, for council tax and business rates, within an average of 10 working days
	To determine 95% of housing benefit claims where no inspection is required in 3 working days
	To enable prompt issue of tax assessments by clearing all HMRC initial appraisal cases for inheritance tax within an average of 6 days and for capital gains tax within an average of 9 days
	To contain reductions in the 2005 rating lists to a maximum of 4.2% of the total compiled list rateable value, over the entire life of the lists
	To ensure that 96% of new council tax bandings are right first time
	To review for local housing allowance purposes 25% of broad rental market areas
	To achieve income from non-statutory services of at least £17.5m
Value for Money	To improve overall value for money on local taxation work by 3% a year
	To improve value for money on inheritance tax work for HMRC by 5%
People	All staff to have the core skills and competencies for their role within 6 months of taking up post ¹

¹ Success in meeting this standard will be judged against 99% achievement.

AGENCY TARGETS 2009-10

PEOPLE

- To achieve an overall staff satisfaction rating of 60%
- To improve health at work so that the average of all sick absence is under 7 days and the average short term sick absence is under 4 days

LOCAL TAXATION

- To achieve at least 90% customer satisfaction for our local taxation work
- To achieve 94% compliance with valuation integrity standards
- To issue a decision notice on council tax proposals within 2 months of receipt of cases²
- To provide a considered decision within 2 months of receipt of rating proposals³ where:
 - the case is unrepresented, or
 - there has solely been a physical change to a propertyand in all other cases, advise the parties of a defined time period when the Agency will deal with the proposal. Priority will be given to cases where significant financial hardship is involved

HOUSING BENEFITS AND ALLOWANCES

- To achieve at least 95% customer satisfaction for our housing benefit and fair rent work
- To achieve 95% compliance with valuation integrity standards for housing benefit determinations and fair rent valuations
- To determine 95% of housing benefit claims requiring an inspection and re-determinations within 15 working days
- To determine 95% of fair rents within 40 working days
- To increase productivity within the service delivery function by 3%

NATIONAL AND CENTRAL SERVICES

- To achieve at least 90% customer satisfaction for the work for HMRC and other statutory clients
- To deliver timeliness targets on all inheritance tax and capital gains tax work as set out in service level agreements
- To achieve 94% compliance with quality assurance standards
- To improve value for money on capital gains tax work for HMRC by 5%

DVS

- To achieve at least 90% customer satisfaction for the work for clients
- To achieve 94% compliance with quality assurance standards
- To recover full resource costs, within Parliamentary approved Estimates, including a return on capital of 3.5% from fees and charges

² Success in meeting this standard will be judged against 98% achievement.

³ As note 2. This will apply to all cases received on or after 1 April 2009.

DELIVERING ON OUR PURPOSE

COMPILING AND MAINTAINING ACCURATE AND COMPREHENSIVE VALUATION LISTS FOR LOCAL TAXATION

The 2010 vision: valuations are right first time, with full information at the outset, so that the correct bill can go out as soon as the property is occupied or liability arises. Queries are dealt with informally and quickly wherever possible and decisions on appeals are reached quickly once the relevant facts and information are supplied.

In Local Taxation, we continue to pursue this vision through a constant focus on improvements in quality, timeliness and value for money and on making our systems and processes more accessible and transparent. Levels of customer satisfaction are closely monitored and we shall be aiming for a minimum of 90% customer satisfaction in our local taxation work - in what will prove to be a very busy year.

On the rating side of our business, the immediate priority is the 2010 revaluation. With the valuation process well under way, we shall be publishing draft rating lists on 30 September 2009 and issuing summary valuations to 1.6 million ratepayers in October 2009. Transparency around rating assessments remains an important consideration and nearly all ratepayers will be able to access their summary valuation and further explanatory information on our website. Most will also receive hard copies of their summary valuation in the post.

Our focus here is on making sure the information we provide is accurate and clear, and that ratepayers have quick and easy access to information online. We are using customer insight, developed from talking to our customer-facing staff, ratepayers and members of our own valuation forums, to help us shape the best solution to meet ratepayers' needs for clear information around summary valuations.

From October 2009 we will move to the enquiry handling phase. We shall be encouraging ratepayers to verify the facts shown on their summary valuation and we will be dealing with enquiries on an informal basis wherever possible. We shall be taking on board any new facts, in order to deliver sound and robust rating lists by 1 April 2010. In line with the wider transformational government agenda, we are working to facilitate a greater degree of online enquiry handling and resolution of queries. We are committed to ensuring our online services continue to meet stringent accessibility and usability standards.

We will work with our clients to develop an online facility so that, on receipt of their new valuation in October, ratepayers will also have the opportunity to get an indication of their rates liability - and so future outgoings - up to six months before they actually receive a bill from their local authority.

The global recession is impacting on many ratepayers and council taxpayers and we need to be sensitive to this in the way we handle our work, while maintaining our standards of fairness and impartiality in the decisions we reach. Our focus will be on meeting customers' and clients' expectations by giving early attention and speedy decisions wherever we can. We will be screening incoming rating proposals (appeals) carefully, identifying those where early action can be taken and pursuing it, whilst ensuring the less straightforward cases are managed into clearance programmes with specific timescales. On rating appeal programming, we anticipate new arrangements for the 2010 lists, which in part will be informed by changes in the way that the Valuation Tribunal for England operates once the new single tribunal comes into being in October.



We aim to give fully considered decisions to ratepayers as quickly as possible - in any case within two months in unrepresented rating cases or where there has been a physical change to the property - but this does depend on the parties checking the facts in relation to their property and providing full information about the grounds for their challenge at the outset.

For council taxpayers we will look to build on the improvements made in enquiry handling. Our aim will be to deal with enquiries at the first point of contact where possible and, where the matter requires further investigation, to give a decision within two months.

List maintenance work, for both rating and council tax, moves on to a universal target: to clear all reports within an average of ten working days. Several of our Groups are now achieving this standard, and best practice from them, including the way they work effectively with local (billing) authorities, will be shared across others to strengthen consistency of service across the Agency. This maintenance work will also be carefully planned to ensure we have the capacity to take any necessary action arising from the issue of summary valuations.



PROVIDING RENTAL ASSESSMENTS AND DETERMINATIONS FOR HOUSING ALLOWANCES AND BENEFITS

From 1 April 2009, the VOA incorporates Rent Officer functions, previously undertaken in England by The Rent Service, which ceased to exist after 31 March 2009. The transfer of these functions creates a significant new stream of activity, impacting on some of the least financially well off people in society.

We have made organisational changes to reflect the new responsibilities for these functions. Operational delivery of Rent Officer functions will be overseen within the newly designated Local Taxation and Housing Allowances business stream. Senior managers in the former Rent Service are now part of the renamed Council Tax and Housing Allowances directorate and will continue to advise on operational policy and provide guidance, ensuring business continuity. The delivery of local housing allowance work will be managed through the Council Tax and Housing Allowances directorate, whilst housing benefit and fair rent work will be managed through two of our Groups - Liverpool in the north and Reading in the south.

Our focus will be on ensuring that we maintain the record of successful delivery of housing benefit, fair rent and local housing allowance work that we inherit. Some 400 staff have transferred into the VOA to ensure a continued high standard of service. New performance indicators and targets are in place to ensure we continue to meet the expectations of this new group of customers and clients, with emphasis on timeliness and quality.

In the short term, Rent Officers in England will be carrying out their operational duties in much the same way as they did before the transfer of functions. This will ensure a seamless transition. But we are very committed to developing closer working and integration of our services progressively where we can. The merger provides a real opportunity to learn from each other and deliver more efficient services to our customers.



PROVIDING ACCURATE VALUATIONS FOR NATIONAL TAXES AND STATUTORY PURPOSES

The 2010 vision: valuations are right first time. Simpler cases are turned round within days and complex cases are given the attention they need.

In National & Central Services we have worked hard to attain high levels of customer satisfaction for the work we do for HMRC, for our statutory clients for Right to Buy purposes and in the capital valuation advice we provide to the Department for Work and Pensions. Our client-specialised teams enable us to control our resources very efficiently and to best meet our customers' needs. By continuing to carefully manage our costs to income and by balancing resources to quality, we aim to build on our progress in the year ahead. We have a target to achieve 90% customer satisfaction but we seek to better it.

For our customers, it remains important to receive prompt, timely valuations in accordance with the requirements of the Service Level Agreements with early decisions on inheritance tax and capital gains tax cases. Our timeliness continues to improve; this year's targets will challenge us further: to clear inheritance tax and capital gains tax initial appraisal cases within an average of six days and nine days, respectively.

The specialist teams within the National & Central Services directorate - Mineral Valuers and the National Assets & Building Surveyors (NABS) teams - continue to deliver valuation services across all VOA business streams. For the first quarter of the year, their principal focus will be on supporting the rating revaluation. The NABS team will also continue to concentrate in the year ahead on delivering expert valuation guidance to Local Taxation on empty property rate relief and supporting our non-statutory services described below.



DELIVERING EXPERT ADVICE ON VALUATIONS AND PROVIDING SPECIALIST PROPERTY SERVICES FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The 2010 vision: being the property advisor of choice across the public sector and recognised for our accuracy, impartiality and customer focus.

Property is a valuable public sector asset. Our experts in surveying and asset management offer a wide range of property advice to help use this to best effect. Our services include strategic asset consultancy, market and asset valuations, viability studies, energy performance assessments, and advice on acquisitions, disposals and lease reviews. The evidence shows that customers appreciate these services largely because they trust the independence and integrity of our surveyors, the high quality standards and the emphasis on value for money.

DVS, the arm of the VOA that provides non-statutory services to a wide range of clients, often in competition with other potential suppliers, will continue to improve the services on offer in the coming year by tailoring these to meet customer needs in Health, Transport, Central Government, Local and Devolved Government and Environment sectors. Opportunities will also be taken to extend DVS expertise in strategic asset management, development viability and sustainability.



DELIVERING AND MAINTAINING A COMPREHENSIVE AND UP TO DATE PROPERTY DATABASE

The 2010 vision: accurate and comprehensive data on properties, non-domestic and domestic, available across the organisation.

We are continuing with our programme of modernising the way in which we store and access key property data, with progressive migration to secure, electronic format. This allows us to access the information more easily from across the network and save accommodation previously used to house hard copy records. We have a phased programme to extend digitisation of key records and, subject to future investment decisions, house them in an Electronic Document and Records Management (EDRM) system.

Another key development in the modernisation of the way in which we hold and access property records is the creation of a Geographic Information System (GIS) to allow data to be cross-referenced to a digital mapping system. This will provide more information to be viewed and analysed in a geospatial format, which will enable a more comprehensive view to be taken of the information. Over the coming year we plan to complete work on the GIS and start to use it for various business purposes.

In due course, we would also like to be able to link the GIS and EDRM systems to give our network a modern and comprehensive database that will lead to greater efficiency and improved cost-effectiveness.



DELIVERING ON OUR COMMITMENT



DEVELOPING A HIGHLY SKILLED AND COMMITTED WORKFORCE THAT REFLECTS THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

The 2010 vision: all staff fully trained for their role and beyond, they understand how their job contributes to achieving the Agency's goals and are all engaged in delivering the vision.

Our challenge for 2009-10 is to ensure we have integrated former Rent Service (TRS) staff into the Agency. We have established a dedicated HR team to assist with queries and produced learning materials that will be rolled out to staff in a phased way. Former TRS staff will have access to all VOA skills training and opportunities to apply for vacancies in other business streams.

We will ensure we maintain the breadth and depth of skills and experience of staff in order to be well placed to respond to future challenges. In particular, demand for higher skills is growing, while less skilled jobs are disappearing. We will be addressing any skills gaps, which might affect capability and productivity.

Against a background of changing demands, we will also consider whether we have the right numbers of professionally qualified staff, with adequate succession planning arrangements in place for the most advanced or specialist skills. We will continue to offer development opportunities to our staff to enable them to become professionally qualified and will be recruiting up to 25 new graduate surveyors to provide succession planning for the future.

As we continue to rationalise accommodation holdings, reducing our overall office floor space where we can in order to minimise our overhead costs, we plan to increase home-based working and anticipate that numbers of staff working in this way will reach around 350 by 31 March 2010. Centralisation and home-based working will alter the skills mix we need across our operations. Our people strategy will be designed to ensure that the staff we have in the office of the future have the right capabilities.



DEVELOPING BETTER PROCESSES AND EXPLOITING NEW TECHNOLOGY TO MAXIMISE IMPROVEMENTS IN ACCURACY, QUALITY AND TIMELINESS

The 2010 vision: streamline processes to deliver a better customer experience. All staff are active in improving what they do and are motivated to make suggestions.

Our direction here is clear: a more adaptable and agile IT infrastructure that allows access to information or systems when and where staff and customers need it. This will take us closer to our goal of more joined up customer-centric public service.

A better customer experience, enabled by new technology, is at the heart of all our change programmes. The centralisation of our process-intensive tasks continues to support our change agenda in delivering better value for money and driving improvements in the speed and consistency of service we provide to our customers, and helping to reduce compliance costs for them. We have successfully piloted centralising the registration of electronic proposals and our bulk print and post functions. This work will be centralised in a phased manner and we expect this transfer to be completed by October 2009.



A wide range of other processing and transactional work areas are also being examined and piloted. Subject to the outcomes of these pilots, we anticipate centralising further such elements of our work over the course of the coming year.

In anticipation of this and in addition to our established Network Support Offices (NSOs) in Halifax and Plymouth, we will be embedding and developing our new NSOs at Rhyl and Durham over the coming year. The former Rent Service's central processing unit, based in Washington, will become a NSO and move to the Durham NSO in the latter part of 2009. This will help release resource to other front line work, including strengthening our caseworker support capability.

Additionally, in a trial in three of our Groups, we are looking at how technology can help us gain more efficiencies by securely creating and updating electronic plans. The results of the pilot are expected in May 2009.

BEING OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE IN THE WAY WE OPERATE, WHILE MANAGING INFORMATION SECURELY IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOOD INDUSTRY PRACTICE

The 2010 vision: we continue to work with our customers to ensure we understand their preferences and needs.

Meeting high standards of data security is fundamental to the Agency's purpose and vital in ensuring continued public trust. We attach great importance to this and have taken significant steps to ensure customer information is handled securely, through a combination of training, resource delivery and IT developments. We will continue with the implementation of further measures in line with government standards and industry best practice, so that our customers can have confidence that their information will be kept safe and handled professionally.

Accessibility of public services to customers remains important. We continue to work with our customers to ensure we understand better what information they need from us and how they wish to communicate with us. To this end, we will be running an omnibus survey with a representative sample of taxpayers in January 2010 to find out more about customer communication preferences and how these apply across face-to-face, telephone, hard copy, web and online channels.

Aligned with the transformational government agenda around accessibility of services, we have already moved key information about our role in business rates to the Businesslink website to make it easier for ratepayers to access relevant information all in one place. In the year ahead, we will begin our preparations to move appropriate content to the Directgov website, completing this by the end of 2010.

We are adopting the government's customer service standard, Customer Service Excellence. Seven of our Groups have already achieved the new standard, and a number of other Groups will undergo the assessment process during the course of the year. All Groups will undertake the assessment process within the next three years.

In Wales we are committed to complying with the terms of our Welsh Language Scheme approved by the Welsh Language Board and enabling us to treat Welsh and English on the basis of equality.

We are also consulting with HMRC on the detail of its new Charter, which outlines standards of behaviour and values to which HMRC will aspire when dealing with people in the exercise of its functions.

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



The Government Standard



WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH PARTNERS

The 2010 vision: we are a partner of choice, enabling us to maximise the benefits of what we do for the taxpayer.

We work very closely with local authorities in connection with both council tax and non-domestic rates and remain open to improvements and joint benefits in developing that partnership. With the transfer of functions from the former Rent Service, we now have another important link with local authorities in England through the housing benefit system. We are continuing to develop plans to ensure that we are able to work in a real partnership with local authorities in these three important areas.

We also intend to continue the work we are doing with HM Land Registry around the development of e-conveyancing to reduce the burden on citizens and business in providing essential information to the VOA. We have already developed arrangements to reduce the need to seek further information from the parties involved in transactions where, for example, we may have difficulty in identifying land that has been sold.

We are also working closely with Ordnance Survey (OS) to obtain benefits from geo-referencing of our property database. This assists in ensuring that our database is accurate, up to date and comprehensive. OS mapping also forms the basis of the Geographic Information System we are developing and this will assist in ensuring the accuracy of our database.



DELIVERING EXCELLENT VALUE FOR MONEY, WHILE COVERING OUR COSTS

The 2010 vision: delivering value for money for our clients and customers.

In managing our finances the Agency ensures our costs match the income received from our clients - in our commercial work we achieve this through our fees and charges. More broadly we look to deliver operational efficiency and value for money in accordance with the Government's objectives.

Following the successful delivery of significant savings from accommodation during 2008-09, we will continue with our rationalisation programme. During 2009-10 we expect to improve the utilisation of space at around 20 sites, many of which will generate savings for 2010 and beyond. The rationalisation programme is an important element of delivering improvements in value for money.

In 2008-09 we successfully introduced a new value for money performance model across our local taxation work. In 2009-10 we will be pursuing use of this model at local as well as at national level.

Responding to the importance of value for money to all our clients, we will also be developing an application of this model for our work with HMRC and DWP.

In 2009-10, effective financial control and investment decision-making will play a central role in our longer term strategy and development towards our vision as we prepare for the next Spending Review.



Improving value for money for all our clients and customers will be at the heart of those investment and spending plans. Accommodation rationalisation in 2008-09 will deliver £2 million savings in the current year, and across other corporate services, following a benchmarking exercise, we shall be reducing spend by 7.5% against 2008-09 baselines. This will result in our finance function operating at less than 0.9% of our total cost, taking it into the top 10% across the public sector. On service delivery we will be driving further value for money improvements of at least 3% across our local taxation functions and also reducing the cost of our local housing allowance activities by some £6 million through economies in corporate services and support functions. We will discuss and agree with our main clients further efficiencies to be delivered in 2011-12.

REDUCING THE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE BY BEING A RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS

The 2010 vision: reducing energy use, recycling more and being good corporate citizens in all our areas of work.



We continue to embed responsible business in every aspect of our work and behaviour, and so every member of staff shares the responsibility. We once more entered the Corporate Responsibility Index run by Business in the Community and the *Financial Times*. We have improved our result from silver to gold, reflecting the progress that we are making in this important area.

The transfer of Rent Officer functions in England to the VOA has given us the opportunity to revisit our values to ensure they are fit for the merged organisation. We will be developing an e-learning programme to support staff understanding of the new values, shown on page 6, and the behaviours that underpin them.

By digitising our records we are reducing our reliance on paper, enabling us to use less space, reduce our office-based utility emissions and the volume of paper we use.

We recognise the benefits and skills transfer available through volunteering and will continue to encourage staff take-up of the Volunteer Day. We will continue to encourage the creation of partnerships between our offices and local schools where possible, particularly by using existing successes as good practice and inspiration, and will aim to have links with ten schools by the autumn.

Our Responsible Business Report, available on our website, details our commitments for the year ahead.



i **l**-managed
forests and recycled wood or fibre
