



Responsible Business Report 2007

Valuation Office Agency

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Chief Executive's Overview

I am pleased to present the Valuation Office Agency's second annual statement on our social responsibility agenda, now called Responsible Business in line with practice elsewhere.

The role of the Agency touches the lives of every business and every household in England and Wales, through our work on council tax and business rates, and we carry out other important functions, which also apply in Scotland. Through the way we do all this, the way we behave as an employer, and the way we manage our travel and use of resources, we have an undeniable impact on society. My colleagues on the Management Board and I are determined that it should be a responsible one. As we said in our Annual Report, "Minimising the impact on the environment, support for the community, ethical work practices – these things sit at the heart of any world class organisation, alongside a strong commitment to customer needs".

Twelve months ago, we put our commitment to the test by entering the "Companies that Count" Corporate Responsibility Index 2006, run by Business in the Community in conjunction with the Sunday Times. We were proud and pleased to have achieved bronze status at our first attempt, and have used the submission itself and the feedback from it to shape our efforts to improve further. We are about to enter again, and we know we will gain from the experience.

We are determined to improve each year at being a responsible business in every sense of the term.



Andrew Hudson
Chief Executive
Valuation Office Agency

Introduction to responsible business and the VOA

What is responsible business?

The VOA has previously presented a Corporate Social Responsibility Statement. After discussion, the Management Board have decided to adopt the phrase "responsible business" to describe the concept more accurately. This fits entirely with the thinking of our partners in Business in the Community and the VOA is pleased to be an active member of their organisation.

Business in the Community, a leading business network designed to inspire and engage companies with responsible business practices, have a clear description of responsible business and the VOA is happy to adopt their description which is perfectly in line with our responsible business statement.

Business in the Community state that ***"Responsible business should be at the core of a company's programmes and strategies, not a bolt-on to operations. Companies that count recognise that responsible business can help to innovate and develop new products and services and not only minimise risk. These companies implement initiatives and programmes to improve their positive impact, not just minimise their negative impact.***

- **Treating employees** - fairly, equitably and with respect
- **Protecting** - the environment for future generations
- **Managing** - the impacts on society and the environment of business operations, products or services through interaction with key stakeholders such as employees, customers, investors, communities and suppliers.
- **Being a responsible neighbour** - by understanding the local environment and adapting to local needs
- **Observing** - basic human rights".

What does the Valuation Office Agency do?

The Valuation Office Agency is an Executive Agency of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). The Agency employs 4440 people (October 2007) and has Investor in People accreditation.

The work of the Agency encompasses:

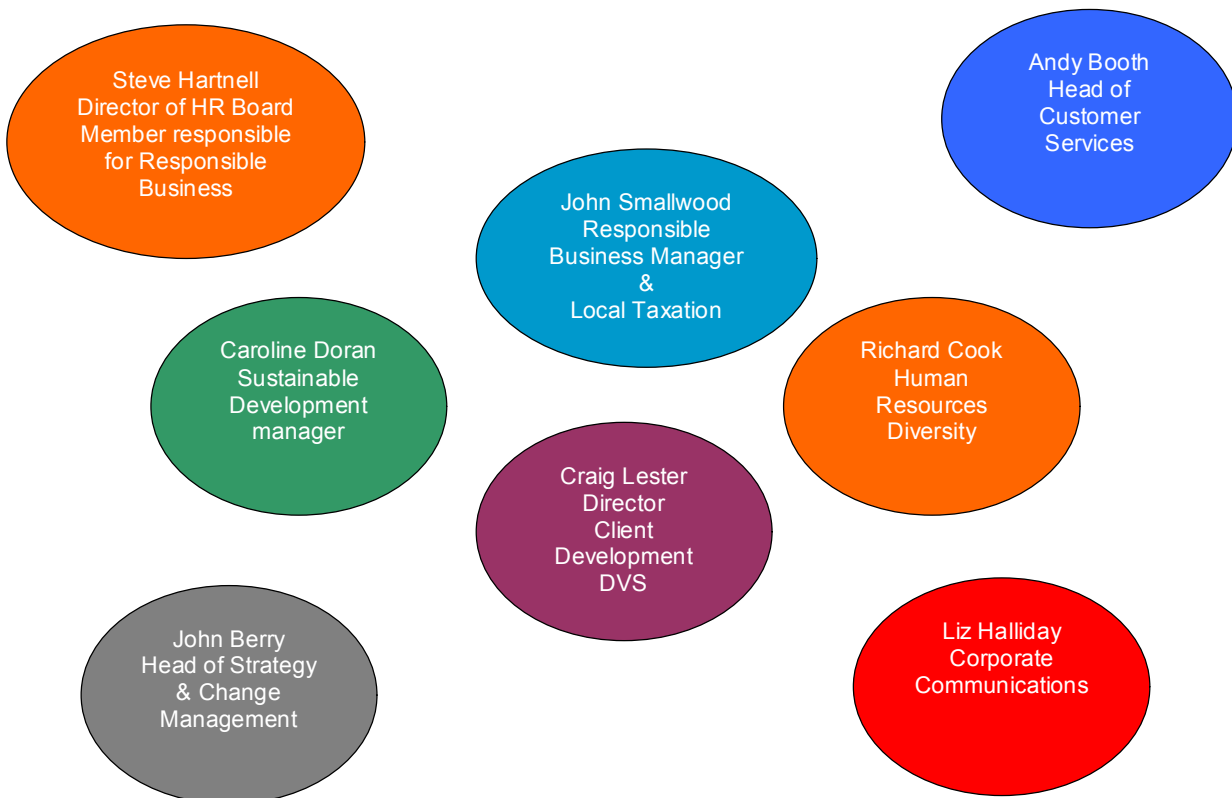
- compiling and maintaining lists of rateable values of around 1.7 million non-domestic properties in England and Wales
- compiling and maintaining the list of council tax bandings of around 23 million domestic properties in England and Wales
- advising government ministers on property valuation matters
- providing services to the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government
- providing valuation advice to HMRC in connection with capital gains, inheritance tax and other compliance work
- delivering a range of non-statutory valuation and estate surveying services to government departments and the wider public sector.

More information on the VOA, is provided on our website: www.voa.gov.uk, which includes the Annual Reports and Forward Plans, along with a series of other documents, including Summaries of Board Minutes and this report.

Responsible business in the VOA

Responsible business (often known as corporate social responsibility) runs through all areas of the Agency. It is about all parts of the Agency working together and sharing their expertise. The Valuation Office Agency does not have a specific Responsible Business team, as we want to embed Responsible Business into all of the actions we take.

The following members of our staff network have a particularly important role in responsible business issues. Their role is to collate and share information, identify opportunities and encourage responsible business. This small team ensures that responsible business is an essential element of how the Agency works. Steve Hartnell (Director of HR) has specific Management Board responsibilities for responsible business. John Smallwood, the Responsible Business manager (formerly CSR manager), usually prepares items for Board consideration.



The Management Board has regular Agenda items to review progress on the responsible business commitments, and expects responsible business principles to be embedded in everyday working practices. The trade unions within the Valuation Office Agency (PCS and Prospect (AVOV)) are pleased to endorse and support the VOA's commitment to responsible business.

Responsible business statement

The Valuation Office Agency is committed to meeting our customers' objectives and maximising customer satisfaction whilst reducing our impact on the environment and supporting the communities we serve.

As a responsible business, the VOA takes account of its economic, social and environmental impacts in the way it operates. The Agency wishes to be a "good neighbour" to its stakeholders, customers, workforce, and to the wider community and the environment.

Responsible business is part of the VOA's aspirations to achieve world class customer satisfaction, as set out in the Forward Plan.

Our broad responsible business strategy is detailed below under the following headings:

- **Vision and Values**
- **Environment**
- **Community**
- **Marketplace**
- **Workplace**

Vision and Values

Our responsible business strategy is underpinned by our vision and core behaviours (our values).

The VOA sets out a medium term Forward Plan, which is revised and updated annually. This sets out the vision, strategy and targets for the Agency, including our Customer Charter, and can be [read here](#).

The VOA has 6 core values:

- Continuous Improvement and Innovation
- Fairness and Impartiality
- Being Businesslike and Customer Focussed
- Teamwork and Partnership
- Involving and Trusting People
- Seeking Excellence from Diversity.

The VOA follows the Civil Service Code as the constitutional framework within which all civil servants work. For details see *The Guide Section 1 Appendix 1* or <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/civilservicecode/index.asp>.

Environment

In support of the Government's Sustainable Development strategy, **Securing the Future**, we are working to reduce the main environmental impacts of our business on the environment by:

- Integrating Sustainable Development and promoting employees' awareness of the environment we work and live in
- Following the Government's Sustainable Procurement Strategy
- Reducing waste and increasing recycling levels across the Agency
- Reducing the VOA's contribution to global warming in terms of energy consumption and travel-related CO² emissions
- Developing an Environmental Management System (EMS) for larger offices across the estate
- Recording information relating to travel, waste, recycling, water and energy in order to measure progress and monitor improvements.

Community

As a government organisation with a workforce of over 4400 staff (4440 at end October 2007) we wish to have a beneficial impact on the communities in which we work. The VOA seeks to engage and support communities by:

- Promoting Payroll Giving
- Providing voluntary leave (one day per year) for our staff to engage in voluntary / charity work, with an aim that at least 25% of staff will take such a day by the year 2010
- Providing the availability of special leave for specified purposes of being a School Governor, Magistrate, member of the Reserve Forces and similar
- Supporting charitable fund raising events
- Seeking opportunities to use our distinctive expertise and experience to contribute to community projects.

Marketplace

We seek to operate in a positive way in working with our customers, clients and stakeholders.

The VOA will treat everyone with fairness, respect and impartiality by:

- Treating all customers and clients with courtesy and respect
- Complying with regulatory requirements
- Communicating honestly and transparently
- Seeking to provide opportunities for customers and stakeholders to comment upon and influence policies and processes
- Continuing to develop our e-commerce
- Whenever possible ensure that our supply chain reflects good ethical practices.

Workplace

We will work to attract and retain the best people and be an employer of choice by:

- Providing and promoting a safe, secure and healthy environment for employees, both on-site and when visiting other premises
- Encouraging a healthy work-life balance
- Promoting equality of opportunity for all
- Understanding, embracing and promoting diversity and equality
- Monitoring the opinions of our staff through regular surveys and using the results to influence improvements
- Offering flexible work patterns
- Supporting a fair and equitable pay system
- Providing learning and development opportunities for all
- Training all staff in the core skills and competencies within 6 months of taking up a new role
- Targeting development to specific groups e.g. the Breakthrough and Springboard personal development programmes and the Prince's Trust Team Programme
- Encouraging innovation
- Involving people in decision making through consultation, including partnership arrangements with trade unions and the annual Staff Survey
- Recognising achievements through annual awards reflecting distinguished performance in community work and environmental matters, leadership, customer service and innovation and ingenuity
- Recognising achievement through recognition payments and significant contribution payments.

Corporate Social Responsibility Achievements

(October 2006 to September 2007)

We have developed and created Corporate Social Responsibility intranet pages providing information relating to Corporate Social Responsibility issues both in the workplace and at home. (These pages will be renamed "Responsible Business" in October 2007).

We have created an Awards section within our Intranet to: celebrate the success of various Award winners; provide detail of the winners and the reasons behind their awards; share good ideas from the Showcase that accompanies the Awards; and to encourage future entries.

Vision, Values & Ethics Achievements

- We continued to promote the Core Values and Behaviours
- We put details of the Civil Service Code on our intranet together with a hyperlink to the full Code. We also distributed a number of hard copies of the Code.

Environment Achievements

- Recycling initiatives are present in most locations in the VOA network: these vary depending upon the particular location, situation and landlord. Paper, spectacles, plastic, mobile phones, cans, bottles, Christmas cards, printer cartridges and postage stamps are some examples of products recycled
- An inter-departmental Sustainable Procurement strategy has been introduced
- We have reinforced our policy instructing that PCs and monitors are shut down after use each day
- We have created indicators for energy, waste and water consumption, as well as travel emissions
- We have increased the use of videoconferencing, giving a reduction in carbon emissions of 3.5 tonnes and a saving of approximately 38,000 business miles
- We have re-launched the use of audio conferencing by promoting awareness of the facility and distributing "spider-phones" to most locations across the network
- We have developed and created Sustainable Development intranet pages providing information relating to Sustainable Development issues both in the workplace and at home
- We have forged links with HMRC with the aim of capturing emerging best practice
- We have made steps to counteract travel related CO² emissions by offsetting air travel through the Global Carbon Offsetting Fund
- The Agency has recycled 123 tonnes of confidential and other paper waste, saving over 2,000 trees, in approximately half of our office locations
- We have introduced e-Procurement throughout the Agency resulting in a reduction in the amount of hardcopy Purchase Orders being produced and distributed
- We have now closed our Lambeth location and, as part of that closure, have ensured that our accommodation partners are appropriately and responsibly re-using the furniture and contents, through the MJF Group
- During the year, we replaced the Agency's mobile phones as part of a revised contract, and the old phones were all returned to the Fonebak scheme.

Community Achievements

- There were 202 recorded voluntary days taken by employees over the last 12 months
- A total of £28,169.00 was raised by employees for national and local charities
- We have presented our second annual award for "Distinguished contribution to the Community and/or Charity and/or environmental matters" to the Customer Service Team in our Head Office for their work with a local primary school
- The Management Board has agreed that supporting schools is a good way of employing VOA expertise and giving something back to the community. The Board are creating a partnership with a local secondary school to our Head Office and will shortly begin a planned programme of visits
- In our [Annual Report 2006-07](#) we provided details of a whole series of events supporting good causes carried out by our staff during that year
- More recently our Head of Profession has undertaken a Charity motorcycle ride in his own time, in conjunction with the Rating and Taxation Manager from HBOS, to raise over £4,000 for good causes and called in at various VOA and HBOS offices en route.

Marketplace Achievements

- We achieved our target of 88% Customer Satisfaction in 2006-07
- In Maintenance of the Rating lists we exceeded our target, clearing the received maintenance reports at better than our target of clearance within two months
- In Maintenance of the Council Tax lists we exceeded our target, clearing the received maintenance reports better than our target of clearance within two months
- All of the twenty-two Groups and our central Customer Services Team continue to have accreditation to Charter Mark, an independent award that recognises exceptional customer service. In addition, an agency representative has been invited to sit on the independence committee of the accrediting body as a recognition of the high level of commitment and success achieved
- Summary Valuations and Valuation schemes remain accessible on the VOA website to provide ratepayers with a channel to access clear information on how rateable values are calculated
- Council Tax Bandings and Rateable Values continue to be maintained and updated on our website to allow taxpayers and ratepayers to view the details on properties across England and Wales
- We have bettered our targets on all aspects of work undertaken for HM Revenue and Customs
- We presented our second annual award for "Distinguished contribution to business excellence" to the Local Taxation Maintenance Team in St Albans for their work following the Buncefield fire.
- We presented three categories of "Distinguished contribution to Customer Service" award at our second annual awards event. A team award that went to the Bristol Council Tax Team, an individual award which went to Guy Hirst for his work in producing a Welsh language newsletter and an internal customer service award for the South West Group Intranet Page Team, for their work on internal communications
- In response to an influx of work and an increase in the public's need for information on Council Tax, due to publicity in the media, we improved our internet site so that the answers to frequently asked questions were easier to find
- We published advice on our internet for members of the public enquiring about the effects on flooding on their properties.

Workplace Achievements

- In our Annual Report 2006-07 we gave details and photo coverage to celebrate our first Annual Awards event. We have also held our second Annual Awards event (September 2007)
- In June 2007, we introduced a new set of pages to our Intranet entitled "Discuss". These pages enable staff across the network to engage in intranet conversations about various Agency related topics. Lively debate has taken place on these pages
- Over 200 staff are involved in our Management Development Programme (MDP), which gains accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Management
- Significant success in staff passing the MDP to gain accreditation in September 2007
- Introduction and commencement of a Senior Leadership Development Programme
- We have continued to address issues arising as a result of the deferment of the 2007 Council Tax Revaluation by downsizing through a series of initiatives, notably by offering early retirement and early severance packages. There have been no compulsory redundancies
- Continued implementation of a development scheme that offers opportunities for staff in any pay band to gain a surveying qualification
- We have continued to promote our suggestion scheme, Innovations, and have made a series of awards and developments as a result
- We have introduced and presented our first Award for "Innovation and Ingenuity" to Bob Bridgewood for his work creating a helpful and cost saving spreadsheet
- We reinforced the "conflict of interest" principles set out in our Staff Handbook, with particular reference to HIPS
- We have created and improved the Diversity and Equality pages on our intranet, with links to items including the Diversity Excellence Model and the current Action Plans
- We have five consultative groups - Disability, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Ethnicity, Religion and Belief. The Equality & Diversity Major Consultative Group (TUS) met on 27 June 2007, bringing all of these groups together for the first annual joint diversity consultative groups conference.

Responsible Business Commitments

(October 2007 - September 2008)

Vision & Values Commitments

- We will make our vision, values and core behaviours much more visible and available
- We will develop an e-learning programme to reinforce the core behaviours
- We will continue to explain, reinforce and embed the Agency Values and the Civil Service Code.

Environment Commitments

Medium term (targets are 2010 and 2020)

Climate Change and Energy

We will work towards reducing carbon emissions from road vehicles by 15% by 2010/2011, relative to 2005/2006 levels:

- Reduce business mileage through greater use of video/audio conferencing
- Update guidance on green travel
- Review, at regular intervals, the CO² levels produced by travel

Carbon Emissions from office

We will work towards increasing energy efficiency of buildings per m² by 15% by 2010 relative to 1999/2000 levels:

- To work with the Carbon Trust and PFI contractors to raise awareness and reduce carbon emissions
- Reduce emissions from our buildings and undertake proactive energy monitoring.

Energy Efficiency

We will work towards increasing energy efficiency per m² by 15% by 2010, relative to 1999/2000 levels

We will work towards increasing energy efficiency per m² by 30% by 2020 relative to 1999/2000 levels

- Adopt energy conservation measures in all new accommodation refurbishment projects, whilst still delivering best value for money
- Phase out bottled water in all buildings: Point of Use water units to replace bottled water. The move to PoU chilled water will reduce the department's carbon footprint through both a decrease in transport (delivery) emissions and the volume of plastic that we consume
- Carry out regular reviews of energy consumption and identify where savings can be made.

Recycling

We will work towards increasing recycling figures to 40% of waste arisings by 2010

We will work towards increasing recycling figures to 75% of waste arisings by 2020

- Introduce 'Environmental Champions' across the Agency to help implement and monitor recycling in office locations.
- Review and audit the recycling (and other) schemes in place across all our locations with a view to developing further recycling schemes through our strategic partner, Mapeley, and in-house.

Natural Resource Protection

We will work towards reducing water consumption by 25% on the office and non-office estate by 2020, relative to 2004/2005 levels

We will work towards reducing water consumption to an average of 3m³ per person/year for all new office builds or major office refurbishments

- Adopt energy conservation measures in all new accommodation refurbishment projects, whilst still delivering best value for money

Short Term (next 12 months)

- We will raise awareness of our Sustainable Development policies and motivate staff and contractors to operate in an environmentally responsible manner
- We will promote (through the procurement unit) best buy products that support sustainable development and in line with the procurement strategy
- We will develop an Environmental Management System for the larger offices in the VOA estate, with a test location identified by April 2008
- We will update, publicise and increase use of the intranet page(s) as they relate to Sustainable Development
- Reduce paper consumption through e-business channels, forms rationalisation and re-usage.

Community Commitments

- We will issue revised instructions and information to encourage and enhance the use of the Voluntary Day. These revisions will include an improved recording process and the ability to link the Volunteer Day to learning and development objectives within the Performance Management system
- We will continue to investigate the possibilities of using our expertise in property in community projects through ProHelp (Business in the Community) or other relevant volunteering
- The Management Board have developed a partnership with a secondary school near to the VOA head office and will shortly (November) start the first of a series of planned visits to work with the pupils
- Other locations are already working with schools and we will be encouraging this as the key theme for Volunteering in 2008
- See also Vision and Values.

Marketplace Commitments

- We will build on the success of our web-site information on non-domestic rating and council tax, through further liaison with ratepayers, taxpayers and billing authorities
- We will continue to build and extend partnerships and relationships with billing authorities and developers to enable better exchange of information
- We will consider, by continuing our ongoing letter and form reviews, the best means and manner of communication with ratepayers and taxpayers
- We will use our marketing managers to increase awareness of our responsible business commitment amongst our existing clients and customers
- We will continue to promote our responsible business policy and achievements via the internet and intranet
- We will enter the "Companies that Count" index in 2007.

Workplace Commitments

- We will continue to develop new HR policies that will benefit both our staff and the business
- We will share the benefits of our HR policies with the wider business and government community
- We will promote the concept that training is a development of the individual, and that we aim to continually develop all our staff
- We will ensure that the revised Performance management process continues to have a close link between performance and development
- We will continue involvement in existing development programmes (Prince's Trust, Spring School) and continue to promote new development opportunities such as the Prince's Trust development coach role for over 25's
- We will continue to provide development opportunities through our Springboard and Breakthrough programmes including development of in-house facilitators and coaches
- We will expand and promote our mentoring and shadowing programme to include staff at all levels
- We will capture the regular voluntary or not for profit work undertaken by our staff e.g. magistrates, TA, Samaritans, Childline, Scouting and Guiding, blood donors, those who sit on committees of professional bodies and ascertain if there are ways these skills can also be used for the mutual benefit of the Agency and the individuals
- We will develop improved ways for staff to contribute ideas and suggestions for future best practice
- We will regularly reinforce the guidelines on conflict of interest and outside appointments.

Contacting the VOA

We welcome your comments on this report. Please email customerservices@voa.gsi.gov.uk, and include "responsible business" in the subject line. Or write to:

Responsible Business Manager, c/o Chief Executive's Office, Valuation Office Agency, Carey Street, London, WC2A 2JE.