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 Y Gweinidog dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a Llywodraeth
 Leol
 Minister for Social Justice and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
 Welsh Assembly Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MB/CS/0017/10

William Graham AM
 National Assembly for Wales
 Cardiff Bay
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16th January 2010

Dear William

I am writing in response to your query to the First Minister regarding the Valuation Tribunal Service for Wales raised in Plenary on 8th December 2009.

As you are aware, the previous Minister for Social Justice and Local Government, Dr Brian Gibbons AM, agreed to proceed with the establishment of a single Valuation Tribunal for Wales, after this recommendation of the Rolph Review had been subject to public consultation. This decision will result in the amalgamation of the current four valuation tribunals in Wales, and I believe, it shall in doing so, support consistency of practice across the tribunal and provide a more efficient and effective service to the public. Amendments are required to legislation to provide for the new Tribunal, and the draft of these are currently subject to a public consultation, with the aim of coming into force on 1st April 2010.

These regulations provide for the following:

- a single Valuation Tribunal for Wales to be established;
- a national President to be elected by and from the members of the new Valuation Tribunal, with each member having one vote;
- regional representatives and deputies to be elected for each of the four regions in Wales, the regions to be consistent with the current boundaries for the four existing VTs, and
- a Governing Council to consist of a National President, four regional representatives, and an independent member to be appointed by Welsh Ministers.

Following concerns raised in the initial consultation of a possible loss of local identity, it was decided that there should be regional representation on the Governing Council, and that a locally-based membership should be maintained, with no change to the appointments process for members. Tribunal members are not to travel outside their region, or over a set

distance to attend hearings, unless they themselves choose to do so. Further the new Tribunal will maintain a presence in the regions of Wales along with a locally based membership. By continuing to sit in accessible locations, the Valuation Tribunals for Wales would continue to provide a local service and allay those concerns about a loss of local identity.

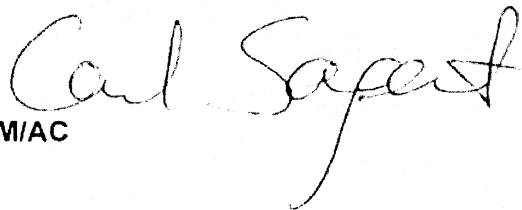
These changes are proposed to provide stronger leadership and promote improved standards of decision making, consistency of approach and dissemination of best practice, all of which should not only increase efficiency of the service provided but should also provide an overall better customer experience for the Welsh public faced with the complex and often daunting task of appealing against their council tax banding or national non-domestic rate.

In answer to your query regarding those people who face the task of making an appeal, there will be very little impact on them, except that in the long-term an improvement in customer experience is to be expected. The Valuation Tribunal for Wales will continue to provide a local service for individual taxpayers. For those people wishing to appeal, they will continue to be governed by the existing rules. There will be no alteration to the appeals process or to their right to appeal. The regulations currently being consulted upon, relate only to the structural organisation of the service and not to the process of making an appeal.

I understand your concern regarding the number of appeals expected from 1st April 2010, when the non domestic property revaluation takes effect. Current estimates indicate that the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) will receive approximately 35,000 enquiries relating to the revaluation over the five-year life of the list, resulting in approximately 1,500 formal appeals being heard by the Valuation Tribunal for Wales. However, it must be remembered that the non domestic property re-valuation takes place every five years in England and Wales, and as such, both the VOA and the Valuation Tribunals in Wales have experience in dealing with such periods of an increased volume of appeals. I enclose, for your information, a recent statement regarding the non domestic property re-valuation and my proposal to amend the Non-Domestic Rating (Small Business Relief) (Wales) Order 2008 to increase the main relief thresholds..

I hope that I have answered your queries, and would like to take this opportunity to remind you that the closing date for the consultation period on the draft regulations is 2nd February 2009. The consultation document can be found on the Welsh Assembly Government web site at <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/localgovernment/singlevaluation/?lang=en> Your comments would be very welcome.

Yours sincerely,



Carl Sargeant AM/AC