



Office of the  
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Creating sustainable communities

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## **Sustaining the Judicial Independence of Valuation Tribunals**

As you know the Office has recently consulted publicly on proposals for sustaining the judicial independence of the Valuation Tribunals. Since the consultation closed in mid September my officials have been considering the responses received. I write to you now to set out the Government's conclusions.

I have been encouraged by the wide variety of responses received. Many contained useful extensions of the proposals put forward in the consultation. I was most grateful to receive your and Laurence Barnes' helpful comments on a number of the suggestions offered as well as your own further very constructive ideas. I am confident that these will all help very significantly in finding the common ground we are all seeking, and in enhancing the interface between the administrative and judicial arms of the Service.

In considering the way forward, the Government has taken fully into account the constitutional model that is provided in the legislation establishing the VTS. I remain strongly of the view that this is in itself an important safeguard for judicial independence. I am pleased that this view has been endorsed by the Council on Tribunals. You and I both agree however that a further provision for discussion among and with the judiciary would be a valuable enhancement to the structure.

The Government has concluded that the way forward is for the Valuation Tribunal Service to establish two committees. The first should be a committee of regional representatives of Valuation Tribunals, and the second should be an interface committee between the Tribunals (as represented by the regional representatives) and the VTS. The Government believes that it would support the necessary partnership between the VTS and the Tribunals for these committees to be established without direction from the Secretary of State at this time.

The details of our conclusions, along with a report on the responses to the consultation, are set out in the enclosed appendices. The Government considers these set out a clear framework for effective, forward looking partnership working which will contribute significantly to the development and rationalisation of the Valuation Tribunals in ways that are fully commensurate with judicial independence.

I believe these conclusions properly reflect the wide consensus that I consider has emerged in response to the consultation and offer practical and effective support for sustaining the judicial independence of the Valuation Tribunals. I should be grateful for your assurance that you concur with this view. Subject to that I invite the VTS to implement these conclusions as soon as possible.

I shall be placing copies of this letter and its appendices on the ODPM web site.

**PHIL HOPE**