



The Rent Service Business Plan 2008-2009

the rent service 
specialists in rental valuations

Part of the Department for Work and Pensions



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Foreword



2008-09 will be a landmark year for The Rent Service (TRS), its customers and staff. The introduction of the new Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in April 2008 is part of the Government's wider Welfare Reform agenda. The new system is designed to provide housing benefit (HB) customers with greater fairness, choice and personal responsibility, and creates a simpler and more transparent system for them to access HB support.

Since the publication of our last business plan the Government's HB Reform plans have been finalised and the Welfare Reform Bill received Royal Assent in May 2007.

The introduction of LHA for new customers means a fundamental change in the operational activities of TRS created through greater efficiency and transparency. As such, the new system no longer requires a separate stand alone body to support it and Ministers have announced that TRS residual functions will transfer to the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) in April 2009.

In 2008-09 our focus will be on four priority areas; firstly, to support our customers with the introduction of LHA and help them to understand the new system and access it easily and efficiently; secondly, to continue to support customers within the existing HB system; thirdly, to continue to deliver high quality services and maintain our track record of excellence in service delivery; and finally, to manage the transition of TRS residual functions to VOA by April 2009.

Over the last year the Agency Management Board (see Annex A) has implemented a number of changes to the structure and operation of TRS to support delivery of this substantial change programme. In September 2007 we launched the TRANSFORM programme, aimed at TRS' customers and staff, and covering all aspects of our preparations for transfer to VOA. Through the TRANSFORM programme, stakeholders will be kept informed and involved with the important changes taking place in the reform of the HB system and our subsequent transfer to VOA.



2008-09 will continue to pose challenges, not least for our staff, as we continue to reduce headcount following introduction of the new LHA and in preparation for our transfer to VOA in April 2009. Over the past twelve months staff and management in TRS have shown enormous commitment and dedication in responding to the demands of our business and I am confident they will continue to demonstrate their professionalism and ability in the coming year to ensure that we deliver against our challenging objectives and plans.



Patrick Boyle
Chief Executive
The Rent Service, March 2008

About Us

TRS is an Executive Agency of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and a front line service delivery organisation. Our role is to provide rental valuation services for the private rented housing sector for HB purposes and the new LHA that will become operational in April 2008.

TRS also carry out Fair Rent determinations and provide non-statutory advice to customers and stakeholders within the public, private and charity sectors.

Much work has been done to prepare for the introduction of LHA. A comprehensive review of localities across England, including extensive consultation with our Local Authority (LA) customers has been completed. Indicative LHAs have been provided to all LAs and we published the new Broad Rental Market Areas* (BRMAs) and 'provisional' LHA rates in January 2008.

*A BRMA is the geographical area used for the determination of LHA.



Our Mission

“We will implement the new LHA and transfer TRS functions to VOA, whilst continuing to deliver high levels of customer service.”

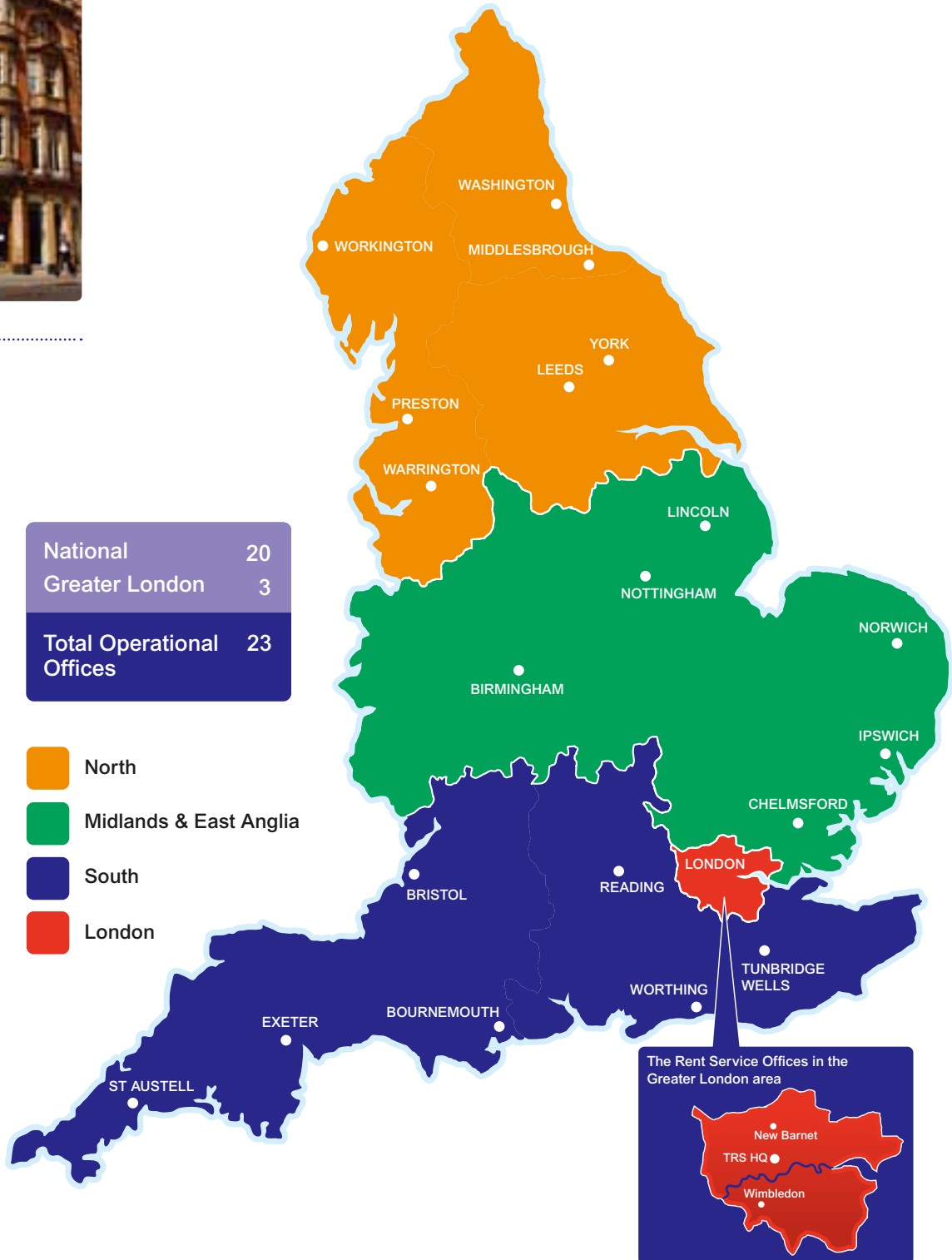




▲ TRS Headquarters

Our Offices

The map below shows the offices that TRS plans to operate from in 2008-09. Approximately 25% of TRS staff are supported to work remotely from their own homes.



Key Relationships

As an integral part of our business responsibilities we engage with a variety of Government organisations both within DWP and across Government.

The Agency's main stakeholders are DWP and Communities and Local Government (CLG).

DWP - Work, Welfare and Equality Group is the Agency's policy sponsor and main stakeholder, having both legislative and policy lead (mainly HB policy) for around 90% of the Agency's workload. TRS work in partnership with DWP to agree appropriate arrangements to consult on performance measures and targets, so that value for money can be demonstrated throughout the Agency's business operations and activities.

CLG – is responsible for the policy and legislative lead affecting the remaining 10% of the Agency's workload which consists of Fair Rent cases.

Representatives from each department, together with appointees made by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, form an Advisory Board to the Agency (see Annex B). The Board's role is to assist in advising the Secretary of State and the Chief Executive on the business and corporate plans of the Agency and its performance against objectives and targets set within them. The Chief Executive retains direct access to the Secretary of State on all matters within the Chief Executive's sphere of responsibility.



Our Values and Behaviours

TRS shares core values with DWP.

Throughout the coming year we will aim, at all times, to be:



Achieving the best

- Deliver an excellent service to our customers and meet key performance targets
- Ensure all our actions and behaviours reflect our overarching approach to quality and customer service



Respecting people

- Recognise the important contribution our staff make to delivering high quality customer services and support them positively during a challenging period of change



Making a difference

- Understand the local and national reasons for change, responding positively to stakeholder needs
- Seek, encourage and listen to stakeholder feedback as a way of improving our quality and effectiveness



Looking outwards

- Speak well of our customers, colleagues and stakeholders and be open and transparent in all communications

Key Strategic Aims

Strategic Aim 1	To deliver high quality services to our customers and achieve key Secretary of State targets.
Strategic Aim 2	To deliver value for money services and achieve our financial targets.
Strategic Aim 3	To work with DWP and LA stakeholders to implement and take forward the HB Reform Agenda.
Strategic Aim 4	To work with DWP, CLG and VOA to ensure that TRS transfers a 'fit for purpose' organisation on 1 April 2009.
Strategic Aim 5	To ensure we have the necessary skills and capacity to maintain effective service delivery whilst managing substantial change.
Strategic Aim 6	To consult our staff and their representatives on the TRANSFORM programme and ensure they are supported to meet the challenges ahead.



Key Business Priorities

Strategic Aim 1

To deliver high quality services to our customers and achieve key Secretary of State targets.

We will achieve this strategic aim in the following ways:

- Delivering stretching key performance targets, which are monitored regularly by DWP sponsorship team and the Agency's Advisory Board
- Focussing on delivering the highest quality service for all our customers
- Continuing to upgrade our core caseload processing system – VICTER (Valuation Information Communications Technology and Electronic Retrieval) to enhance organisational efficiency by improving processing times and functionality
- Delivering the work of the Centralised Processing Unit (CPU) which will help to achieve a faster and more efficient service to our customers



Our performance will be measured against a range of customer and business related key targets. These are shown in Figure 1 on the next page



Key Secretary of State Targets

Figure 1: Key Secretary of State Targets

Service Delivery
To determine 94% of Housing Benefit claims with an inspection in 15 working days.
To determine 94% of Housing Benefit claims without an inspection in 3 working days.
To determine 94% of Pre-Tenancy Housing Benefit claims within 4 working days.
To determine 94% of Redeterminations within 15 working days.
To determine 94% of Fair Rents within 40 working days.
Quality
95% of all Housing Benefit determinations that are checked as part of our quality assurance processes are verified as being accurate.
95% of all Fair Rent valuations that are checked as part of our quality assurance processes are verified as being accurate.
Customer Satisfaction
To ensure that at least 95% of our Local Authority customers rate our service as satisfactory or better during the year.
To ensure that at least 95% of our Fair Rent customers, and those Housing Benefit customers that we inspect, rate our service as satisfactory or better during the year.
Valuation Assurance
To review in the first year of LHA 25% of Broad Rental Market Areas.
Value for Money for Service Delivery Teams
Productivity
To increase productivity within the Service Delivery function by 2% by the end of the year.
Cost per case
To reduce the Service Delivery function cost per case by 1.5% in real terms by the end of the year.
Sickness Absence
To keep sickness absence below 8 working days per employee per year.



Customer Satisfaction

The Agency places great importance in gathering views and opinions from its customers as it aims to provide an even better and more efficient service.

In 2008-09 TRS will conduct the following two surveys:

Local Authority Survey

The 2008-09 survey will canvas the views of LAs who are our primary customers. Our target is to achieve at least a **95%** satisfactory or better rating from our LA customers who respond to the survey.



The survey will provide us with helpful feedback on what we do well, and will highlight areas of our service where we may need to make improvements.

National Customer Satisfaction Survey

The 2008-09 survey will canvas the views of Fair Rent and HB customers. Our target is to ensure at least **95%** of our Fair Rent customers, and those HB customers that we inspect, rate our service as satisfactory or better.

The surveys will assist the Agency with meeting:

- TRS requirements of our continuous improvement process
- DWP business plan targets set each year by the Secretary of State

We aim to increase the response rate in both of these surveys in order to gather a broader and fuller picture from a wider range of our stakeholders. This will help us to continue to shape our services to meet the needs of our customers.

Quality

It is still vital that the quality of our work continues to meet the highest standards. To this end our quality targets for 2008-09 are:

- **95%** of all Housing Benefit determinations checked as part of our quality assurance processes are verified as being accurate
- **95%** of all Fair Rent valuations checked as part of our quality assurance processes are verified as being accurate

Ensuring accessibility for all – TRS literature and information

TRS works hard to ensure information for our customers and printed material is accessible.

For example, to support customers with a visual impairment, we adhere to the RNIB clear print guidelines, which cover type size, typeface, contrast and printing. Customer literature can also be provided in Braille and spoken word versions. The following TRS publications are available in Chinese, Hindu, Gujerati, Punjabi, Urdu and Arabic on TRS public website:

1. Fair Rent - The role of the rent officer and rent assessment committee.
2. Fair Rent - Understanding your registered rent.
3. Housing Benefit - The Rent Service and Housing Benefit.
4. Housing Benefit - Pre-tenancy determination.
5. Asking for Information from The Rent Service.
6. If things go wrong - complaints.
7. Housing Benefit - The Rent Service and Housing Benefit - A guide for landlords.

Printed copies of TRS leaflets are available from:

**The Rent Service
Customer Services
5 Welbeck Street
London
WG1 9YQ**

Telephone TRS Customer Services team on: 01202 551590

Alternatively you can access these via our public website, within the 'Advice and Guidance' section: www.therentservice.gov.uk

Or e-mail: customer.services@therentservice.gov.uk

Speed of Processing

We will continue to effectively support performance in terms of speed of delivery to our customers and stakeholders during 2008-09. Whilst the introduction of the LHA for new customers is expected to reduce our current HB workload by approximately 40% during the year, we still aim to deliver a high quality speed of processing service to all our customers and stakeholders whilst meeting the challenging reductions in staff numbers. Our target for all service delivery functions will be **94%**.

During 2008-09 we will measure both productivity and cost per case through our front line Service Delivery teams who directly deliver our services to customers.

Electronic Interface System (EIS) take-up strategy

The EIS is software that enables TRS to have direct electronic connectivity with LAs. It improves quality by reducing errors and inaccuracies within the referral process. This is achieved by using an agreed electronic format that verifies the information and ensures that it meets a minimum standard. The process also aims to provide an accurate electronic audit trail for both parties.





During 2008-09 we will actively promote the benefits of the EIS in terms of data security and efficiency with the aim of increasing the number of LA users by 20%. As at February 2008, TRS had 110 of the 354 LAs across England using EIS to transmit referrals electronically and 23 LAs testing the software.

Centralised Processing Unit & Contact Centre

Following the successful completion of a pilot to test centralised processing of HB work in early 2006, TRS undertook a review of processing procedures. Following this, it was agreed by the Agency Management Board to establish a CPU. This will enable TRS to provide an efficient service to LAs and meet the challenges that the introduction of LHA in April 2008 may bring.

The introduction of LHA for new claims from April 2008 will have a significant impact on TRS and its workload. It is expected that our workload will reduce by 40% this year, and by 2011 it will be 75% lower than the level in 2007-08.

Centralising the administrative processes that support HB casework, the CPU will be able to respond to these fluctuations in workload and staff accordingly.

In January 2008 TRS established a CPU in Washington, Tyne and Wear, which took overall responsibility for the administrative functions of HB casework from the Service Delivery teams. The early evidence suggests that the CPU is delivering.

The workload of the CPU is split into two main functions:

(i) The Processing Unit

All hard copy HB referrals, Pre-tenancy determinations and Redetermination cases have been handled by the unit since January 2008. Fair Rent cases will be phased in from April 2008. This will ensure that all existing administrative work is being undertaken by the Unit in advance of the transfer to VOA in April 2009.

(ii) The Contact Centre

The Contact Centre will support the work of the Customer Service Team and handle any casework enquiries, plus act as the national contact centre for enquiries by LAs across England.

The telephone number for the Contact Centre is: **08450 264696**

Strategic Aim 2

To deliver value for money services and achieve our financial targets.

We will achieve this strategic aim in the following ways:

- By increasing productivity by 2%
- By reducing the cost per case by 1.5% in real terms
- By keeping our sickness absence level below an average of 8 working days per employee in 2008-09
- By delivering our workload within our agreed financial allocation

Value for money

The measure of our success will be determined through three separate indicators:

- increasing productivity
- reducing cost per case; and
- improving the quality of the determinations that we make

Productivity

As a result of the changes to how LHA will be carried out for new customers in 2008-09, the measurement of our improvements in productivity and cost per case will focus on the staff that deliver our front line and service delivery functions. The following results for the productivity and cost per case have therefore been restated for earlier years to show a fair comparison with the target for 2008-09.

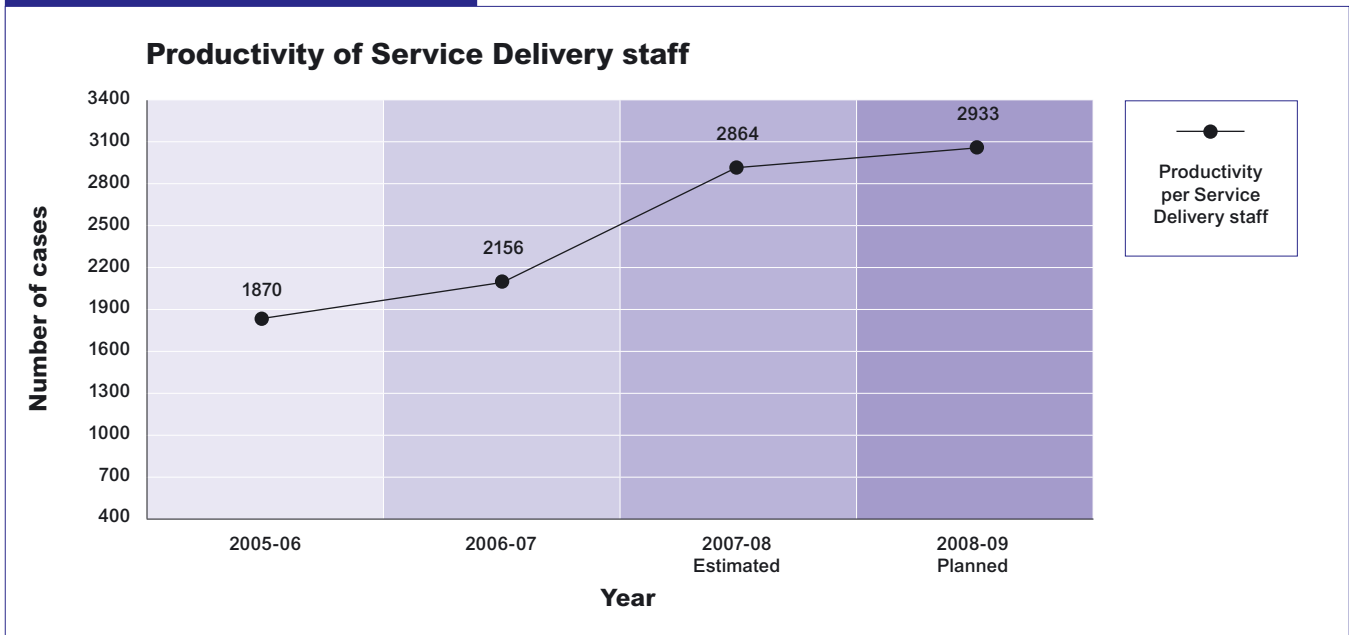
Figure 2: Productivity increases

Description	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08 Estimated	2008-09 Planned
Number of cases per Service Delivery staff	1870	2156	2864	2933
% Increase in Productivity				2%

Our target is for Service Delivery staff to have increased TRS productivity by **2%** at the end of 2008-09.



Figure 3: Trend in Productivity



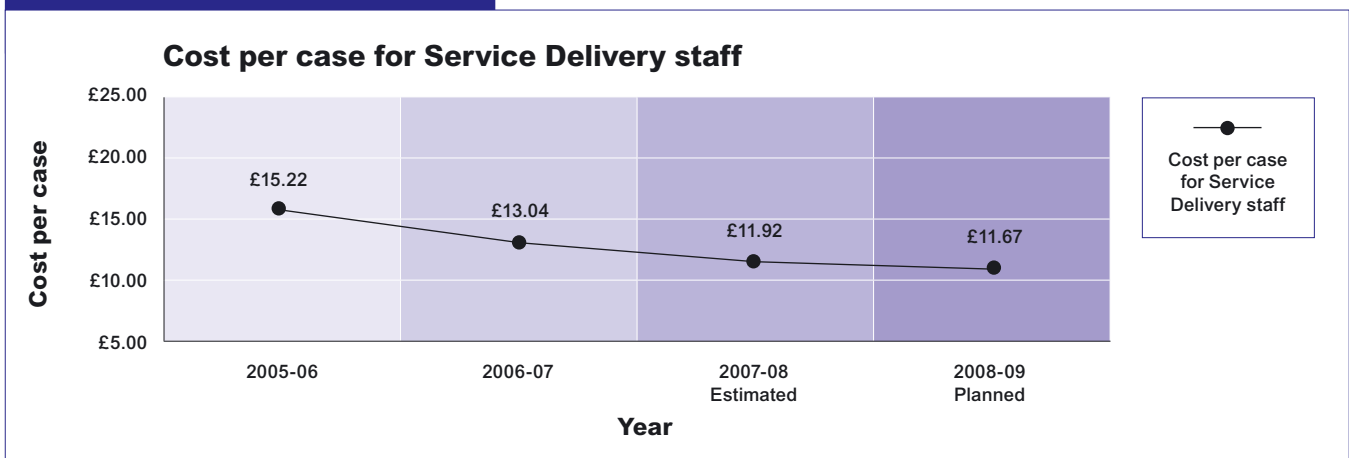
Cost per case

Our target for 2008-09 is to reduce cost per case by 1.5% in real terms by the end of the year. Results for previous years have been restated for comparison purposes.

Figure 4: Cost per case

Description	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08 Estimated	2008-09 Planned
Cost per case for Service Delivery staff	£15.22	£13.04	£11.92	£11.67
% Decrease in cost per case				-1.5%

Figure 5: Trend in Cost per case



Figures 2 - 5 highlight the improving trend in value for money for TRS Service Delivery teams since 2005-06.

Absence

Maintaining performance across the organisation depends largely upon a healthy workforce who attend work regularly. In 2008-09 we aim to ensure that TRS averages no more than **8 days** sickness absence per employee. We will work closely with managers, staff and our Occupational Health Adviser to manage each sickness absence case in an appropriate and effective manner during this period of significant change.

Workload

Housing Benefit

The introduction of LHA for new claims from April 2008 will have a significant impact on TRS and its workload. It is expected that our workload will reduce by 40% this year, and by 2011 it will be 75% lower than the level in 2007-08.

We expect this to happen in two stages:

- The first will be the immediate effect of the LHA, with all new benefit claims processed under the new legislation. The impact of this is expected to be noticed from June 2008
- The second is where existing customers move home or experience a gap in their claim period, at this point they will fall under the new processes

The effect of the latter is more difficult to predict and will vary across the country.

Working with DWP colleagues we have estimated the 'churn rate' to result in a final HB caseload of approximately 610,000 cases, almost 50% of the 2007-08 total. This is shown at Figure 6.



Figure 6: National workload forecast

	National			
	2007-08 Expected Caseload	2008-09 Forecast Caseload	Decrease	% Decrease
Housing Benefit referrals (with & without inspection)	1,080,200	576,100	504,100	47%
Pre-tenancy determinations	134,400	27,000	107,400	80%
Redeterminations	13,090	6,600	6,490	50%
Total Housing Benefit work	1,227,690	609,700	617,990	50%
Fair Rent applications	86,000	81,000	5,000	6%
Housing Renovation Grants	100	0	100	0
Total Caseload	1,313,790	690,700	623,090	47%

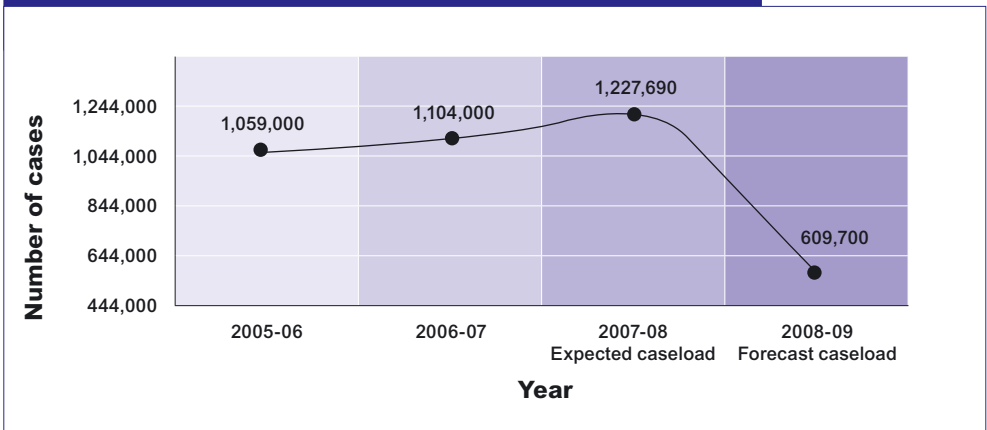
Figure 7: Forecast workload by territory

	2007-08 Expected caseload	2008-09 Forecast caseload	Decrease
NORTH			
Housing Benefit referrals (with & without inspection)	298,500	162,000	136,500
Pre-tenancy determinations	27,000	6,000	21,000
Redeterminations	3,900	2,000	1,900
Total Housing Benefit Work	329,400	170,000	159,400
Fair Rent applications	23,500	22,500	1,000
Housing Renovation Grants	70	0	70
Total caseload North	352,970	192,500	160,470
LONDON			
Housing Benefit referrals (with & without inspection)	195,500	104,000	91,500
Pre-tenancy determinations	30,100	6,000	24,100
Redeterminations	4,400	2,200	2,200
Total Housing Benefit Work	230,000	112,200	117,800
Fair Rent applications	32,000	30,000	2,000
Housing Renovation Grants	10	0	10
Total caseload London	262,010	142,200	119,810
MIDLANDS AND EAST			
Housing Benefit referrals (with & without inspection)	276,000	145,500	130,500
Pre-tenancy determinations	36,500	7,000	29,500
Redeterminations	1,600	800	800
Total Housing Benefit Work	314,100	153,300	160,800
Fair Rent applications	19,500	16,500	3,000
Housing Renovation Grants	10	0	10
Total caseload Midlands & East	333,610	169,800	163,810
SOUTH			
Housing Benefit referrals (with & without inspection)	310,200	164,600	145,600
Pre-tenancy determinations	40,800	8,000	32,800
Redeterminations	3,190	1,600	1,590
Total Housing Benefit Work	354,190	174,200	179,990
Fair Rent applications	11,000	12,000	-1,000
Housing Renovation Grants	10	0	10
Total caseload South	365,200	186,200	179,000
National caseload	1,313,790	690,700	623,090

Decline in Workload – Housing Benefit referrals

Figure 8 shows a comparison of workload over the past three years and the expected impact of the introduction of the new LHA from 2008-09 on the overall number of HB referrals.

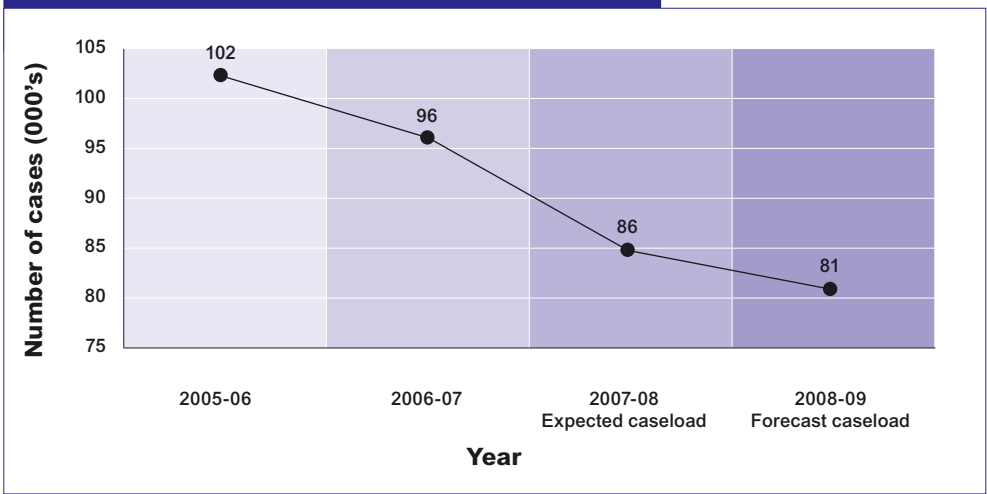
Figure 8: Workload trend – Housing Benefit cases



Fair Rent

In recent years the trend in our Fair Rent caseload is again expected to decrease in 2008-09. The level of applications for registered rents has steadily fallen since 1989, when changes to legislation removed the option for tenancies created after 14 January 1989 to request a Fair Rent. For 2008-09 we are predicting a caseload of 81,000 cases, this represents approximately 5,000 less than our 2007-08 expected outturn.

Figure 9: Workload trend – Fair Rent cases





Strategic Aim 3

To work with DWP and LA stakeholders to implement and take forward the HB Reform Agenda.

We will achieve this strategic aim in the following ways:

- By consulting with and providing support to LAs during the implementation of the LHA
- By providing BRMAs through consultation, lettings and socio-economic data research collection to support the LHA
- By collecting sufficient lettings information to ensure the LHA is representative of the local market
- By introducing a web-based solution for the delivery of monthly LHA information to LAs

Introduction of LHA and support for Local Authorities

In the lead up to the introduction of BRMAs and the LHA, TRS has consulted widely with LAs, landlord groups and organisations representing the interests of benefit customers, such as Shelter and Citizens Advice.

This process has been carried out through a mixture of individual meetings, presentations and joint TRS/DWP seminars, where all key stakeholders were invited to discuss the plans for LHA introduction and TRS transfer to VOA. This has ensured that all stakeholders were made aware of the planned changes and were engaged in the planning process for the new system.

TRS staff will continue to work with LAs to foster the good working relationships established and provide support in ensuring the success of the introduction and implementation of LHA. We will continue to contribute to landlord and tenant forums, provide information to local stakeholder groups and maintain our extensive contacts with LAs, landlords, agents and tenants.

Once implemented TRS will continue to support the delivery of LHAs in several key areas:

- By ensuring the BRMAs are kept up to date and reflect any changes and developments in the area
- By maintaining a database of lettings information that is representative of the Private Rented Sector

- By providing LHA figures to each LA for the required size categories each month
- By working with LAs to explain and promote the LHA to landlords and tenants

BRMA implementation

TRS is responsible for keeping localities, and the Local Reference Rents (LRRs) that apply within them, under regular review. This ensures they accurately reflect the patterns of areas in which people live and enjoy services and the rental values within those areas. It is these LRRs that LAs use to calculate HB.

A commitment was made as part of the 2006-07 Business Plan to undertake a localities review and consult with LAs across England. As a result of this review there was a substantial decrease in the number of localities.

For the LHA a geographical area known as a BRMA is determined by TRS and from this area evidence of private sector lettings is gathered which will be used to calculate a 'median' that will be used by the LA to determine the HB entitlement for those cases.

During 2008-09 TRS will keep all BRMAs under review, and in the first year of LHA are committed to reviewing **25%** of these. The need for carrying out a review of a BRMA will be suggested by changes in the relevant components in the statute, and we will prioritise and plan based on factors noted either at the time of the last review or since. We remain committed to consultation and information-sharing with the LAs involved.

Property inspections and collection of lettings information

Essential information on local housing markets is gathered during property inspections. These inspections support the lettings information database, updating socio-economic data, identifying trends in local housing markets, and improving knowledge of individual properties.

Rent Officers will seek to develop improved methods of collection using the latest equipment such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). These devices will help Rent Officers capture valuable property data for valuation purposes from tenants and landlords.

To complement the above, we will continue to measure our lettings information database against the Private Rented Sector as defined by the Office of National Statistics to meet our collection objectives. To this end we will aim to ensure that the amount of lettings information that we hold will be approximately **10%** of the Private Rented Sector and that it will be representative of the whole of this sector.





Property inspections will continue to increase the number of sources of rental evidence available to ensure that information is obtained from a wide range of tenancies. Inspections will enhance market evidence collection in local markets where open market rental information is not readily available or totally represented by letting agents.

Property inspections also enable us to gain an appreciation of the quality and type of accommodation available to HB customers and their access to local services. Inspections will therefore be targeted to where they will have maximum effect and support the collecting of lettings information and the introduction of LHA.

In support of these aims we will seek to inspect **15%** of predicted caseload during 2008-09, which will be a stretching target in view of the challenges that TRS will face during this period.

The role of the Rent Officer must inevitably change with the introduction of LHA, and we have already begun the process of increasing the skills and knowledge needed to gather and analyse lettings information, and review and set BRMAs. We will continue to increase the skills of our Rent Officers in this area, whilst ensuring that we maintain and improve the necessary knowledge to continue to meet our Fair Rent responsibilities.



E-deliver

The E-deliver project is a partnership arrangement with LA software suppliers, the Rent Registration Service for Scotland and the Rent Officer Service for Wales, and is funded by DWP.

The new E-deliver Web Portal will be hosted by TRS and launched in April 2008 to provide benefit customers and LAs with a single point of access to the latest LHA rates.

LAs will be able to download LHA and BRMA rates on a weekly and monthly basis as well as maps, GIS polygon datasets, postcodes and properties included within BRMAs.

It will also provide members of the public with a Bedroom Calculator that indicates the LHA rate for different sized properties based on the evidence gathered by Rent Officers.

Working with colleagues in DWP, TRS will ensure that the site is widely promoted to ensure that potential new customers are able to access the new LHAs.

Strategic Aim 4

To work with DWP, CLG and VOA to ensure that TRS transfers a 'fit for purpose' organisation on 1 April 2009.

We will achieve this strategic aim in the following ways:

- By maintaining our strong corporate governance and internal control framework
- By the joint TRS/VOA TRANSFORM programme that brings staff with the necessary skills and resources together to secure a successful transfer of people and assets to VOA
- By the programme governance structure which ensures that all stakeholders are involved and engaged in key decisions throughout the transfer process
- By ensuring that we have the appropriate IT strategy to help deliver the transition and support the ongoing business

TRANSFORM programme

The TRANSFORM programme was launched on 12 September 2007. The programme has been set up to ensure the residual functions of TRS and the appropriate number of staff are transferred to VOA on 1 April 2009 in a manner that safeguards the operational effectiveness of the transferring business.

This year we will ensure that staff fully understand the process for selection to transfer, the basis of their transfer, the differences and similarities between VOA and TRS working conditions and cultures, and the plans for the future once they are part of VOA.





TRANSFORM

The TRANSFORM programme has been divided into the following workstreams:

Figure 10: TRANSFORM workstreams

Workstream	Overall aim of the Workstream
HR	To support the transfer of functions from TRS to VOA by ensuring adequate skilled resources are in place, whilst ensuring we meet our existing business and organisational obligations.
Functions to Transfer	To ensure that those functions that transfer to VOA on 1 April 2009 are fit for purpose and documented in such a way that VOA are clear how those functions operate in sufficient time for them to be able to align the transferring functions to their existing business.
Due Diligence, Legal and Lights Out	To ensure the assets and liabilities of TRS as at 31 March 2009 (including contracts to be novated and outstanding commitments) are properly transferred to VOA and that the final statutory accounts and annual report are prepared in accordance with the Government Financial Reporting Manual.
Estates	To reduce DWP/TRS/VOA financial liability in respect of estates, whilst taking into account the requirements of all parties.
Information Communication Technology (ICT)	To ensure that the residual operational and support services transferring to VOA have appropriate ICT in place that are fully operational and fit for purpose to support them.
Communications	To ensure all aspects of the change programme are effectively communicated to internal and external audiences. This will ensure that all stakeholders are engaged and contribute to the proposals and changes in a timely manner.
Programme Management	To manage the overall direction and management of the TRANSFORM programme ensuring delivery of the programme to plan. This workstream is responsible for tracking delivery of key products to time, budget and to appropriate quality.

Programme Governance

The TRS/VOA change programme includes managers from both organisations appointed to ensure that the objectives are met, with key activities delivered to plan and within the agreed funding.

The TRANSFORM Programme has the following strategic objectives:

- agree and document the transferring functions, data and operational processes in advance of 1 April 2009, so that VOA is able to understand the business it is taking on and know what best to do with that business

- establish the headcount required to deliver the agreed organisational model that transfers to VOA
- meet legal obligations before TRS closes its doors
- develop career transition strategies for those staff that will not have continuing roles

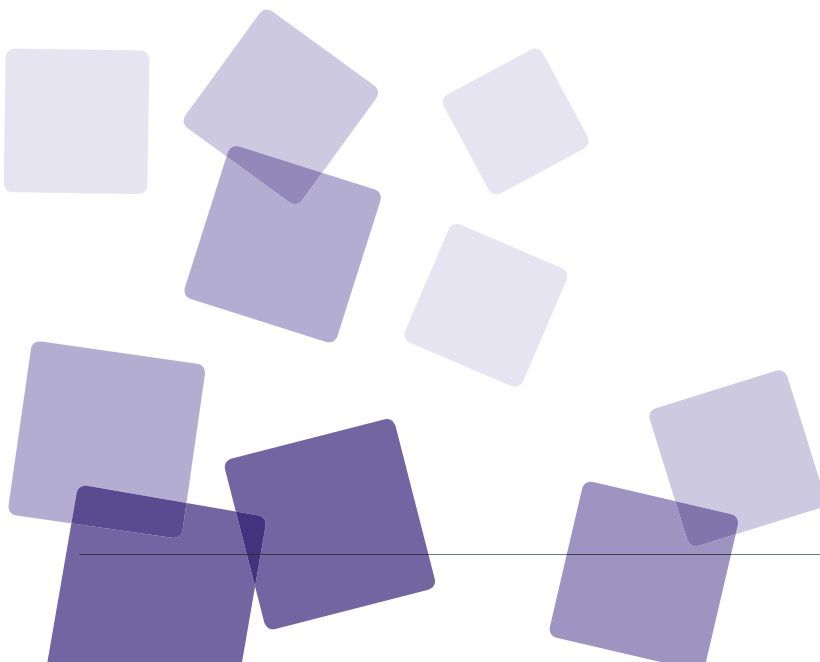
Information Technology Strategy

During 2008-09 the IT Strategy will continue to support the delivery of day-to-day TRS business and prepare the IT systems for their incorporation into VOA on 1 April 2009.

To achieve this, all software will be maintained at a version in line with the business needs of TRS whilst taking into account versions of similar software used or planned for future use by VOA. This will ensure the continued capability to communicate with customers and other stakeholders.

We will aim to increase efficiency and productivity by utilising the latest technology and by actively supporting and implementing the wider E-Government IT and Modernising Government initiatives.

TRS will ensure that the IT systems comply with relevant security standards and legislation and, in particular, we will ensure that the provisions of the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act are strictly applied, with any future development having due regard to the Freedom of Information requirements.



Strategic Aim 5

To ensure we have the necessary skills and capacity to maintain effective service delivery whilst managing substantial change.

We will achieve this strategic aim in the following ways:

- By providing strong, capable programme management and fully resourcing each of the seven workstreams within the TRANSFORM programme, we will ensure the change process is integrated with our existing business and targets
- By supporting and developing TRS managers with change management skills, we will equip them to help their staff through the transformation process
- By reviewing and where necessary reorganising our business to best deliver the post-LHA processes, we will ensure we retain and allocate skills effectively

Working towards VOA

We have already begun to develop good working relationships with our colleagues in VOA, and will develop these further in 2008-09 by working in partnership with them when investing in the development of our staff. VOA will be the key stakeholder in the development of staff who will transfer to them, and access to some of their current training delivery (including e-learning) will be an essential part of our 2008-09 learning timetable.

We will also develop and deliver learning which helps drive the performance of our new CPU toward optimal levels.



We will continue to support our Rent Officers in gaining professional valuation qualifications whilst ensuring that the assessment of these qualifications match with the current arrangements within VOA.

There will be some staff who will transfer to deliver corporate support functions within VOA, and we will support the continuing professional development needs of these staff during 2008-09. We will also work closely with VOA on awareness programmes for VOA and TRS staff to help raise the profile and knowledge of the business processes of both organisations.

Developing our people

In 2008-09 we will focus on development needs that will:

- help deliver our core business during 2008-09 and beyond
- maintain or increase the professional standing of staff who will transfer to VOA
- it may also be necessary, where appropriate, to equip staff leaving the Agency to go to other roles with recognisable academic or vocational qualifications and transferable skills

Staff morale

Motivating our staff to achieve the high performance that we need from them will be a key management challenge this year. Career transition support will be offered to all staff, regardless of the possibility of transferring to VOA, to allow individuals to take some control of their career and be an active part of the TRANSFORM programme.

The planned staff conference in September 2008 will be an event which staff should look forward to and enjoy, and will be an ideal opportunity for the Agency Management Board to review their hard work and effort over the years, and to motivate for a continued high performance for the rest of the year and beyond.

Our Welfare team will continue to provide an in-house service for all staff who feel they would benefit from some advice and guidance on matters which are affecting their working or personal lives. External counselling services will continue to be available from our employee assistance provider.





Strategic Aim 6

To consult our staff and their representatives on the TRANSFORM programme and ensure they are supported to meet the challenges ahead.

We will achieve this strategic aim in the following ways:

- By continuing our programme of staff engagement and communication which includes regular involvement and dialogue with trade union representatives, together with a full communications programme for all staff
- By providing clear and early options for staff and delivering a comprehensive and professional career transition support programme for everyone affected by the transition

Consultation

The implementation of the LHA and our transfer to VOA will impact upon different groups of staff in various ways. What is clear is that no one in TRS will be unaffected, and in this challenging year we will work hard to maintain a positive, motivated and high performing workforce to ensure that the functions we transfer to VOA are fit for purpose.

Relationships with our trade unions and staff representatives assumes more importance than ever in 2008-09. We will continue to use our agreed joint framework for consultation, and develop that further with representatives from VOA and where necessary their trade unions.

Staff communications

A key element of the success of the TRANSFORM programme over the next twelve months will be regular updates and ongoing communication that ensure TRS and VOA stakeholders - both internal and external - are kept informed of progress and key stages during this time of change.

The communications activity will also support the programme and workstream leads by ensuring that key decisions, milestones and activities are communicated in a supportive and timely way.

When the TRANSFORM programme was launched in September 2007 there were six regional simultaneous presentations held for staff across England to ensure that everyone received a consistent message on the same day. Since that time we have maintained a regular flow of information to staff on all aspects of TRS business and the transfer to VOA.

Our plans for 2008-09 include:

The intranet – this has been reviewed and will continue to be updated on a regular basis to reflect both weekly headlines and also to focus on new areas such as the CPU and changes to VICTER. The overall aim of the intranet is to make it more ‘user friendly’ and accessible for staff with encouragement to use it as a daily source of news and information.

Pulse checks – we will run a further series of intranet-based staff surveys with short questions and an easy response mechanism. The first of these ‘pulse checks’ was conducted in November 2007. Follow-up surveys will be conducted during 2008.

INFORM magazine – this monthly magazine for staff has been redesigned with greater emphasis on corporate stories while still retaining coverage of leisure and sports activities. This will continue to be produced throughout 2008-09 with an emphasis on providing a good mix of corporate and social content.

General communications – there will be communications support for initiatives such as training modules and the career transition support programme. Messages will be shared using a variety of communication tools that will be created in-house to support our programme of activities and to obtain the views of staff; and finally TRS communications mailbox which will continue to provide a focal point for receiving feedback from staff.

Developing staff leaving the organisation

We will continue to provide a comprehensive career transition support service, through our current provider Reed Consulting, to all staff who will leave TRS as a result of our diminishing workload. This will include one-to-one career assessments with trained consultants, a comprehensive skills analysis and attendance at workshops to assist with job search techniques.

Some training needs may be identified through this process, and where appropriate we will support departing staff in gaining academic or vocational qualifications, in circumstances where the individual is at a real disadvantage without them.

In circumstances where staff need to develop transferable skills we will also aim to support these, through in-house skills development, e-learning or other solutions.





To ensure that professionally qualified staff can maintain their status for future employment we will support their continuing professional development.

To enhance our commitment to effective service delivery, the Agency is committed to diversity and equality principles, which are set out in our equality scheme and action plans. These documents are being reviewed and will be republished in May 2008. All actions in the plans are overseen by the Equality Board who monitor progress.

Resource Plan

During 2008-09 we will employ an average of **565** staff to deliver our services and we plan to spend approximately **£38m**, which includes capital investment of approximately **£0.250m** and funding for early releases.



Financial resources

Figure 11: Financial resources

Resource	Actual 2006-07	Forecast 2007-08	Planned 2008-09
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Running Costs	32,397	32,323	27,610
Capital Expenditure	1,792	1,066	250
Notional Items	2,360	2,080	1,370
Total Administrative resources	36,549	35,469	29,230
Early Release Funding	1,145	3,800	8,500
Total Financial resources	37,694	39,269	37,730

The total financial resources available to the Agency to fund its planned activities for 2008-09 are shown in Figure 11 above.

The real terms reduction compared with the previous years reflects the efficiency savings that we are planning on delivering during 2008-09 through the introduction of the LHA. The delivery of the efficiency gains is supplemented by the funding made available by DWP for early departures to allow the Agency to meet its reduced headcount target for 2008-09.

Staff resources

Figure 12: Staff resources

Resource	Actual 2006-07	Forecast 2007-08	Planned 2008-09
Front Line Delivery:	580	557	460
Corporate Support:	110	108	105
Total Staff	690	665	565

Note: Staff figures are based on full-time equivalents and show the average staff numbers during the year.



Corporate Governance



A major focus for the Agency in the lead up to the transfer of functions to VOA will be the need to maintain the strength and effectiveness of our internal controls and risk management procedures. With anticipated changes to organisational structures and staffing profiles the need for strong corporate governance will continue to remain paramount. It will be a challenging period in terms of meeting aims and objectives, and careful attention will be needed to ensure that standards remain high throughout the period of transition.



To ensure that focus is maintained the Agency will continue to integrate governance, business planning and risk management into the internal control framework. This integrated approach to governance will provide efficiencies and prevent duplication of effort and will ensure that governance is linked with delivery of the Agency's business.

Internal Control

Our internal control processes are subject to regular audits and reviews throughout the year and assurances are provided to our Audit Committee by the internal auditors. The audit programme is agreed in advance by the Audit Committee, which is chaired by an external member of the TRS Advisory Board and attended by the external auditors appointed by the National Audit Office. Stewardship reporting is mandatory for all Directors and is conducted every six months. These reports feed into the annual Statement of Internal Control which is audited in conjunction with the annual report and accounts.

TRS internal control framework is contained within a comprehensive finance manual which is accessible to all staff via the intranet and which is reviewed and updated annually. This manual, referred to as the Standing Financial Instructions, contains all the procedures and forms required for managing and controlling public funds and assets. As 2008-09 progresses and staff movements are expected to increase we will be relying on this detailed finance manual to ensure that internal controls are maintained.

Risk Management

The system of internal control within the Agency is supported by a rolling risk management process. We regularly review the principal risks that threaten the achievement of the Agency's policies, aims and objectives and identify actions that can be taken to address those risks. Risk is managed at four key levels:

- Strategic level – key risks identified and managed by the Agency Management Board, and reviewed by the Audit Committee
- Directorate level – key risks identified and managed by Directors and their management teams
- Territory level – key risks at this level are identified by all staff, and managed by the Territorial Manager and feed into Directorate level risks as appropriate
- Programme & Project level – key programme and project risks are identified and discussed at the relevant programme or project boards

In terms of the TRANSFORM programme, the risks are agreed by consensus between TRS and VOA through meetings and discussions within the defined workstreams and then considered by the Joint TRANSFORM Programme Board. These risks may then be considered for inclusion in the TRS Strategic Risk Register by the Agency Management Board.

Business Continuity

A key part of managing our risks is ensuring that we have plans in place to deal with any incident that might put in jeopardy the safety of our staff or the delivery of our business. A Disaster Recovery Site (DRS) operates at one of our branch offices and is equipped to provide a seamless transfer of IT services from our current IT site to the DRS should an incident occur.

The development of remote working capacity has also allowed us to manage and deliver our work from anywhere in the country if required. Workloads are regularly transferred between branch offices in the ordinary course of our business to manage flows and this facility can be utilised whenever required to maintain business delivery in the event of an incident.

In 2008-09 TRS will review the Business Continuity Plans and test our backup IT systems at the DRS. A review of our disaster recovery processes will also be undertaken by our internal auditors.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee advises the Chief Executive (via the Agency Management Board) on internal control and risk issues. The Chair of the Audit Committee is also a member of the Advisory Board and provides independent reports to the Advisory Board on those issues. The Audit Committee meets at least three times each year and the current members are shown at **Annex C**.





Estates Rationalisation

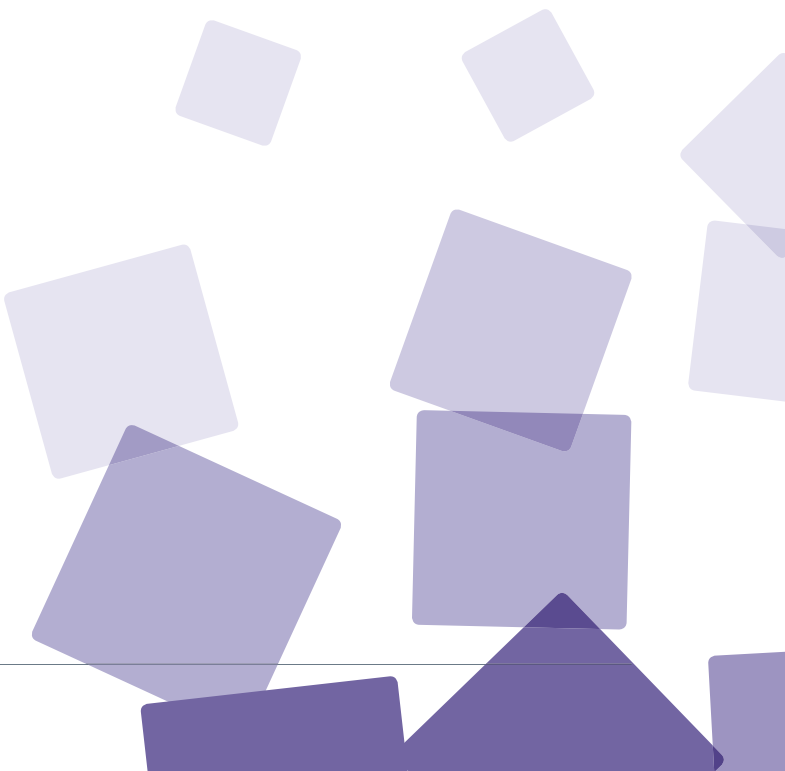
During 2007-08 we exercised lease opportunities to close offices in Truro, Newcastle, Preston, Southampton, Maidstone, Chichester and Birmingham. Staff from these locations were relocated to other TRS offices and space was also made available within VOA offices in St. Austell, Preston, Tunbridge Wells, Worthing and Birmingham.

From 1 April 2008, we will be operating from nineteen TRS offices and four VOA offices in England and these are shown on Page 10.

The Estates Programme Board has agreed the closure of TRS offices in York, Bournemouth, Exeter, Warrington, Workington, Reading and Lincoln during 2008-09.

We will continue to work closely with VOA and DWP colleagues on our estates strategy. Our aim is to reduce the liability for the estate as far as is possible by the time our functions transfer at the end of the year. To this end we will prepare business cases which will consider the relocation of staff from all of our offices into VOA accommodation, and the disposal of TRS estate. The intention is to programme these moves in such a way as to minimise disruption to service delivery and obtain best value for money.

As we reduce our estate we will endeavour to consider the environment when disposing of surplus furniture and storage, and will ensure that where possible surplus stock is either re-used or donated to charitable organisations.



Forward Look

The introduction of LHA for new claims from April 2008 will have a significant impact on TRS and its workload. We expect our workload to reduce by 40% this year and by 2011 it will be 75% lower than the level in 2007-08. Our preparations for the transfer of TRS residual functions to VOA in April 2009 are at an advanced stage, the TRANSFORM programme launched in September 2007 ensures that we are equipped to manage all key staffing and delivery issues in partnership with our VOA colleagues.

TRS and VOA management will continue to work with trade union representatives to ensure that all aspects of the staff transfer process are handled effectively and sensitively and staff involvement and participation remains central to our plans.

Efficiency and value for money remain at the heart of our strategy. In January 2008 we established our CPU in Washington, Tyne and Wear, which now handles all of our administrative processing. The early evidence suggests that the CPU is delivering substantial productivity gains, headcount reductions and increased customer service levels. Rationalisation of our estate continued during 2007-08 and during 2008-09 we plan to reduce the number of offices we operate from so that the liability for the estate will be reduced to a minimum.

My management team and I are fully committed to delivering on our significant and important agenda over the next twelve months as we prepare TRS for its new future within VOA.



Patrick Boyle
Chief Executive



Annex A

Agency Management Board



▲ Patrick Boyle
Chief Executive (Chair)
Tel: 020 7023 6221



▲ Norman Foster
Deputy Chief Executive
Tel: 020 7023 6023



▲ Mark Brookfield
Finance Director
Tel: 020 7023 6064



▲ Neil Prosser
Human Resources Director
Tel: 020 7023 6270



▲ Pauline Moore
Head of HR Operations & Learning
Tel: 020 7023 6280



▲ John Swinnerton
Valuation Assurance Director
Tel: 020 7023 6183



▲ Keith Wheeler
Service Delivery Director
Tel: 0121 410 3811

Invited Attendees:

Colin Hitchin
Andrew Rogers
Heather Starr

Head of Communications & Customer Service
Head of TRANSFORM Programme
Trade Union Representative

Annex B

Advisory Board



▲ **Shirley Trundle**
DWP Director, Benefits and Strategy (Chair)



▲ **Paul Howarth**
DWP Head of Housing Benefit Strategy Division



▲ **Janet Pope**
External Member



▲ **Ilona Blue**
DWP Head of Local Authority Performance Division



▲ **Derek McMahon**
DWP Deputy Director Planning & Performance Management Development



▲ **Paul Sanderson**
VOA: Director of Data & Special Projects



▲ **Valerie Pearce**
External Member: Local Government Association Representative



▲ **Simon Llewellyn**
CLG: Head of Private Renting and Leasehold Division

The Agency's Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Finance Director and Human Resources Director are also members of the Advisory Board

Annex C

Audit Committee



▲ Janet Pope
External Member (Chair)



▲ Neil Prosser
Human Resources Director



▲ Norman Foster
Deputy Chief Executive



▲ Michael Lynham
VOA: Financial Advisor



▲ Richard Harrison
*Head of Redeterminations
Unit*



▲ Steve Sammon
*Territorial Manager
(Midlands & East)*



▲ Derek McMahon
*DWP Deputy Director
Planning & Performance
Management Development*



▲ Harriet Stephens
*Valuation Team Manager
(Bristol)*

Attendees

Patrick Boyle
Mark Brookfield
Jennie Baldwin
Andrew Manning
Nick Corker
Colin Wilcox
James Ferris
Tim Drew
Scott Birch
Anita Etienne
Roland Knell

TRS: Chief Executive
TRS: Finance Director
TRS: Head of Financial Services
Deloitte: Head of Internal Audit
Deloitte: Internal Audit Delivery Manager
NAO: Director
NAO: Audit Manager
PKF: Partner
PKF: Senior Manager
Senior Financial Accountant
Risk Improvement Manager



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Telephone orders/General enquiries: 0870 600 5522
Fax orders: 0870 600 5533
E-mail: customer.services@tso.co.uk
Textphone 0870 240 3701

TSO Shops

16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD
028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401
71 Lothian Road, Edinburgh EH3 9AZ
0870 606 5566 Fax 0870 606 5588

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