

**90%** OF APPEALS ARE REPRESENTED



SUCCESSFUL APPEALS  
**27%** REPRESENTED  
**33%** UNREPRESENTED



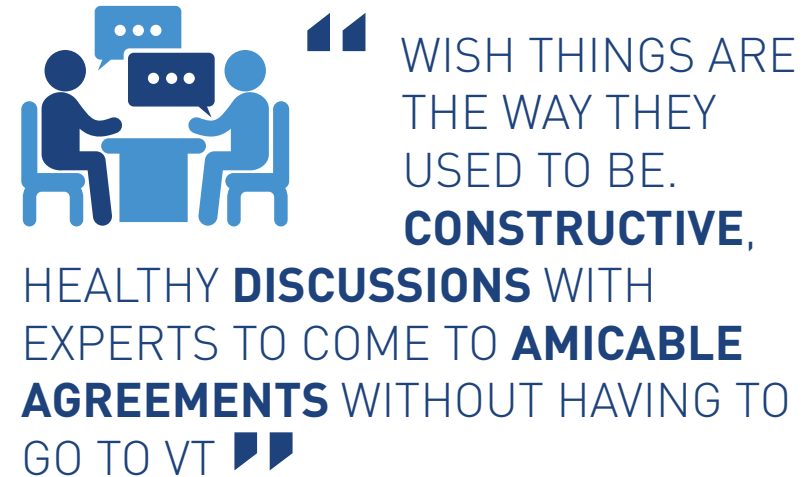
APPEALS IN ALL SECTORS HAVE INCREASED FROM **2005 TO 2010**



APPEALS ARE LESS SUCCESSFUL AGAINST THE 2010 VS 2005 LIST

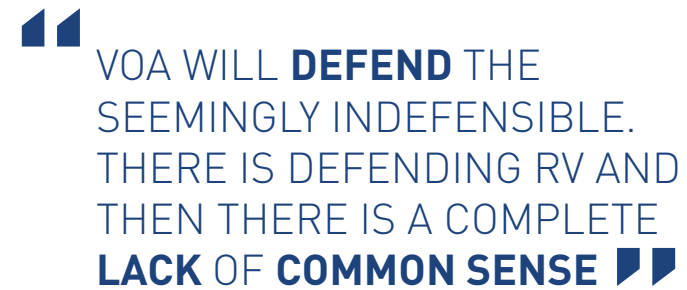
**-9%** REPRESENTED  
**-15%** UNREPRESENTED

    
REPRESENTED AND UNREPRESENTED IS MOSTLY EQUAL IN ALL SECTORS



**CONSTRUCTIVE,**

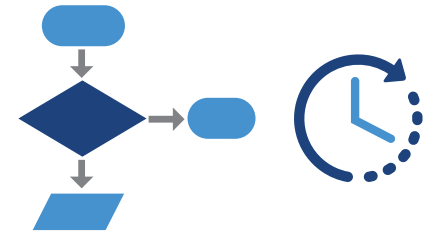
HEALTHY **DISCUSSIONS** WITH  
EXPERTS TO COME TO **AMICABLE**  
**AGREEMENTS** WITHOUT HAVING TO  
GO TO VT 



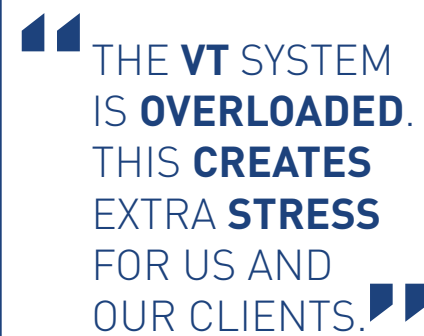
VOA WILL **DEFEND** THE SEEMINGLY INDEFENSIBLE. THERE IS DEFENDING RV AND THEN THERE IS A COMPLETE **LACK OF COMMON SENSE**

WE FEEL A LOT OF PAIN WORKING TO THE VOA'S CURRENT WAYS. WE ALSO CAN SEE THE

REFERENCERS, CASEWORKERS, VALUERS ETC ARE MOSTLY GOOD GUYS CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE. ■■

A flowchart with a blue rounded rectangle at the top, an arrow pointing down to a blue diamond, an arrow pointing right to a blue rounded rectangle, and an arrow pointing down to a blue parallelogram. To the right is a blue clock icon with a circular arrow around it.

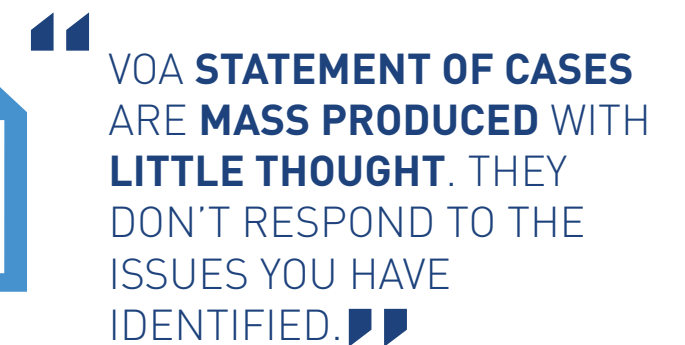
“MOST OF THE **GOOD PEOPLE** HAVE **LEFT** AND **WITH THEM** THEIR **SKILLS** AND **KNOWLEDGE**. THERE ARE ONLY A FEW GOOD PEOPLE THAT REMAIN.”



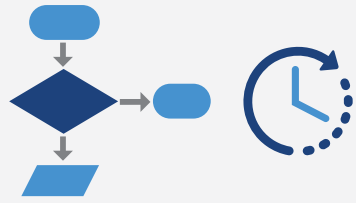
“THE **VT** SYSTEM  
IS **OVERLOADED**.  
THIS **CREATES**  
EXTRA **STRESS**  
FOR US AND  
OUR CLIENTS.”



**“DELAYS CAN CAUSE SOME OF OUR CLIENTS TO GO OUT OF BUSINESS.”**



VOA **STATEMENT OF CASES**  
ARE **MASS PRODUCED** WITH  
**LITTLE THOUGHT**. THEY  
DON'T RESPOND TO THE  
ISSUES YOU HAVE  
IDENTIFIED.



## PROCESS

- The VOA say they are fair but they are not. They used to be.
- Having our cases passed around internally in the VOA is a huge frustration and causes issues as case knowledge is lost.
- Our clients get very frustrated with the process.
- The VOA are far more process driven than they used to be. They no longer think sensibly.
- The VOA are under resourced.
- Some in the VOA take delight in hiding behind regulations.
- The VOA make simple cases difficult. They put things in for appeal when it is clear the rates are wrong.
- The VOA has a culture of fear. Staff are not empowered and they are scared of giving discounts.
- Even when we are in agreement it can take far too long for this to be actioned.
- The VOA will under value to protect against appeals.
- Some cases take time to be allocated. We have no idea who to deal with while this is going on.
- There is a huge backlog of cases and we think that in certain instances the VOA are purposefully not listing things. This has been exacerbated by the edict from George Osborne to fix the backlog. The VOA is too focused on hitting this target reduction.
- The VOA data should really include GPS coordinates, as it can sometimes be hard to locate a property exactly
- The way that the VOA website captures addresses doesn't always reflect how addresses are structured. This can make it harder to find properties in the system.
- Feel that valuers are reluctant to make professional judgements and would prefer the VT decided for them.
- Proposals will often get made invalid for no good reason. It can be very hard to work out why and make the necessary corrections or challenge the reasoning. Maybe this is a delaying tactic?
- Feel that the properties they represent contribute a much more significant proportion of RV than those of smaller organisations. If all cases are treated equally, they end up with a poor service that feels unwarranted.
- There is a concern that valuers can act unprofessionally. Either by:
  - Under-valuing properties to protect against future reductions (so an increase can be threatened if the ratepayer appeals)
  - Adding the wrong things to valuations to protect against reductions.
  - Hiding line items of a valuation within the £/m2.
  - Feel that people are under pressure not to lose too much value out of the list rather than to achieve the correct valuation.
- The VOA treats every case as the same and won't prioritise the more complex ones.



## STATEMENT OF CASE

- VOA's SoC can contain evidence that we're not aware of and can change the path of the appeal.
- It takes time to collect evidence for a SoC.
- Getting evidence comes down to personal contacts.
- Sometimes the margin is too small and the effort to go to appeal means it isn't financially worth it.
- If a reduction is over 5% then the VOA won't sign it off without going to tribunal.
- The VOA cherry picks the information they want to share.
- The VOA do everything they can to keep the RV as high as they can.
- If we don't know the basis of the VOA case how can we negotiate?
- Even on simple cases you have to appeal with all the effort that goes with that.



## COMMUNICATION

- It is very hard to get hold of a case worker. It is just as hard to get a reply. It can feel like case workers are hiding from you.
- The lack of communication puts pressure on everyone.
- When you make your appeal you cannot give your client any idea on the date it will be heard.
- We often have to escalate to get a result. This takes a lot of hard work and time.
- The VOA call centre system is frustrating. "I want to talk to the case worker that wrote to me but I can't be put through and have to wait for a call back from someone to tell me they can't help me and to arrange for the person I called for to call me."
- Direct dials are rarely given out.
- We are not told when our case workers go on holiday. When they go away work on our cases stops.
- Too much information is forgotten about or lost.
- It is hard to get hold of anyone after 4pm.
- We give no information in proposals because we don't have to. When we have provided the information the VOA aren't interested anyway.
- It's getting harder to have a productive discussion to reach an agreement. VOA staff are reluctant to talk to us.
- Feel that you have to put in an appeal to get anyone at the VOA to speak to you. This has made things much more adversarial.
- The VOA are reluctant to engage beyond the target date. Simply respond, "we await your case".
- Even if we have the correct contact details, phones ring out and email inboxes bounce our emails.



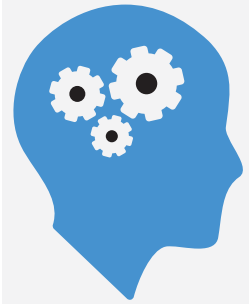
## VALUATION TRIBUNAL

- It costs a lot of money to go to tribunal (£100k).
- The VT panel are not property specialists and can not always see compelling evidence for what it is. Therefore there are a lot of wrong decisions made.
- When a case gets a tribunal date it comes out of the blue and it is all systems go. This is demanding on us and sometimes our clients. Some cases take years to get to VT.
- Sometimes the VOA send people who know nothing about the case to tribunal.
- Valuation Tribunals have targets on listings, not on resolutions. This colours how things work.



## VOLUME AGENTS

- Volume agents ride on the back of our work. Once we get a win they exploit it in the area via their marketing team.
- Worry that the blanket appeals type of agents have put the VOA under such pressure that they've gone into a defensive mode. Also concerned that they've yet to develop a strategy to combat them.
- There is a concern that the VOA now think that all agents are crooks.



## KNOWLEDGE

- Feel that the knowledge base of the VOA is in decline.
- Younger VOA staff are not well skilled and don't know what they are talking about.
- Feel that the VOA workforce is becoming less skilled. This can make first contact more difficult.
- The local knowledge has gone. VOA staff used to know a property and its rating history. This made discussions much more productive. Now a case may go to Tribunal as a consequence when agreement could have been reached, or go around the loop until someone with the right expertise is assigned to the case.
- We don't have access to the rental information the VOA has used to decide their valuation. This makes it hard to understand if the RV is correct.

In the NDR space, the primary audience group that the VOA interacts with is that of ratings agents. Around 90% of NDR payers are represented by an agent, which makes this an important group to understand. The agent marketplace is quite varied however, ranging from lone surveyors, up to multi-national consultancy firms who provide ratings advice as just one of many property related services.

Recognising this variation, it would be less useful to have a single agent persona, as whilst there are many common needs, there are some important differences. During the course of our research we have identified four different categories of agents:



INTEGRATED

- PROFESSIONALLY QUALIFIED
- A LARGE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTANCY
- RV IS A ONLY PART OF WHAT THEY DO
- PROVIDE OTHER SERVICES TO THEIR CLIENTS
- BUILD GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH VOA STAFF
- WILL OFTEN HAVE A PREFERRED CASEWORKER
- WORK IN THE INTERESTS OF THEIR CLIENTS
- LIKE DIRECT CONTACT VIA EMAIL OR PHONE
- ONLY APPEAL CASES THEY KNOW THEY CAN WIN
- WILL UNDERTAKE A RANGE OF SERVICES FOR THEIR CLIENTS
- NDR APPEALS ARE PART OF A BROADER CLIENT SERVICE
- LIKELY TO REPRESENT LARGE BUSINESS
- REASONED ARGUMENTS AND OPEN TO DISCUSSION.

PROFESSIONAL

- PROFESSIONALLY QUALIFIED
- KNOW THEIR MARKET AND EXPERTS IN THEIR FIELD
- SMALLER BUSINESSES - UNLIKELY TO BE INTERNATIONAL
- LIKELY TO HAVE LARGE INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS ALONG WITH MANY SME
- BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS WITH VOA STAFF
- WILL OFTEN HAVE A PREFERRED CASEWORKER
- LIKE DIRECT CONTACT VIA EMAIL OR PHONE
- NO WIN NO FEE SERVICE
- VOLUME AGENTS ARE EATING INTO THEIR BUSINESS
- NETWORK WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL AGENTS - AVOID VOLUME AGENTS.
- ONLY APPEAL CASES THEY KNOW THEY CAN WIN.

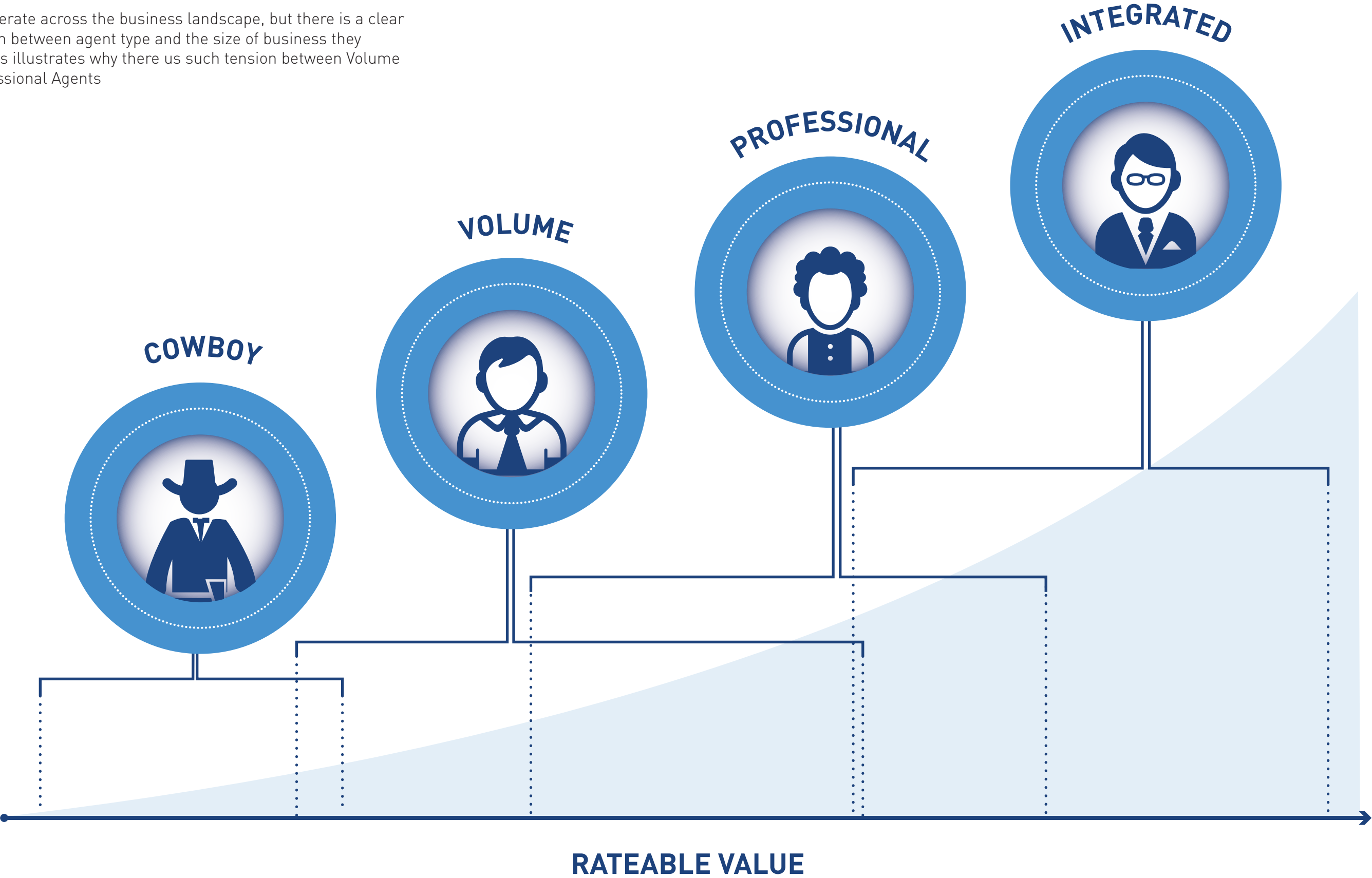
VOLUME

- NO WIN NO FEE
- HIGHLY SALES DRIVEN, AGGRESSIVE CASE WORKER
- APPEAL TARGETS
- COLD CALL TO FIND WORK
- WATCH THE SUCCESS OF OTHER AGENTS AND THEN USE THEIR MARKETING TEAMS TO HAMMER THE MARKET TO PICK UP NEW BUSINESS
- BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH VOA STAFF OR WOULD LIKE TO
- LIKE DIRECT CONTACT VIA EMAIL OR PHONE
- MAINTAIN A LIST OF CASE WORKER CONTACTS
- RELUCTANT TO WITHDRAW CASES OWING TO INTERNAL TARGETS
- WILL PUSH THE VOA TO GO TO TRIBUNAL
- APPEAL EVERYTHING. CAN CAUSE CLIENT RV TO INCREASE

COWBOY

- HARD TO GET HOLD OF (FOR BOTH VOA AND CUSTOMERS)
- COLD CALL OR SELL ON THE DOOR STEP TO FIND WORK
- WILL PROMISE A LOT
- TAKE AN UP FRONT FEE
- PREFER EMAIL TO CONTACT THE VOA
- PROVIDE LITTLE TO NO EVIDENCE - "THE RATE IS TOO RIGHT"
- ACCEPT VOA's FIRST RESPONSE AS A NO
- THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE REASON

Agents operate across the business landscape, but there is a clear destination between agent type and the size of business they target. This illustrates why there is such tension between Volume and Professional Agents





ROLE:

AGENT

TYPE:

VOLUME

NAME:

JOANNE WOOD

THE VOLUME AGENTS HAVE A DIFFERENT OPERATING MODEL TO OTHER TYPES OF AGENTS. THEIR MAIN FOCUS IS ON APPEALS, WITH A STATED AIM TO APPEAL IN ALMOST ALL INSTANCES, UNLESS THEY KNOW OF A CLEAR REASON THAT THE RATEABLE VALUE OF THE CLIENT'S PROPERTY WILL INCREASE. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THEY WILL RELY ON THE CLIENT TO VOLUNTEER THIS INFORMATION, SO LESS INFORMED OR ENGAGED CLIENTS COULD STILL BE AT RISK OF AN INCREASE IN THEIR RATES BILL.

VOLUME AGENTS WORK PREDOMINATELY WITH SMES AND HAVE AN UPPER AND LOWER THRESHOLD OF RATEABLE VALUE THAT THEY WILL TYPICALLY TAKE ON. THIS MEANS THAT THEY TEND TO BE TARGETING OCCUPIERS OF SINGLE PROPERTIES. WHEN IT COMES TO TARGETING, THEY HAVE A DISTINCT SALES FUNCTION, WHO CAN BE VERY AGGRESSIVE IN THEIR RECRUITMENT OF CLIENTS. OTHER AGENTS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT THEY ARE NOT AVERSE TO ATTEMPTING TO POACH THEIR CLIENTS WITH PROMISES OF RATES REDUCTIONS THOUGHT TO BE VERY UNREALISTIC.

THEY BEMOAN THE LACK OF ENGAGEMENT FROM THE VOA, WHILST TACITLY ACKNOWLEDGING THEIR OWN PART IN CREATING THE WORKLOAD THE VOA CURRENTLY EXPERIENCES. THEY ALSO WORRY ABOUT A PERCEIVED SKILLS DRAIN FROM THE VOA, WHILST ACTIVELY HIRING EX-VOA PERSONNEL. AS SUCH THEY PRESENT SOMETHING OF A CHALLENGE FOR THE VOA TO HAVE A CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH.

#### PROFILE

- They are very sales focused, which governs much of how they behave as a business.
- They will appeal all cases regardless of merit. The only exception is in instances where the client has shared information that suggests the RV could go up.
- They only deal with appeals and don't handle other property services.
- They work on a no-win no-fee basis.
- The majority of their clients are within the bulk classes of property.
- They have few large clients and mostly deal with SMEs. They have a threshold of rateable value and so avoid the smallest properties and don't target the largest RVs.
- Their clients will tend to be single property occupiers.
- They do have some "prestige" clients, but these are the exception.
- They feel that they pay much better than the VOA and this is why they attract ex-VOA staff.

“WE WILL ALWAYS APPEAL”

- Their business is split into three teams:
  - Sales
  - Client Services
  - Surveyors, most of whom are chartered
- They are attempting to broaden their business focus, but this is very much a work in progress.
- Most of their work is driven by templates. This is how they are able to generate a large volume of appeals.
- Their business is won via cold calling in the main. They use the VOA website to determine who to target.
- They aren't very interested in responding to ITTs, owing to the effort they involve and the lower chances of success.



CVS



ROLE:  
**AGENT**

TYPE:  
**VOLUME**

NAME:  
**JOANNE WOOD**

**VOA INTERACTIONS CONTINUED**

- To aid communication with the VOA they maintain a list of VOA contacts. This represents their route into the organisation, regardless of whether a specific contact is the right one.
- Despite this, they struggle to make contact with the VOA. Feeling that getting in contact is akin to “bashing through”.
- Most of their interaction is by phone or email
- For an appeal they will only provide:
  - The name of the business
  - The address
  - The rent
  - The stock phrase that says the rent is too high
- They feel that all agents use this same approach and same stock phrase when it comes to appeals.
- They suggest that there is variation between VOA offices in willingness to negotiate beyond the target date. They will target the ones that they know are more likely to do a deal.
- The most meaningful interaction for them is when the VOA shares their case.
- The VOA website is felt to be good, but can be unreliable.

**CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS**

- They sell by cold calling. Often this approach is aggressive, with ratepayers reporting being contacted on a regular basis.
- They believe that most of their customers have no idea about how rating works.
- Communication with their clients is mostly handled by their Client Services team. This keeps their “professional” employees remote from some of their sharper practices.
- They send out a quarterly newsletter to keep clients engaged.
- When asking the client for property information the client will provide:
  - Trading details
  - Rates bills
  - The lease
- The client is also asked to fill out a custom version of a Form of Return that the agent has created.
- Properties are only inspected after the VOA has acknowledged the case. This differs to how other types of agent approach inspections.
- Clients are signed up to the next list as a matter of course. Clients are often not aware that this has happened.
- In common with the professional agents, they feel that a lot of their clients’ businesses are marginal and RV reductions could save them
- They maintain their own database of rent details and feel that in some instances they know more about rental detail than the VOA.

**OTHER INTERACTIONS**

- They will liaise with other agents to share evidence. Particularly for multi-floor multi-occupancy offices.
- They meet regularly with the Valuation Tribunal to discuss upcoming cases and groupings of cases.

**NEEDS AND WANTS**

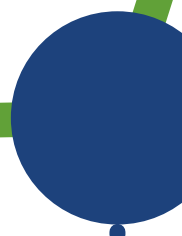
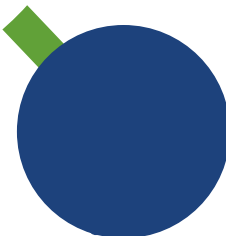
- The VOA to engage to resolve the case one way or another.
- To reach a resolution before preparation of a Statement of Case is necessary. They are keen to avoid the effort this involves.
- They would like better access to the VOA’s rental information.

■ **WE WANT TO ENGAGE WITH THE VOA, THE VOA DOESN'T WANT TO ENGAGE WITH US** ■



**CVS**

MAINTENANCE



CUSTOMER JOURNEYS

A journey map shows the path that a customer takes to achieve a specific goal. The map shows all the steps that the customer takes from the point at which their journey begins, through to when their goal is achieved, and in some cases illustrating what may happen beyond that point. This is often referred to as an end-to-end journey.

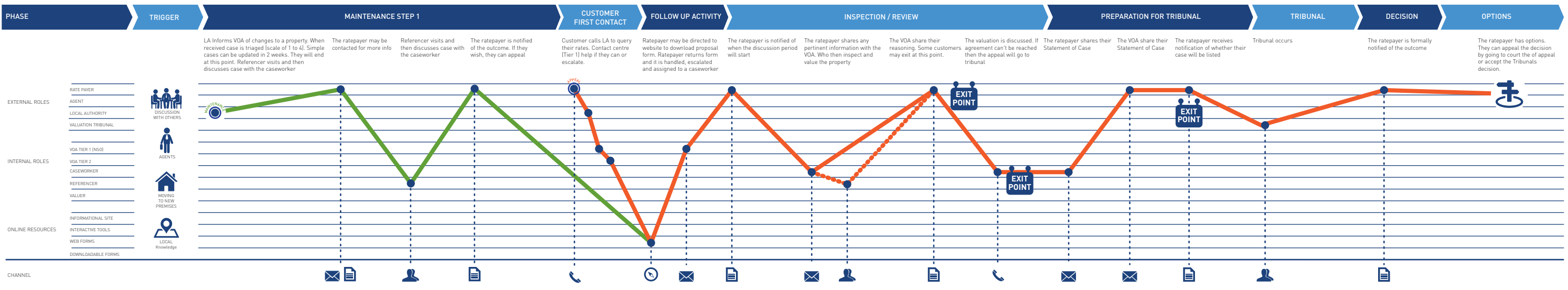
Rather than consider a journey as beginning when a customer comes into contact with the VOA, our end-to-end journeys consider the totality of the experience, starting from the trigger that caused the customer to begin their journey, through any interactions they may have with other organisations or media before arriving at the VOA. The journeys then cover all the interaction points with the VOA, both online and offline, before either concluding or moving beyond the VOA into interaction with other organisations.

There are a number of key components to the journey maps:

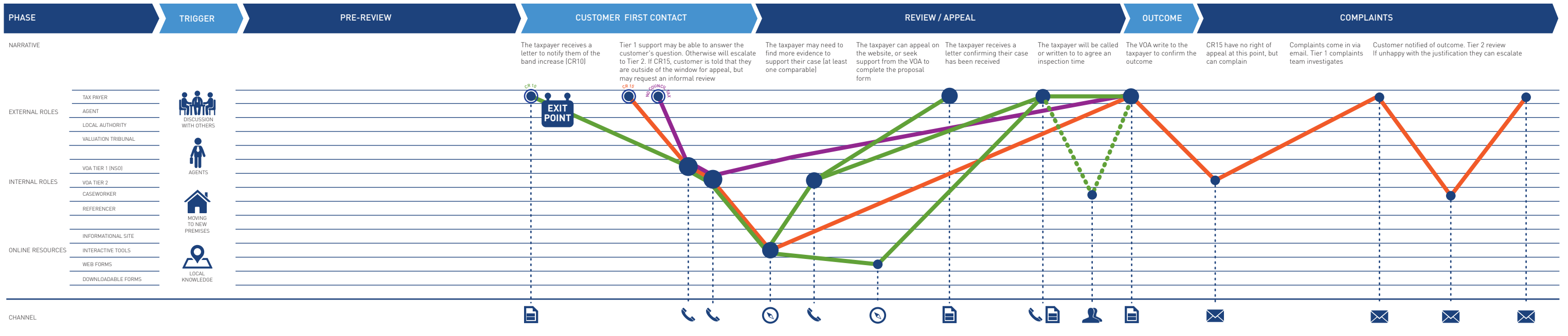
- Narrative: a description of the interaction that is occurring at key points during the journey.
- Roles: they key people with whom the customer will interact on their journey. On the journey maps these are shown as the horizontal lines across the map.
- Channels: these are the different routes through which the customer can interact with the VOA. This could include the contact centre, the website, direct contact with caseworkers and so on. Each interaction point in a specific channel is marked as a node on the journey map.
- Path: the route taken through the journey.
- VOA documents: any documentation or online reference sources that the customer will see during their journey. Any issues with these sources will be detailed.
- Emotions: this illustrates how the customer, and other key roles, are feeling during the process. This is where the main point points in a journey will be captured, typically coinciding with the more negative emotional states.
- VOA objectives: this section describes any VOA objectives that result in the journey proceeding as it does. It is important to bear these in mind when changes to the journey are considered to ensure that changes address both VOA and customer needs.

By understanding the journey that a customer goes on when interacting with the VOA, we can identify the key pain points, those areas where interaction is more difficult than it needs to be, any areas of inefficiency and highlight any unintended or unanticipated interactions. By viewing the journeys from a role perspective, we can also understand how much communication and guidance the customer receives from the VOA during their journey, which has been a recurring issue identified throughout our research.

THIS IS THE COMPLETE CUSTOMER JOURNEY PLOTTING THE ACTIONS OF CUSTOMERS AND VOA STAFF.

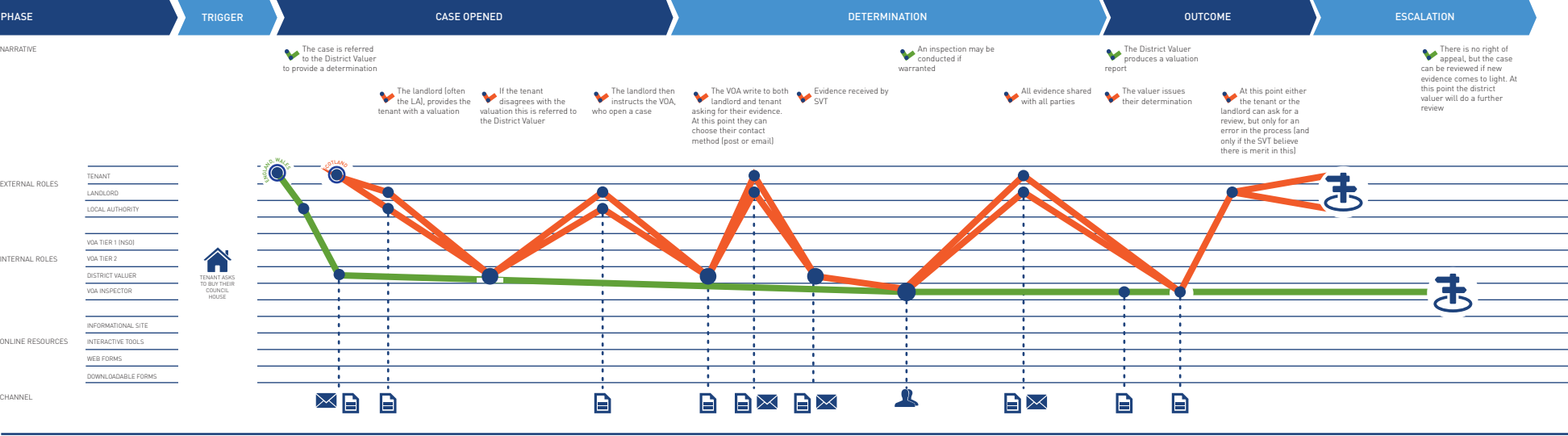


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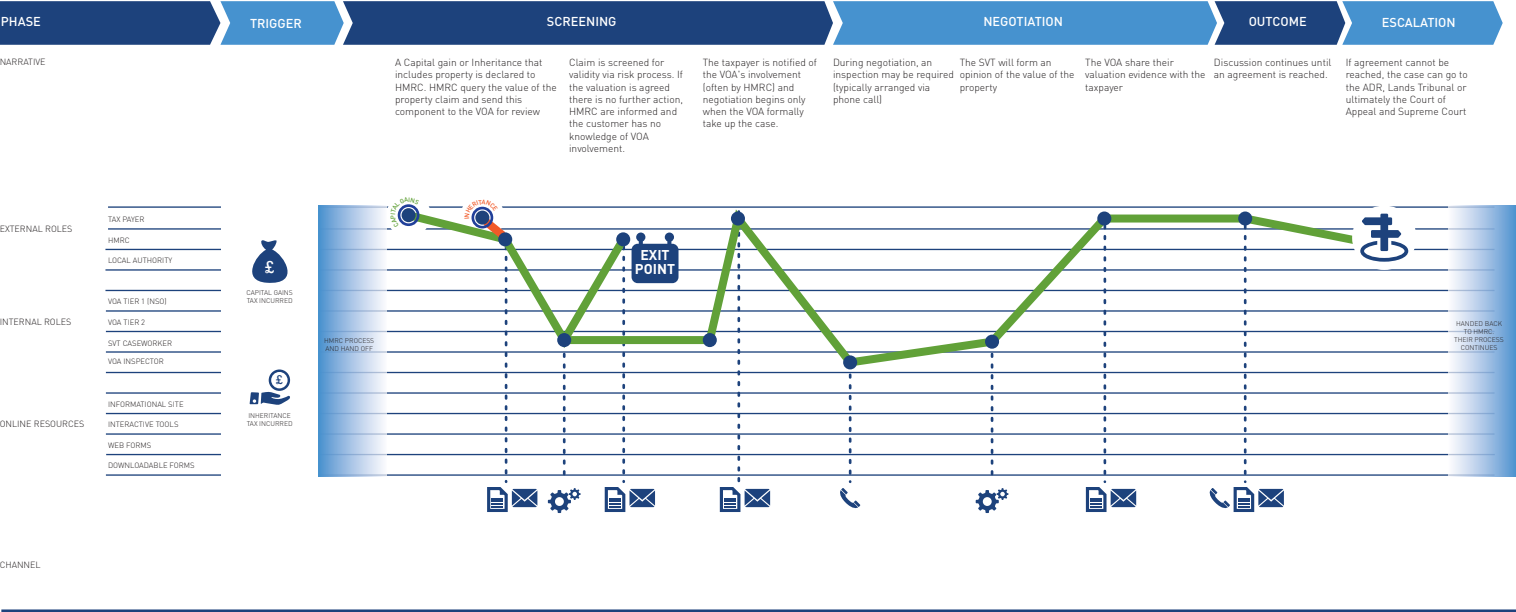
RIGHT TO BUY JOURNEY

LEGISLATION DEFINES THE PROCESS. SCOTLAND ARE STOPPING RIGHT TO BUY AT THE END OF 2016



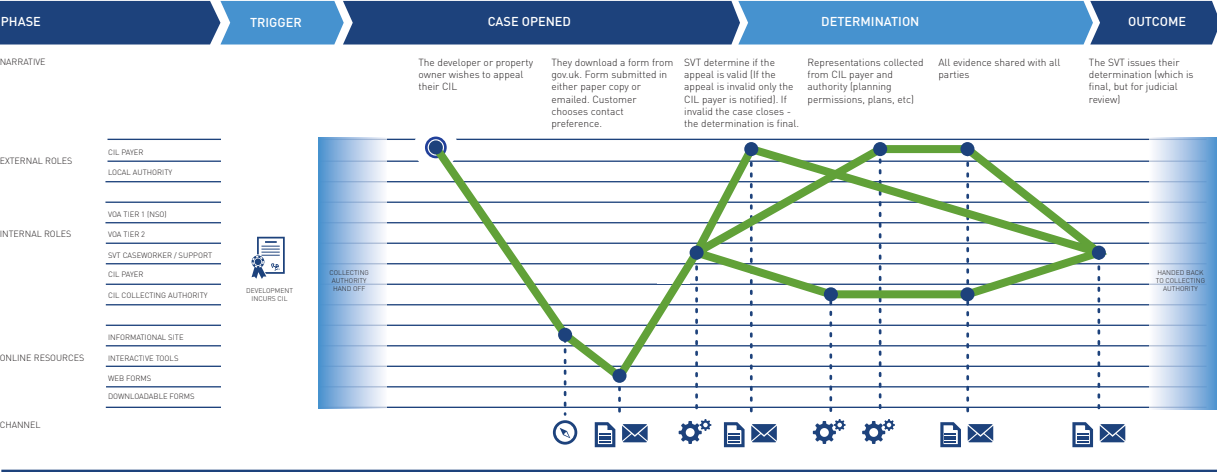
CAPITAL GAINS AND INHERITANCE TAX JOURNEY

THE VOA'S ROLE IS A SMALL PART OF A BIGGER HMRC PROCESS. THEREFORE SCOPE TO CHANGE IS LIMITED.



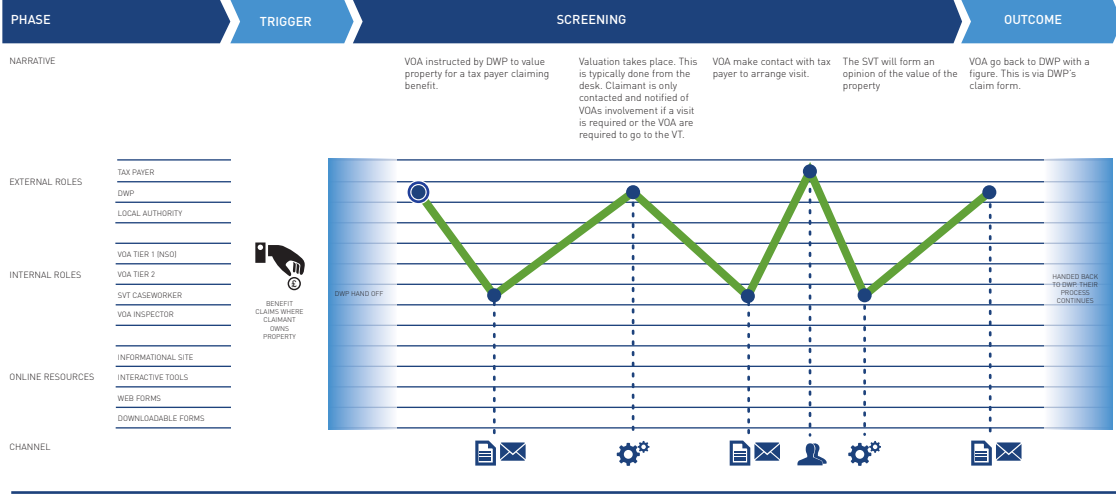
CIL JOURNEY

LEGISLATION DEFINES THE PROCESS.



DWP CUSTOMER JOURNEY

THE VOA'S ROLE IS A SMALL PART OF A BIGGER DWP PROCESS. THEREFORE SCOPE TO CHANGE IS LIMITED. DWP ARE A PAPER BASED ORGANISATION. ALL INBOUND COMMUNICATIONS ARRIVE IN PAPER FORM.





CUSTOMER JOURNEY

THIS IS THE COMPLETE CUSTOMER JOURNEY PLOTTING THE ACTIONS OF CUSTOMERS AND VOA STAFF.

