

**VALUATION OFFICE AGENCY**  
**BILLING AUTHORITY ELECTRONIC DATA TRANSFER**  
**INVEST TO SAVE BUDGET - R2/45**  
**EVALUATION REPORT**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

This evaluation report is in respect of the Valuation Office Agency's (VOA) project to trial the electronic transfer of data to Billing Authorities (BA's). The project took place during 1999/00 using funding from the Invest to Save budget Round 1. The pilot was successful and since then a live service has been available to all 387 BA's  
£120,000 of the estimated £160,000 costs was made available by ISB all of which was utilised on the pilot, roll out and year one support.

**2. AIMS OF PILOT**

The VOA is responsible for producing and maintaining rating and council tax lists in respect of approximately 1.8 million non domestic properties and approximately 23 million domestic properties. This involves the daily transfer to BA's of copious amounts of data in the form of schedules showing change to the list and on a regular basis completely revised full "snapshot" lists. Much of the data is transferred in hard copy, floppy disk or tape. The aims of the pilot were to implement a capability whereby the data could be transferred over the Internet thus enabling efficiencies in VOA and BA's. It was felt that the project when implemented would make a notable contribution to the electronic and joined up government agenda.

**3. OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the pilot were to build an IT infrastructure capable of meeting the business aims and in so doing identify :-

- technical options and constraints
- business efficiency benefits to the BA's
- business efficiency benefits to the VOA
- improved overall effectiveness
- the likelihood of take up by the BA's

- security risks likely to arise and means of eliminating or reducing them
- risks to data integrity
- the costs likely to fall to both VOA and BA's
- any conflicts with legislative

#### **4. TREASURY ISB ASSISTANCE**

The VOA is a net vote agency and has to cover it's expenditure by income so investment opportunities are difficult to fund. Because of the cost of funding millennium compliance and IT support to the 2000 revaluation of non - domestic properties a successful claim for £120,000 of ISB funds was made.

#### **5. PARTNERS TO THE PROJECT**

The VOA outsources most of it's IT services to EDS. The main partners in the project though were the billing authorities of Brent (England) and Torfaen, Cardiff, Gwynedd and Wrexham (Wales). All co-operated with the project the only limiting factor being the extent to which they could easily manipulate their IT system

#### **6. SOLUTION TRIALLED AND NOW IMPLEMENTED**

The solution implemented involved using the existing magnetic data extract routines from the VOA central database in respect of NNDR and Council Tax full lists and schedules. The data was downloaded to tape and imported to a separate server but within the server room at EDS Worthing as part of a daily operation. This server connects over a leased line through firewalls and routers to the VOA hosted web site at EDS Stockley Park. BA's wishing to use the service connect to the VOA web site and on the first occasion of use must obtain a secure password in order that they can access only data appertaining to their particular BA.

On accessing the service (via the internet) a list of menus are presented with a listing of all the data which is currently available for download (eg lists, schedules, technical circulars) The BA can then download the files either direct into their system, a spreadsheet or database. The data remains available for an average of 6 weeks before it is archived to save space. Help screens are available as are the services of the VOA IT Help Desk.

#### **7. BENEFITS TO BA's**

The benefits to BA's are in not having to deal with huge piles of paper, numerous floppy disks and tapes which are increasingly difficult to read. They can access the data at a time which is suitable to them . Some BA's have been able to read the data straight into their systems thus negating the need to key data. There is no danger of the data going astray. The service contributes to both joined up and electronic government. The process review has acted as a catalyst for the BA's and VOA to consider afresh the processes involved in the production of schedules and lists.

## **8. BENEFITS TO VOA**

The benefits to the VOA lie in cost reduction from not having to sort, envelope and post copious amounts of A3 schedules and lists. There is no danger of the data going astray and there is no risk to system security. It contributes to joined up and electronic government targets. The service is capable of being expanded upon at a later date to provide a more seamless integration with BA IT systems.

## **9. PROJECT EXECUTION**

With VOA being "in the lead" the project was managed by VOA using the Valuation Office Agency Project Management Methodology. The project met it's timescales and costs no more than planned for. The service met the expectations of those BA's participating in the pilot but see "Further Developments" below.

## **10. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

Take up of the service has been patchy across the 387 BA' with 107 downloads occurring in April 2001 using the electronic service although a number indicate they will adopt the service in the future. Whilst this is not a spectacularly high take up one needs to have regard to the large and differing types of IT systems in BA's and that many are outsourced with little funding to pay for changes. VOA is currently analysing the results of a comprehensive questionnaire which focuses on data transfer to and from BA's. The intention is to make the service more attractive by offering more than one electronic file structure thus enabling more BA's to automatically populate their IT systems from the data downloaded from VOA

## **11. SUMMARY**

Overall the project went very well and should be regarded as a tribute to the Treasury ISB

Brian McCormick  
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