



**CHAMBERS
IRELAND**
IN BUSINESS FOR BUSINESS

**Chambers Ireland's Submission to the Valuation Office on their Statement of Strategy
2017-2019**

15/09/2016

Chambers Ireland is the largest business network in the State. Given the importance of property valuations for commercial rates of businesses we place great importance on the work and strategy of this office and with members in every geographic region and economic sector in Ireland, we are well positioned to understand the concerns of Irish businesses and represent their views. Chambers Ireland welcomes the work of the Valuation Office and we are pleased to have the opportunity to inform this consultation on the Office's Statement of Strategy for the period 2017-2019. Discussed below are a number of strategic issues which we would like to see included in the strategy and plans of the Valuation Office.

Chambers Ireland would firstly like to commend the Valuation Office on improving the Office's communications processes with commercial rate payers particularly the availability of online information and resources for rate payers. We are greatly encouraged by these developments and would like to see this enhancement of communications with rate-paying businesses continue.

We would like to see the Valuation Office's Statement of Strategy 2017-2019 contain clear commitments and goals. This Statement of strategy should aim to provide the Office with measurable goals with key performance indicators for the evaluation of these goals. A statement of strategy must include concise aims and tangible outputs in order to realise ambitions and we wish to see this form an important part of the Statement of Strategy of the Valuation Office.

Chambers Ireland would like to see the Valuation Office continue to work to increase the pace of revaluations of commercial properties. We do recognise that this is a challenging task. In relation to this we are encouraged by the proposed Occupier Assisted Valuation pilot scheme in County Laois. Following the completion of this valuation project we would like to see a report on its outcomes and recommendations on the viability of such an occupier assisted valuation scheme being implemented nationally. Similarly, we would welcome a review of the potential of outsourcing revaluations to service providers to help

expedite revaluation processes. Chambers Ireland takes the view that such schemes have the potential to increase the pace of the revaluation process.

The Barclay review group has been established in Scotland to make recommendations to enhance and reform the commercial rates system in Scotland to better support business growth and long term. The Group will report to Ministers in July 2017. We recommend that the results of this review be considered by the Valuations Office to ascertain any potential application to the Irish system.

In relation to looking abroad for strategic policies, we would like to see the Valuation Office look to the business rates relief schemes of the UK. Businesses in the UK severely affected by disruption to their premises have the opportunity to contact their Valuation Office and seek a revaluation of their rates on the basis of temporary impacts to their trading circumstances. Such a scheme is not available to businesses in Ireland and we would like to see this considered by the Valuation Office as a measure to introduce in the coming years. Businesses impacted by local disruptions currently have very few options available to them in relation to relaxation of their commercial rates and this places significant stress on a business in times of reduced trade caused by external factors such as nearby building works, road closures or flooding. We would like to see greater flexibility on valuations made available to businesses by the Valuation Office.

The appeals process for re-evaluation of commercial rates is currently an onerous task for business owners who believe that they have received an incorrect valuation. Chambers Ireland wishes to see the appeals process made more accessible to businesses and would also like to see this currently lengthy process expedited. One way this could be achieved would be to apply an online dispute resolution mechanism to the appeals of valuations. This method is proving increasingly useful in resolving business related disputes and has the potential to be increase the efficiency and time-frame of the appeals process for all stakeholders.

Finally, Chambers Ireland encourages the Valuation Office to make better use of ICT tools to improve efficiency and speed in the valuation of commercial properties. ICT resources, such as the online dispute resolution mechanism mentioned above, have the capacity to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Office and could also improve rate-payer engagement in the process of valuation. We recognise the success of the Navdirect initiative and suggest further opportunities for utilising ICT to enhance services be explored.

Chambers Ireland hopes that these points will be considered for inclusion in the Statement of Strategy of the Valuation Office and we look forward to future engagement with this Office on behalf of our members.