



# CUSTOMER TRACKING SURVEY:

## Technical Report

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## 1 Technical report introduction

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is an executive agency of HMRC. Its strategic function is to provide the valuations and property advice required to support taxation and benefits in England and Wales. As part of its role, it gathers evidence to understand customers' views and experience of the services that the Agency provides.

GfK, an independent research company, was commissioned by the Valuation Office Agency to undertake their annual Customer Tracking Survey (CTS), comprising four waves of research among the VOA's customers (one per quarter) in the 2015-16 survey period. The VOA's customers include (i) business property owners/lessees who appeal their Rateable Value (RV) for Non Domestic Rates (NDR) on a commercial property; and (ii) domestic respondents who appeal their Council Tax (CT) banding for a property. Customers can initiate the appeal by themselves or employ an agent to manage the appeal on their behalf. The Customer Tracking Survey measures CT and business rates customer perceptions of the VOA's appeals process, their views of their communication with the VOA and, if applicable, their agent, as well as their views on what improvements they think could be made to VOA processes.

An annual report of the CTS was produced for the 2015-16 survey period. This accompanying document details the key technical information including sampling, methodological and fieldwork processes; questionnaire design; and data analysis techniques.

There are four separate sample groups in the CTS: Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates appellants, each split into those who appealed to the VOA directly or via an agent (unrepresented or represented). Some parts of the survey process were identical for all four groups, while others were specific to each group. This technical report describes the whole process of the survey from sampling to data, and where relevant includes separate sub-sections for each sample group.

The overall response rates, after removing ineligible sample cases were as follows:

- NDR Unrepresented 56%
- NDR Represented 31%
- CT Unrepresented 40%
- CT Represented 33%

## 2 Sampling

### 2.1 Target Population

The target population for this survey was all who had appealed against their property's rateable value (RV) or Council Tax (CT) band, and whose appeal had finished in 2015 according to the VOA database. The database identified appellants as NDR (Non Domestic Rates) or CT (Council Tax) and also whether they were 'unrepresented' i.e. they made the appeal themselves/on behalf of their organisation; or were 'represented', i.e. they commissioned an agent to undertake the process on their behalf. In total there were four target groups:

1. Council Tax unrepresented
2. Council Tax represented
3. Non Domestic Rates unrepresented
4. Non Domestic Rates represented

### 2.2 Drawing the Sample

The sample was drawn on a quarterly basis from the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) central database. In previous years the VOA undertook the sample selection process themselves but for the 2015-16 research programme this task was transferred to GfK. The VOA had all the necessary protocols in place in relation to data protection and, in addition, the VOA and GfK entered into a data sharing agreement.

The VOA transferred the records of those whose appeal had ended within a given quarter, to GfK, through a secure portal. To ensure consistency with previous years GfK undertook the sampling process in line with the sampling instructions provided to GfK by the VOA through their existing guidance for CTS sampling. This guidance outlined each step of the sampling process:

#### Step 1 – Data Preparation (VOA)

- Downloading the data from the VOAs central database
- Running SAS code to start initial cleaning of the sample. This is the first stage for identifying duplicates, customers who have been surveyed recently, contact details and customers that were represented by agents.
- Splitting the sample into survey streams (NDR and CT)

#### Step 2 – Population Counts (GfK)

- Calculating the overall population of each stream to enable a representative sample to be drawn
- Identifying agent names (represented only) – it was important to identify the agent name as the number of cases assigned to a given person was used as a proxy to determine whether the person was an agent or not

### **Step 3 – Data Cleaning (GfK)**

- Identifying those who are eligible to be in the sample e.g., removing duplicates, those who have been previously surveyed, those with missing contact information
- Checking whether the case has been assigned to the correct target group – ‘Represented’ or ‘Unrepresented’ i.e. whether the case was represented by an agent or not.

### **Step 4 – Sample Selection (GfK)**

- Drawing the random sample
- Checks on customer contact information to determine which address details to use to enable the customer to be contacted

Clarifications were sought from the VOA as required. Halfway through the contract (after completing quarter 2), the sampling guidance was revised in discussion with the VOA, but these changes involved mainly wording and comprehension changes, to enhance clarity, as opposed to removing or adding sampling steps. One material change involved the VOA removing the ‘case remarks’ and agent details fields for all customers before sending the sample to GfK, as these fields were unused in the sampling process.

As mentioned in step 3 - the sample was cleaned before the final selection to ensure that duplicate records and those who had previously been surveyed were removed from the overall sample file. The VOA’s initial in-house sample processing (step 1) flagged cases that had been previously surveyed, or were duplicates, but further duplicates were identified and removed manually during the sampling steps at each quarter. On average across the four quarters, 16 per cent of the available sample was removed in this way.

For the NDR sample, businesses that employed over 250 people AND that managed 10 or more properties were removed from the sample, on the grounds that it would be very difficult to get in touch with the right person with whom to discuss the appeal.

Customer details were stratified by region and whether the appeal had been successful or unsuccessful.

In the case of CT, the “unrepresented” sample was further stratified by dividing it into two categories:

- appeals that were CR15 i.e. enquiry received (no proposal rights exist)
- appeals that were IPP i.e. a formal proposal

Not all cases contained telephone numbers, and a look-up process was carried out on sampled cases that had no numbers (described further below).

The target number of interviews to be completed at each quarter was as follows:

- 500 for NDR Unrepresented
- 200 for NDR Represented
- 315 for CT Unrepresented
- 125 for CT Represented

In calculating the issued sample sizes needed to achieve the target number of interviews, GfK and VOA agreed numbers based on the response rates from previous waves of the survey, and the likely numbers of cases for which it would be possible to obtain telephone numbers. As both response rates and number look-up success rates proved lower than anticipated in some cases, GfK did not meet the target numbers for all groups and so sample sizes were amended each quarter to attempt to bring the total across all four quarters to 2,000 per sample group. The available sample and selected sample is shown in table one.

**Table 1: Total amount of sample available 2015/16**

	NDR Represented	NDR Unrepresented	CT Represented	CT Unrepresented	Total
<b>Available</b>	81,747	7,814	4,098	53,332	146,991
<b>Selected</b>	4,532	6,433	2,938	5,180	19,083

## 2.3 Opt-out

After the final sample had been selected an opt-out process was run by the VOA. An advance letter was sent to all selected people/organisations at the appeal address, prior to fieldwork commencing. The purpose of the letter was to alert them to the forthcoming survey and to provide them with an opportunity to opt out. The letter contained a helpline number and email address which those sampled could contact for more information or if they would like to be removed from the sample. Any letter that was returned as undelivered was counted as an opt-out. Sample members were given a three week period within which to opt out (although some continued to opt out during the fieldwork period).

The VOA provided GfK with a list of all those who had opted out of the survey and these were removed from the main sample file. Any late opt-outs were also removed during fieldwork as soon as they were received.

### 2.3.1 Telephone number lookups

After the sample was selected and all opt-outs were processed, any sampled appellant still included in the sample for which there was no available telephone number was put forward for number lookups. A two-stage process was used of automated lookups (contracted to a specialist supplier, UK Changes) and (in the case of the NDR sample only) manual lookups involving online directories and Google search. Manual searches were appropriate as much of the sample contained a business name and specific business address, so searches were conducted online looking at organisation websites and Google to try to source numbers. In some cases, the business address in the sample referenced a head office and these numbers were included where appropriate.

For the CT sample only the automated lookup process was possible because in the absence of the appellant names (the sample record often just had “Council Tax Payer” in the name field) there were no other clues on which to base a manual lookup.

Table 2 shows the percentage of each sample sent for lookup for each sample, and the success rate in finding numbers. The striking difference between represented and unrepresented appellants is explained by the fact that in most represented cases the VOA database contained the name of the agent rather than the appellant.

**Table 2: Percentage of Telephone Lookups by sample type**

	Number sent for lookup	Success rate (%)
<b>NDR Represented</b>	97	74
<b>NDR Unrepresented</b>	21	65
<b>CT Represented</b>	96	22
<b>CT Unrepresented</b>	35	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>198</b>

### 3 Questionnaire Development

The questionnaires (separate questionnaires for NDR and CT, each with separate sections for represented and unrepresented appellants) had been developed during the previous research programme. Given that the VOA wished to be able to track the responses from its customers over time, the questionnaire remained largely unchanged from the 2014/15 research programme. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in the appendix but the main question areas covered for each sample group were as shown in Table 3:

**Table 3: Questionnaire sections by sample type**

	NDR Rep	NDR Unrep	CT Rep	CT Unrep
Screenener	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number and type of appeals	✓	✓	✓	✓
Arrangements with agent	✓		✓	
Awareness of the VOA/appeals system	✓	✓	✓	✓
Outcome of appeal and overall ratings of the VOA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use of websites	✓	✓	✓	✓
Contact with the VOA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time burden of the appeal process (added at Q3)		✓		
Ratings of dealing with staff of the VOA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reputation of the VOA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Re-contact question	✓	✓	✓	✓

The majority of the questionnaire content remained the same throughout the year as well as being broadly unchanged from previous years. At quarter 3 2015/16, a group of new questions was added to the NDR questionnaire to investigate the time burden that completing the forms placed on business customers (for unrepresented customers only). These questions were retained at quarter 4.

To ensure that the respondents were answering the survey in relation to the correct appeal, at the start of the interview, respondents were told that throughout the survey the questions would be referring to the appeal made for the property at a specified address (and respondents were reminded of this several times during the interview).

### **3.1 Screening**

A screener was included at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that the survey was either conducted with the named appellant (usually the person who had submitted the appeal) or someone else who was familiar with that particular appeal.

For the NDR survey, the sample provided by the VOA contained some named contacts and some just with references to the organisation name. Any businesses where the interviewer was unable to locate an individual within the organisation who was aware of the appeal were screened out.

For the CT survey the sample provided by the VOA contained some named contacts and some just with references to “the Council Tax Payer”. The sample always contained the property address and a check was made to ensure that the respondent was aware that a Council Tax appeal had been made at that property recently. Any household who was not aware of a recent appeal was screened out.

In addition, a check was made to ensure the named contact was not an agent (i.e. a representative of a business who appeals rates on behalf of the organisation). Any respondent found to be an agent (in effect where the respondent details in the sample file were in fact agent details) were screened out of the survey. Approximately six per cent of unrepresented NDR respondents and one per cent of unrepresented CT customers were screened out across the four quarters. The screener also contained questions which allowed for the identification of respondents who had used an agent to make their appeal. The VOA provided the sample files for unrepresented and represented appellants separately, but occasionally there were records in one file that belonged in the other, so this was an extra stage to ensure respondents were allocated correctly. Those who were identified as having used an agent were swapped in the script from the incorrect group to the correct one, to ensure they were asked the questions relevant to their situation.

## **4 Fieldwork**

Prior to commencing fieldwork, all interviewers were given a briefing on the survey. The briefing included the background to the survey, the eligibility criteria for each respondent group and best practices to encourage participation and maximise response. A dummy interview was also conducted to ensure that the interviewers were familiar with the script, and interviewers were also encouraged to run through the dummy script on their own.

Fieldwork was conducted over a five week period. Fieldwork was conducted between the following dates:

Quarter 1: 25<sup>th</sup> June 2015 – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015

Quarter 2: 14<sup>th</sup> September 2015 – 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015

Quarter 3: 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016 – 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2016

Quarter 4: 17<sup>th</sup> March 2016 – 25<sup>th</sup> April 2016

#### 4.1 Response rates

Table 4 shows a summary of response for the whole year for each of the four sample types. Response rates are based on eligible sample only. Sample members were counted as ineligible if they were screened out or if their telephone number was incorrect.

**Table 4: Response rate summary**

	Sample issued	Interviews achieved	Response rate	%
<b>NDR Unrepresented</b>	4,576	1,459	56	
<b>NDR Represented</b>	4,709	847	31	
<b>CT Unrepresented</b>	3,701	1,263	40	
<b>CT Represented</b>	548	161	33	

Tables 5 to 8 provide full details of the sample breakdown after fieldwork had completed, along with the response rate for each quarter. The category “refusal” includes cases where the respondent refused to continue part way through the interview.

**Table 5: Response rates for NDR Unrepresented sample**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
<b>Selected sample (excluding opt-outs)</b>	1,352	1,088	1,752	1,457	5,609
<b>Sample available (with telephone numbers)</b>	1,093	1,005	1,495	983	4,576
Ineligible/wrong number	349	166	876	589	1980
<b>Eligible sample</b>	744	839	619	394	2596
<b>Completed interviews</b>	351	325	448	335	1,459
Live sample (voicemail, soft appointments etc.)	101	253	379	156	889
Refusal	227	198	247	172	844
Other non-response (away during fieldwork, language difficulties etc.)	65	63	169	61	358
<b>Response rate</b>	47%	39%	72%	85%	56%

**Table 6: Response rates for NDR Represented sample**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
<b>Selected sample (excluding opt-outs)</b>	695	801	2,261	2,407	6,164
<b>Sample available (with telephone numbers)</b>	489	630	1,532	2,058	4,709
Ineligible/wrong number	104	151	631	1111	1997
<b>Eligible sample</b>	385	479	901	947	2712
<b>Completed interviews</b>	71	111	356	309	847
Live sample (voicemail, soft appointments etc.)	116	201	171	344	832

Refusal	82	121	215	171	589
Other non-response (away during fieldwork, language difficulties etc.)	116	46	160	123	445
<b>Response rate</b>	18%	23%	40%	33%	31%

**Table 7: Response rates for CT Unrepresented sample**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
<b>Selected sample (excluding opt-outs)</b>	1,085	1,088	1,359	1,233	4,765
<b>Sample available (with telephone numbers)</b>	759	852	1026	1064	3701
Ineligible/wrong number	48	70	249	190	557
<b>Eligible sample</b>	711	782	777	874	3,144
<b>Completed interviews</b>	281	268	348	366	1,263
Contact attempted (voicemail, soft appointments etc.)	242	187	81	163	600
Refusal	162	273	202	227	864
Other non-response (away during fieldwork, language difficulties etc.)	24	49	144	117	334
Wrong number	45	61	142	97	345
<b>Response rate</b>	40%	34%	45%	42%	40%

**Table 8: Response rates for CT Represented sample**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
<b>Selected sample (excluding opt-outs)</b>	591	678	441	319	2116
<b>Sample available (with telephone numbers)</b>	158	282	66	42	548
Ineligible/wrong number	9	31	16	10	66
<b>Eligible sample</b>					
<b>Completed interviews</b>	47	80	19	15	161
Live sample (voicemail, soft appointments etc.)	44	16	4	3	67
Refusal	54	124	13	5	196
Other non-response (away during fieldwork, language difficulties etc.)	4	31	14	9	58
<b>Response rate</b>	32	32	38	47	33

## **5 Data analysis**

### **5.1 Coding**

There were no open-ended questions where respondents' answers were recorded verbatim by the interviewer for subsequent office coding, but there were a number of 'other specify' questions. If a respondent gave an answer that did not fit one of the categories on the precoded list the interviewer coded 'other' and also recorded the exact words the respondent had used.

The responses from all of these questions were sent for back-coding by GfK's coding team. The coders examined the verbatim response to see if it should have been coded as one of the existing precodes instead, even though the respondent may not have used any of the exact words on the precode. In instances where the response did not fit into the precoded lists, the GfK coders either left it coded simply as 'other' or if there were other respondents mentioning the same issue, created a new code.

The coding team received a briefing from the executive team prior to commencing coding. All coding was conducted in line with GfK's quality procedures.

### **5.2 Computer tabulations**

To aggregate data from all respondents, and to permit cross-analysis of one variable by another, computer tabulations were produced by the GfK data processing team.

The specification for the computer tabulations was agreed with the VOA, prior to the table set-up process. The specification was based upon the previous research programme to ensure continuity of data across the waves. The crossbreaks (the variables across the top of each page of tabulations against which the questionnaire variables are analysed) included both sample-defined variables and questionnaire variables.

Computer tabulations were provided at each quarter, as well as a combined annual set of computer tabulations at the end of the year.

### **5.3 SPSS data**

To allow VOA to conduct its own bespoke analysis alongside the standard tabulations, SPSS data was provided to the VOA on a quarterly basis, to an agreed specification. The SPSS file was produced following the production of the computer tabulations to assist in the process of checking the accuracy of both tables and data.

The SPSS data file contains the interview questions, derived variables, weighting and the required additional sample information. A combined SPSS file of the annual data was also supplied. Separate SPSS outputs were produced for CT and for NDR, each containing both unrepresented and represented respondents in the same file.

### **5.4 Weighting**

In any survey there is always a risk that the people who do not take part are different in various ways from those who do – either because of differential likelihood to refuse, or because some people are harder to get hold of than others. These differences may be entirely random, with no systematic differences between key sub-groups, and can safely be ignored, but on other occasions there may be systematic differences, with particular types of people less likely to be included in the survey, and these systematic differences can lead to response bias.

The standard approach in surveys to deal with response bias is by means of weighting. A number of variables are identified as being particularly important for the survey (because they are likely to correlate with some of the key questions), and for which there is reliable data available on what the population that the sample was drawn from looks like.

Any differences between the distribution of the population and the distribution of the achieved sample on any of these variables is then corrected by weighting. Sub-groups that are under-represented in the achieved sample are weighted up, and those that are over-represented are weighted down, so that the distribution in the achieved sample now matches that of the population.

In this survey information from the original database for each quarter was used to provide the weighting targets for each sub-group.

For the NDR samples the data were weighted to reflect the overall population in the VOA database by whether the appeal was successful or unsuccessful, and also by region.

For the CT samples the data were also weighted by region and whether successful or unsuccessful, but the latter variable was split into four cells rather than two, combining appeal type with outcome: CR15 successful, CR15 unsuccessful, IPP successful and IPP unsuccessful.

## APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE (FROM QUARTER 4 2015/16)

### NDR CTS Questionnaire Q4

Valuation Office Agency

272.209.30178

*The VOA sets Council Tax bandings and business property rateable values used to calculate business rates for millions of properties. Their Customer Tracking Survey aims to understand customer satisfaction among people who have appealed the VOA's rateable value of their business property, with the way VOA dealt with their appeal*

*Length of interview: 10-15 minutes*

*Start fieldwork: 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016*

*End fieldwork: 25<sup>th</sup> April 2016*

### I. SAMPLE VARIABLES

*Case number (unique)*

*Rep/Unrep*

*Survey Frame*

*Primary Tel No*

*PropFullAddress*

*Property Add 1-6*

*Property Post Code*

*Current RV / band*

*Occ/Party Name*

*Occ/Party Add 1-6*

*Occ/Party Post Code*

*Agent name*

*Created RV / band*

*Agreed or proposed RV / band*

*Sett Code*

### II. QUOTA CHECK BASED ON SAMPLE VARIABLES

*No quotas – just as many interviews as possible in each category.*

### III. INTRODUCTION

*Good morning, afternoon, evening. My name is ... from GfK, the independent research organisation.*

*IF NAME IN SAMPLE:*

*Can I speak to [INSERT NAME] please?*

*INTERVIEWER: IF NO NAME IN SAMPLE OR NAMED LEAD NOT AVAILABLE:*

*Is there someone in the organisation who is familiar with the appeal into the rateable value of your business or organisation's property and can give their views today?*

*INTERVIEWER: IF YES SEEK PERMISSION TO DO INTERVIEW WITH THEM. IF NO SEEK TO ARRANGE APPOINTMENT.*

*I am calling to ask some questions on behalf of the Valuation Office Agency, also known as the VOA, whose records show that your organisation recently made an appeal into the rateable value of your business or organisation's property at INSERT PROPERTY ADDESSS - which may have been through an agent. We are conducting a survey of people who have recently appealed their business rates to learn about how the process could be improved. You may have received a letter about this survey in the last few weeks.*

*INTERVIEWER: THE PERSON IN THE ORGANISATION WHO DEALT WITH THE APPEAL WILL VARY ACROSS BUSINESSES. FOR SMALLER BUSINESSES IT WOULD USUALLY BE THE OWNER/OCCUPIER THAT WOULD DEAL WITH THE APPEAL BUT WITH LARGER ENTERPRISES IT MAY BE THE MANAGING DIRECTOR, ESTATES MANAGER, FINANCE DIRECTOR, COMPANY SECRETARY OR IF THEY ARE A UK-WIDE ORGANISATION THEY MAY HAVE AN INTERNAL PROPERTY/ESTATES SERVICES DEPARTMENT.*

*INTERVIEWER NOTE: EMAIL COPY OF LETTER IF REQUIRED*

*The interview will take on average 10-15 minutes depending on the answers given. I would like to assure you that all the information we collect will be kept in the strictest confidence, and used for research purposes only. The interview and the answers you give will not affect the decision of any current or future appeal or your relationship with the VOA. It will not be possible to identify you or your address in the results.*

*Please note that it is your experiences throughout the appeal that we are interested in, not just the final outcome.*

#### **IV. SCREENER**

S01 [S]

Can I just check, are you an 'agent'? By 'agent', I mean a representative of a company acting on behalf of someone who is appealing against their Council Tax property banding.

1. Yes – I am an agent
2. No – I am not an agent
3. Don't know
4. Refused

*SCRIPTER: all respondents answering 1, 3 and 4 should be screened out*

**Base: All answering 2 at S01**

S02 [S]

Our records show that an appeal was recently made for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]. By 'appeal', I mean a challenge to your business rates valuation. Is this correct?

*INTERVIEWER: SOME RESPONDENTS WILL HAVE A LARGE PORTFOLIO OF PROPERTIES OR AN AGENT WOULD BE DEALING WITH THE APPEAL. IN THESE CASES WHERE THE RESPONDENT IS NOT SURE THEN PLEASE ASK IF IT IS LIKELY THAT AN APPEAL WAS RECENTLY MADE FOR THAT PROPERTY*

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

*SCRIPTER: all respondents answering 2-3 should be screened out*

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT FOR ALL CONTINUING: Please note that throughout the survey, the questions will be referring to the appeal made for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]*

**Base: All represented sample**

S03 [S]

Our records also show that this appeal was made on your behalf by [INSERT AGENT NAME]. Is this correct?

1. Yes – this agent
2. Yes – different agent (specify)
3. Not correct

*IF YES: INTERVIEWER READ OUT:* Just so you know, [INSERT AGENT NAME] has been made aware of this project, although they will not know that you personally have taken part.

*SCRIPTER: codes 1-2 go to S06. Code 3 continue to S04.*

**Base: All code 3 at S03**

S04 [S]

Did you/your organisation use an agent at any point to handle your appeal? IF YES: Did you use an agent during the entire length of the appeal (from start to finish), or during part of the appeal?

1. Yes – used an agent for the whole appeal
2. Yes – used an agent for part of the appeal
3. No – did not use an agent at all

*SCRIPTER: Code 1 go to S06. Code 2 go to S05. Code 3 go to unrepresented script.*

**Base: All code 2 at S04**

S05 [S]

Thinking back over the entire length of the appeal, was it you/your organisation or the agent who mainly dealt with the VOA?

1. Mainly the agent
2. Mainly the respondent/respondent's organisation
3. Appeal equally balanced between agent and respondent/respondent's organisation

*SCRIPTER: Code 1 go to S06. Code 2 go to unrepresented script. If code 3, refer to sample: if respondent is from unrepresented sample, go to unrepresented script; if from represented sample go to S06.*

**Base: All codes 1-2 at S03 OR code 1 at S04 OR code 1 or 3 at S05 (All who say an agent dealt with their appeal)**

S06 [S]

Can you tell me how many people does your organisation currently employ either full or part time at all its locations? Include any working proprietors or owners, but exclude the self-employed and outside contractor or agency staff.

*INTERVIEWER: CODE INTO BAND. IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ASK FOR AN ESTIMATE.*

1. 1
2. 2-4
3. 5-9
4. 10-24
5. 25-49
6. 50-99
7. 100-249
8. 250+
9. Organisation is no longer in business

- 10. Don't know
- 11. Refused

*SCRIPTER: Code 9 go to represented script. All codes 10-11 (Don't know/refused) go to S06a.*

**Base: All codes 10-11 at S06**

S06a [S]

Do you have less than 250 employees?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Don't know

**Base: All codes 1-8, 10-11 at S06**

S07 [S]

And as far as you are aware, how many properties in the UK has your organisation owned or leased and been responsible for the business rates in total in the last 12 months? Please include all properties including any that have since been sold.

*INTERVIEWER: SINGLE CODE INTO BAND. IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ASK FOR AN ESTIMATE*

- 1. 1
- 2. 2-4
- 3. 5-9
- 4. 10-24
- 5. 25-49
- 6. 50-99
- 7. 100+
- 8. Organisation is no longer in business
- 9. Don't know
- 0. Refused

*SCRIPTER:*

Go to represented script if:

- Codes 1-7 at S06 or codes 1 or 3 at S06a (under 250 employees)
- Code 8 at S06 or code 2 at S06a AND codes 1-4 at S07 (over 250 employees but under 20 properties)
- Codes 8, 9 or 0 at S07

Go to S08 if:

- Code 8 at S06 or code 2 at S06a AND codes 5-7 at S07 (over 250 employees and over 20 properties)

**Base: All code 8 at S06 or code 2 at S06a AND codes 5-7 at S07 (all with over 250 employees and over 20 properties)**

S08 [S]

VOA is conducting this piece of research with smaller businesses. However, we may ask for your assistance in future research which will help the VOA improve the service that it provides its customers. Would you be happy to be re-contacted by the VOA within the next 12 months?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT AGREE TO BE RE-CONTACTED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS (CODE 2 AT S08):*

As the VOA databases are based on property addresses, we will make sure we remove your property from the lists contacted for research purposes. However, if you appeal against a different property, it may be possible that you are included in the sample.

On behalf of GfK and the VOA, thank you very much for your time. If you have any queries about this research project, you can telephone Rachel Feechan on 020 7890 9789.

## V. MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE

### UNREPRESENTED QUESTIONNAIRE

#### 1. Awareness of the VOA/system

Base: all respondents

INTERVIEWER: READ OUT TO ALL:

Please note that throughout the survey I am interested in your dealings with the Valuation Office Agency, which we will refer to throughout the survey as the VOA, not your dealings with the local council, or anyone else about your business rates bill, for example Small Business Rates Relief. We will also refer to your rateable value, which is the value used to calculate your business rates.

Q02 [S]

As far as you recall, how many separate appeals to the VOA have you made in the last two years? Meaning separate appeals to the VOA and not contacts about the same issue.

*IF NECESSARY, INTERVIEWER READ OUT:* By 'appeals', I mean a challenge to your business rates valuation.

*INTERVIEWER: WRITE IN NUMBER, THEN RECORD TO BAND.*

1. 1
2. 2-3
3. 4-5
4. More than 5
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q03a [S]

Prior to starting your appeal at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], did you receive a letter from the VOA notifying you of a change to your rateable value?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all code 2-6 at Q02 (all who made more than one appeal)

Q03b [S]

Was this the first time you appealed against the rateable value of [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], or have you ever appealed against the rateable value of that property before?

1. First time
2. Appealed for that property before
3. Don't know
4. Refused

**Base: all respondents**

Q04 [M]

Why did you get in contact with the VOA about your rateable value? Was it because ...?

*SCRIPTER: randomise codes 1-3.*

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. You thought the band was wrong
2. You wanted the property to be deleted from the list
3. You wanted to split a property or merge properties
4. Or for another reason (specify)
5. Don't know [S]
6. Refused [S]

**Base: all respondents**

Q05 [S per statement]

Before you started your appeal against the rateable value of your property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], how much, if anything, did you feel you knew about ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT. Did you feel you ...? READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

*SCRIPTER: randomise order of statements A-C*

	Knew a lot	Knew a fair amount	Knew a little	Knew nothing	Don't know	Refused
A. How non-domestic and business properties in England and Wales are valued by the VOA	1	2	3	4	5	6
B. How to appeal against the rateable value of a property	1	2	3	4	5	6
C. The VOA (Valuation Office Agency)	1	2	3	4	5	6

**2. USING AGENTS TO HANDLE APPEALS**

**Base: all respondents**

Q08 [S]

Did an agent approach you at any time to handle the appeal? By 'agent' I mean an individual or company who deals with someone else's rateable value appeal.

1. Yes – I had direct contact
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

**Base: all respondents**

Q16c [S]

Did you have direct contact with the VOA at any point during your appeal? For example any written correspondence such as an acknowledgement of the appeal or the final decision; speaking on the phone; meeting staff or receiving emails. Please do not include any contact with an agent.

*INTERVIEWER: IF NO: Was that because an agent mainly dealt with the VOA, a friend, family member or colleague mainly dealt with the VOA or other reasons?*

1. Yes – I had direct contact
2. No, did not have direct contact – my agent dealt with it
3. No, did not have direct contact – friend/family member/colleague dealt with it
4. No, did not have direct contact – other (specify)
5. Don't know
6. Refused

**Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)**

Q16e [S]

How often did you have direct contact with the VOA during your appeal?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT 1-4. IF RESPONDENT UNSURE, ASK FOR ESTIMATE AND CODE TO NEAREST BAND*

1. Once a week
2. Two or three times a month
3. Once a month
4. Once every couple of months
5. Once every three or four months
6. Less often
7. Don't know
8. Refused

### **3. OUTCOME OF APPEAL AND OVERALL RATINGS OF THE VOA**

**Base: all respondents**

READ OUT TO ALL: Please note that throughout the survey the questions will be referring to the appeal made for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]

Q18a [S]

Have you received any indication of a decision from the VOA about the appeal for [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], even if it is only an interim decision that you are still discussing with them?

*INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT SAYS THAT THEY ARE NOT AWARE THAT THEIR APPEAL HAD CONCLUDED / REACHED A DECISION, CHECK IF:*

- *THERE WAS A PREVIOUS APPEAL TO THE ONE THAT THEY ARE REFERRING TO (AND CODE THE OUTCOME AS APPROPRIATE)*
- *THEY WITHDREW THE CASE (CODE BELOW)*
- *IT WAS STRUCK OUT BY THE VALUATION TRIBUNAL*

*IF THEY STILL SAY THEY ARE NOT AWARE THAT THEIR APPEAL HAD CONCLUDED, WE WOULD STILL LIKE THEM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY AND THEIR VIEWS ARE STILL IMPORTANT.*

*IF NECESSARY IF THEY WANT FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE OUTCOME OF THEIR APPEAL SAY THEY SHOULD CONTACT EITHER THEIR LOCAL VALUATION OFFICE OR THE CENTRAL VALUATION OFFICE AGENCY SWITCHBOARD (03000 501501).*

*SCRIPTER: if code 2 and sample says 'unsuccessful' in the 'successful/unsuccessful' column, bring up: Can I just check, are you sure the rateable value was decreased by the VOA following your appeal? Recode as necessary*

*IF CODE 1 OR 3 AND SAMPLE SAYS 'SUCCESSFUL' IN THE 'SUCCESSFUL/UNSUCCESSFUL' COLUMN, BRING UP: Can I just check, are you sure the rateable value was not decreased by the VOA following your appeal? Recode as necessary*

1. Yes – increased rateable value
2. Yes – decreased rateable value
3. Yes – no change to rateable value
4. No – no decision at all
5. Case was withdrawn by the customer
6. Case was withdrawn by the agent
7. Case was struck out by the tribunal
8. Other (specify)
9. Don't know
0. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 and 5-8 at Q18a (all who have an outcome from the VOA)

Q19 [S]

Was this the outcome that you wanted?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 at Q18 (all who have an outcome from the VOA)

Q20 [S]

Thinking about the decision you have from the VOA, overall how well would you say you understand the reasons why this decision was made?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4*

1. Very well
2. Fairly well
3. Not very well
4. Not at all well
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all except codes 4-5 at Q18a (all who have an outcome from the VOA)

Q22 [S]

Overall, did you think that the decision you have received from the VOA was the right decision or the wrong decision?

1. Was the right decision
2. Was the wrong decision
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q22a [S]

As far as you are aware, [IF Q18 = CODE 1 TO 3: how long did the appeal take from the time it started? EVERYONE ELSE: how long has the appeal taken from the time it started?]

*INTERVIEWER ADD IF NECESSARY: In terms of the end point of your appeal, we mean you either withdrew the case, reached an agreement with the VOA or received a decision from the Valuation Tribunal for the property.*

*PROMPT FROM ANSWER CODES IF NECESSARY. IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ASK FOR AN ESTIMATE*

1. Up to 1 week
2. More than 1 week up to 1 month
3. More than 1 month up to 2 months
4. More than 2 months up to 6 months
5. More than 6 months up to 12 months
6. More than 12 months up to 18 months
7. More than 18 months up to 24 months
8. More than 24 months
9. Don't know
10. Refused

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q23 [S]

[IF CODE 1 TO 3 AT Q18: Putting aside the decision you have from the VOA and] thinking just about the service you received, how would you rate your overall experience of dealing with the VOA?

*INTERVIEWER: ADD IF NECESSARY I mean your experience of how your appeal was dealt with by the VOA, disregarding the outcome of your appeal. Has it been... READ OUT CODES 1-8*

*SCRIPTER: Alternate order*

1. Very good
2. Fairly good
3. Neither good nor poor
4. Fairly poor
5. Very poor
6. Don't know
7. Refused

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA) at QUARTER 2 AND 4 ONLY

Q23b [S]

[If Q18a = codes 1-3: Still putting aside the decision you have from the VOA, and] Thinking of all your dealings with the VOA, did you experience any of the following?

*READ OUT. MULTICODE OKAY FOR CODES 1-4*

1. Something particularly good that pleased you
2. A few small things that pleased you
3. A few minor problems or issues
4. A major complaint or problem

Base: all codes 1-2 at Q23b (all had experience which pleased them) IN QUARTER 2 AND 4 ONLY

Q23c [O]

Thinking about what pleased you; can you tell me what happened?

*INTERVIEWER: PROBE: Why did this please you?*

WRITE IN

2. Don't know
3. Refused

Base: all codes 3-4 at Q23b (all had problems with experience) IN QUARTER 2 AND 4 ONLY

Q23d [O]

Thinking about what problems or issues you encountered, can you tell me what happened?

*INTERVIEWER: PROBE: Why was this a problem?*

WRITE IN

2. Don't know
3. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q24 [S]

[IF CODE 1-3 AT Q18a: Now you have a decision from the VOA how/ EVERYONE ELSE: How] much, if anything, do you feel you now know about how properties in England and Wales are valued for business rates valuation? Do you feel you ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4*

1. Know a lot
2. Know a fair amount
3. Know a little
4. Know nothing
5. Don't know
6. Refused

#### 4. WEBSITES

Base: all respondents

READ OUT TO ALL: Now some questions about using websites during your appeal.

Q26 [M]

Did you visit any of the following websites to get information about business rates valuation, prior to starting or during your appeal?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-7.*

1. VOA (Valuation Office Agency)
2. GOV.UK
3. Business Link
4. Directgov
5. HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs)
6. Or a council website
7. Yes, another website (specify)
8. Yes – but can't remember which website
9. No – did not visit a website
10. Don't know
11. Refused

Base: all codes 1-8 at Q26 (all who had contact with a website)

Q27 [S]

To what extent did the website/s give you the information you needed? Did it/they give you ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. All of the information
2. Most of the information
3. Some of the information
4. None of the information
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all code 2 at Q26 (all who visited the GOV.UK website)

Q27aa [S]

Thinking [ADD IF MORE THAN ONE WEBSITE VISITED AT Q26: specifically] about your use of GOV.UK to get information about rateable values, how useful was this website?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. Very useful
2. Fairly useful
3. Not very useful
4. Not at all useful
5. Don't know
6. Refused

## 5. FIRST GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE VALUATION OFFICE AGENCY

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

I would now like to ask you about when you first got in touch with the VOA about the appeals process for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]

Q29 [S]

How did you first get in contact with the VOA? Was it by ...?

*INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT STATES FIRST CONTACT WAS 'THROUGH THE COUNCIL' OR 'THROUGH AN AGENT' PROBE AS TO THE FIRST CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION THEY USED DURING THE FIRST CONTACT WITH VOA STAFF I.E. SPOKE TO THEM OVER THE PHONE ETC AND CODE ACCORDINGLY.*

*DO NOT READ OUT*

*SCRIPTER: Fix order of codes*

1. Telephone
2. Letter
3. Email
4. You visiting a local office
5. Website
6. Colleague/employee contacted them for me
7. Friend/family member/someone else contacted them for me

8. Other (specify)
9. Don't know
10. Refused

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q30 [S]

When you first got in touch, to what extent did you receive enough information about what the VOA would do to reach a decision on your appeal? Did you get ...?

INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4

1. All of the information you needed
2. Most of the information you needed
3. Some of the information you needed
4. None of the information you needed
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q30a [S per statement]

When you first got in touch, do you agree or disagree that the VOA ...

INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE

SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused
A. Made clear the next steps in the process	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B. Made clear what information you needed to provide	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## 6. METHODS OF DEALING WITH THE VOA THROUGHOUT THE APPEAL

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q32 [M]

Thinking about the appeals process for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]: During the appeal which, if any, of the following methods did you have contact with the VOA? Please include receiving any written correspondence such as an acknowledgement of the appeal or the final decision, speaking on the phone, meeting staff or receiving emails.

Q33 [M]

And through which of the following methods would you prefer to have contact in any future dealings with the VOA?

FOR BOTH Q32+33:

INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-6.

SCRIPTER: Randomise codes 1-6

Q32.

Q33.

<b>Telephone</b>	1	1
<b>Letter</b>	2	2
<b>Email</b>	3	3
<b>Website</b>	4	4
<b>A member of staff visiting you</b>	5	5
<b>You visiting a local office</b>	6	6
(DO NOT READ OUT) Colleague/employee acting on my behalf	7	N/A
(DO NOT READ OUT) Friend/family acting on my behalf	8	N/A
Other (WRITE IN)	9	7
Don't know	10	8
Refused	11	9

Base: all codes 2-3 at Q32 (all who received written correspondence from the VOA)

Q34 [S]

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the advice and information in VOA's written communications was easy to understand? Please include any emails and letters received.

1. Strongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know
7. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q35 [S]

Did your appeal against the rateable value of your property include a visit to your property by an inspector or someone else from the VOA?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all respondents

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT*

We would like to understand better the amount of time it takes you to provide us with the information needed to make your appeal. The next questions ask about the time it took you to complete certain forms during your appeal. This includes the time it took you to gather the information needed to complete the form, as well as filling out the form itself.

Base: all respondents

Q40 [S]

During your appeal against the rateable value of your property at [insert first line of address from sample], did you complete any of the following forms?

READ OUT STATEMENTS A AND B IN FULL

	Yes	No	Don't know
a. A form to make the appeal (which is sometimes known as a 'Proposal to alter the 2010 List')	1	2	3
b. A Statement of Case (this is a statement of the issues in dispute made 6 weeks before the hearing at the Valuation Tribunal)	1	2	3

Base: all code 1 at Q40a (all who had completed a form to make the appeal)

Q41 [S]

Can you estimate, in hours, how long it took you to complete the appeal form (the Proposal to alter the List)? Please include in your estimate the time you may have spent collecting evidence as well as the actual time you spent filling in this form.

Please only include the time you spent on the appeal form, as we will ask separately about how long it took you to complete any other forms [IF ALSO CODE 1 AT Q40B: including the Statement of Case]

Enter number

2. Don't know

If Don't know ask

Did it take:

Less than 2 hours

2 hours but less than 4 hours

4 hours but less than 7 hours

7 hours or more

Don't know

Base: all code 1 at Q40b (all who had completed a Statement of Case)

Q42 [S]

Can you estimate, in hours, how long it took you to complete the Statement of Case? Please include in your estimate the time you may have spent collecting evidence as well as the actual time you spent filling in the form.

Enter number

2. Don't know

If Don't know ask

Did it take:

Less than 2 hours

2 hours but less than 4 hours

4 hours but less than 7 hours

7 hours or more

Don't know

Base: all code 2 at Q40a AND Q420b (all who had not completed a form to make the appeal or a Statement of Case)

Q43 [S]

Do you recall completing any other forms or paperwork associated with your appeal, even if you can't recall precisely what these were?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Base: all code 1 at Q43 (all who had completed forms associated with their appeal but do not remember what these were)

Q44 [S]

Can you estimate, in hours, how long it took you to gather the information required and complete the paperwork associated with your appeal?

Enter number

2. Don't know

If Don't know ask

Did it take:

- Less than 2 hours
- 2 hours but less than 4 hours
- 4 hours but less than 7 hours
- 7 hours or more
- Don't know

Base: all respondents

Q45 [S]

Do you recall completing a Request for Rental Information Form or Form of Return in the last 2 years, to tell the VOA about your property details and rental or trading information?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Base: all code 1 at Q45 (all who completed a Request for Rental Information Form)

Q46 [S]

Can you estimate, in hours, how long it took you to gather the information required and complete the Rental Information form/Form of Return?

Enter number

2. Don't know

If Don't know ask

Did it take:

- Less than 2 hours
- 2 hours but less than 4 hours
- 4 hours but less than 7 hours
- 7 hours or more
- Don't know

## 7. RATINGS OF DEALINGS WITH STAFF AT THE VALUATION OFFICE AGENCY

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q38 [S per statement]

I now want you to think about your experience of dealing with staff at the VOA, including anyone you spoke to on the phone or who visited your property. Can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE.

SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused
A. Staff had the knowledge and expertise needed to answer all of your questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B. Staff responded to your queries within an appropriate timeframe	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C. Staff were professional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D. Staff were polite and friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## 8. REPUTATION OF THE VOA

Base: all respondents

Q39 [S per statement]

Now thinking about the way the VOA works, and your experience of the appeals process, can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE.

SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused
A. The appeals process is easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B. You trust the VOA to get the outcome of your appeal right	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C. Your case was dealt with fairly by the VOA	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D. The way the VOA values properties is easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## F. ABOUT YOU (UNREPRESENTED RESPONDENTS)

Base: all respondents

Finally, I would just like to ask a few questions to help classify your answers. Everything you say will be treated in confidence.

Q41 [S]

What is your age?

*INTERVIEWER: RECORD EXACT AGE AND SINGLE CODE INTO BAND*

1. 16-24
2. 25-34
3. 35-44
4. 45-54
5. 55-64
6. 65-74
7. 75+
8. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q44 [S]

*INTERVIEWER: RECORD GENDER OF RESPONDENT*

1. Male
2. Female

Base: all respondents

Q46 [S]

Can you confirm your job title or role within your organisation?

READ OUT/PROBE TO PRECODES

1. Business owner/CEO/COO/Managing Director
2. Other Directors
3. Managers (below Director level)
4. Executive
5. Sales/customer service
6. Administration (e.g. Secretary, Clerk etc)
7. Other (specify)

Base: all respondents

Q52 [S]

Is the property you appealed about ...

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT (EXCEPT DON'T KNOW AND REFUSED)*

1. A shop or other retail premises
2. A restaurant/café/pub/bar or hotel
3. A manufacturing premises
4. Agricultural property/land
5. Industrial property/land
6. Personal services (e.g. gym, garage, church)
7. Residential property e.g. being re-classified
8. Other work premises such as an office
9. Something else (WRITE IN)

- 10. Don't know
- 11. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q53 [S]

And as far as you are aware, how many properties in the UK has your organisation owned or leased and been responsible for the business rates in total in the last 12 months? Please include all properties including any that have since been sold.

*INTERVIEWER: SINGLE CODE INTO BAND. IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ASK FOR AN ESTIMATE*

- 1. 1
- 2. 2-4
- 3. 5-9
- 4. 10-24
- 5. 25-49
- 6. 50-99
- 7. 100+
- 8. Organisation is no longer in business
- 9. Don't know
- 0. Refused

Base: All

Q54 [S]

how many people does your organisation currently employ either full or part time at all its locations? Include any working proprietors or owners, but exclude the self-employed and outside contractor or agency staff.

*INTERVIEWER: CODE INTO BAND. IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ASK FOR AN ESTIMATE.*

- 1. 1
- 2. 2-4
- 3. 5-9
- 4. 10-24
- 5. 25-49
- 6. 50-99
- 7. 100-249
- 8. 250+
- 9. Organisation is no longer in business
- 10. Don't know
- 11. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q57 [S]

The VOA may want to do further research in the future about similar issues to those we have discussed today. Would you be happy to be re-contacted by the VOA as part of this research within the next 12 months?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT AGREE TO BE RECONTACTED (SCRIPTER: show for all saying 2 at QF6): As the VOA databases are based on property*

addresses, we will make sure we remove your property from the lists contacted for research purposes. However, if you appeal against a different property, it may be possible that you are included in the sample.

Base: all respondents

Q58 [S]

The Valuation Office Agency would like to add the records they already hold on your appeal to your answers to this survey. This will help us with further research to get a more accurate picture of customers' experiences and perceptions of the appeals process. All information will be used for research and statistical purposes only. Your personal details will be kept completely confidential. Are you happy for your responses to be linked to your case information and for the linked data to be passed on in an anonymized format to the VOA?

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT REQUESTS MORE INFO:

- Your answers will not be used by operational colleagues, such as caseworkers, and will only be accessed by analysts
- Consenting to data linkage will in no way affect the dealings you may have with the VOA now or in the future
- We will only link your responses to this survey to the administrative data relating to this specific appeal
- The data linking will take place at GfK, our survey contractor, and the dataset passed back to the VOA will be anonymized so that we will not be able to identify your individual name or business

1. Yes
2. No

**On behalf of GfK and the VOA, thank you very much for your time. If you have any queries about this research project, you can telephone Rachel Feechan on 020 9870 9789**

END OF NDR UNREP QUESTIONNAIRE

## REPRESENTED QUESTIONNAIRE

Base: all respondents

QA4 [S]

Was this the first time that you had worked with your agent to make an appeal?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all code 2 at QA4 (all who had worked with their agent more than once)

QA5 [S]

How long have you been working with your agent to make appeals of business rates against your property or properties?

1. Up to 1 year
2. More than 1 year and up to 2 years
3. More than 2 years and up to 3 years
4. More than 3 years and up to 5 years

5. More than 5 years
6. Don't know
7. Refused

Base: all respondents

QA6 [S]

When you began working with your agent, did they approach you to handle the appeal or did you approach the agent?

1. Agent approached me
2. I approached the agent
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all respondents

QA8 [S]

Which of the following best describes the payment structure you have agreed with your agent for making appeals to the VOA?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT INCLUDING 'OTHER'.*

*SCRIPTER: Rotate order of statements 1-5.*

1. Part of existing contract of services
2. Retainer for making appeals for organisation
3. Upfront fee for each appeal (and a percentage of any rebate/savings)
4. Upfront/single fee for each appeal (no percentage of rebate/savings)
5. No win no fee (and a percentage of any rebate/savings)
6. Other (specify)
7. Don't know
8. Refused

Base: all codes 3 or 5 at QA8 (all giving a percentage of any rebate/savings)

QA9 [S]

What proportion of any rebate did you agree your agent would take if the appeal at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6] was successful?

WRITE IN PERCENTAGE

2. Other (specify)
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all codes 3 or 4 at QA8 (all charged an upfront or single fee by their agent)

QA9a [S]

How much was charged by your agent for the upfront/single fee for the appeal at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]?

*INTERVIEWER: IF NECESSARY: Please be assured that your answers are confidential; your answer will not be personally attributed to you. We appreciate that your relationship with your agent is commercially sensitive and your relationship with the VOA will not be affected in any way.*

*INTERVIEWER – NOTE: DOUBLE CHECK IF ABOVE £2,000.*

WRITE IN AMOUNT IN POUNDS

2. Other (specify)

3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all respondents

QA11 [S]

How much information did your agent give you at the start of the process to explain how the appeal would work?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4*

1. A great deal
2. A fair amount
3. Not very much
4. No information at all
5. Don't know
6. Refused

## B. CURRENT APPEAL

Base: all respondents

QB1a [S]

As far as you recall, how many separate appeals to the VOA have you made for any commercial properties in the last two years, either directly to the VOA or through an agent? Meaning separate appeals and not contacts about the same issue.

*INTERVIEWER: IF NECESSARY: By 'appeals' I mean a challenge to your business rates valuation. WRITE IN NUMBER AND RECORD TO BAND.*

1. 1
2. 2-3
3. 4-5
4. More than 5
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all respondents

I would now like to ask you specifically about the appeal against [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]

QB1 [S]

Was this the first time you or your agent appealed against the rateable value of [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], or have you or your agent appealed against the rateable value of that particular property before?

1. First time
2. Appealed for that property before myself
3. Appealed for that property before through an agent
4. Don't know
5. Refused

Base: all respondents

QB1b [S]

Why did your agent get in contact with the VOA about your rateable value? Was it because ...

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise codes 1-3*

1. You thought the rateable value was wrong
2. You wanted the property to be deleted from the list
3. You wanted to split a property or merge properties
4. Another reason (specify)
5. Don't know
6. Refused

**Base: all respondents**

QB2 [S]

Have you received any indication of a decision from the VOA about the appeal for [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], even if it is only an interim decision that you are still discussing with them?

*INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT SAYS THAT THEY ARE NOT AWARE THAT THEIR APPEAL HAD CONCLUDED / REACHED A DECISION, CHECK IF:*

- *THERE WAS A PREVIOUS APPEAL TO THE ONE THAT THEY ARE REFERRING TO (AND CODE THE OUTCOME AS APPROPRIATE)*
- *THEY WITHDREW THE CASE (CODE BELOW)*
- *IT WAS STRUCK OUT BY THE VALUATION TRIBUNAL (CODE BELOW)*

*IF THEY STILL SAY THEY ARE NOT AWARE THAT THEIR APPEAL HAD CONCLUDED, WE WOULD STILL LIKE THEM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY AND THEIR VIEWS ARE STILL IMPORTANT.*

*IF NECESSARY IF THEY WANT FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE OUTCOME OF THEIR APPEAL SAY THEY SHOULD CONTACT EITHER THEIR LOCAL VALUATION OFFICE OR THE CENTRAL VALUATION OFFICE AGENCY SWITCHBOARD (03000 501501).*

*SCRIPTER: if code 2 and sample says 'unsuccessful' in the 'successful/unsuccessful' column, bring up: Can I just check, are you sure the rateable value was decreased by the VOA following your appeal? Recode as necessary*

*IF CODE 1 OR 3 AND SAMPLE SAYS 'SUCCESSFUL' IN THE 'SUCCESSFUL/UNSUCCESSFUL' COLUMN, BRING UP: Can I just check, are you sure the rateable value was not decreased by the VOA following your appeal? Recode as necessary*

1. Yes – increased rateable value
2. Yes – decreased rateable value
3. Yes – no change to rateable value
4. No – no decision at all
5. Case was withdrawn by the customer
6. Case was withdrawn by the agent
7. Case was struck out by the tribunal
8. Other (specify)
9. Don't know
0. Refused

**Base: all codes 1-3 and 5-8 at QB2 (all who have an outcome from the VOA)**

QB3 [S]

Was this the outcome that you wanted?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

#### 4. Refused

Base: all respondents

QB4 [S]

As far as you are aware, [IF QB2 = CODE 1 TO 3: how long did the appeal take from the time it started? EVERYONE ELSE: how long has the appeal taken from the time it started?]

*INTERVIEWER ADD IF NECESSARY: In terms of the end point of your appeal, we mean either you or your agent withdrew the case, reached an agreement with the VOA or received a decision from the Valuation Tribunal for the property.*

*INTERVIEWER: PROMPT FROM ANSWER CODES IF NECESSARY. IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ASK FOR AN ESTIMATE*

1. Up to 1 week
2. More than 1 week up to 1 month
3. More than 1 month up to 2 months
4. More than 2 months up to 6 months
5. More than 6 months up to 12 months
6. More than 12 months up to 18 months
7. More than 18 months up to 24 months
8. More than 24 months
9. Don't know
10. Refused

Base: all respondents

QB5 [S]

How often [IF CODES 1-3 AT QB2: did you have] [EVERYONE ELSE: have you had] contact with your agent since starting the appeal for [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]? Did you have contact at least ...

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-6. IF RESPONDENT UNSURE, ASK FOR ESTIMATE AND CODE TO NEAREST BAND*

1. Once a week
2. Two or three times a month
3. Once a month
4. Once every couple of months
5. Once every three or four months
6. Less often
7. Don't know
8. Refused

Base: all respondents

QB6 [S]

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the way your agent has dealt with the appeal? [IF CODES 1-3 AT QA15: Please think about the service you received rather than the outcome of the appeal.] Were you ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-5*

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
4. Fairly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied

6. Don't know
7. Refused

Base: all codes 4-5 at QB6 (all dissatisfied with agent)

QB7 [M]

Why were you dissatisfied with the way your agent dealt with your appeal?

*INTERVIEWER: DO NOT READ OUT. CODE TO LIST BELOW.*

1. Didn't get me the outcome I/organisation wanted/didn't achieve a reduction in my business rates
2. Don't feel they understood my/my organisation's case/argument fully
3. Didn't answer/respond to my queries
4. Didn't feel they did a good job/made the case well enough/was incompetent
5. Didn't seem interested/committed to my appeal/case
6. Didn't keep me updated of progress
7. Didn't explain things/communicate well (e.g. reasons for outcome)
8. Was slow/unresponsive/took too long
9. Was rude/impolite/had poor attitude
10. Other (specify)
11. Don't know
12. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 at QB2 (all who had a decision from the VOA)

QB8 [S]

Thinking about the decision you have received on the appeal, how well would you say you understand the reasons why this decision was made?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4*

1. Very well
2. Fairly well
3. Not very well
4. Not at all well
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 at QB2 (all who had a decision from the VOA)

QB10 [S]

Overall, did you think that the decision was the right decision, or the wrong decision?

1. Was the right decision
2. Was the wrong decision
3. Don't know
4. Refused

## BB. WEBSITES

Base: all respondents

READ OUT TO ALL: Now some questions about using websites during your appeal.

QBB1 [M]

Did you visit any of the following websites to get information about rateable values, prior to starting or during your appeal?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-7.*

1. VOA (Valuation Office Agency)
2. GOV.UK
3. Business Link
4. Directgov
5. HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs)
6. Or a council website
7. Yes, another website (specify)
8. Yes – but can't remember which website
9. No – did not visit a website [S]
10. Don't know
11. Refused

Base: all codes 1-8 at QBB1 (all who had contact with a website)

QBB2 [S]

To what extent did the website/s give you the information you needed? Did it/they give you ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. All of the information
2. Most of the information
3. Some of the information
4. None of the information
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all codes 2-4 at QBB2 (All who did not get all of the information they wanted)

QBB2 [M]

What would you have liked more information or answers on?

*INTERVIEWER: PROBE: What else?*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise codes 1-12*

1. The accepted grounds to appeal/what makes an appeal 'valid'
2. Details of other properties with the same rateable value
3. How long an appeal process would take
4. My/the organisation's input/what would be required from me in an appeal (e.g. evidence)
5. How I/the organisation can get in touch with the VOA
6. Details of my local valuation office
7. The process/what happens at each stage of an appeal
8. Staff details/who does what/who would be dealing with an appeal
9. How the VOA calculate rateable values (e.g. do an inspection, use other sources etc)
10. What is/isn't taken into account when valuing properties
11. Assurances on the independence/impartiality of the VOA
12. Information in plain English/less jargon
13. Other (specify)
14. Don't know
15. Refused

Base: all code 2 at QBB1 (all who visited the GOV.UK website)

QBB3 [S]

Thinking [ADD IF MORE THAN ONE WEBSITE VISITED AT QBB1: specifically] about your use of GOV.UK to get information about rateable values, how useful was this website?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. Very useful
2. Fairly useful
3. Not very useful
4. Not at all useful
5. Don't know
6. Refused

### C. DIRECT CONTACT WITH VOA

Base: all respondents

QC1 [M]

Have you ever had direct contact with the VOA during the course of this or any other appeal, or at any other time? For example, any written correspondence, a property inspection, speaking on the phone or receiving emails. Please do not include contact with your agent.

*INTERVIEWER: IF RECEIVED A LETTER TO SAY THEIR RATEABLE VALUE HAS CHANGED, PLEASE CODE 2*

1. Telephone
2. Letter
3. Email
4. Inspection/a member of staff visiting you
5. You visiting a local office
6. No [S]
7. Don't know
8. Refused

Base: all codes 1-5 at QC1 (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

QC2 [M]

What have you had direct contact with the VOA about?

*INTERVIEWER: DO NOT READ OUT. CODE TO LIST.*

1. Letter informing me of the outcome of the appeal
2. Correspondence on the appeal
3. About the process/what I could and couldn't do
4. To do with an inspection/visit
5. About neighbouring properties/similar properties/why other properties are in a different band
6. Confirmation that the appeal was received/lodged/commencing/that the agent had lodged the appeal
7. About details/measurements of the property
8. I had queries/responding to queries
9. Other (specify)
10. Don't know
11. Refused

Base: all codes 2-3 at QC1 or codes 1-3 at QB2 (all who received written correspondence or have been informed that their appeal has ended)

QC3 [S]

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the advice and information in VOA's written communications is easy to understand? Please include any emails and letters received.

**INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-5. DO NOT READ OUT 'HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS'**

1. Strongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Have not received any written communications
7. Don't know
8. Refused

**Base: all code 2 at B1 AND NOT CODE 1, 3, 4 OR 5 (all who had written contact ONLY)**

QC3b [S]

How many written letters have you ever received from the VOA?

1. One
2. More than one
3. Don't know

**Base: all codes 1-5 at QB1 AND NOT CODES 1 OR 3 AT QB4 (all who had personal dealings with the VOA)**

QC4 [S per statement]

I want you to think about your experience of dealing with staff at the VOA, including anyone you spoke to on the phone or who visited your property. Can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

**INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE (CODES 1-5)**

**SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused	Not applicable
A. Staff had the knowledge and expertise needed to answer all of your questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
C. Staff were professional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
D. Staff were polite and friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

## **D. UNDERSTANDING AND INFORMATION**

**Base: all respondents**

QD1 [S]

[IF CODES 1-3 AT QB2: Now you have a decision from the VOA] How much, if anything, do you feel you now know about how properties in England and Wales are valued by the VOA? Do you feel you ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4*

1. Know a lot
2. Know a fair amount
3. Know a little
4. Know nothing
5. Don't know
6. Refused

**Base: all respondents**

QD2 [S per statement]

I am now going to read you a list of statements about the evidence that could be taken into account when determining rateable values. Could you tell me, based on what you know, whether you think each are true or false? If you don't know, just say and we will move on.

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements*

	True	False	Don't know	Refused
A. The VOA takes into account reductions in rental values due to the recession that occurred after April 2008	1	2	3	4
B. If I make physical changes to my property by extending it or demolishing part of it, this needs to be reflected in my rateable value assessment	1	2	3	4
C. The VOA reassess the rateable value of each business property on an annual basis	1	2	3	4

## **E. REPUTATION OF THE VOA**

**Base: all respondents**

QE1 [S per statement]

Now thinking about all you know about the way the VOA works, even if it is only a limited amount, can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE (CODES 1-5)*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements*

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused
A. The appeals process is easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B. You trust the VOA to get the outcome of your appeal right	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D. The way the VOA values properties is easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Base: all respondents

QE3 [S]

Is there anything that you feel the VOA needs to do to improve the appeals process and how it engages with customers?

WRITE IN

2. Don't know
3. Refused

## F. ABOUT YOU (REPRESENTED RESPONDENTS)

Base: all respondents

Finally, I would just like to ask a few questions to help classify your answers. Everything you say will be treated in confidence.

QF1 [S]

What is your age?

*INTERVIEWER: RECORD EXACT AGE AND SINGLE CODE INTO BAND*

1. 16-24
2. 25-34
3. 35-44
4. 45-54
5. 55-64
6. 65-74
7. 75+
8. Refused

Base: all respondents

QF2 [S]

*INTERVIEWER: RECORD GENDER OF RESPONDENT*

1. Male
2. Female

Base: all respondents

QF3 [S]

Can you confirm your job title or role within your organisation?

## READ OUT/PROBE TO PRECODES

8. Business owner/CEO/COO/Managing Director
9. Other Directors
10. Managers (below Director level)
11. Executive
12. Sales/customer service
13. Administration (e.g. Secretary, Clerk etc)
14. Other (specify)

### Base: all respondents

QF6 [S]

The VOA may want to do further research in the future about similar issues to those we have discussed today. Would you be happy to be re-contacted by the VOA as part of this research within the next 12 months?

1. Yes
2. No

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT AGREE TO BE RECONTACTED (SCRIPTER: show for all saying 2 at QF6):* As the VOA databases are based on property addresses, we will make sure we remove your property from the lists contacted for research purposes. However, if you appeal against a different property, it may be possible that you are included in the sample.

### Base: all respondents

QF9 [S]

The Valuation Office Agency would like to add the records they already hold on your appeal to your answers to this survey. This will help us with further research to get a more accurate picture of customers' experiences and perceptions of the appeals process. All information will be used for research and statistical purposes only. Your personal details will be kept completely confidential. Are you happy for your responses to be linked to your case information and for the linked data to be passed on in an anonymized format to the VOA?

**INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT REQUESTS MORE INFO:**

- Your answers will not be used by operational colleagues, such as caseworkers, and will only be accessed by analysts
- Consenting to data linkage will in no way affect the dealings you may have with the VOA now or in the future
- We will only link your responses to this survey to the administrative data relating to this specific appeal
- The data linking will take place at GfK, our survey contractor, and the dataset passed back to the VOA will be anonymized so that we will not be able to identify your individual name or business

1. Yes
2. No

**On behalf of GfK and the VOA, thank you very much for your time. If you have any queries about this research project, you can telephone Rachel Feechan on 020 9870 9789**

**END OF NDR REP QUESTIONNAIRE**

## CT CTS Questionnaire Q4

Valuation Office Agency

272.209.30178

*The VOA sets Council Tax bandings and business property rateable values used to calculate business rates for millions of properties. Their Customer Tracking Survey aims to understand customer satisfaction among people who have appealed the VOA's Council Tax banding, with the way VOA dealt with their appeal*

*Length of interview: ~15 minutes*

*Start fieldwork: 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016*

*End fieldwork: 25<sup>th</sup> April 2016*

### I. SAMPLE VARIABLES

*Case number (unique)  
 Rep/Unrep  
 IPP/CR15  
 Survey Frame  
 Primary telephone number  
 Property full address  
 Property add 1-6  
 Property postcode  
 Current RV band  
 Occ/party name  
 Occ/party add 1-6  
 Occ/party postcode  
 Agent name  
 Created RV band  
 Sett Code  
 Successful/unsuccessful*

### II. QUOTA CHECK BASED ON SAMPLE VARIABLES

*No quotas – just as many interviews as possible in each category.*

### III. INTRODUCTION

*Good morning, afternoon, evening. My name is ... from GfK, the independent research organisation. Can I speak to [INSERT OCC/PARTY NAME] please?*

*I am calling to ask you some questions on behalf of the Valuation Office Agency, also known as the VOA, whose records show that you recently appealed the Council Tax banding of [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADDS 1-6] - which may have been through an agent. We are conducting a survey of people who have recently appealed their banding to learn about how the process could be improved. You may have received a letter about this survey in the last few weeks. Do you know about this appeal and can you give your views today? The interview will take around 10-15 minutes.*

*IF NOT AVAILABLE: Is there someone else in the household who is familiar with the appeal into your Council Tax banding and can give their views today?*

*INTERVIEWER NOTE: THE RESPONDENT MAY RECOGNISE THEIR APPEAL AS AN 'ENQUIRY' OR 'CHALLENGE' OR 'PROPOSAL'. EMAIL COPY OF LETTER IF REQUIRED. Please note that it is your experiences throughout the appeal that we are interested in, not just the final outcome.*

*I would like to assure you that all the information we collect will be kept in the strictest confidence, and used for research purposes only. The interview and the answers you give will not affect the decision of any current or future appeal or your relationship with the VOA. It will not be possible to identify you or your address in the results.*

#### IV. SCREENER

S01 [S]

Can I just check, are you an 'agent'? By 'agent', I mean a representative of a company acting on behalf of someone who is appealing against their Council Tax property banding.

1. Yes – I am an agent
2. No – I am not an agent
3. Don't know
4. Refused

*SCRIPTER: all respondents answering 1, 3 and 4 should be screened out*

Base: All answering 2 at S01

S02 [S]

Our records show that an appeal was recently made for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]. By 'appeal', I mean a challenge to your Council Tax banding. Is this correct?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

*SCRIPTER: all respondents answering 2-3 should be screened out*

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT FOR ALL CONTINUING:* Please note that throughout the survey, the questions will be referring to the appeal made for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]

Base: All represented sample

S03 [S]

Our records also show that this appeal was made on your behalf by [INSERT AGENT NAME]. Is this correct?

1. Yes – this agent
2. Yes – different agent (specify)
3. Not correct

*IF YES: INTERVIEWER READ OUT:* Just so you know, [INSERT AGENT NAME] has been made aware of this project, although they will not know that you personally have taken part.

*SCRIPTER: codes 1-2 go to represented script. Code 3 continue to S04.*

Base: All code 3 at S3

S04 [S]

Did you use an agent at any point to handle your appeal? IF YES: Did you use an agent during the entire length of the appeal (from start to finish), or during part of the appeal?

1. Yes – used an agent for the whole appeal

2. Yes – used an agent for part of the appeal
3. No – did not use an agent at all

*SCRIPTER: Code 1 go to represented script. Code 3 go to unrepresented script. Code 2 continue to S05.*

Base: All code 2 at S04

S05 [S]

Thinking back over the entire length of the appeal, was it you or the agent who mainly dealt with the VOA?

1. Mainly the agent
2. Mainly the respondent
3. Appeal equally balanced between agent and respondent

*SCRIPTER: Code 1 go to represented script. Code 2 go to unrepresented script. If code 3, refer to sample: if respondent is from unrepresented sample, go to unrepresented script; if from represented sample go to represented script.*

## V. MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE

### UNREPRESENTED QUESTIONNAIRE

#### 1. Awareness of the VOA/system

Base: all respondents

Q02 [S]

As far as you recall, how many separate appeals, enquiries or proposals to your Council Tax banding have you made to the VOA in the last two years? Meaning separate appeals to the VOA and not contacts about the same issue.

*IF NECESSARY, INTERVIEWER READ OUT:* By 'appeals, enquiries and proposals', I mean a challenge to your Council Tax banding.

*INTERVIEWER: WRITE IN NUMBER, THEN RECORD TO BAND.*

1. 1
2. 2-3
3. 4-5
4. More than 5
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q02b [S]

I now want you to think about your appeal into your Council Tax banding for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]. Did this relate to the home that you personally live in?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all codes 2-4 at Q02b (all whose appeal did not relate to the home they personally live in)

Q02c [S]

Did the appeal relate to one of the following?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-6.*

1. A second home
2. A property you rent out
3. The home of a friend or relative
4. A property managed by a company you work for
5. A previous home
6. A development project
7. Other (specify)
8. Don't know
9. Refused

**Base: all respondents**

Q03a [S]

Prior to starting your appeal at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], did you receive a letter from the VOA notifying you of a change to your Council Tax banding?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

**Base: all respondents**

Q04 [M]

Why did you get in contact with the VOA about your Council Tax banding? Was it because ...?

*SCRIPTER: randomise codes 1-3.*

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. You thought the band was wrong
2. You wanted the property to be deleted from the list
3. You wanted to split a property or merge properties
4. Or for another reason (specify)
5. Don't know [S]
6. Refused [S]

READ OUT IF ON BEHALF OF A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER (code 3 at Q02c): For the rest of the survey, when I refer to 'your' appeal, property or banding, we are referring to the property you appealed on behalf of a friend or family member.

**Base: all respondents**

Q05 [S per statement]

Before you started your appeal against the Council Tax banding of your property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], how much, if anything, did you feel you knew about ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT. Did you feel you ...? READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

*SCRIPTER: randomise order of statements A-C*

Knew a lot	Knew a fair amount	Knew a little	Knew nothing	Don't know	Refused
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A. How properties in England and Wales are valued by the VOA	1	2	3	4	5	6
B. How to appeal against the Council Tax banding of a property	1	2	3	4	5	6
C. The VOA (Valuation Office Agency)	1	2	3	4	5	6

Base: all respondents

Q08 [S]

Did an agent approach you at any time to handle the appeal? By 'agent', I mean an individual or company who deals with someone else's Council Tax appeal.

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

## 2. DIRECT CONTACT WITH VOA

Base: all respondents

Q16c [S]

Did you have direct contact with the VOA during your appeal? For example, any written correspondence such as an acknowledgement of the appeal or the final decision; speaking on the phone; meeting staff or receiving emails. Please do not include any contact with an agent. IF NO: Was that because an agent mainly dealt with the VOA, a friend, family member or colleague mainly dealt with the VOA, or for other reasons?

1. Yes – I had direct contact
2. No, did not have direct contact – my agent dealt with it
3. No, did not have direct contact – a friend/family member/colleague dealt with it
4. No, did not have direct contact – other reason (specify)
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q16e [S]

How often did you have direct contact with the VOA during your appeal?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT 1-4. IF RESPONDENT UNSURE, ASK FOR ESTIMATE AND CODE TO NEAREST BAND*

1. Once a week
2. Two or three times a month
3. Once a month
4. Once every couple of months
5. Once every three or four months
6. Less often
7. Don't know
8. Refused

## 3. OUTCOME OF APPEAL AND OVERALL RATINGS OF THE VOA

Base: all respondents

READ OUT TO ALL: Please note that throughout the survey the questions will be referring to the appeal made for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]

Q18 [S]

Have you received any indication of a decision from the VOA about the appeal for [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], even if it is only an interim decision that you are still discussing with them? By this we mean a decision made by the VOA on whether or not to change the banding of your property, and not any change in the bill you received from the council.

*INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT SAYS THAT THEY ARE NOT AWARE THAT THEIR APPEAL HAD CONCLUDED / REACHED A DECISION, CHECK IF:*

- *THERE WAS A PREVIOUS APPEAL TO THE ONE THAT THEY ARE REFERRING TO (AND CODE THE OUTCOME AS APPROPRIATE)*
- *THEY WITHDREW THE CASE (CODE BELOW)*
- *THEY ARE REFERRING TO SUBSEQUENT CONTACT WITH THE VALUATION TRIBUNAL BECAUSE THEY DISAGREE WITH VOA'S DECISION (AND CODE THE OUTCOME AS APPROPRIATE)*

*IF NECESSARY IF THEY WANT FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE OUTCOME OF THEIR APPEAL SAY THEY SHOULD CONTACT EITHER THEIR LOCAL VALUATION OFFICE OR THE CENTRAL VALUATION OFFICE AGENCY SWITCHBOARD (03000 501501).*

*SCRIPTER: if code 2 and sample says 'unsuccessful' in the 'successful/unsuccessful' column, bring up: Can I just check, are you sure the Council Tax banding was decreased by the VOA following your appeal? Recode as necessary*

*IF CODE 1 OR 3 AND SAMPLE SAYS 'SUCCESSFUL' IN THE 'SUCCESSFUL/UNSUCCESSFUL' COLUMN, BRING UP: Can I just check, are you sure the Council Tax banding was not decreased by the VOA following your appeal? Recode as necessary*

1. Yes – banding has increased/pay more Council Tax
2. Yes – banding has decreased/pay less Council Tax
3. Yes – no change to banding
4. No – no decision at all
5. Case was withdrawn by the customer
6. Case was withdrawn by the agent
7. Case was struck out by the tribunal
8. Other (specify)
9. Don't know
0. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 and 5-8 at Q18 (all who have an outcome from the VOA)

Q19 [S]

Was this the outcome that you wanted?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 at Q18 (all who have an outcome from the VOA)

Q20 [S]

Thinking about the decision you have from the VOA, overall how well would you say you understand the reasons why this decision was made?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT*

1. Very well
2. Fairly well
3. Not very well
4. Not at all well
5. Don't know
6. Refused

**Base: all codes 1-3 at Q18 (all who have an outcome from the VOA)**

Q22 [S]

Overall, did you think that the decision you have received from the VOA was the right decision or the wrong decision?

1. Was the right decision
2. Was the wrong decision
3. Don't know
4. Refused

**Base: all respondents**

Q22a [S]

As far as you are aware, [IF Q18 = CODE 1 TO 3: how long did the appeal take from the time it started? EVERYONE ELSE: how long has the appeal taken from the time it started?]

*INTERVIEWER ADD IF NECESSARY: In terms of the end point of your appeal, we mean the VOA sent you a letter setting out their decision on your Council Tax banding for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]*

*PROMPT FROM ANSWER CODES IF NECESSARY. IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ASK FOR AN ESTIMATE*

1. Up to 1 week
2. More than 1 week up to 1 month
3. More than 1 month up to 2 months
4. More than 2 months up to 6 months
5. More than 6 months up to 12 months
6. More than 12 months up to 18 months
7. More than 18 months up to 24 months
8. More than 24 months
9. Don't know
10. Refused

**Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)**

Q23 [S]

[IF CODE 1 TO 3 AT Q18: Putting aside the decision you have from the VOA and] thinking just about the service you received, how would you rate your overall experience of dealing with the VOA?

*INTERVIEWER: ADD IF NECESSARY I mean your experience of how your appeal was dealt with by the VOA, disregarding the outcome of your appeal. Has it been... READ OUT CODES 1-8*

*SCRIPTER: Alternate order*

1. Very good
2. Fairly good
3. Neither good nor poor
4. Fairly poor

5. Very poor
6. Don't know
7. Refused

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA) IN QUARTER 2 AND 4 ONLY

Q23b [M]

[IF CODE 1 TO 3 AT Q18: Still putting aside the decision you have from the VOA and] thinking of all your dealings with the VOA, did you experience any of the following?

INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4

1. Something particularly good that pleased you
2. A few small things that pleased you
3. A few minor problems or issues
4. A major complaint or problem
5. None of these
6. Don't know
7. Refused

SCRIPTER: Codes 1-2 go to Q23c, codes 3-4 go to Q23d, codes 5-7 go to Q24. If codes 1 or 2 and 3 or 4 at Q23b randomise which of Q23c or Q23d they are asked (i.e. they should not be asked both)

Base: all codes 1-2 at Q23b (all had experience which pleased them) IN QUARTER 2 AND 4 ONLY

Q23c [O]

Thinking about what pleased you; can you tell me what happened?

INTERVIEWER: PROBE: *Why did this please you?*

WRITE IN

2. Don't know
3. Refused

Base: all codes 3-4 at Q23b (all had problems with experience) IN QUARTER 2 AND 4 ONLY

Q23d [O]

Thinking about what problems or issues you encountered, can you tell me what happened?

INTERVIEWER: PROBE: *Why was this a problem?*

WRITE IN

2. Don't know
3. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q24 [S]

[IF CODE 1-3 AT Q18: Now you have a decision from the VOA how/ EVERYONE ELSE: How] much, if anything, do you feel you now know about how properties in England and Wales are valued for Council Tax banding? Do you feel you ...?

INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4

1. Know a lot
2. Know a fair amount
3. Know a little
4. Know nothing

5. Don't know
6. Refused

#### 4. WEBSITES

Base: all respondents

READ OUT TO ALL: Now some questions about using websites during your appeal.

Q26 [M]

Did you visit any of the following websites to get information about Council Tax banding, prior to starting or during your appeal?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-7.*

1. VOA (Valuation Office Agency)
2. GOV.UK
3. Business Link
4. Directgov
5. HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs)
6. Or a council website
7. Yes, another website (specify)
8. Yes – but can't remember which website
9. No – did not visit a website
10. Don't know
11. Refused

Base: all codes 1-8 at Q26 (all who had contact with a website)

Q27 [S]

To what extent did the website/s give you the information you needed? Did it/they give you ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. All of the information
2. Most of the information
3. Some of the information
4. None of the information
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all code 2 at Q26 (all who visited the GOV.UK website)

Q26a [S]

Thinking [ADD IF MORE THAN ONE WEBSITE VISITED AT Q26: specifically] about your use of GOV.UK to get information about Council Tax banding, how useful was this website?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. Very useful
2. Fairly useful
3. Not very useful
4. Not at all useful
5. Don't know
6. Refused

## 5. FIRST GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE VALUATION OFFICE AGENCY

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

I would now like to ask you about when you first got in touch with the VOA about the appeals process for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]

Q29 [S]

How did you first get in contact with the VOA? Was it by ...?

*INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT STATES FIRST CONTACT WAS 'THROUGH THE COUNCIL' OR 'THROUGH AN AGENT' PROBE AS TO THE FIRST CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION THEY USED DURING THE FIRST CONTACT WITH VOA STAFF I.E. SPOKE TO THEM OVER THE PHONE ETC AND CODE ACCORDINGLY.*

*SCRIPTER: FIX ORDER LIKE BELOW*

1. Telephone
2. Letter
3. Email
4. You visiting a local office
5. Website
6. Friend/family member/someone else contacted them for me
7. Other (specify)
8. Don't know
9. Refused

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q30 [S]

When you first got in touch, to what extent did you receive enough information about what the VOA would do to reach a decision on your appeal? Did you get ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4*

1. All of the information you needed
2. Most of the information you needed
3. Some of the information you needed
4. None of the information you needed
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q30a [S per statement]

When you first got in touch, do you agree or disagree that the VOA ...

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements*

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused
C. Made clear the next steps in the process	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B. Made clear what information you needed to provide	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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## 6. METHODS OF DEALING WITH THE VOA THROUGHOUT THE APPEAL

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q32 [M]

During the appeal which, if any, of the following methods did you have contact with the VOA? Please include receiving any written correspondence such as an acknowledgement of the appeal or the final decision, speaking on the phone, meeting staff or receiving emails.

Q33 [M]

And through which of the following methods would you prefer to have contact in any future dealings with the VOA?

INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-6.

SCRIPTER: Randomise codes 1-6

	Q32.	Q33.
<b>Telephone</b>	1	1
<b>Letter</b>	2	2
<b>Email</b>	3	3
<b>Website</b>	4	4
<b>A member of staff visiting you</b>	5	5
<b>You visiting a local office</b>	6	6
(DO NOT READ OUT) Colleague/employee acting on your behalf	7	N/A
(DO NOT READ OUT) Friend/family acting on your behalf	8	N/A
Other (WRITE IN)	9	7
Don't know	10	8
Refused	11	9

Base: all codes 2-3 at Q32 (all who received written correspondence from the VOA)

Q34 [S]

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the advice and information in VOA's written communications was easy to understand? Please include any emails and letters received.

1. Strongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know
7. Refused

Base: all respondents

Q35 [S]

Did your appeal about your Council Tax banding include a visit to your property by an inspector or someone else from the VOA?

1. Yes

- 2. No
- 3. Don't know
- 4. Refused

## 7. RATINGS OF DEALINGS WITH STAFF AT THE VOA

Base: all code 1 at Q16c (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

Q38 [S per statement]

I now want you to think about your experience of dealing with staff at the VOA, including anyone you spoke to on the phone or who visited your property. Can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE.*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements*

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused
A. Staff had the knowledge and expertise needed to answer all of your questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B. Staff responded to your queries within an appropriate timeframe	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C. Staff were professional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D. Staff were polite and friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## 8. REPUTATION OF THE VOA

Base: all respondents

Q39 [S per statement]

Now thinking about the way the VOA works, and your experience of the appeals process, can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE.*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements*

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused
A. The appeals process is easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B. You trust the VOA to get the outcome of your appeal right	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C. Your case was dealt with fairly by the VOA	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D. The way the VOA values properties is easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## REPRESENTED QUESTIONNAIRE

Base: all respondents

QA4 [S]

Was this the first time you or your agent appealed against the Council Tax banding of [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]?

1. First time
2. Appealed the property before myself
3. Appealed the property before through an agent
4. Don't know
5. Refused

Base: all respondents

QA6 [S]

How did your agent approach you?

*INTERVIEWER: IF NECESSARY:* This would be [INSERT AGENT NAME]

1. By letter through the door
2. By telephone (cold calling)
3. Face to face (cold calling)
4. I approached the agent
5. Other (specify)
6. Don't know
7. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 at QA6 (all approached by an agent)

QA7 [S]

Was the approach by your agent the first time you found out that you could appeal your Council Tax banding?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 at QA6 (all approached by an agent)

QA8 [S]

Why did your agent get in contact with the VOA about your Council Tax banding? Was it because ...?

1. You thought the band was wrong
2. You wanted the property to be deleted from the list
3. You wanted to split a property or merge properties
4. Another reason (specify)
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all respondents

QA12 [S]

Did your agent charge you an upfront fee to make the appeal for you?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all code 1 at QA12 (all whose agents charged upfront fees to make the appeal)

QA13 [S]

How much was this fee? Please be assured that your answers are confidential.

*INTERVIEWER: WRITE IN AMOUNT IN POUNDS AND DOUBLE CHECK IF £200 OR MORE.*

*SCRIPTER: Once amount entered, automatically code to bands 2-6.*

WRITE IN AMOUNT IN POUNDS

2. Up to £50
3. £51-£99
4. £100-£149
5. £150-£199
6. £200+
7. Other (specify)
8. Don't know/can't remember
9. Refused

Base: all code 1 at QA12 (all whose agents charged upfront fees to make the appeal)

QA13b [S]

Did the agent tell you that the fee would be refundable if the appeal was unsuccessful?

IF YES: Was that the full fee (i.e. 100% of it) or part of the fee?

1. Yes – refund full fee
2. Yes – refund part of the fee
3. No
4. Don't know

Base: all respondents

QA14 [S]

If the appeal was successful, what proportion of any rebate did you agree [INSERT AGENT NAME] would take?

WRITE IN PERCENTAGE

2. Other (specify)
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all respondents

QA15 [S]

Have you received a decision from your agent or the VOA about the appeal for [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6], even if it is only an interim decision that you are still discussing with them? By this we mean a decision made by the VOA on whether or not to change the banding of your property, and not any change in the bill you received from the council.

SCRIPTER:

*If code 2 and sample says 'unsuccessful' in the 'successful/unsuccessful' column, bring up: Can I just check, are you sure the Council Tax banding was decreased by the VOA following your appeal? Recode as necessary*

*If code 1 or 3 and sample says 'successful' in the 'successful/unsuccessful' column, bring up: Can I just check, are you sure the Council Tax banding was not decreased by the VOA following your appeal? Recode as necessary*

1. Yes – banding has increased/pay more Council Tax
2. Yes – banding has decreased/pay less Council Tax
3. Yes – no change to banding
4. No – no decision at all
5. Case was withdrawn by the customer
6. Case was withdrawn by the agent
7. Case was struck out by the tribunal
8. Other (specify)
9. Don't know
0. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 and 5-8 at QA15 (all who have an outcome from the VOA)

QA16 [S]

Was this the outcome that you wanted?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 at QA15 AND code 1-2 at QA13b (all who have an outcome from the VOA and who were told their agent fees were refundable)

QA17b [S]

Have you received a refund of the fee that you paid to the agent?

1. Yes
2. No – but I am expecting to
3. No – have not heard anything
4. Other (specify)
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all respondents

QA18 [S]

As far as you are aware, [IF QA15 = CODE 1 TO 3: how long did the appeal take from the time it started? EVERYONE ELSE: how long has the appeal taken from the time it started?]

*INTERVIEWER ADD IF NECESSARY: In terms of the end point of your appeal, we mean the VOA or your agent sent you a letter informing you of the decision on your Council Tax banding for the property at [INSERT OCC/PARTY ADD 1-6]*

*PROMPT FROM ANSWER CODES IF NECESSARY. IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ASK FOR AN ESTIMATE*

1. Up to 1 week
2. More than 1 week up to 1 month
3. More than 1 month up to 2 months
4. More than 2 months up to 6 months
5. More than 6 months up to 12 months
6. More than 12 months up to 18 months
7. More than 18 months up to 24 months
8. More than 24 months
9. Don't know
10. Refused

**Base: all respondents**

QA19 [S]

How often [IF CODES 1-3 AT QA15: did you have] [IF CODES 4-5 AT QA15: have you had] contact with your agent during the appeal? [IF CODES 1-3 AT QA15: did you have] [IF CODES 4-5 AT QA15: have you had] contact at least ... [IF CODE 6 AT QA15: How often have you had contact with the agent?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-6. IF RESPONDENT UNSURE, ASK FOR ESTIMATE AND CODE TO NEAREST BAND*

1. Once a week
2. Two or three times a month
3. Once a month
4. Once every couple of months
5. Once every three or four months
6. Less often
7. (DO NOT READ OUT) Only had one contact at the beginning
8. Don't know
9. Refused

**Base: all respondents**

QA21 [S]

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the way your agent has dealt with the appeal? [IF CODES 1-3 AT QA15: Please think about the service you received rather than the outcome of the appeal.] Were you ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-5*

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
4. Fairly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Don't know
7. Refused

**Base: all codes 4-5 at QA21 (all dissatisfied with agent)**

QA22 [M]

Why were you dissatisfied with the way your agent dealt with your appeal?

*INTERVIEWER: DO NOT READ OUT. CODE TO LIST BELOW.*

**SCRIPTER:**

1. Didn't get me the outcome I/organisation wanted/didn't achieve a change in my Council Tax Band
2. Don't feel they understood my argument fully
3. Didn't answer/respond to my queries
4. Didn't feel they did a good job/made the case well enough/was incompetent
5. Didn't seem interested/committed to my appeal/case
6. Didn't keep me updated of progress
7. Didn't explain things/communicate well (e.g. reasons for outcome)
8. Was slow/unresponsive/took too long
9. Was rude/impolite/had poor attitude
10. Promised too much/false hope/should have been clear how likely appeal success was
11. Cost too much/took too much of rebate
12. Not clear on cost
13. Other (specify)
14. Don't know
15. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 at QA15 (all who had a decision from the VOA)

QA23 [S]

Thinking about the decision you have received on the appeal, how well would you say you understand the reasons why this decision was made?

**INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4**

1. Very well
2. Fairly well
3. Not very well
4. Not at all well
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 at QA15 (all who had a decision from the VOA)

QA24 [S]

Overall, did you think that the decision was the right decision, or the wrong decision?

1. Was the right decision
2. Was the wrong decision
3. Don't know
4. Refused

**BB. WEBSITES**

Base: all respondents

READ OUT TO ALL: Now some questions about using websites during your appeal.

QBB1 [M]

Did you visit any of the following websites to get information about Council Tax banding, prior to starting or during your appeal?

**INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-7.**

1. VOA (Valuation Office Agency)
2. GOV.UK
3. Business Link
4. Directgov

5. HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs)
6. Or a council website
7. Yes, another website (specify)
8. Yes – but can't remember which website
9. No – did not visit a website [S]
10. Don't know
11. Refused

Base: all codes 1-8 at QBB1 (all who had contact with a website)

QBB2 [S]

To what extent did the website/s give you the information you needed? Did it/they give you ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. All of the information
2. Most of the information
3. Some of the information
4. None of the information
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all code 2 at QBB1 (all who visited the GOV.UK website)

QBB3 [S]

Thinking [ADD IF MORE THAN ONE WEBSITE VISITED AT QBB1: specifically] about your use of GOV.UK to get information about Council Tax banding, how useful was this website?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4.*

1. Very useful
2. Fairly useful
3. Not very useful
4. Not at all useful
5. Don't know
6. Refused

## **B. DIRECT CONTACT WITH VOA**

Base: all respondents

QB1 [M]

Have you ever had direct contact with the VOA during the course of this or any other appeal, or at any other time? For example, any written correspondence, a property inspection, speaking on the phone or receiving emails. Please do not include contact with your agent.

*INTERVIEWER: IF RECEIVED A LETTER TO SAY THEIR BANDING HAS CHANGED, PLEASE CODE 2*

1. Telephone
2. Letter
3. Email
4. Inspection/a member of staff visiting you
5. You visiting a local office
6. No [S]
7. Don't know
8. Refused

Base: all codes 1-5 at QB1 (all who had direct contact with the VOA)

QB2 [M]

What have you had direct contact with the VOA about?

*INTERVIEWER: DO NOT READ OUT. CODE TO LIST.*

1. Letter informing me of the outcome of the appeal
2. Correspondence on the appeal
3. About the process/what I could and couldn't do
4. To do with an inspection/visit
5. About neighbouring properties/similar properties/why other properties are in a different band
6. Confirmation that the appeal was received/lodged/commencing/that the agent had lodged the appeal
7. Other (specify)
8. Don't know
9. Refused

Base: all codes 2-3 at QB1 or codes 1-2 at QA15 (all who received written correspondence or have been informed of change to banding)

QB3 [S]

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the advice and information in VOA's written communications is easy to understand? Please include any emails and letters received.

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-5. DO NOT READ OUT 'HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS'*

1. Strongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Have not received any written communications
7. Don't know
8. Refused

Base: all code 2 at B1 AND NOT CODE 1, 3, 4 OR 5 (all who had written contact ONLY)

QB4 [S]

How many written letters have you ever received from the VOA?

1. One
2. More than one
3. Don't know

Base: all codes 1-5 at QB1 AND NOT CODES 1 OR 3 AT QB4 (all who had personal dealings with the VOA)

QB5 [S per statement]

I want you to think about your experience of dealing with staff at the VOA, including anyone you spoke to on the phone or who visited your property. Can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE (CODES 1-5)*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements*

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused	Not applicable
A. Staff had the knowledge and expertise needed to answer all of your questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
C. Staff were professional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
D. Staff were polite and friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

### C. UNDERSTANDING AND INFORMATION

Base: all respondents

QC1 [S]

[IF CODES 1-3 AT QA15: Now you have a decision from the VOA] How much, if anything, do you feel you now know about how properties in England and Wales are valued for Council Tax banding? Do you feel you ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT CODES 1-4*

1. Know a lot
2. Know a fair amount
3. Know a little
4. Know nothing
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all respondents

QC2 [S per statement]

I am now going to read you some statements about the process for appealing your Council Tax banding and I would like you to tell me whether you think they are true or false – from what you know or have heard. If you don't know, just say and we will move on.

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements*

	True	False	Don't know	Refused
D. It is free to appeal your Council Tax banding to the VOA	1	2	3	4
E. An appeal to the VOA is more likely to be successful if undertaken by an agent	1	2	3	4
F. VOA processes all appeals within the same timeframe, regardless of whether an agent is used	1	2	3	4

## G. REPUTATION OF THE VOA

Base: all respondents

QD1 [S per statement]

Now thinking about all you know about the way the VOA works, even if it is only a limited amount, can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND READ OUT SCALE (CODES 1-5)*

*SCRIPTER: Randomise order of statements*

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused
A. The appeals process is easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B. You trust the VOA to get the outcome of your appeal right	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D. The way the VOA values properties is easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## ALL UNREPRESENTED AND REPRESENTED SAMPLE ARE ASKED FOLLOWING SECTION

### F. ABOUT YOU

Base: all respondents

Finally, I would just like to ask a few questions to help classify your answers. Everything you say will be treated in confidence.

Q43 [S]

*INTERVIEWER: RECORD GENDER OF RESPONDENT*

1. Male
2. Female

Base: all respondents

Q40 [S]

What is your age?

*INTERVIEWER: RECORD EXACT AGE AND SINGLE CODE INTO BAND*

1. 16-24
2. 25-34
3. 35-44
4. 45-54
5. 55-64
6. 65-74

7. 75+
8. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 or 5-7 at Q2c or code 1 at Q2b (all private individuals)

Q45 [S]

And are you yourself ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT*

1. Working full-time or part time (IF NECESSARY: 8 hours or more a week)
2. Unemployed (IF NECESSARY: registered or not registered but looking for work)
3. Retired
4. Other (IF NECESSARY: including student, looking after the home, disabled)
5. Don't know
6. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 or 5-7 at Q2c or code 1 at Q2b (all private individuals)

Q48 [S]

Is the property you appealed for ...?

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT*

1. Owned outright by the household
2. Being bought on mortgage
3. Rented from the Council/Local Authority
4. Rented from a Housing Association
5. Rented from a private landlord
6. Other (specify)
7. Don't know
8. Refused

Base: all codes 1-3 or 5-7 at Q2c or code 1 at Q2b (all not an organisation)

Q55 [S]

The VOA may want to do further research in the future about similar issues to those we have discussed today. Would you be happy to be re-contacted by the VOA as part of this research within the next 12 months?

1. Yes
2. No

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT AGREE TO BE RECONTACTED (SCRIPTER: show for all saying 2 at Q55):* As the VOA databases are based on property addresses, we will make sure we remove your property from the lists contacted for research purposes. However, if you appeal against a different property, it may be possible that you are included in the sample.

Base: all code 4 at Q2c (all organisations)

Q56 [S]

The VOA may want to do further research in future about similar issues to those we have discussed today. Would your organisation be happy to be re-contacted by the VOA as part of this research within the next 12 months?

1. Yes
2. No

*INTERVIEWER: READ OUT IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT AGREE TO BE RECONTACTED*  
(*SCRIPTER: show for all saying 2 at Q56*): As the VOA databases are based on property addresses, we will make sure we remove your property from the lists contacted for research purposes. However, if you appeal against a different property, it may be possible that you are included in the sample.

Base: all respondents

Q57 [S]

The Valuation Office Agency would like to add the records they already hold on your appeal to your answers to this survey. This will help us with further research to get a more accurate picture of customers' experiences and perceptions of the appeals process. All information will be used for research and statistical purposes only. Your personal details will be kept completely confidential. Are you happy for your responses to be linked to your case information and for the linked data to be passed on in an anonymized format to the VOA?

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT REQUESTS MORE INFO:

- Your answers will not be used by operational colleagues, such as caseworkers, and will only be accessed by analysts
- Consenting to data linkage will in no way affect the dealings you may have with the VOA now or in the future
- We will only link your responses to this survey to the administrative data relating to this specific appeal
- The data linking will take place at GfK, our survey contractor, and the dataset passed back to the VOA will be anonymized so that we will not be able to identify your individual name or business

1. Yes
2. No

On behalf of GfK and the VOA, thank you very much for your time. If you have any queries about this research project, you can telephone Rachel Feechan on 020 9870 9789

**END OF QUESTIONNAIRE**