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Tribunals Service continues with programme of reforms

Radical reforms and improvements in efficiency continue to dominate the Tribunals Service's agenda - according to its 2009-10 Business Plan, published today.

The coming twelve months will see the next phases of a new two-tier structure that will modernise and streamline the UK's tribunals, making the process more effective and consistent across the various jurisdictions.

The overhaul is part of measures introduced under the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act (2007), that has already led to the establishment of several dedicated chambers within the new First-tier tribunal. Chambers in the Upper Tribunal, which will hear onward appeals from the First-tier, have also been created.

Work is well underway on the second phase:

- April heralded the start of the new tax appeals system, with the four previous tribunals abolished and replaced by a single, specialist First-tier chamber. Onward appeals now go to the dedicated Finance and Tax Chamber in the Upper Tribunal.
- The Lands Tribunal is expected to move across from June and statutory changes to underpin the new regime are in progress.
- From September, the Charity; Information; Consumer Credit Appeals; Estate Agents Appeals Panel; Gambling Appeals; Claims Management; Immigration Services and some functions of the Transport Tribunal will all start to transfer their jurisdictions into a new General Regulatory Chamber.

But it's not just the tribunals and the appeals processes that are changing; the Tribunals Service itself is on a mission to ensure that service levels continue to improve across the spectrum - while improving value for money for the taxpayer.

Chief Executive of the Tribunals Service Kevin Sadler explains: "Continuous improvement and maximising efficiency are two of the Tribunals Services key priorities for this year. As part of this, we're working with relevant government departments to see how and where we can make

changes that will help solve more cases before they're escalated to the tribunal. For example, we're collaborating with the Department for Business and Enterprise Regulatory Reform on alternative measures to resolve more disputes in the workplace, before a claim is lodged at the Employment Tribunal."

Managing its resources effectively is crucial to helping the Tribunals Service deliver increased efficiency whilst maintaining high service levels. As part of this, and in collaboration with other agencies within the Ministry of Justice such as Her Majesty's Court Service, the Tribunals Service is promoting more effective use of their combined estates, rationalising where possible by sharing venues without compromising on service provision. There is also a national cross-clerking project, which means clerks are trained across jurisdictions, rather than specialising in just one, so there is a larger and more diverse pool of clerks able to work for a number of different tribunals.

The major reforms are all part of a drive to fundamentally improve the tribunal process for those people that need it most – the customers. Kevin adds: "People who come to tribunals have often been through a stressful period in their lives and can be vulnerable. With these reforms, we're making sure that they have suitable access to justice by simplifying and improving the services they use. And where we're making savings through more efficient ways of working, we're also ploughing these back into the system, meaning users will see even more benefits in the long run."

The full publication is available for download at www.tribunals.gov.uk

Ends

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Notes to editors

- The Tribunals Service provides administration and support to various tribunals throughout the UK. An executive agency of the Ministry of Justice, it was formed in 2006 to:
 1. Provide responsive, efficient administration of the tribunals;
 2. Promote and protect the independent of the judiciary;
 3. Contribute to the improvement of the quality of decision-making across government;
and
 4. Reform the tribunals justice system for the benefit of its customers and the wider public.
- For further information and the latest news on the Tribunals Service, see www.tribunals.gov.uk.