

Leasehold Valuation Tribunals

Guidance on procedure

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Dispensation with service charge consultation
Administration charges
Estate charges
Variation of Leases
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Part 1

Guidance on procedure

What will this guidance tell me?

This guidance is designed to tell you about the procedures followed by the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal. The types of cases dealt with are described in Part 2. The guidance does not tell you about the law which applies to your case. For this, you may wish to refer to the guidance issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (previously the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). The Leasehold Valuation Tribunal is independent of the parties to an application and cannot give legal-advice.

What is the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal?

The Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT) is the formal name given to the body appointed to make decisions on various types of dispute relating to residential leasehold property.

LVTs are part of the Residential Property Tribunal Service (RPTS). There are five regional offices in England. Their addresses and telephone numbers can be found at Annex B to this booklet. Information about procedure is also available on the RPTS national helpline on 0845 600 3178 between 10am and 4pm Monday to Friday and at the RPTS website on www.rpts.gov.uk.

Who will deal with my application?

From the time an application is made to the LVT, a number of different people will deal with the paperwork involved and the parties. These include the following:

The Case Officers

The case officers are the administrative staff who will deal with correspondence and, if appropriate, the collection of fees. When you make an application, it is the case officer who receives the paperwork and checks that there is sufficient information for the application to go forward. The case officer will continue to deal with the paperwork until you have received a final decision in your case. The case officers are able to speak to you about the processes and procedures relating to your application. They cannot give general legal advice or advise you about the law relating to your application. Each of the five regional offices has a Regional Manager who is responsible for the work of the case officers. Their names are included at Annex B.

The Tribunal Members

These are two types of member:

- 1.** The Chairman: he or she is appointed to be a Chairman by the Lord Chancellor. A Chairman will usually be a lawyer or a surveyor. The Chairman is responsible for the smooth running of the proceedings and will write up the reasons for the tribunal's decision.
- 2.** Other members: other members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Again, they may be lawyers or surveyors or lay people. Alternatively, they may have particular expertise which will assist in reaching a decision in your case.

The Panel President

Each Panel has a President who is responsible for the members and in particular, decides which members should be appointed to hear and decide a particular case. They will not be involved in the decision in your case unless they sit as a member of the tribunal. Their names are given at Annex B.

What sort of cases does this booklet tell me about?

This booklet tells you about the LVT's procedure for dealing with service charges, dispensation with service charge consultation requirements, administration charges, applications under the right to manage, the appointment of managers, the variation of leases, estate charge cases, forfeiture and landlord's choice of insurer. A brief description of each of these types of case is given in Part 2. If-you-are in doubt as to whether the LVT can deal with your case-you should take independent legal advice from a solicitor, housing advisor or contact the:

Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE)

2nd Floor, 31 Worship Street, London EC2A 2DX

Tel: 020 7374 5380

0845 345 1993

Fax: 020 7374 5373

Email: info@lease-advice.org

www.LEASE-advice.org

or a **Citizen's Advice Bureau**

www.citizensadvice.co.uk

In London there is also a free legal advice service at the Legal Advice Centre at the College of Law, London WC1 (Tel: 020 7291 1230)

Part 2

The types of application

Applications about service charges

What are service charges?

Service charges are sums of money payable by a tenant to a landlord for the costs of services, repairs, improvements, maintenance, insurance or the landlord's costs of management under the terms of his/her lease.

Can the LVT make decisions about all aspects of a service charge?

The LVT can decide about all aspects of the liability to pay a service charge. It can decide by whom, to whom, how much and when a service charge is payable. A service charge is only payable to the extent that it is reasonable. Therefore in order to decide liability a tribunal also decides whether service charge costs are reasonably incurred and if so whether the standard of any works for which the costs are charged is reasonable. Applications can be made either before or after service charge costs have been incurred. Applications are made under section 27A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

What is the LVT's power to dispense with service charge consultation requirements?

The law requires landlords to consult with tenants before incurring expenditure for works or entering into long term agreements for services. Consultation is required-when costs exceed prescribed limits. The-consultation requirements are very detailed and are contained in section 20 of-the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and associated regulations. An-application may be made to the LVT to dispense with all or any-of these requirements. An application

to dispense with or to modify consultation may be made before works are carried out. Alternatively an application can be made after or during works where a dispute about consultation has arisen. In either case the LVT can only make a determination to dispense if it is satisfied that it is reasonable to do so. Applications for dispensation are made under section 20ZA of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

Applications about administration charges

What are administration charges?

These are charges made to a tenant of residential property for:

- A.** the grant of approvals or applications for approvals;
- B.** in connection with the provision of information or documents;
- C.** in respect of a failure to make a payment by the due date;
- D.** in connection with a breach of a covenant or condition in the lease.

Administration charges can be variable or fixed. A variable charge is one that is neither specified in the lease (eg £50) nor is calculated in accordance with a formula specified in the lease.

Can the LVT make decisions about all aspects of administration charges

The LVT can decide about all aspects of the liability to pay an administration charge. It can decide by whom, to whom, how much and when an administration charge is payable. A variable administration charge is only payable to the extent that it is reasonable. Therefore in deciding liability to pay a variable administration charge, a tribunal also decides whether the costs are reasonable. Where the LVT is dealing with a fixed administration charge, it has the power to vary the lease on the ground that the charge specified or the formula by which the charge is calculated is unreasonable. Applications are made under Schedule 11 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002.

Applications about estate charges

What are charges under estate management schemes (estate charges)?

These are charges made under schemes which were created under section 19 of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 or Chapter 4 of Part I and section 94(6) of the Leasehold Reform Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. Estate charges can be variable or fixed. A variable charge is one that is neither specified in the lease nor is calculated in accordance with a formula specified in the lease.

Can the LVT make decisions about all aspects of estate charges?

The LVT can decide about all aspects of the liability to pay estate charges. It can decide by whom, to whom, how much and when an estate charge is payable. A variable estate charge is only payable to the extent that it is reasonable. Therefore in deciding liability to pay a variable estate charge, a tribunal also decides whether the costs are reasonable. Where the LVT is dealing with a fixed estate charge, it has the power to vary the lease on the ground that the charge specified or the formula by which the charge is calculated is unreasonable. Applications are made under section 159 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002.

Applications to vary a lease or leases

What types of leases can the LVT vary?

The LVT has power to vary long leases of flats. A long lease is one which has been granted for a term exceeding 21 years. This is separate from the power to vary leases in relation to administration and estate charges which is dealt with above.

Can the LVT vary all and any type of provision in a lease?

No. The grounds for seeking a variation of a lease are set out in Part IV of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987. If you are in doubt about whether the LVT can vary a lease you should take independent advice.

Who can apply for the variation of a lease?

Any party to a long lease of a flat may apply for the variation of a lease. Also, applications for variation may be made in respect of two or more flats where there is a consensus for that variation from the majority of parties to the leases. Furthermore, where the variation of one lease would affect other leases, then an application may be made to vary those other leases.

Must I notify any other person of my intention to apply for a variation?

Yes. If you wish to apply for a variation of a lease, you must give notice of the application to any person whom you know or have reason to believe may be affected by the variation. For example, this may include other tenants or any superior landlord or mortgagee. Those persons notified may apply to join in the proceedings as either applicants or respondents. If you are the respondent to an application for variation you also have a duty to notify persons who may be affected and who have not already been notified by the applicant.

Must I provide the LVT with a draft of the variation I seek?

Yes. You must provide a draft of the wording of the variation. If the LVT decides that it will vary the lease it will either adopt that wording or substitute other wording as it considers appropriate.

Applications about the Right to Manage

What is the Right to Manage?

This is a right for tenants of flats to take over the management of a property from the landlord without the need to show fault on the part of the landlord or any manager. The requirements to exercise the right are set out in Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002. The right is exercised through a right to manage company (RTM company).

Can the LVT deal with all disputes under the Right to Manage?

No. The detailed procedures for exercising the right and for running an RTM company are relatively complex and are not dealt with in this guidance. However, the LVT can deal with the following applications:

- A.** an application by an RTM company for a determination that it was entitled to acquire the right to manage on the relevant date where the landlord disputes the entitlement;
- B.** an application by an RTM company for a determination that it is entitled to acquire the right to manage where the landlord is missing;
- C.** an application for a determination of the amount of costs incurred by the landlord (or other party to the lease other than the landlord and tenant) or a manager appointed under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (see below) in association with the exercise of the right;
- D.** an application for a determination of the amount of accrued uncommitted service charges to be paid by landlord/third party/manager to an RTM company;
- E.** an application by the RTM company, a landlord or a tenant for a determination whether approval is to be given under the terms of a lease;

- F. an application by an RTM company for a determination that the right may be exercised early.

Applications under C and D can be made by the RTM company or the landlord/third party/manager.

Applications to appoint a manager

What power does the LVT have to appoint a manager?

The LVT has the power to appoint a manager of premises containing flats under section 24 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 where it is satisfied that grounds have been proved and that it is just and equitable to do so. Usually it is necessary to prove that there is fault with the management of the property, for example a failure to carry out obligations under a lease or charging unreasonable service charges.

Who can make an application to appoint a manager?

Applications can be made by a tenant or group of tenants or by a landlord.

Must I take any preliminary steps before I make an application?

Yes. An application to appoint a manager cannot be made unless a notice which complies with section 22 of the 1987 Act has been served. Exceptionally, on application, the LVT has power to dispense with the service of this notice. It can do so if it is satisfied that the grounds set out in section 22(3) apply, namely that it would not be reasonable to serve such a notice on the landlord.

Applications about forfeiture

Can the LVT deal with all aspects of forfeiture?

No. The County Court decides whether or not a lease should be forfeited.

What forfeiture disputes can the LVT deal with?

The LVT is limited to deciding the following:

- A.** whether there has been a breach of a covenant or condition in the lease (other than those described in paragraph (B) below). A landlord under a long lease cannot serve a notice under section 146 of the Law of Property Act 1925 on a tenant unless they have obtained a determination that there has been such a breach or unless the tenant has admitted the breach. An application for this type of determination can only be made by a landlord. The application to the LVT is made under section 168(4) of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002;
- B.** whether service charges or administration charges are payable. A landlord under a long lease cannot take steps to forfeit a lease in respect of an alleged failure to pay service charges or administration charges unless they have obtained a determination that such charges are payable. This is the same type of application as is described on pages 5 and 6 of the booklet under section 27A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 or schedule 11 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002.

Applications about insurance

Can the LVT deal with disputes about insurance?

Yes. The LVT can deal with insurance disputes in two circumstances:

- A.** where a lease requires that a tenant insures a property with an insurer nominated or approved by the landlord, the LVT may determine whether the insurance provided is unsatisfactory in any respect and/or whether the premiums payable are excessive;
- B.** where insurance is payable as part of a service charge, then the LVT can decide on its recoverability under the lease and its reasonableness.

Part 3

Making an application

How do I make an application to the LVT?

Application forms are available from the Panel offices. You may need to complete more than one form, where for example you want the LVT to make a decision about service charge costs and an administration charge. All forms should be completed as fully as possible. When completing the forms please read the guidance notes. These tell you what documents you should include. Do not send all of the papers you think might be relevant to your case. You will be asked to provide full documentation at a later stage. The application form should be returned to your local Panel office. If you do not know which is the correct office please telephone the RPTS national helpline on 0845 600 3178.

Can a County Court transfer a case to the LVT?

Yes. If the County Court is dealing with a case which includes issues that the LVT has power to deal with, the judge can decide to make an order for those issues to be transferred to the LVT. Usually, the rest of the claim will be adjourned until after the LVT makes its decision. The claimant in the County Court case becomes the applicant at the LVT.

Do I have to pay a fee to make an application?

For some applications, yes. The DCLG has decided that for service charge, dispensation of service charge consultation requirements, administration charge, appointment of a manager, landlord's choice of insurer and lease variation applications, fees are payable. No fees are payable for right to manage applications, forfeiture applications under section 168(4) of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 and estate management charge applications. In all other cases there are two-fees: the application fee and a hearing fee.

How much is the application fee?

An application fee varies either according to how much money is in dispute (for service charges, administration charges) or according to the number of dwellings to which the application relates (dispensation of service charge consultation requirements, appointment of managers and variation of leases). The tables below set out how the fee is calculated.

Service charges, administration charges

Amount not more than £500	Fee	£50
Amount more than £500 but not more than £1000	Fee	£70
Amount more than £1000 but not more than £5000	Fee	£100
Amount more than £5000 but not more than £15000	Fee	£200
Amount more than £15000	Fee	£350

Dispensation of consultation – requirements, appointment of managers and variation of leases

5 or fewer dwellings	Fee	£150
Between 6 and 10 dwellings	Fee	£250
More than 10 dwellings	Fee	£350

When do I pay the application fee?

This depends on whether you are making your application directly to the LVT or whether the case has been transferred from the County Court.

Direct applications – the fee must be paid with the application. Fees must be paid by cheque or by postal order made in favour of the Department for Communities and Local Government. The LVT will not accept cash.

Transferred applications – the claimant in the County Court will be invoiced for the fee when the papers are received from the County Court. If you have already paid a fee to the County Court, this will be deducted from the invoice. The fee must be paid by cheque or by postal order made in favour of the Department for Communities and Local Government . The LVT will not accept cash.

Can I apply to the LVT if I cannot afford the fees?

If you or your partner are in receipt of one of a specified number of benefits, you can apply for a waiver of the fees. The benefits are as follows:

- Income Support;
- Housing Benefit;
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance;
- a working tax credit and a tax credit with a disability or severe disability element or a child tax credit, or a guarantee credit under the State Pensions Credit Act 2002, or a certificate issued under the Funding Code which has not been revoked or discharged and which is in respect of the proceedings before the tribunal the whole or part of which have been transferred from the county court for determination by a tribunal;
- a working tax credit where the Gross Annual Income used to calculate the tax credit is £14,213 or less.

If I make more than one application to the LVT do I have to pay a separate fee for each one?

No, you need only pay one fee. This will be the highest of the fees you would have paid for any one of the applications you are making.

How much is the hearing fee?

The hearing fee is £150 unless you are entitled to have it waived (see above). The next chapter explains when this fee must be paid. You do not need to pay the fee until you receive an invoice which will be sent to you by the appropriate panel office. You must pay the hearing fee by either a cheque or a postal order drawn in favour of the Department for Communities and Local Government . The LVT will not accept cash. If your case is to be decided without a hearing (see the next chapter) you do not have to pay a hearing fee.

Part 4

How the LVT will process your application

What happens after I have sent in my application form?

Your application will be acknowledged. If you do not receive an acknowledgement within 14 days of sending it, please contact the Panel office to make sure that it has arrived. Next, your application will be checked by a case officer to ensure that you have supplied sufficient information to enable the application to proceed. If important information is missing, the case officer may write to request that you send this to the Panel office. A copy of your application will then be sent to any person named as a respondent on the application form.

How will the LVT deal with my case?

The LVT can decide cases at a hearing, where applicants, respondents and their witnesses attend to give oral evidence and to explain their case in person. Alternatively, the case can be decided without a hearing and on the basis of a consideration of documents and written representations alone. If the LVT decide that the case requires a hearing or one of the parties requests a hearing, then the application can either be dealt with on the fast track or on the standard track.

What is the difference between the fast track and the standard track?

The fast track is used for cases which are relatively straightforward. This may be because they involve a simple dispute about a limited number of issues. On the other hand the standard track may be more appropriate for a complex dispute involving a large number of issues. For example in a service charge case, the fast track may be appropriate where an application concerns the payability of two or three items from one service charge year. By contrast, the standard track would be appropriate for a case where the payability of service charge costs over a number of years for numerous items of work and services was in dispute.

How quickly will a case be decided on the fast track?

The LVT aims to decide fast track cases within 10 weeks of the receipt of an application. On the application form you will be asked to indicate whether you think that it would be appropriate to have your case dealt with on the fast track. Before you give this indication please bear in mind the following considerations:

- A.** if the LVT agrees to deal with the case on the fast track you will be required to provide all relevant documents and submissions within a short period of time. You should therefore be sure that you can be ready to deal with the case quickly;
- B.** the case may be allocated for an LVT to hear the evidence and make a decision without a pre-trial review (please see the next chapter for a further explanation of what a pre-trial review is);
- C.** when you fill in the application form you should ensure that you indicate any dates when you or your witnesses will not be available for hearing within the following 10 weeks;

- D.** you will be asked to pay your hearing fee (if applicable) of £150 at an early stage. If you do not pay the fee within 14 days, the date for hearing will be vacated and it will not be possible to guarantee that the application will be dealt with within 10 weeks;
- E.** if the case turns out to be more complicated than first anticipated, then it may be reallocated to the standard track.

The LVT will take your preference to have the case fast tracked into account, but this will not be decisive. The decision on tracking will be made taking into account all the relevant circumstances.

What will happen if the case is allocated to the standard track?

If the LVT decides that your case should be dealt with on the standard track, a Chairman will look at the papers provided and will decide whether a Pre-Trial Review (PTR) is necessary. If you are invited to a PTR it is strongly recommended that you attend. If a PTR is not arranged and you feel that you would benefit from a PTR hearing, you may write to the case officer and request one.

What is a Pre-Trial Review (PTR)?

This is a short hearing which all parties should attend. It is conducted by an LVT chairman, who may sit alone, or in some cases with either one or two other members. The PTR is a relatively informal hearing to try to identify the issues in the case and to see if any part of the dispute can be resolved by agreement at that stage. It is not a hearing of the issues and the LVT will not make any final decision on the case. No hearing fee is payable for a PTR.

What happens at a PTR?

At the PTR the LVT will look at the application and the documents sent with it. All parties will be given an opportunity to speak.

The purpose of the PTR is:

- to find out whether there is any prospect that the parties can settle any of their disagreements;
- to find out whether either party is able to make admissions about any part of the application; for example, a landlord may admit that part of a charge was excessive or a tenant might admit that part of a charge was reasonable;
- to decide what further steps need to be taken to enable the application to come to a hearing;
- to decide if the application can conveniently be heard in conjunction with any others that deal with the same property/issues;
- to deal with any application made by any person who wants to join in the proceedings as a further party to them;
- to set out the ground rules to enable the application to be heard in an efficient manner.

After the PTR the LVT will give directions setting out the steps to be taken by the parties to deal with the points mentioned above.

What are directions?

Directions are the orders made by the LVT which require the parties to take specified steps to ensure that all the necessary information about an application is provided. Directions may be given for any type of case.

The most common directions are to:

- indicate what information will be required by the LVT for the full hearing;
- provide written statements of your case. This is a document which sets out what is in dispute and a summary of the arguments in support of your case;
- provide the other parties to the case with copies of documents which are relevant to the dispute;
- try to agree with the other parties which documents will be used at the hearing of the application and collate these into a bundle. If no agreement can be reached each party will be asked to produce their own bundle of documents. The pages on a bundle of documents should be numbered for ease of reference;
- include expert evidence in a report (see below);
- include in appointment of manager cases, a requirement that the proposed new manager attend the full hearing so that the LVT can ascertain whether he/she would be an appropriate person to appoint.

The directions will also set out a timetable for the full hearing of the application and will often fix a time for the LVT to inspect the property.

What should I do if I cannot comply with directions?

You should always do your best to comply with directions. However, if there is a good reason for non-compliance you should write to the other parties and to the LVT explaining the difficulty. If appropriate, the LVT will vary the directions. On occasion the LVT may arrange for there to be a further PTR. If you do not understand what the directions require, you should ask the LVT for an explanation.

Will I need an expert to help me with my case?

This depends on the type of case. Expert evidence is sometimes needed where the dispute involves very technical matters. Experts are not always required and this is something you may wish to discuss at the PTR. If expert evidence is required then the expert will be asked to produce a report which sets out the evidence that they will give at the hearing of the application. If both parties intend to call expert evidence on a particular issue, the experts will be asked to exchange their reports and may also be asked to meet before the hearing to find out if any aspects of the matter can be agreed. It may be possible to agree jointly to instruct one single independent expert.

How does the LVT set a timetable for the hearing of a case?

The LVT will give time limits for complying with the directions. At the PTR it will be possible to discuss how much time should be given for each stage of the directions. It is vital that the timetable is adhered to. Any failure to comply with the directions may prejudice a party's case and in particular the LVT may give less weight to evidence which is late or which takes another party

by surprise. At the PTR the LVT may also give a date for the final hearing of the case. In order to set a date it is necessary for an estimate to be made of how long the final hearing is likely to last. This process is assisted if parties are able to give an indication of how many witnesses they might be calling and how long their evidence is likely to last. The LVT may also decide that an inspection of the property is necessary and if so, will also include this in the directions.

Can the date of the final hearing be changed?

A hearing before the LVT should take priority over other engagements. Once the date has been fixed and the parties notified, the LVT will not permit a postponement unless a very good reason has been shown. This is necessary in the interest of justice to all parties and to ensure the efficient use of resources generally. If you wish to apply for a postponement you should send in a written request. You should send a copy of the request to all of the other parties to the application. You will be notified in writing whether or not a postponement has been granted.

When does the hearing fee have to be paid?

The hearing fee must be paid within 14 days of invoice. For cases on the standard track, the invoice will be sent out following directions specifying the date of hearing. If the fee remains unpaid for a further month, the application will be treated as having been withdrawn.

May other parties join the application?

Other people who have an interest in the application may apply to be joined as applicants or respondents. The LVT has a discretion whether to allow other persons to join in this way and will usually only do so if he or she may be affected by the outcome of the case.

Are there any further hearings before the full hearing?

The LVT can arrange for there to be further PTR hearings. This can follow the request of one or more of the parties or because the LVT considers it necessary. In addition the LVT can arrange for there to be a 'preliminary hearing'.

What is a preliminary hearing?

In exceptional cases, the LVT may be concerned that they do not have the power to deal with all or some of the issues raised by the applicant. In such a case, a preliminary hearing will be arranged at which the parties will be given the opportunity to make representations. Following the preliminary hearing the LVT will give a written decision on whether it has power to proceed and, if so, it will issue directions similar to those given at a PTR. No hearing fee is payable for a preliminary hearing.

Can I withdraw my application?

If you are the applicant you can withdraw all or part of your application if you no longer wish to proceed. In this case you should notify the LVT in writing and you should copy your letter to all other parties.

What procedure does the LVT follow to determine cases on consideration of papers alone?

If no party requests a hearing and the LVT considers it to be appropriate, then cases can be determined on consideration of documents alone. Paper considerations will usually be suitable for simple cases. However, there is no reason in principle why they should not also be used for more complicated cases, in particular where for example, the issues do not involve decisions on contested evidence. Where it has been directed that a case can be determined on consideration of the papers alone, the parties will be asked to provide all of the documentation by a specified date. A hearing fee is not required. An LVT will then be asked to consider the case. In some circumstances further information may be requested. In some cases the LVT may wish to inspect the property. Once the LVT has reached its determination, a decision will be sent to the parties and the rights of appeal, set out in Part 6 of this booklet will apply to that decision.

If the Tribunal directs that a case should be decided on consideration of papers alone can I still request a hearing?

Yes, you can request a hearing at any stage before the determination is made. Where a party request a hearing, it will be arranged as described on page 28 of this booklet.

What steps can the LVT take to decide urgent cases?

Where it is important that a case is decided as a matter of real urgency (eg. because the health, safety or welfare of a tenant is at risk), then you should notify the Panel office of the urgency and the reason for this. In exceptional circumstances the tribunal can arrange a hearing at very short notice and if necessary a decision on an application can be given within a matter of days. It will assist the LVT if you give as much information as possible in writing as to the need for urgency. The procedure will also be assisted if you inform any person affected, that the application is to be made. Please let the LVT know that you have done this.

Part 5

The hearing

What happens at the full hearing?

The full hearing is when the case is heard. In regions outside London arrangements will be made for the hearing to take place at a local venue. In London hearings are usually held at the Panel office. The proceedings are orderly but informal. Each party is given an adequate opportunity to explain their case. Usually, the applicant will present his/her case first and the respondent will follow afterwards. The LVT will include a Chairman and one or two other members. The LVT will be careful to make sure that both parties have a fair hearing and put the points they want to make. The LVT is not there, however, to make either party's case for them.

Will I be allowed to ask questions at the hearing?

Yes. Either party will be able to ask the other about their case if present. The LVT members may also ask questions. For example, a tenant may be asked to explain why an element of the service charge is unreasonable. Similarly, a landlord may be asked to say why an element of the service charge is reasonable or to explain management decisions or actions.

What documents will the LVT refer to at the hearing?

The LVT will refer to the documents supplied by the parties. These should be included in a "bundle". This is a set of documents relevant to the issues in the case. In the directions, the parties may have been asked to provide copies of a single bundle which includes all of the documents that the parties wish to refer to. Alternatively, each party may have been asked to provide copies of his or her own bundle. In either case, the pages of the bundle must be numbered for ease of reference. The directions will indicate when the copies of bundles are to be sent to the LVT and to the other party. It is very important that bundles are supplied in good time for the hearing. This will give the LVT members the opportunity to read the papers and may prevent unnecessary postponement and adjournments.

What happens when the tribunal carries out an inspection?

The LVT may want to inspect the property to familiarise itself with it. Usually, the inspection is held on the morning of the hearing. In some cases the LVT will arrange for an inspection during or at the end of the hearing. The parties are entitled to attend the inspection and to draw the attention of the LVT to any physical aspect of the property that they wish them to see, but not to make any representations; those must be kept for the hearing. Usually the LVT will need to inspect the exterior of the property and the common parts.

Part 6

The decision

When will I know the LVT's decision?

Occasionally an LVT will let the parties know the decision at the end of the hearing. More often the LVT will issue a document containing its decision and the reasons for it after the hearing and usually within six weeks. In cases where the application has been referred to the LVT from the County Court, then a copy of the decision will also be sent to the County Court.

Can the LVT order one party to pay the other party's costs?

No. Save in exceptional, limited, circumstances each party has to pay its own costs. Some leases allow a landlord to recover legal costs as part of the service charge. The LVT has the power to make an order preventing a landlord from taking this step. This is known as a section 20C order. A tenant may ask for a s20C order either in the application form or, if the tenant is a respondent in writing to the LVT office.

Can the LVT order one party to reimburse the fees paid by another party?

Yes. Any party can ask the LVT to order another party to pay to them the whole or part of any fee that they have paid to the LVT. The LVT also has the power to do this of its own volition without the request of a party.

Can I ask the LVT to reconsider its decision?

No. The regulations do not allow the LVT to reconsider its decision. If a party is unhappy with the LVT's decision the appropriate course of action is to ask for permission to appeal.

If I am unhappy with the LVT's decision, how do I appeal?

Any party can appeal an LVT decision to the Lands Tribunal. Permission to appeal must be given by either the LVT concerned or the Lands Tribunal. Any application for permission (leave) to appeal must be made to the LVT within 21 days of the date the decision was sent to the parties, although the LVT has power to extend that time in exceptional cases if a request for an extension is made within that time. The application should set out the grounds for appeal. The Lands Tribunal will not accept any application for permission to appeal unless permission has first been refused by the LVT. Following a refusal of permission by the LVT, parties have 14 days to seek permission from the Lands Tribunal. The LVT cannot reconsider its own decision.

If I am unhappy with the handling of my case to whom should I complain?

A party who has a complaint about a committee member or members should write to the Panel President. If that party is unhappy with the President's response, they can write to the Senior President, at the

RPTS Corporate Unit
3rd Floor, 10 Alfred Place
London
WC1E 7LR
Tel: 020 7446 7750

They will receive an acknowledgement within 2 working days of receipt of the complaint. A full reply will follow within 14 working days, or the complainant will be advised of any delay. A person is also entitled to ask their M.P. to ask the Parliamentary Ombudsman to investigate a complaint about maladministration.

Does the Human Rights Act apply to the LVT's proceedings?

Yes. Parties to an application are entitled to the benefit of the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. In effect, this entitles them to have their case determined in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights. Of particular relevance is Article 6 of the Convention which provides that parties have the right to a fair hearing within a reasonable time and before an impartial tribunal. This includes their right to put their case and to question the case brought by the other party and to be given reasons for the decision of the LVT. Also relevant is Article 8, which provides that everyone has the right to respect for his private life, his home and his correspondence – any inspection of the inside of a property will only be undertaken with the consent of the occupier. In making their decisions, LVTs are obliged to have regard to the rights embodied in the Convention and where possible to interpret legislation consistently with those rights.

Annex A

DCLG guidance

Further reading

Among the Government booklets available from the Department for Communities and Local Government (previously the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), you may want to consult:

Residential long leaseholders – a guide to your rights and responsibilities (03 HC 01756)

A full list of DCLG booklets and copies of each are available from:

DCLG Free Literature

PO Box No 236

Wetherby LS23 7NB

Tel: 0870 1226236

Fax: 0870 1226237

Text phone: 0870 1207405

E-mail: odpm@twoten.press.net

Annex B

Panel information

Northern Rent Assessment Panel

President: Martin Davey

Regional Manager: Beatrice Whipp

1st Floor, 5 New York Street

Manchester M1 4JB

Tel: 0845 1002614

0161 237 9491

Fax: 0161 237 3656

Midland Rent Assessment Panel

President: Simon Duffy

Regional Manager: Maureen McCabe

2nd Floor, Louisa House

92-93 Edward Street

Birmingham B1 2RA

Tel: 0845 1002615

0121 236 7837

Fax: 0121 236 9337

Eastern Rent Assessment Panel

President: Bruce Edgington

Regional Manager: Mark Allbut

Great Eastern House

Tenison Road

Cambridge CB1 2TR

Tel: 0845 1002616

01223 505112

Fax: 01223 505116

London Rent Assessment Panel

President: Siobhan McGrath

Regional Manager: Donald Brown

1st Floor, 10 Alfred Place

London WC1E 7LR

Tel: 020 7446 7700

Fax: 020 7637 1250

Southern Rent Assessment Panel

President: Robert Long

Regional Manager: Jim May

1st Floor, 1 Market Avenue

Chichester PO19 1JU

Tel: 0845 1002617

01243 779394

Fax: 01243 779389

Corporate Unit

Senior President: Siobhan McGrath

Chief Executive: Michael Ross

3rd Floor, 10 Alfred Place

London WC1E 7LR

Tel: 020 7446 7750

Fax: 020 7580 5684

RPTS national helpline: 0845 600 3178

RPTS website: www.rpts.gov.uk

Disclaimer

The contents of this publication are correct at the time of going to press. Please refer to the RPTS website for the current version.

RPTS Booklets/Leaflets

Code	Description
LVTL	Are you a Landlord, Tenant or Lessee? Can the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal help you to resolve problems?
GNL/10	Are you a Landlord, Tenant or Leaseholder? Can the Residential Property Tribunal Service help you? It helps thousands every year.
LE/4	Leasehold Enfranchisement
LVTB/3	Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT): Service Charges, Dispensation with Charge Consultation, Administration Charges, Variation of Leases, Right to Manage, Appointment of Manager, Landlord's choice of insurer, Forfeiture.
FR/1	Rent Assessment Committees: Fair Rents Guidance on procedure
MR/2	Rent Assessment Committees: Market Rents Guidance on procedure
TA/5	Tenants Associations
HHSRS/9	Housing Act 2004: Housing Health & Safety Rating System Application and Appeals relating to Improvement Notices, Prohibition Orders, Demolition Orders, Emergency Measures (Unfit Properties)
EDMO/8	Housing Act 2004: Applications and Appeals in Respect of Empty Dwelling Management Orders under the Housing Act 2004
UWS/6	Unhappy with our service? Here's what we'll do
EOP	Equal Opportunities Policy
AR	Annual Report
DW	Document Wallet
RTB/7	Residential Property Tribunals: Determinations by Residential Property Tribunals as to whether a dwelling-house is particularly suitable for occupation by elderly persons.
CP	Corporate Plan
RPTS	Property Matters: An introduction to RPTS. What to expect at a Rent Assessment Committee or Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (Video/DVD)
HMOs/11	Housing Act 2004: Application and appeals relating to Licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) Selective licensing of other residential accommodation
MOs/12	Application and appeals relating to interim and final Management Orders (MOs) under the Housing Act 2004
Order From	Yoro Edmond RPTS, 10 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7LR Tel: 020 7446 7757 Fax: 020 7580 5684 or 020 7637 1250 Email: yoro.edmond@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

**Residential Property
Tribunal Service**

10 Alfred Place
London
WC1E 7LR

Telephone: 020 7446 7700

Facsimile: 020 7580 5684

National Helpline

0845 600 3178

Website

www.rpts.gov.uk

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