

Business rates

working with you to ensure your rateable value is correct



This fact sheet explains why the VOA – the part of HM Revenue & Customs responsible for assessing the rateable values of non-domestic properties for rates – sometimes visits properties. It also tells you what happens during the visit, and what we do with the information gathered.

What is rateable value?

The rateable value represents the annual rent that a non-domestic property could be let for on the open market on a set date. For the current rating lists of all the rateable values of business properties in England and Wales, this date is 1 April 2003. This common approach ensures that every property is treated in the same way and supports a fair system for everyone.

It is important you understand that the rateable value of your property is not the amount of rates you pay.

Your local authority calculates your bill by combining the rateable value and the *multiplier*, or *uniform business rate*, a figure set by central government. After this is done, any appropriate adjustments can be applied – these might include small business rate relief, or transitional relief – to arrive at your rates bill. If you want to know more about rate relief, contact your local authority.



Why we need to visit properties

When we assess rateable values, a visit to the property is a normal and necessary part of the process that we might use to help us make sure that your rates bill is calculated fairly, using accurate information. An accurate valuation means you can budget more accurately across the business year and that your cash flow is not disrupted.

We need current information about properties that might affect the amount of rent paid for them, for example the floor area. We may ask for details such as whether you pay rent, or not, and the terms of your lease. This all helps us to make sure your rateable value is correct.

A visit might be prompted when a property is first built or first used for non-domestic purposes, or it could be the result of the local authority informing us that changes have been carried out to a property. These changes might include extensions, alterations or change of use.

What happens during a visit?

On many occasions we will not need to disturb you at all, as we can get the information we need simply by looking at the outside of the property. Sometimes ratepayers have plans of their property and are happy to share a copy with us, either before or during the inspection, which reduces the amount of time we need to spend at the property.

When an internal inspection is necessary, we will usually try to arrange a convenient appointment in advance. Our normal inspection times are Monday to Friday between 9:00am and 4:00pm.

During routine inspections we will measure the floor area(s) and note the details of the general layout of the building.

Questions we are likely to ask are:

- The name of the owner
- The amount of annual rent you pay (if applicable)
- When this rent first became payable and,
- The date of the next rent review

Having this information to hand when we visit will be helpful and means we'll take up less of your time. If you don't have this information then don't be concerned; all you need to do is let us have the contact details of someone who will have access to the information and we will contact them direct.

When we visit, we often take photographs of the property. Again this is more efficient for us and for you as it means our visit can be concluded much quicker.

If you have any questions about our visit please contact your local Valuation Office. The contact details are listed in your local telephone directory and in the 'Where to Find Us' section on our website www.voa.gov.uk

VOA employees always carry and present identity cards that include a photograph. However, if you have any doubts you should never allow access to your property and we urge you to call your local Valuation Office to check the identity of the representative if you have any concerns.

What happens after our visit?

Following our visit we may review the rating assessment, taking into account any new or different details that have come to light during the inspection.

If the rateable value needs to change we will write to let you know. We will also notify the local authority, who will prepare a new rates bill, based on the revised rateable value and send it to you. If your rateable value changes you do need to continue to pay your rates according to your existing bill until you receive a revised bill. If you find that this causes financial hardship you can contact your local authority for advice.

We may find, at a later stage, that we need more detailed information than was available when we visited you. If so, we will probably send you what is called a 'Form of return' or a 'Request for information'. Even though we have visited you, it is important that you complete this form and return it to us within the 56-day period specified. If not, you will be liable to penalties.

If you have a query about your rateable value contact your local Valuation Office. You can speak to dedicated staff who are knowledgeable about assessments for rates and are well informed about property issues in your local area.

To find out more about rates go to www.voa.gov.uk and www.mybusinessrates.gov.uk – both official government websites.