



Phillippa Aldrich on the business rates revaluation - part 2

Business advice for flooring contractors

In a rage about rates? Prepare to appeal!

LAST month I outlined the business rates revaluation to be implemented in April 2010. Sounds a long way off, but there is only a narrow window of opportunity in which to appeal and prevent your rates rising. You need to start working now.

Next month (September) the Valuation Office Agency publishes the new rateable values on its website. Occupiers then have six months to check that the valuation of their property is based on factually correct information and, if not, to appeal.

The rateable value should reflect the net effective rent of a property and take into account any incentives such as rent free periods or cash contributions from landlords.

Any changes to the neighbourhood or property which may affect the value of the premises can be reported; the Valuation Office Agency will then investigate further.

There has so far been no

blanket reduction in business rates to reflect the reduction in rents due to the recession or the abolition of empty rates relief, but it may still be possible to contend, on a case-by-case basis, that changes to the empty rate relief legislation impact on a property's rental value. For example, a property's rateable value could be cut if it came onto the rental market because of the change in the empty rates legislation.

If the outcome of any further investigation is still unsatisfactory, an occupier can formally propose to alter their property's rating. A three month period then ensues during which most cases should be settled by agreement.

However, if this fails, the case is automatically referred to the local valuation tribunal for an appeal to be heard. Three weeks before the hearing, an appellant will be informed of rents of similar properties that may be used by the valuation office to justify their

valuation. An agreement can still be reached at any time. If a case gets to the hearing stage, the appellant does not have to attend and can state their case in writing. However, attendance may be wise, just in case any further information is required.

Business rates must be paid whilst the appeal process is underway and until a decision is reached. If an appellant is suffering particular hardship the process may be sped up. Ultimately, if a case is successful, the relevant council will refund any overpayment, with interest. The tribunal is free. Occupiers must bear in mind that a reduction in rateable value, unfortunately does not always mean a reduction in business rates.

To stand the best chance of paying fair and accurate business rates in future, occupiers should start gathering information on the impact of the empty rate legislation and collate records of

rental incentives being given locally.

You may also consider appointing a rating agent to value the property, identify grounds for a rates reduction, complete the proposal and act as a point of contact with the local valuation office. Any rating agent should have detailed local knowledge of procedures and any local conditions which may affect values.

Unless the government makes a U-turn and reinstates empty property rate relief, some businesses may not even see 2010. However, those that do should not be punished further through extortionate rates they can ill afford. So prepare to appeal. **CFJ**

Valuation Office Agency:

■ www.voa.gov.uk

Employing a rating agent:

■ www.businesslink.gov.uk

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David Gatfield on training

Apprenticeships used to take 4-5 years!

I WAS in Manchester the other day, a place close to my heart for many reasons, not least that I lived there for a big part of my life before meeting a girl from Leeds and defecting to Yorkshire.

It's also the city where almost 40 years ago Altro opened a contracts office over Silvio's cake shop in Fountain Street. The girls who worked behind the counter there must have thought I needed feeding up, as every time I went in to buy a sandwich they would put an extra one in the bag when the boss wasn't watching.

Anyway while I was in Manchester I couldn't help having a walk down memory lane, I went to Fountain Street and soon found myself standing in front of the building where our office used to be.

Still there, all boarded up and looking old and sad, Silvio's is now 'the game cube' and staffed by 12 year old technophiles oblivious to the ghosts of the generous shop girls and the hungry apprentice floorlayer.

My mind wandered to my early days. I thought about my apprenticeship and the many training courses I had to attend on my journey from sweeping the floors and going for the chips to running large contracts and everything in between.

After my initial induction course, I was loaned out to old Albert, a sub contractor who though he looked old through my then young eyes, was just 57 which coincidentally is my age now, and of

course it's not old as I now know.

Albert's nick name was the gloom peddler, due to his ability to put a wet blanket on everything, but he was also a great floorlayer, from the old school when boys served real 4-5 year apprenticeships before becoming men and being let loose with a Stanley knife.

His apprenticeship must have been hard, but mine under Albert was harder, I would sweep and scrape the floor until you could eat from it only to be told how useless I was and to start again, then 'make a brew and go for the chips'.

It all seems a bit Dickensian now, but that's just the way it was and I got used to it, and hard though it was, somehow I knew it was for my own good.

Eventually I became adept at scribing and templating and being less of an encumbrance to the skilled fitter, even helping him to earn extra money once the 'pricework' system was adopted.

Today it's hard to find flooring companies employing young lads with a view to spending 4-5 years turning them into half decent floorlayers.

This is mainly due to a lack of spare cash for such a luxury, and I used to think perhaps even a lack of raw material - after all, floorlaying is hard work for not a great deal of gain in the early years and many young lads choose easier more lucrative options.

Over 8,000 skilled flooring fitters are expected

to retire over the next 10 years, and manufacturers and industry leaders should be doing as much as possible to encourage new people into the trade.

Working in the flooring industry is an exciting and challenging profession that can take you all over the world. If you are talented and dedicated then the possibilities are very exciting. It's not just about buildings, as a career in flooring can take you across a multitude of sectors, including transport, automotive and even maritime.

In the current economic climate, the opportunity to re-skill should not be underestimated either. Many areas of industry will have equipped people with transferrable skills well suited to the flooring industry.

Flooring companies and others are doing what we can to take up the slack in the absence of traditional apprenticeships, in our own case we run countless training courses at head office which not only allow us to impart some hard won knowledge on the young and not so young who attend, but also gives us the opportunity to meet flooring contractors from all over the world and swap stories and ideas, an exercise from which we can all learn. **CFJ**

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Further information on
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