



VOA Property Inspection Guidance for Business Ratepayers



1. Purpose of a VOA Visit

From time to time, the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) may need to attend your property to verify details of your premises or confirm information relevant to its rateable value assessment. This is part of their statutory duty to maintain fair and accurate Rating Lists under the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

As your appointed agents, Portrait acts on your behalf throughout the Check and Challenge process. We have prepared this guide to help you understand what to expect during a VOA visit, what you may be asked, and how to ensure your interests are protected. This includes:

- 1 Confirm property measurements, layout, and use of space.
- 2 Verify changes since the last assessment (e.g. extensions, refurbishments, or sub-divisions).
- 3 Assess site characteristics or plant and machinery that may affect valuation.
- 4 Clarify details submitted through a Check or Challenge.

2. What to Expect During the Visit

A VOA representative:

- 1 Will carry official identification and written authorisation to inspect the property.
- 2 Should explain the purpose of their visit clearly before entering.
- 3 May take measurements, photographs, and notes relating to the physical characteristics of the property.
- 4 Might ask questions about occupancy, use of different areas, or recent works.
- 5 Should remain professional, impartial, and respectful at all times.

If at any stage you feel uncertain, you are entitled to ask the VOA officer to speak directly with Portrait for clarification or to verify our role as your acting agent.

3. When to Notify Portrait

The VOA may not always be aware that you have appointed an agent. If:

- 1 You receive direct contact from the VOA, or
- 2 A visit is arranged without us being copied into correspondence,

Please notify us immediately, as this allows us to brief the VOA on your case, ensure they have the correct documentation, and verify that their inspection aligns with the nature of your Check or Challenge submission.

4. Common Questions You May Be Asked

During inspection, VOA officers often ask:

- 1 Who occupies the property and how it is used.
- 2 When the business began trading at the premises.
- 3 Details of any physical alterations (e.g. new partitions, added mezzanines, or changed floor layouts).
- 4 Whether areas are sublet or shared.
- 5 The purpose of any storage or ancillary space.
- 6 The nature and extent of any works recently carried out.

These are standard enquiries and not necessarily indicative of disagreement.

If you are unsure how to answer, politely inform the officer that your agent (**Portrait**) holds the relevant documentation and can respond formally on your behalf.

5. Important Notes & Cautions

To protect your interests:

- 1 Never sign or verbally agree to any valuation, plan, or measurement without consulting us.
- 2 Avoid offering estimates or assumptions about sizes, rent, or costs.
- 3 Do not provide confidential business data unless instructed by us — the VOA is bound by HMRC confidentiality provisions, but their role is limited to rating matters.
- 4 Keep a record of the visit (names, date, questions asked).
- 5 If any correspondence or valuation notice is later received, forward it to Portrait immediately.

6. Site Visit Relevance to “Check” and “Challenge” Cases

Where we have submitted:

- 1 A Check only (verifying information), the VOA's visit may not be contentious and could simply confirm the property's accuracy.
- 2 A Challenge (disputing the rateable value), a site inspection may form part of the evidence-gathering stage.

If a blank Check has been submitted (where floor plans were accepted as accurate and no measurement challenge was raised), please contact us before confirming a VOA visit, as the officer may be visiting to verify assumptions that are not under dispute.

In such cases, Portrait should manage the engagement to ensure consistency with the case position.

7. Professional Standards and Impartiality

The VOA is legally required to remain impartial and must not have any conflict of interest. All assessments are made independently and free from bias. Similarly, we ensure all communications maintain transparency and professionalism while protecting your position as ratepayer.

8. After the Visit

Following inspection, the VOA may:

- 1 Make updates to their internal record,
- 2 Request additional information (via email or formal notice), or
- 3 Issue a Notice of Alteration to the Rating List, which we will review immediately upon receipt.

If you are contacted directly, please inform us. We will confirm the accuracy of any proposed changes and, where necessary, submit representations or appeals.

9. Our Role as Your Agents

Portrait's responsibility includes:

- 1 Acting as your single point of contact with the VOA.
- 2 Ensuring all communication and evidence are consistent with your case strategy.
- 3 Reviewing all documentation and responses before submission.
- 4 Protecting you from providing information that could be misinterpreted or incomplete.
- 5 Maintaining full compliance with the VOA's procedures while safeguarding your interests.

If a VOA officer requests clarification or documents during their visit, you can simply say: *"Our rating agent, **Portrait**, is handling this on our behalf. You can contact them directly for further information."*

10. Summary of Best Practice for Clients

- 1 Always notify Portrait of any direct VOA communication.
- 2 Ensure a responsible person is present during any visit.
- 3 Request to see identification before granting access.
- 4 Avoid confirming or denying measurements without our input.
- 5 Keep written notes of any interaction.
- 6 Forward all follow-up correspondence to us immediately.

VOA visits are a normal part of the rating process and often a positive step toward resolving your case. By maintaining clear communication and directing any technical discussions through Portrait, you help ensure a fair, accurate, and efficient outcome.



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