Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Report to:	**Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board**
Meeting on:	**15th September 2023**
Subject:	**Communications Strategy**
Author:	**Assistant Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer**

1. Introduction

Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board's vision states that "we aim to provide high quality, transparent, effective and responsive services to all of our stakeholders." To ensure we meet our vision, good communication is pivotal. This document outlines our strategy for good communications with staff, stakeholders and external organisations etc.

The strategy has been approved by our Management Team and is being presented to the Board for approval.

2. Recommendations

i.   The Board approves the policy.

Lindsey Hendry
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21st August 2023

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RENFREWSHIRE VALUATION JOINT BOARD

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

2023-2026

Title	Communications Strategy
Author	Assistant Assessor
Approved By	Management Team
Date of Approval	July 2023
Reviewer	Assistant Assessor
Review Date	As required

Review History

Review No.	Details	Release Date

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1.0 Introduction

Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board's (the "Board") vision states that "we aim to provide high quality, transparent, effective and responsive services to all of our stakeholders". Our Commitment Statement includes the following, all of which directly relate to, or are dependent upon, good communications.

- Consulting our stakeholders and listening and responding to their views

- Valuing staff and providing them with opportunities to develop and contribute

- Encouraging innovation and recognising achievement within the organisation

- Treating all stakeholders, including staff, in a fair, consistent manner in accordance with our Equalities Requirements.

- Ensuring we are accessible and accountable to stakeholders

- Using language which is easy to understand

- Working with our partners in the Scottish Assessors' Association (SAA) to ensure transparency and Scotland-wide consistency of approach to service delivery

It is only through good communications that we will meet our commitments and achieve our aims.

2.0 The Strategy

This strategy aims to illustrate that the Board will:-

- Ensure our communication methods are effective
- Collect and evaluate the views and experiences of citizens
- Engage with external organisations and institutions
- Develop formal and informal partnerships to use resources efficiently and drive improvement
- Use feedback obtained through the various communication channels to plan and deliver better services.
- Work with partners to ensure communications are efficient and effective

For the purposes of this Strategy, the term "Communications" will be considered in the wider sense of all forms of 'giving and receiving information'. Such a document cannot detail every form of communication that occurs in a multi-functional organisation such as the Board, but it will identify the main methods by which the Board will deliver its objectives. These will include direct mail, email, the Board website, SAA website and advertising. The Board has social media accounts which are used where appropriate.

3.0 General Approach

The majority of the Board's communications are directly related to the three statutory functions of the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). These are production and maintenance of the:-

- Valuation Roll, for Non-domestic Rating purposes (NDR).
- Council Tax List (CT)
- Electoral Register

The format, content and frequency of these communications are, in many instances prescribed by law and may not be entirely under the control of the Board. We will make our communications with the public as clear and easy to use as possible.

We will also provide information and assistance about our services to citizens using language which is easy to understand and by the most appropriate method. We also subscribe to an interpreter service to ensure language is not a barrier to access our services. Digital communications are increasingly important to the Board.

Internal communications will ensure a well-informed workforce which is equipped to deliver services and empowered to make improvements. We will ensure that our employees have an understanding of change affecting the organisation now and in the future.

Information gathered for statutory purposes, and through the Assessor and ERO's statutory powers, will be treated at all times with appropriate confidentiality and in accordance with the data protection legislation.

4.0 <u>Objectives</u>

The objectives of our communications are shown in the table below.

Externally	Internally
• To deliver statutory functions in accordance with the law • To improve service delivery in line with stakeholder requirements • To inform the public of our functions • To provide openness and transparency in all operations of the Assessor, the ERO and the Board • To work with partners to ensure consistency of service across Scotland • To give stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to decisions and actions of the Board	• To communicate news and information to employees • To improve service delivery • To provide an understanding of change • Improve employee morale • To ensure member scrutiny of officers' actions and decisions. • To give employees the opportunity to contribute to decisions and actions of the Joint Board
Underpinning all of the above is our commitment to eliminate discrimination, promote equalities and good relations.	

5.0 <u>Partnerships</u>

To ensure efficient use of public money and ensure nationwide consistency of message, the Board will deliver many of its communications through, or in partnership with, the following:-

Partner	Partnership areas
Scottish Assessors Association	Design of forms, consultation responses, web portal (see below), stakeholder meetings, press enquiries and national advertising campaigns
Assessors web portal	**Public:** Council Tax List and Valuation Roll search facilities, public provision of Practice Notes and valuations, provision of general information and news, NDR and CT proposal submission facilities, various stakeholder form return facilities and consultation releases. **Institutions:** Government statistical extraction, data to local councils, access to data for government agencies, including Scottish Water, emergency services and government projects.

	Between Assessors: Shared information repositories and internal guidance
Electoral Commission	Design of forms, guidance manuals, consultations/reports, media resources, events and national advertising campaigns.
Association of Electoral Administrators	Design of forms, guidance and advice, consultations/reports, national lobbying.
Renfrewshire Council (RC) Communications Department	On request, RC will aid RVJB with press releases and press enquiries

Of those listed, the following two areas are of particular importance:

5.1 Assessors Web Site (www.saa.gov.uk)

This web facility provides a single point of access to the Valuation Roll, Council Tax List and Electoral Registration information across Scotland. It is an exemplar of joint working which is the chosen way to provide consistent data to a range of stakeholders in an efficient manner. Assessors & EROs are committed to using the portal as a primary way of delivering modern services and it is seen as one of the main tools in delivering 3-yearly revaluations and Non-Domestic Rates Reform.

The Board commits staff to the Management Committee and Project Team and provides a share of its funding.

5.2 The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission (EC) provides guidance to EROs on the performance of their duties and issues a comprehensive set of on-line guidance notes. The Commission also sets ERO performance standards and monitors compliance with these.

The EC provides a regularly updated suite of media tools including leaflets and posters, national television and social media adverts and campaigns, role play tools and email banners which are developed through market research and targeted at particular populations of electors and potential electors. The joint aim is to maximise the use of these materials to increase the number of people who are registered for electoral purposes. This in turn will help to improve the completeness and accuracy of registers.

6.0 External Communications

The Board's regular communications primarily relate to the three statutory functions. Summaries of these communications are provided at Appendices 1-3.

6.1 Non-Domestic Rating and Council Tax Valuation (See Appendices 1-2)

Most active communications with stakeholders take the form of statutory notices or requests made under statutory powers. These were previously issued by post but, increasingly, the Board is looking to provide these by email or other electronic means. Various items of outgoing mail, including email, invite feedback through our Customer Satisfaction process.

The Assessors portal (see above) provides the public with an invaluable source of the general information on the assessors' services and has an excellent search facility for service users wishing to find information on the Valuation Roll and/or Council Tax Valuation List. Proposals can be submitted on-line.

Communications with government and a number of ratepayer representative bodies, including the Scottish Ratepayers Forum, and the Scottish Rating Surveyors Forum, are maintained through the Scottish Assessors Association.

On a day-to day basis, valuation staff members communicate with ratepayers, council tax payers, their agents and the importance of these communications in customer satisfaction and influencing public perception of the service should not be underestimated.

6.2 Electoral Registration (See Appendix 3)

As with the Assessor's valuation functions, many of the ERO's public communications also take the form of statutory notices or requests made under statutory powers. Where legal provision has been made, an increasing number of these are issued and/or received by electronic means (web submission, email etc).The Board also invites feedback by including a link to our Customer Satisfaction Survey on all our emails. The survey is also available to stakeholders via our website.

Electoral Registration is the main area of proactive promotion with a campaign every year to promote the annual electoral canvass. The aims of the campaign are to increase public awareness of the annual canvass process, maximise the number of people who respond to the annual canvass where required and improve the completeness and accuracy of registers.

There are a number of initiatives and these are contained in the annual "Electoral Engagement Strategy". Specific efforts are made, and will continue to be made, to target population groups which, from research, are known to be underrepresented in the Electoral Register.

In many instances it is impossible to tie the outcomes with our engagement activities. It is therefore very difficult to evaluate the success of these campaigns with any accuracy. Where outcomes can be monitored these will be measured and assessed as detailed in the Participation Strategy.

6.3 Corporate Communications (See Appendix 4)

To enhance openness and ensure transparency in all that we do, the Board makes a full suite of reports available to the public and other stakeholders through the publication of Board Reports on RC's website and Public Performance Reports on our website.

The Board's Complaints Handling Procedure is aligned with the Ombudsman's Model complaints procedure and provides a structured process for the Board to learn from public feedback. Complainants are advised of the outcomes of their complaints including any corporate learning which has been highlighted during the process. We also publish annual and quarterly complaints reports.

Recent users of Board services are invited via email to provide feedback using our Customer Satisfaction Survey. The results of these surveys are reported to the Management Team to improve and refine services.

7.0 Internal Communications (See Appendix 5)

Internal communications are directed towards supporting the Board's aims, objectives and statutory functions and improving the services we deliver. We also communicate with employees to promote engagement, encourage development and provide an understanding of change (further details below). Staff are also continually encouraged to contribute to service design and improvement.

The Board's shared network drives and electronic document management system are the main platform for policies, procedures, guidance and advice. New or revised versions of policies are issued by email or at team briefings and through specific training/roll-out events.

Management Team meetings are followed by Team Briefings to deliver news, decisions and actions to employees. These briefings are supported by way of meeting 'Bullet Notes' which help ensure consistency of message.

The employees' Trades Union is consulted on all relevant draft policies and policy changes and is given the opportunity to present to the Board where appropriate.

8.0 <u>Review of Strategy</u>

This Strategy will be reviewed at 3-yearly intervals or earlier where appropriate.

Non-Domestic Rating – Communications Plan

		Description	Purpose	Channel
CITIZEN	←	Valuation Notices	Statutory requirement	Paper/mail, but information also available at SAA web portal. Electronic provision may well be enabled moving forward.
	↔	Valuation roll searches. Submission of proposals and various particulars. Provision of general information.	As per description	Scottish Assessors web portal
	↔	Rental and other Assessors Information Notices	To gather information to assist with making up and maintaining Valuation Roll	Issued:- Paper/mail Responses: SAA web site interactive forms are default position with paper/mail provided on request, RVJB web site forms. On-line submissions will continue to be expanded.
	→	Property visits	To gather details of the property as well ownership/occupancy details	Physical site visits
	↔	Ratepayer Representative Bodies (including SRF and SRSF)	To support statutory functions To inform procedure To disseminate news To consult To inform service planning and improvement	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephony, at meetings, consultations, remote conferencing etc.
		Description	**Purpose**	**Channel**
INSTITUTIONS	←	Council Billing Departments	Statutory Requirement	Secure weekly Data Exchange Regular reconciliations by paper/report
	↔	Scottish Assessors Association (and colleague Assessors)	To support statutory functions To ensure Scotland-wide consistency. To design and inform procedure To disseminate news Consult with governments and others Exchange of best practice	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephony, meetings, consultations, remote conferencing etc. Assessors' portal – secure dtf, shared secure web site space plus the above.
	↔	Other Valuation Authorities including Valuation Office Agency,	To support statutory functions To design and inform procedure To disseminate news	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephony, meetings, consultations, remote conferencing etc.

		Land & Property Services NI	Consult with governments and others Exchange of best practice	
		Liaison with Government(s), departments and their agencies, including Harmonisation Group and Scottish Water	Service planning Service improvement Provision of news /change information Service/Performance Monitoring Legislative Consultations Exchange of best practice	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephony, meetings, consultations etc both directly and through SAA and IRRV.
		Registers of Scotland	Provision of Sales Information	Secure File Transfer

Council Tax Valuation List – Communications Plan

		Description	Purpose	Channel
CITIZEN	←	Banding Notices	Statutory requirement	Paper/mail, but information also available at SAA web portal.
	↔	Council Tax List searches Submission of proposals. Provision of general information	As per description	Scottish Assessors' web portal
	→	Property visits	To gather physical attribute and occupation data	Physical site visits
		Description	**Purpose**	**Channel**
INSTITUTIONS	←	Council Billing Departments	Statutory Requirement	Secure weekly Data Exchange Quarterly reconciliations by paper/report
	↔	Scottish Assessors Association (and colleague Assessors)	To support statutory functions To ensure Scotland-wide consistency. To design and inform procedure To disseminate news Consult with governments and others Exchange of best practice	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, meetings, consultations, remote conferencing etc. Assessors' portal – secure dtf, shared secure web site space plus the above.
	↔	Liaison with Government(s), departments and their agencies	Service planning Service improvement Provision of news /change information Service/Performance Monitoring Legislative Consultations Exchange of best practice	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, meetings, consultations etc both directly and through SAA and IRRV.
	↔	Electoral Registration Officer	Maintenance of Council Tax Lists Maintenance of Electoral Register	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, meetings, remote conferencing etc.
	→	Registers of Scotland	Provision of Sales Information	Secure File Transfer

Electoral Registration Function – Communications Plan

		Description	Purpose	Channel
CITIZEN	↔	Annual Canvass forms (3 different forms)	Statutory requirement	Issued: Annually by paper/email Returns: Paper/mail, Internet, telephone, Household visit
	↔	Invitation to Register	Statutory requirement	Issued: Paper/email/download from internet Returns: Paper/mail, Internet (GDS). Household visit
	↔	Household canvass/ visits	Statutory requirement	Issued: Paper - household visit/mail Return: Paper – household visit/mail or encourage electronic return
	→	On-line application	Application to be registered Voter Authority Certificate applications	Government Digital Service (GDS)
	↔	Various (absent voter and special category) application forms	Statutory requirement	Issued: Paper/email/download from internet Returns: Paper/mail/email. AV applications will be provided by GDS in future for UK Parliamentary Electors
	←	Canvass Advertising	To improve canvass return rates. Improve the accuracy of the Electoral Register See separate Participation Strategy	Various Local Public Notices Notification to the Board's Constituent Councils to advertise on their websites etc. Web site Notice Social Media Campaigns to be reviewed annually
	←	Notices of Addition, Deletion & related	Statutory requirement General Enquiry	Issued: Paper/mail, email
INSTITUTIONS		**Description**	**Purpose**	**Channel**
	←	Provision of Registers to Returning Officers	Statutory requirement	Secure electronic exchange Managed and planned through liaison meetings
	←	Provision of Registers to Political Parties, Elected Members etc	Statutory requirement	Various channels (paper and secure exchange) as requested by recipient
	→	News, information etc from Electoral Commission	Service improvement Provision of news/change information	Email – EC Bulletins, EC Alerts, EC Roll Call Meetings and Seminars

	Provision of information to Electoral Commission	Service/Performance Monitoring Compliance with Standards	Email with attachments Cloud reporting, Web submission Ad hoc face –to –face meetings
	News, information etc from AEA	Service improvement Provision of news/change information	Email – Weekly Notifications Arena Magazine Branch meetings, Conferences, Training events
	Liaison with Government(s), departments and their agencies, including Electoral Management Board	Service planning Service improvement Provision of news/change information Service/Performance Monitoring Legislative Consultations	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, at meetings, consultations etc both directly and through SAA, AEA, EC.

RVJB CORPORATE EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

		Description	Purpose	Channel
CITIZEN	←	Public Performance, Annual and Board Reports	Openness and transparency Public scrutiny Performance reporting Accountability	RVJB Web site for Public Performance Reports and Renfrewshire Council for Board Reports
	↔	Customer Complaints Procedures	Learning from stakeholders Process improvements Accountability	Available on Web site or a paper copy on request Submissions made by email, web submission, paper/mail Responses as per submission type
	↔	Customer Satisfaction process	Learning from stakeholders Process improvements Accountability	Invitation via email Submissions by web form. Response as appropriate
	↔	General Service Provision	To ensure the public has access to our services	Face-to-face, wheelchair access, language translation service
INSTITUTIONS	↔	Scottish Assessors Association	To support statutory functions To ensure Scotland-wide consistency. To design and inform procedure To disseminate news Consult with governments and others Exchange of best practice	See Electoral Registration, Non-Domestic Rating and Council Tax Assessors' portal
	↔	Renfrewshire Council	Provision of Support Services	Service Level Agreement Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, meetings and remote conference facilities – both formal and informal
	→	Constituent Councils' Planning and Building Control	Identification of changes affecting Valuation Roll, Council Tax List and Electoral Register	Website download/access File transfer Paper transfer where required

RVJB CORPORATE STAFF COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

		Description	Purpose	Channel
RVJB MANAGEMENT	→	Policies and Procedures (inc HR, Health & Safety)	Procedural uniformity/operational consistency Compliance with statute and best practice	Intranet/Shared network drive, website, paper, team briefings, email circulation, presentations, training events, online meetings etc as appropriate. Note that although this is presented as a one directional flow, staff are involved in policy etc formulation
	→	Operational Guidance, Instruction and Assistance	Clarity of roles and responsibilities Procedural uniformity/operational consistency	Intranet/Shared network drive, website, paper, team briefings, email circulation, presentations, training events, remote conferencing etc as appropriate. Note that although this is presented as a one directional flow, staff are involved in formulation of process and procedure
	←	Grievance, and Suggestions Box	Opportunity for staff to raise issues or suggestions with the Management Team	Document management system, email, paper.
	↔	Trades Unions	Representation of staff to Management Team	Formally and informally through meetings, exchanges of draft policies, proposed changes etc.
	↔	Staff Equalities Survey	Quantification of representation of protected characteristics within workforce. Monitoring of equality of application of internal policies and procedures. Informing external/statutory reports.	Issued by email Responses by email and paper
	↔	General Management Information	Procedural uniformity/operational consistency Provide information on change. Seek staff feedback on proposals	Team Briefings, Minutes, email, intranet, face-to-face, online meetings. Team briefings after each management team meeting provide staff with opportunity to feedback on decisions and proposals.
	↔	Internal Working Groups	Innovation and suggestions Opportunity for staff input into process and procedural design	Face-to-face meetings, minutes, email, online meetings, etc