



# Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

**Report to:** Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

**Meeting on:** 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020

**Subject:** Covid19 Report - Organisational Response

**Author:** Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

## 1. Introduction

This report is to provide members with a report on how the organisation met the Covid19 lockdown and the service levels maintained and delivered.

## 2. Background

Whilst the office moved into full lockdown on 23<sup>rd</sup> March any members of staff who fell into one of the vulnerable groups identified by government had already been sent home.

Prior to 23<sup>rd</sup> March, remote working was not facilitated within Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board. Initially focus was on ensuring Senior Management Team, managers and all stakeholder focused means of contact were facilitated. Thereafter, within 4 weeks we managed to get 100% remote home working. This involved both our IT department and staff coming up with innovative solutions to connectivity issues and equipment capability.

## 3. Service Delivery

### 3.1 Non Domestic Valuation

Updates reflecting changes to the Valuation Roll have been processed and any necessary mail has been issued.

Enquiries regarding the Business Grants which the Government had offered to qualifying businesses were also able to be answered.

Appeal negotiations for the 2017 Revaluation continued, albeit at a considerably reduced pace as not all agents/ratepayers are in a position to carry out negotiations. We are in the fortunate position where we have approximately only 10% of these appeals outstanding. The remaining appeals will be cited/recited for courts from the Autumn going forward, as all remaining Revaluation appeals must be disposed of by 31<sup>st</sup> December this year under legislation.

### 3.2 Council Tax

Updates for new houses to be added to the Valuation List for Council Tax were also processed. However, until site visits are permitted there will be a limited number of new houses added, only those we already hold the required details for can be processed.

As there is no statutory disposal date in relation to Council Tax proposal/appeals, resources, prior to lock down, have been prioritised on ensuring we meet our statutory duties. One benefit of the current situation has been that we have managed to concentrate resources on reviewing all outstanding Council tax proposals/appeals.

Some of these will require an inspection before a definitive outcome can be made, therefore until lockdown restrictions are eased not all of these appeals can be finalised. The work that has been managed to be carried out so far has been very useful and has allowed staff to clear a large proportion of these appeals, allowing efforts to be concentrated on those appeals requiring an inspection when we return to the office.

### 3.3 Electoral

We have been very aware given the circumstances of lockdown that the purchase and successful implementation of our new Electoral Management System (EMS) has allowed us to continue delivering electoral services, it is fair to say without this system we would have struggled to continue any level of service given that our previous system was a bespoke one and did not lend itself to remote access.

Following lockdown we were about to produce the 1<sup>st</sup> April update to the Electoral Register and I am pleased to report we managed to do this remotely. It was particularly important to produce this update as it reflected the changes to Renfrewshire Council's Polling Scheme. The May update to the register has also gone ahead ensuring those electors who have informed us of changes or wish to be added to or removed from the register have all been processed and notified. I am confident therefore that monthly updates can continue remotely as necessary.

## 4. Lessons learned (so far)

It is safe to say that changes to our business continuity plan (BCP) will be made following on from this experience. A revised version of our BCP will be brought to the Board for approval in the coming months. In all honesty, I don't think a full lockdown scenario continuing for weeks/months was ever fully envisaged. Suffice to say lessons have been learned and changes will be made to reflect the way we have responded and achieved as full a service as possible in challenging circumstances.

Our Corporate Risk Register will also be updated to incorporate these particular circumstances.

On a practical basis, as an example of some changes that would help this type of scenario should it arise again, I will now be investigating moving all staff to mobile phones as is the option in Renfrewshire Council. Alongside this the provision and ordering of hand sanitisers, hygienic wipes etc is also ongoing as are quotes for the possible provision of clear Perspex screens. Discussions on how these options can be achieved are already underway

## **General Conclusions**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff in the Joint Board, as without the staff's continued support, dedication and flexibility in these unusual circumstances, it would not have been possible to deliver the level of service we have achieved in these extraordinary times.

## **Recommendations**

- i. The Board notes the contents of this report.

Kate A Crawford – 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020

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