



Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Minute of Meeting Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board.

Date	Time	Venue
Friday, 29 May 2020	14:00	Remotely by MS Teams ,

Present

Councillor Angela Convery, Councillor Annette Ireland and Councillor Paul O’Kane (all East Renfrewshire Council); Councillor Graeme Brooks and Councillor Tommy McVey (both Inverclyde Council); and Councillor Tom Begg, Councillor Jacqueline Cameron, Councillor Audrey Doig, Councillor Kenny MacLaren, Councillor Mags MacLaren, Councillor John McIntyre, Councillor Jim Sharkey and Councillor Andy Steel (all Renfrewshire Council).

Chair

Councillor Audrey Doig, Convener, presided.

In Attendance

K Crawford, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer, L Hendry, Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer and J Murgatroyd, Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer (all Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board); Andrea McMahon, Chief Auditor, C McCourt, Finance Business Partner and E Currie, Senior Committee Services Officer (all Finance & Resources, Renfrewshire Council); and M Ferris, Senior Manager (Audit Scotland).

Recording of Meeting

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Convener intimated that this meeting of the Joint Board would be recorded and that the recording would be available to watch on the Council’s website.

Apologies

Councillor Colin Jackson and Councillor Innes Nelson (both Inverclyde Council).

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest intimated prior to the commencement of the meeting.

1 Minute

There was submitted the Minute of the meeting of this Joint Board held on 28 February 2020.

DECIDED: That the Minute be approved.

2 Covid-19 - Organisational Response

There was submitted a report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer providing an update on how the organisation met the COVID-19 lockdown and the service levels maintained and delivered.

The report intimated that those members of staff within the vulnerable groups identified had been sent home prior to the office being closed on 23 March 2020. At the point of lockdown, Joint Board staff were not able to work from home and within a period of four weeks this moved to 100% remote home working.

The report provided information on service delivery in relation to non-domestic valuation; Council Tax and electoral registration.

It was noted that the business continuity plan would be updated to reflect the lessons learned and submitted to a future meeting of the Joint Board for approval.

The Joint Board thanked all staff for their continued support, dedication and flexibility in these unusual circumstances and for the level of service achieved to date.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

3 Distribution of Requisitions

Under reference to item 4 of the Minute of the meeting of this Joint Board held on 28 February 2020 there was submitted a report by the Treasurer relative to the distribution of requisitions.

The report intimated that at the meeting of this Joint Board held on 28 February 2020 the Revenue Estimates 2020/21 to 2022/23 had been approved and that the Treasurer had been requested to review the method used to distribute the annual requisition across the three constituent authorities.

As approved by the Joint Board on 18 February 2000, the annual distribution of the requisition across the three constituent authorities was based on proportions of Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) in relation to council tax valuation, land valuation (NDR rateable subject numbers) and electoral registration as a proxy for the workload demand on the Assessor in relation to each authority.

There had occurred an anomalous position with the number of rateable subjects in Renfrewshire increasing significantly due to a large self-storage facility based in Renfrewshire, the only facility of this type in Scotland, securing authority based on an English court decision to classify each individual self-storage area as a rateable subject, adding circa 3,000 additional subjects to the Renfrewshire number, which was an increase of approximately 55%. This distortion was not reflective of the principle by which the original shares were agreed, therefore, the report proposed that while this position remained, the annual distribution be based on the proportion agreed in the 2019/20 Revenue Estimates, as detailed in the report. The Treasurer would review, on an annual basis, the appropriateness of the methodology recommended in order to ensure that a fair level of requisition was provided by each authority.

DECIDED: That the recommended requisition method to be used for future Revenue Estimates, as detailed in the report, be approved.

4 Unaudited Annual Accounts 2019/20

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer relative to the unaudited annual accounts for the Joint Board 2019/20 which were appended to the report.

The report intimated that the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020 would be submitted to Audit Scotland in advance of the statutory deadline of 30 June 2020.

The Joint Board had ended the 2019/20 financial year with a surplus of income over expenditure of £268,728 and this compared favourably to the budgeted surplus of £92,191, resulting in a budget underspend of £176,537.

The management commentary within the accounts provided an overview of the Joint Board's financial performance during 2019/20 together with a summary of risks and the outlook for the future.

The Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014 required the Joint Board to prepare and publish a set of accounts, including an annual governance statement, by 30 June each year. The unaudited accounts were then required to be formally considered by the Joint Board no later than 31 August and the annual governance statement should be formally approved at this time.

In accordance with the Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014, the unaudited annual accounts would be signed only by the Treasurer as proper officer. The accounts would then be subject to external audit by the Joint Board's appointed auditor, Audit Scotland, by 30 September. The 2019/20 audited annual accounts were scheduled to be presented to the Joint Board on 18 September 2020 for approval and signing by the Convener, the Assessor and the Treasurer, in accordance with the regulations.

DECIDED:

- (a) That the annual accounts for the year ended 31 March 2019 be noted and that the accounts be further presented to the Joint Board on completion of the audit;
- (b) That the annual governance statement be approved; and
- (c) That the final budget monitoring position for 2019/20 be noted.

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Councillor Sharkey left the meeting prior to consideration of the following item of business.

5 Remuneration of Elected Members Who Are Appointed Conveners and Vice Conveners of Joint Boards

There was submitted a joint report by the Clerk and the Treasurer relative to remuneration for elected members, including the Convener and Vice-convener of Joint Boards introduced by The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 (Remuneration) Regulations 2007.

The report intimated that since 2007, various amendment regulations had amended the yearly remuneration to be paid to elected members, including those elected members who were conveners or vice-conveners of joint boards. The most recent amendment regulations had been laid before the Scottish Parliament on 13 February 2020 and came into force from 1 April 2020. These amendment regulations, The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 (Remuneration) Amendment Regulations 2020 stipulated changes to the remuneration rates payable to elected members.

The change implemented by the 2020 amendment regulations was an increase of 2.2% in the yearly remuneration payable to councillors from 1 April 2020. The 2020 amendment regulations stipulated that the convener of a joint board shall be paid, from 1 April 2020, a total yearly amount of £22,320 inclusive of any amount payable to them as a local authority councillor under the 2007 Regulations; and that the vice-convener of a joint board shall be paid, from 1 April 2020, a total yearly amount of £22,204 inclusive of any amount payable to them as a local authority councillor under the 2007 Regulations.

The Regulations state that “remuneration shall be paid by the local authority of which the convener and vice-convener, as the case may be, is a member to one convener and one vice-convener for each joint board”. The remuneration costs for both the Convener and Depute Convener of this Joint Board shall be met in full by Renfrewshire Council for Councillor Audrey Doig and by East Renfrewshire Council for Councillor Paul O’Kane.

DECIDED:

- (a) That the revised remuneration levels mandated by The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 (Remuneration) Amendment Regulations 2020 for the Convener and Depute Convener of this Joint Board be noted; and
- (b) That it be noted that the remuneration costs for each position shall be met by the local authority at which the position holder was an elected member.

6 Internal Audit Annual Report 2019/20

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor, Renfrewshire Council, relative to the Internal Audit Annual Report on the Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board 2019/20.

The report intimated that the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards required that the Chief Auditor prepare an annual report on the internal audit activity's purpose, authority and responsibility as well as performance relative to its plan. The report must also provide an audit opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control environment of the audited body.

The annual report for the Joint Board was appended to the report and outlined the role of internal audit, the performance of the internal audit team and the main findings from the internal audit work undertaken in 2019/20 and contained an audit assurance statement.

DECIDED: That the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2019/20 be noted.

7 Barclay Update / Service Review

Under reference to item 6 of the Minute of the meeting of this Joint Board held on 28 February 2020, there was submitted a report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer relative to developments and expenditure arising from the Barclay Review and the review of the current staffing structure to address recruitment issues.

The report intimated that The Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill had been partially implemented in April 2020 and detailed the six main Barclay recommendations reflected in Bill.

The report provided detail on recruitment and retention of staff; the IT Valuation System; and the internal Barclay Project Group.

Currently, in terms of the Scheme of Delegations, the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer had a delegation which stated that "The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer is empowered or is recognised by the Joint Board as enjoying the authority:- (1) to deploy resources as he/she thinks fit for the best execution of functions under his/her management subject to the Joint Board's Financial Regulations and subject to there being appropriate provision in the Joint Board's budget."

The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer sought the Joint Board's approval for use of this delegation to restructure as necessary, taking account of the fact of the difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff. This would be done in consultation with both the Clerk and the Treasurer to the Joint Board and would allow the flexibility to address the vacancies and required remodelling of the existing structure in a fluid manner which resulted in an organisation that could deliver the new statutory requirements.

DECIDED: That the report be approved to allow the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer to reorganise the structure, as already delegated, ensuring financial implications were within both the core budget and Barclay funding.

8 Electoral Update

There was submitted a report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer providing an update on electoral issues facing the Joint Board.

The report provided an update on the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act; the forthcoming changes to the annual canvass; publication of registers; and elections.

It was noted that the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer was a member of both the Westminster and Scottish Government Accessibility Groups which were looking at ways to improve access to elections for a broad spectrum of people with varying issues around accessing registration and participation in elections.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

9 Strategic Service Plan 2018/21 - Annual Update

There was submitted a report by the Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer relative to the annual update of the three-yearly Strategic Service Plan 2018/21, a copy of which was appended to the report.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

10 Performance Report

There was submitted a report by the Assistant Assessor & Assistant Electoral Registration Officer providing an update on the current performance and workload issues facing the Joint Board together with the Valuation Roll and Council Tax performance statistics for 2019/20.

The report detailed the performance in Council Tax and non-domestic valuation against set targets. In relation to Council Tax valuation, for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, it was noted that the addition of new houses to the Valuation List and the deletion of demolished houses remained a priority with the time taken to enter new houses into the Valuation (Council Tax) List exceeding the target of 95% within three months and only just missing the target of 99.50% within 6 months by 0.05%, with the key performance indicators being 97.13% and 99.45% respectively.

The report also detailed the average number of days taken to add a house in each constituent authority area between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 and also the number of deletions from the Valuation (Council Tax) List between 1 April and 31 March during 2018/19 and 2019/20 by constituent authority area.

The report set out the time taken to make statutory amendments to the Valuation Roll, excluding appeal settlements and amendments to the prescribed entries, between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 by constituent authority area, which met the target of 80% to be actioned within three months but fell below the target of 95% within six months, with key performance indicators being 80.04% and 91.13% respectively. It was noted that staff were heavily involved in work disposing of the 2017 Revaluation Appeals with 89.41% of the 3,542 subjects being disposed of to date.

As a result of the demands placed on staff and resources, the performance targets for Council Tax and Non-domestic Valuation had been reviewed and the report proposed

that the targets for 2020/21 in relation to Council Tax be 95% within three months and 97% within six months and for Non-domestic Valuation be 80% within three months and 90% within six months. The proposed KPI's for 2020/21 were detailed in the report and it was noted that these may require to be reviewed further as the effects of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic become known in terms of how it would impact on working practices and the way in which services were delivered to stakeholders.

The summary of performance returns 2010/11 to 2019/20 was appended to the report.

DECIDED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the performance targets for 2020/21 be approved; and
- (c) That the publication of the summary report, appended to the report, be approved.

11 Non Domestic Appeals

There was submitted a report by the Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer advising on the appeal process and progress on disposal of revaluation appeals and running roll appeals received since the 2017 revaluation.

The report intimated that a five-yearly revaluation process had been introduced by The Valuation and Rating (Scotland) Act 1956 and this required the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer to value, or revalue, all the lands and heritages in the valuation area. These valuations were totally fresh and need bear no relation to the value applied in the preceding seven years.

The revaluation brought with it a fresh right of appeal which had to be exercised within a six-month period starting from 1 April in the year of the revaluation or within six months of the date of issue of the Valuation Notice, whichever was later. These appeals must be disposed of within time limits prescribed in the Timetable Order which currently stated by the end of the third year following revaluation, this being 31 December 2020.

The report provided information in relation to negotiation of appeals; the Local Valuation Appeal Committee; revaluation appeals; the disposal of 2017 revaluation appeals; the disposal of running roll appeals; and the disposal of other outstanding appeals.

The appendix to the report detailed the number of appeals received, disposed of and outstanding by constituent authority and the Joint Board area as a whole as at 31 March 2020.

The disposal of appeals was a major component of the work undertaken by the Assessor's valuation staff and was work that could be stressful due to the strict legislative timetables and the adversarial nature of the negotiations. The unexpected results of the current pandemic had resulted in Valuation Appeal Committee hearings scheduled during the Spring diet being cancelled. This together with the additional running roll appeals and the short statutory deadline for their disposal would require careful planning of resources whilst concurrently delivering the 2022 Revaluation.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

12 Date of Next Meeting

DECIDED: That it be noted that the next meeting of the Joint Board would be held at 2.00 pm on 18 September 2020.