



Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Minute of Meeting Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board.

Date	Time	Venue
Friday, 28 February 2020	14:00	Council Chambers (Renfrewshire), Council Headquarters, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1AN

Present

Councillor Angela Convery, Councillor Annette Ireland, Councillor Charlie Gilbert and Councillor Paul O'Kane (all East Renfrewshire Council); Councillor Graeme Brooks, Councillor Tommy McVey and Councillor Innes Nelson (all Inverclyde Council); and Councillor Tom Begg, Councillor Jacqueline Cameron, Councillor Audrey Doig, Councillor Kenny MacLaren, Councillor John McNaughtan (substitute for 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, J Murgatroyd, Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer, and S Carlton, Principal Administrative Officer (all Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board); A MacArthur, Head of Finance (for items 1 to 6 only), T McGowan, Senior Accountancy Assistant and E Currie, Senior Committee Services Officer (all Finance & Resources, Renfrewshire Council); and S Afzal, Auditor (Audit Scotland).

Apology

Councillor Mags MacLaren (Renfrewshire 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 22 November 2019.

DECIDED: That the Minute be approved.

2 Attendance at Joint Board Meetings

Under reference to item 2 of the Minute of the meeting of this Board held on 23 November 2018, there was submitted a report by the Clerk relative to attendance at Joint Board meetings.

The report intimated that the Joint Board's procedural standing orders stated that if a member does not go to any meetings of the board for 12 months, the clerk must tell the board (unless the board has given the member permission not to attend). If the board is not satisfied about why the member has failed to attend, it will tell that member's constituent authority so that they can consider ending the appointment of that member and appointing a replacement member.

Councillor Angela Convery, East Renfrewshire Council, last attended a meeting of the Joint Board on 23 November 2018.

DECIDED: That, as Councillor Convery was in attendance at the meeting, the report be noted.

3 Revenue Budget Monitoring

There was submitted a revenue budget monitoring report by the Treasurer in respect of the Joint Board for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 January 2020.

The report intimated that gross expenditure was currently £112,000 underspent compared to budget and that gross income was £59,000 over-recovered. The Joint Board was projected to contribute £66,000 to reserves by the end of the financial year and further detail was provided in section 4 of the report.

There had been no budget adjustments since the start of the financial year, however, the financial schedule reflected updated budget figures that included Barclay funding of £200,000.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

4 Revenue Estimates 2020/21 to 2022/23

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer relative to the revenue estimates for the Joint Board including the requisition of constituent authorities for the financial year 2020/21 and indicative planning figures for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

The appendix to the report detailed the revenue estimates 2020/21 to 2022/23 for the Joint Board and the requisitions for constituent authorities were detailed in paragraph 6.4 of the report.

The report intimated that the financial environment in which the Joint Board and constituent authorities operated continued to be characterised by significant demand and cost pressures, compounded by reducing levels of government grant support. The Scottish Budget and local government settlement announced on 6 February 2020 again reflected a core revenue grant cut for local authorities and was for a single year only, adding some uncertainty to financial forecasts. However, it was recognised that over the medium-term, local government in Scotland was likely to face further contraction in available resources, relating predominantly to the provision of revenue grant from the Scottish Government. In this context, the Joint Board would continue to seek operational savings to ensure financial sustainability.

Following the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in 2014/15, the Cabinet Office had provided funding for costs incurred as a result of additional duties undertaken during the lifetime of this Parliament. This funding would end on 31 March 2020 and the Joint Board would be expected to meet the costs of the annual canvass, estimated at £70,000 for 2020/21, from its core budget. With no obligation to repay unspent funding received to date, underspends of IER funding carried forward from previous years amounting to £76,000 would be transferred into revenue reserves at the end of 2019/20. This would be drawn down over the next three years to contribute to ongoing canvassing costs, which would now form part of the Joint Board's core activities.

The report provided information on the assumptions that the budget had been based on and a financial overview for the Joint Board.

As approved at the meeting of the Joint Board held on 18 February 2000, the allocation of the requisition across constituent authorities was based on the percentage proportions of GAE constituents 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 and Electoral Registration Officer in relation to each authority. There was now an anomalous position in Renfrewshire with the number of rateable subjects rising significantly due to a large self-storage facility, 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 around 3,000 additional subjects to Renfrewshire, an increase of approximately 55%.

This distortion was not reflective of the principle by which the original shares were agreed and the report proposed that while this position remained, the land valuation element of the requisition distribution agreed for 2019/20 remain in place with the other elements of council tax valuation and electoral registration being updated as per normal practice. The Treasurer would discuss a fair basis for future distribution which was not distorted by such exceptional issues with constituent authorities and submit further information to the next meeting of the Joint Board. The proposed basis for shares was detailed in the table in paragraph 6.2 of the report.

The proposed overall requisition level for constituent authorities was £2,278,570, a reduction of 1% on 2019/20 requisition levels. The individual requisition levels were detailed in the table in paragraph 6.3 of the report and these indicative figures represented planned requisition increases of 1.8% for 2021/22 and 2.5% for 2022/23. The total requisitions payable by constituent authorities, including the full pass-through of Barclay funding, was detailed in the table in paragraph 6.4 of the report.

DECIDED:

(a) That the 2020/21 revenue estimates, as detailed in the appendix to the report, be approved;

(b) That the total requisitions for constituent authorities, as detailed in paragraph 6.4 of the report, be approved;

(c) That the proposal to maintain each Council's share of the land valuation element of the distribution mechanism at 2019/20 levels as an interim position while a revised distribution method was developed, as outlined in paragraph 6.2 of the report, be approved and that it be noted that the Treasurer would submit a further report to the next meeting of the Joint Board to be held on 29 May 2020; and

(d) That the indicative estimates for 2021/22 and 2022/23 be noted.

5 Audit Scotland Annual Audit Plan 2019/20

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer relative to the annual audit plan 2019/20 for the Joint Board which outlined Audit Scotland's planned activities in their audit for the 2019/20 financial year, a copy of which was appended to the report.

The report intimated that, based on analysis of the risks facing the Joint Board, Audit Scotland had submitted an audit plan which outlined its approach to the audit of the Joint Board's 2019/20 annual accounts to assess whether the accounts provided a true and fair view of the Joint Board's financial position and also whether the accounts had been prepared in accordance with proper accounting practice, the 2019 Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK.

The annual audit plan outlined the responsibilities of the Joint Board and of Audit Scotland; its assessment of key challenges and risks; the approach and timetable for completion of the audit; and included a section on Audit Risks which had been included in the audit plans of many bodies which Audit Scotland worked with. The inclusion of this section was not a reflection of any specific risk within the Joint Board.

DECIDED: That Audit Scotland's annual audit plan 2019/20 be noted.

6 Barclay Review Update

Under reference to item 8 of the Minute of the meeting of this Joint Board held on 22 November 2019, there was submitted a report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer relative to developments and expenditure arising from the Barclay Review.

The report intimated that following final scrutiny, The Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill would be partially implemented in April 2020. The report provided detail on the six main Barclay recommendations reflected in Bill; recruitment and retention of staff; the IT Valuation System; and the internal Barclay Project Group.

It was noted that the recruitment and retention of staff was now becoming a serious issue which highlighted an underlying issue which had been exacerbated by the Barclay Review. The report sought authorisation for the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer to review the current structure and report back to the Joint Board.

DECIDED: That the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer be authorised to review the current staffing structure in order to address the recruitment issues and submit a report to the next meeting of the Joint Board.

7 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 new Electoral Management System (EMS); the December UK Parliamentary General Election; the forthcoming changes to the annual canvass; publication of registers and elections.

The Convener and members of the Joint Board thanked all Joint Board staff for the work carried out in connection with the December UK Parliamentary General Election.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

8 Performance Report

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

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 to 31 December 2019, 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 narrowly missing the target of 99.50% within six months, by 0.15%.

The report also detailed the average number of days taken to add a house in each constituent authority area between 1 April and 31 December 2019 which exceeded the internal target of 38 days and also the number of deletions from the Valuation (Council Tax) List between 1 April and 31 December in 2018 and 2019 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 and 31 December 2019 by constituent authority area, which exceeded the targets of 80% to be actioned within three months and narrowly missing the target of 95% within six months, by 0.43%.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

9 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 December 2019.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

10 Corporate Risk Register

There was submitted a report by the Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer relative to the Joint Board's Corporate Risk Register, a copy of which was appended to the report.

The report intimated that the Corporate Risk Register had been reviewed in line with the Joint Board's agreed review cycle.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

11 Trade Union Facility Time Policy

There was submitted a report by the Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer relative to the Joint Board's Trade Union Facility Time Policy, a copy of which was appended to the report.

DECIDED: That the Trade Union Facility Time Policy, as appended to the report, be approved.

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 29 May 2020 in the offices of East Renfrewshire Council.

Valedictory

The Convener advised that this would be Shona Carlton's last Joint Board meeting before she retired at the end of March 2020 after almost 42 years' service. Shona had joined the Assessor's office as an Administrative Assistant and had worked her way up to the role of Principal Administrative Officer, a role she has held for more than 12 years. Shona is highly regarded by people both within and out with the organisation and will be missed.

The Convener thanked Shona for her contribution to the work of the Assessor's office and the Joint Board and wished her well in her retirement.