



Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Minute of Meeting Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board.

Date	Time	Venue
Friday, 24 February 2023	14:00	Council Chambers (Renfrewshire), Council Headquarters, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1AN

Present

Councillor Annette Ireland (East Renfrewshire Council); Councillor Paul Cassidy and Councillor Innes Nelson (Inverclyde Council); and Councillor Graeme Clark, Councillor Audrey Doig, Councillor Kevin Montgomery, Councillor Bruce MacFarlane, Councillor Kenny MacLaren, Councillor Mags MacLaren and Councillor Andy Steel (Renfrewshire Council).

Chair

Councillor Audrey Doig, Convener, presided.

In Attendance

R Nicol, Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer and L Hendry, Assistant Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer (both Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board); M Conaghan, Head of Corporate Governance (Clerk) (for items 1 to 4 only), C McCourt, Head of Finance & Business Services, E Currie and P Shiach, both Senior Committee Services Officers and T McGowan, Senior Accountancy Assistant (all Renfrewshire Council); and A Kolodziej, Audit Manager (Azets).

Apologies

Provost Mary Montague (East Renfrewshire Council); Councillor Graeme Brooks (Inverclyde Council) and Councillor Mullin (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 18 November 2022.

DECIDED: That the Minute be approved.

2 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 2022 to 3 February 2023.

The report intimated that at the end of period 11, the Joint Board had an underspend position of £178,000 and was projected to underspend by £144,000 against budget by the end of the financial year, as detailed in section 4 of the report.

It was noted that there had been no budget adjustments since the start of the financial year.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

3 Revenue Estimates 2023/24 to 2025/26

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer presenting the revenue estimates for the Joint Board, including the requisition of constituent authorities for the financial year 2023/24 and indicative planning figures for 2024/25 and 2025/26. Appendix 1 to the report detailed the revenue estimates 2023/24 to 2025/26 for the Joint Board and the total requisitions payable by constituent authorities.

The report intimated that the Scottish Budget statement delivered on 15 December 2022 announced a local government settlement for a single financial year only, adding some uncertainty to the medium-term outlook. The report recognised that local government in Scotland was facing a significantly challenging financial position and could face further contraction in the provision of revenue grant from the Scottish Government and the Joint Board would continue to seek cost reductions to ensure financial sustainability.

The report provided information on the assumptions that the budget had been based on and a financial overview for the Joint Board which included the proposed use of reserves, as detailed in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.5 of the report.

The report noted that the distribution of requisitions payable by constituent authorities had been based on the percentage proportions of GAE constituents for the previous financial year and that for 2023/24, the 2022/23 GAE figures had been used, as detailed in the table in paragraph 6.1 of the report. The proposed overall 2023/24 requisition level for constituent authorities had been retained at the 2022/23 level of £2,342,180 in recognition of the local government funding environment.

The report advised that the budget also incorporated draft indicative requisition increases of 2% for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and that this would be kept under review over the next two years. As increases at this level were significantly above the movement in the local government settlement, they were recognised as being challenging for councils to fund, consequently, it was likely that increasingly flexible use of reserves and a requirement for ongoing efficiency measures would continue to feature in setting future budgets.

The proposed total requisitions payable by each authority for 2023/24, including the full pass-through of Barclay funding, were detailed in the table in paragraph 6.4 of the report.

DECIDED:

- (a) That the 2023/24 revenue estimates, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
- (b) That the recommendations with regards requisitions for constituent authorities, as outlined in section 6 of the report, be approved;
- (c) That the proposed use of reserves, including proposals in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.5 of the report, be approved; and
- (d) That the indicative estimates for 2024/25 and 2025/26 be noted.

4 Audit Plan 2022/23

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer relative to the annual audit plan 2022/23 for the Joint Board which outlined Azets planned activities in their audit for the 2022/23 financial year, a copy of which was appended to the report.

The report intimated that Azets had submitted an audit plan which outlined the approach to the audit of the Joint Board's 2022/23 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 2022 Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK.

The audit plan outlined the responsibilities of the Joint Board and Azets; the assessment of key challenges and risks; and the approach and timetable for completion of the audit. It was noted that the risks identified here were included in the audit plans of many bodies which Azets worked with and their inclusion was not a reflection of any specific risk within the Joint Board.

The report advised that the statutory deadline for the approval of the audited accounts for 2022/23 was 31 September 2023 and that the annual audit report was planned to be reported to the meeting of this Joint Board scheduled to be held on 15 September 2023.

The report noted that the proposed audit fee was indicated at £9,940 for the current financial year and represented an increase of 13% above the fee set by Audit Scotland in 2022/23. Within the terms of the Audit Scotland appointment, local audit teams had discretion to vary the fee by up to 20% above the level set depending on the level of identified audit risk and this proposed higher fee reflected the additional work required in the first year of a new audit appointment.

Adrian Kolodziej, Audit Manager, Azets, presented the annual audit plan to members.

DECIDED:

- (a) That Azets annual audit plan 2022/23 be noted; and
- (b) That the proposed audit fee for 2022/23 of £9,940 be approved.

5 Electoral Update Report

There was submitted a report by the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to the current position in relation to electoral registration.

In relation to the 2022 canvass, the report intimated that the canvass commenced on 4 July 2022 and that the revised register had been published on 1 December 2022 and the number of electors contained in the register were detailed in paragraph 2.2 of the report.

The report noted that no other elections were scheduled, however, the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer advised that this would be kept under review and staff would be able to deliver should circumstances require.

In relation to the Elections Act 2022, the report advised that the Act received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022 with the provisions of the Act coming in force at various times. It was noted that the main provisions that would impact the Joint Board would be the requirement for voter ID and changes to the absent voting application process for UK Parliamentary elections, and changes to the eligibility to be registered as an overseas elector. The report further advised that the final statutory instruments on voter identification were made on 22 December 2022 and came into force on 16 January 2023 and that online and paper applications could now be made for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) which was required if an elector wished to vote in person and did not have an approved form of photo ID; that a new ERO portal for processing these applications had been created by the UK Government and staff had undertaken training in its use; that to date, 15 applications had been received for VACs; that funding of £8,791 had been received in 2022/23 for implementing voter identification and that funding of £8,603 was expected in 2023/24; that secondary legislation in relation to the changes to the franchise for overseas electors and absent vote applications was expected to be laid in the coming months and that the changes would be in place over the summer of 2023; and that it had been intimated that funding would be provided by the UK Government for these new burdens during 2023/24, however no indication of the level of funding had been received.

In relation to the absent vote identifier refresh, the report noted that approximately 6,300 signature refresh notices had been issued to electors in January 2023 who had a postal or proxy vote where the signature on record was more than five years old and that recently 3,000 reminders had been issued.

The report advised that the Scottish Government had published a consultation on electoral reform and that the ERO would provide comments to the Scottish Assessors' Association Electoral Registration Committee who would submit a joint response to the Scottish Government before the closing date of 15 March 2023.

In relation to procurement, the report intimated that progress had been made with the Electoral Management System (EMS) and print and mail procurements. The EMS procurement had been undertaken using Crown Commercial Services GCloud 13 Framework Agreement and that, at this stage, the recommended supplier was Democracy Counts Limited. The contract would be for a period of three years with the option to extend for a further 12 month period and that the total contract value would be £96,000. The print and mail services project was in the early stages and the procurement routes to market were currently being reviewed.

DECIDED:

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted; and
- (b) That the EMS procurement, referenced at paragraph 7.1 of the report, be approved.

6 Non-domestic Rates Reform Update

Under reference to item 5 of the Minute of the meeting of this Joint Board held on 18 November 2022, there was submitted a report by the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to developments and expenditure arising from the Barclay Review.

The report intimated that the Non-domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 and associated Regulations were the main legislative means for introducing the non-domestic rates reforms recommended by the Barclay Review and the six main Barclay recommendations reflected in the Act were detailed in the report.

The report further intimated that the Scottish Assessor's Association (SAA) had regular contact with the Scottish Government to ensure a consistent approach. Assessors would continue to work jointly to ensure delivery of all new duties and would support ongoing development of the SAA Portal which provided information to ratepayers and their agents. Assessors had submitted plans to the Scottish Government detailing the actions being taken to ensure that all Barclay recommendations would be fully implemented and delivered within legislative timelines. These plans had now been approved and covered the period up to 2025 by which time all the recommendations of the Barclay review would be in place.

In relation to staffing, the report advised that the retention and recruitment of valuation staff remained difficult and that several rounds of advertising had not proven successful; the recruitment of a further two trainee valuers would be undertaken and efforts would be continued to recruit a valuer/senior valuer on an ongoing basis; currently there were two posts of senior surveyor, one of which was vacant, with recent recruitment efforts being unsuccessful. These posts were being redesignated to a new post of principal

valuer and would be advertised soon; and that currently there were two posts of Assistant Assessor and ERO, one of which had been regraded to reflect amended duties with the other being removed from the establishment to provide a balanced budget. It was noted that it was hoped these changes would assist in alleviating the staffing pressures that the valuation section had been under.

The report advised that the next non-domestic revaluation was due in April 2023 with a target date of April 2022, the date to which all valuations were tied to ensure all non-domestic properties were valued at the same point in time; the draft valuation roll had been published on 30 November 2022 and draft valuation notices had been issued immediately thereafter and that staff were engaging with a number of interested parties who had made representations against the draft valuations and that this would continue into early March when the valuation roll would be finalised; the lands and heritages within public parks identified as being no longer exempt from entry in the valuation roll from 1 April 2023 had been shown in the draft valuation roll and draft valuation notices had been issued to the proprietor, tenants and occupiers; since publication of the draft valuation roll, attention turned towards the 2023 revaluation roll and maintenance of the valuation roll which had paused for a period of time. It was noted that the final revaluation roll would be delivered to the three constituent authorities on 15 March 2023 and would be effective from 1 April 2023 with revaluation notices being issued to proprietors, tenants and occupiers after 15 March 2023.

In relation to changes to the appeals system, the report advised that the transfer of the Local Appeal Committees into the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service would now take place on 1 April 2023; that the Valuation (Proposals Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2022, Valuation Timetable (Scotland) Order 2022 and Valuation Roll and Valuation Notice (Scotland) Order 2022 had been laid before Parliament in mid-December 2022 and would, amongst other things, provide clarity on the new two-stage proposal/appeal process; and that upgrades to the SAA portal to allow submission of proposals online were currently being developed to replace the existing online appeal facility and that joint board staff were engaging with the SCTS to ensure the smooth transfer of existing appeals from 1 April 2023.

In relation to self-catering properties, it was noted that the legislation changed with effect from 1 April 2022 and that, to be classed as a non-domestic property, owners of self-catering properties would now be required to provide evidence of 70 days actual letting as well as 140 days intention to let. The letting must be on a commercial basis with a view to making a profit. In this regard, the Assessor wrote to owners of all self-catering properties within the Joint Board area to inform them of the change and would be writing to them again requesting the required evidence.

In relation to information gathering powers, it was noted that the Assessor now had new powers to issue Assessor Information Notices (AINs) which, if not responded to, could lead to the Assessor issuing a Civil Penalty to the non-responder(s). With assistance from Renfrewshire Council's sundry debt team, processes had been agreed to assist in the collection of any Civil Penalties raised for all three constituent authorities. The revenue raised from the issue of Civil Penalty Notices would be paid to the Scottish Government's Consolidated Fund, net of costs. These processes would be kept under review and the Scottish Government would be advised of any monies due to them.

The report further intimated that development of the IT valuation system continued with the aim of going live at a suitable time for service delivery.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

7 Non-domestic Appeals

There was submitted a report by the Assistant Assessor & 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 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. However, the Scottish Government had extended the disposal date for 2017 revaluation appeals to 31 December 2021 and it was noted that the Assessor had discharged this statutory duty with only a small number of outstanding revaluation appeals being referred to the Lands Tribunal prior to the disposal date.

The report provided an update in relation to the right of appeal; 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.

Appendix 1 to the report detailed the number of revaluation appeals received, disposed of and outstanding by constituent authority and the Joint Board area as at 31 December 2022; and Appendix 2 to the report detailed the number of running roll appeals received on or after 1 March 2020, outlining those dealt with in each constituent authority and the Joint Board area as at 31 December 2022.

The report advised that 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 report congratulated staff in disposing of the 2017 revaluation appeals within the statutory disposal date of 31 December 2021 with the small number of appeals being referred to the Lands Tribunal and thanked them for their commitment and professionalism in rising to the challenge faced since March 2020 and successfully continuing to deliver the service.

The report further advised that despite the legislation laid before the Scottish Government to ensure that no account could be taken of any matter occurring on or after 2 April 2020, whether directly or indirectly attributable to coronavirus, it would be a challenge to dispose of the outstanding Covid MCC appeals.

DECIDED: That the contents of the report be noted.

8 Performance Report

There was submitted a report by the Assistant Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer providing an update to the reporting of performance for the first nine months of the rating year to inform 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, 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 targets of 95% within three months and 97% within six months, by achieving 97.90% and 99.33% respectively.

The report also detailed the average number of days taken to add a house in each constituent authority area in the period 1 April to 31 December 2022 and also the number of deletions from the valuation (council tax) list between 1 April and 31 December during 2021 and 2022.

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 2022 by constituent authority area, which exceeded the targets of 50% to be actioned within three months and 75% within six months, by achieving 55.88% and 86.93% respectively.

The report noted that the current performance was above the targets set for this year however, this might diminish as staff had paused maintaining the valuation roll due to discharging the statutory duty of preparing and publishing the draft valuation roll on 30 November 2022 for the 2023 revaluation.

On behalf of the Joint Board, the Convener thanked staff for the work undertaken in dealing with statutory amendments to the valuation list for council tax and the valuation roll.

DECIDED: That the contents of the report be noted.

9 Corporate Risk Register

Under reference to item 10 of the Minute of the meeting of this Joint Board held on 16 September 2022, there was submitted a report by the Assistant Assessor & 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 and that the risks had been evaluated in line with the Joint Board's Risk Management Strategy. The evaluation of each risk shown reflected the significance of each risk's impact and the likelihood of occurrence combined with the mitigations and controls identified by the management team.

DECIDED: That the contents of the report be noted.

10 **Robertson Centre Office**

There was submitted a report by the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to the Joint Board's offices in the Robertson Centre, Glasgow Road, Paisley which are let from Renfrewshire Council.

The report intimated that the lease of the premises was due to end in March 2024 and that Renfrewshire Council had advised that it was undertaking a review of its property portfolio with the Robertson Centre forming part of this review. Renfrewshire Council had intimated that due to this they would prefer not to extend the lease beyond its currently agreed period.

The report advised that the management team were exploring options for a future office base for the Joint Board's functions and that key considerations within this would include continuity of service provision, cost and the suitability of the premises. There were currently no planned electoral events over the next 13 months, however, any change of office location would need to take account of the potential for a short notice electoral event.

The report noted that some additional expenditure might fall within the current financial year to facilitate a move and it was intended that where this occurred it would be funded by the use of reserves.

DECIDED: That the contents of the report be noted.

11 **HM King Charles III Coronation – Additional Public Holiday**

There was submitted a report by the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer advising that the Prime Minister had proclaimed an additional bank holiday on Monday 8 May 2023 to mark the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III following his Coronation on Saturday 6 May 2023.

The report intimated that the additional bank holiday would be for this year only and that the declaration of a bank holiday did not give a statutory entitlement to time off, however the Joint Board's lead authority, in common with many other local authorities, had decided to approve the additional public holiday for 2023.

DECIDED: That the additional public holiday on Monday 8 May 2023 and the closure of the Joint Board's offices on that day 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 26 May 2023 and would be a hybrid meeting in the offices of Renfrewshire Council.