



Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Minute of Meeting Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Date	Time	Venue
Friday, 19 August 2016	14:00	Inverclyde Council, Municipal Buildings, Clyde Square, GREENOCK, PA15 1LZ

PRESENT

Provost Carmichael (East Renfrewshire Council) and Councillors Brennan, Nelson and Shepherd (all Inverclyde Council); and M Sharkey, Hood, McGee, Bibby, A Doig and Mullin (Renfrewshire Council).

CHAIR

Councillor Mullin, Convener, presided.

APOLOGIES

Councillors O’Kane, Gilbert and Green (East Renfrewshire Council); Loughran (Inverclyde Council) and Williams (Renfrewshire Council).

IN ATTENDANCE

A MacTaggart, Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer, K Crawford, Depute Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer, L Hendry, Divisional Assessor & Assistant Electoral Registration Officer and S Carlton, Principal Admin Officer (all Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board); and A MacArthur, Head of Finance, M Simpson, Finance Manager (Management Accounting) and E Currie, Senior Committee Services Officer (all Finance & Resources, 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 the Joint Board held on 20 May 2016.

DECIDED: That the Minute be approved.

2 **RESPONSE TO MATTERS RAISED REGARDING SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN MAY 2016**

Under reference to item 6 of the Minute of the meeting of this Joint Board held on 20 May 2016 there was submitted a report by the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to events which occurred around the Scottish Parliamentary Election.

The report provided information in relation to the issue of postal votes and the information slips provided to electors at polling stations when they found that their names were not shown on the appropriate Register.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

3 **AUDITED ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2015/16**

Under reference to item 2 of the Minute of the meeting of this Joint Board held on 20 May 2016 there was submitted a report by the Treasurer relative to the annual accounts for the Joint Board for 2015/16. The report intimated that the audit certificate issued by Audit Scotland provided an unqualified opinion that the abstract of accounts presented a true and fair view of the financial position of the Joint Board as at 31 March 2016, in accordance with the accounting policies detailed in the accounts. A report on the 2015/16 audit by Audit Scotland was also attached to the report.

DECIDED: That the audited accounts 2015/16 be approved for signature and the report by Audit Scotland be noted.

4 **BUDGET MONITORING**

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer in respect of the Joint Board for the period 1 April to 22 July 2016.

The report intimated that gross expenditure was £23,000 over budget and income was currently £1,000 over recovered resulting in a net overspend of £22,000.

The projected year-end position was a deficit of £79,000 resulting in a draw of reserves of £188,500 compared to a budgeted draw on reserves of £109,500. This was as a result of low staff turnover, unanticipated costs and an income reduction of £54,720 from the Cabinet Office to fund Individual Electoral Registration (IER). The Joint Board were examining ways to minimise the deficit and planned to approach the Cabinet Office regarding the underfunding.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

5 BUDGETARY RISKS AND FUTURE RESTRUCTURING

There was submitted a report by the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to the ongoing risks and challenges from April 2017 arising from reductions in financial settlements.

The report intimated that the Joint Board's budget for 2016/17 was £2,213,000, a reduction of approximately 10% from the budget of £2,459,800 in 2010/11. The majority of the Joint Board's budget was made up of salaries and other staff costs and the only effective and practical method of further and significant reductions to the budget would be to reduce staffing levels. There were currently 42 (FTE) staff compared to 55 (FTE) in 2007. To date, the shortfall had been managed by natural wastage, 'stretching' of vacancies and the use of VER/VR. The Joint Board's reserves had been used to offset the effects of the budget reductions and had been substantially reduced by the impact of VER/VR.

The report further intimated that any significant reduction to available budget would put at risk the statutory duties of the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer. The cost associated with Electoral Registration had risen sharply since the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) with the cost of the annual canvass rising from £130,000 to £270,000. Until last year the increase in cost had been offset by funding from the UK Government but the support funding did not meet the actual costs and the Joint Board was in discussion with the UK Government.

The Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer advised that, on behalf of the Joint Board, the Convener and Depute Convener had written to Chris Skidmore MP expressing concern that the Joint Board faced a significant budget overspend due to the significantly reduced funding in support of Individual Electoral Registration in financial year 2016/17 and supporting any bid for additional funding made by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer. The Joint Board would be advised of any reply received.

The report provided information in relation to the work associated with valuation; the Land Reform Bill; Fixed-line Telecoms and proposals to vary the charges associated with Council Tax.

The Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer was working with the Treasurer to establish a sustainable future structure which would balance savings against the ability of the organisation to meet its statutory obligations. A review of the senior management structure would take place in the first half of 2017 and it was anticipated that this would yield savings in terms of staffing costs. Consideration would also be given to whether VER/VR would allow additional savings to be made. A more detailed report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Joint Board to be held on 18 November 2016 covering the senior management restructure and any other proposals in terms of savings; whether further finances would be made available for IER; and providing an indication of the 2017/18 funding position.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

6 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION ANNUAL REPORT 2016

There was submitted a report by the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to the Electoral Registration Annual Report 2016, the purpose of which was to consider the levels of electoral registration in the Joint Board area and to identify the methods employed to ensure that the maximum possible number of citizens were registered to vote. The report had changed from that prepared in previous years but where possible similar statistics to those presented in previous years had been included together with additional statistics to highlight the activities involved in Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

An important balance had to be achieved between quantity and quality in compilation of the register and it was as important to make sure that there were no names on the register of people who were not entitled to vote as it was to try to get everyone who was entitled to vote onto the register. The report detailed the process of electoral registration; the measurement of accuracy of the register; continuous improvement to quality and accuracy of the Register; the steps taken to address under registration; additional activities proposed to maximise registration; and other registration activity.

The introduction of IER had and would continue to make significant changes to the process of Registration.

The Joint Board's commitment to accuracy of the Electoral Register and maximisation of registration was noted. The Joint Board would continue to review its current practices and would adapt and develop where appropriate to ensure that the registration process was as accurate and cost-effective as possible.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

7 PERFORMANCE REPORT

There was submitted a report by the Divisional Assessor & Assistant Electoral Registration Officer covering the first six months of the rating year and 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, 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 again exceeding the target of 95% within three months but marginally missing the target of 99.5% within six months, with less than 1%. Given staff priority had been engaged with the statutory duty of completing the 2017 Revaluation, coupled with the fact that the actual number of houses added compared with the same time last year had increased by 40%, this minor decrease in performance gave no cause for concern.

The report also detailed the average number of days taken to add a house in each constituent authority area between 1 April and 30 June 2016 and also the number of deletions from the Valuation (Council Tax) List between 1 April and 31 March during 2015 and 2016 by constituent authority area.

The report detailed the number of statutory amendments to the Valuation Roll, excluding appeal settlements and amendments to the prescribed entries, between 1 April and 30 June 2016 by constituent authority area, again ahead of the targets of 80% to be actioned within three months and 95% within six months. These amendments were value changes only and did not reflect alterations where overall value was unchanged, changes to occupancy details or other administrative changes. It was noted that there had been a 61% increase in the total number of alterations compared to this time last year.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

SEDERUNT

Councillor A Doig entered the meeting prior to consideration of the following item of business.

8 2017 NON DOMESTIC RATING REVALUATION PROGRESS REPORT

There was submitted a report by the Divisional Assessor & Assistant Electoral Registration Officer relative to the work being undertaken in preparation for the 2017 Non-domestic Rating Revaluation which came into effect on 1 April 2017.

The report intimated that the Lands Valuation (Scotland) Act required that the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer value or revalue all of the lands and heritages in his valuation area. These valuations were to be totally fresh and relate to rental levels prevailing at the statutory 'tone date' of 1 April 2015. As of 2 August 2016, 8449 subjects, 82% of the Joint Board's total valuation roll, had been revalued and the remaining subjects would be revalued by 30 September 2016.

A detailed analysis of all non-domestic subjects within the Joint Board area grouped by statistical categories formed the appendix to the report.

It was noted that the Joint Board's Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer was the designated Assessor for fixed line Telecommunications Subjects which had resulted in a substantial increase in the workload of Joint Board staff in preparation for the 2017 Revaluation. Whilst every endeavour would be made to meet the current performance levels in relation to running roll and council tax targets, these may be affected as a result of the time pressures to complete the 2017 Revaluation within the timescale set by the Scottish Government.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

9 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

There was submitted a report by the Depute Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to the Corporate Risk Register for the Joint Board which had been updated to reflect the current challenges and risks facing the Joint Board. A copy of the Corporate Risk Register formed the appendix to the report.

It was noted that references to the IT Disaster Recovery Plan were a 'work in progress' as discussions were currently ongoing with Renfrewshire Council for the Joint Board to be incorporated within the Council's IT Disaster Recovery Procedures. It was anticipated that this work would be finalised by Spring 2017.

DECIDED: That the Corporate Risk Register, which formed the appendix to the report, be approved.

10 BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

There was submitted a report by the Depute Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to the Business Continuity Plan for the Joint Board which had been updated to ensure it reflected the most recent changes in circumstances facing the Joint Board. A copy of the Business Continuity Plan formed the appendix to the report.

DECIDED: That the Business Continuity Plan, which formed the appendix to the report, be approved.

11 RE-USE OF INFORMATION PROCEDURES AND ASSET LIST FOR COUNCILS AND JOINT BOARDS

There was submitted a report by the Depute Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to the Policy on Re-use of Information Procedures and Asset List for Councils and Joint Boards, a copy of which formed the appendix to the report.

The report intimated that the purpose of the policy was to ensure that stakeholders were aware of what information held by the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer could be re-used by other stakeholders.

DECIDED: That the Policy on Re-use of Information Procedures and Asset List for Councils and Joint Boards, which formed the appendix to the report, be approved.

12 UPDATE ON TEMPORARY POSTS - PROPERTY ASSISTANTS

There was submitted a report by the Depute Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer relative to the two temporary posts of Property Assistants being made permanent within the staffing structure.

The report intimated that looking ahead to the various challenges facing the Joint Board's technical section in the medium to long term, the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer was seeking to incorporate both temporary posts into the permanent establishment of the staffing structure. In keeping with best practice both posts would be advertised as permanent posts.

DECIDED: That the report be approved.

13 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 Friday 18 November 2016 within the Robertson Centre, Glasgow Road, Paisley.