HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD	Agenda Item	**8**
3 February 2016	Report No	**VAL-5-16**

Electoral management Systems Review

Report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Summary

This report considers the performance issues relating to the Boards Electoral Management System and considers options for review.

1.   Current Position

The Electoral Management System is provided by IDOX and is housed on the infrastructure provided by the Highland Council via the Fujitsu contract. The system operates using thin client methodology over the wide area network. There is one database that is accessed by each of the Board's four area offices. The database is fully backed up in accordance with recognised procedures.

The single database allows for more efficient management of the database but relies on the network having sufficient performance to provide adequate response times. There have been performance issues in the past and while matters have improved to some degree, performance falls someway short of the ideal.

The performance issues are potentially wasteful of staff time and have the capacity to provide unwelcome pressures at times of peak reliance. This can result in increased overtime requirements in order to meet statutory deadlines.

The same software is in use by five other ERO's in Scotland and a number of English Councils. One other software supplier provides an EMS system to ERO's in Scotland, with the remainder using in-house solutions.   All of the systems currently in use in Scotland have been adapted to deal with the requirements of 16 & 17 year old voting.

2.   Proposed Action

Despite previous investigations, it is not entirely clear the extent to which the performance issues relate to the infrastructure, the software or a mix of the two. It is recommended that a formal appraisal of the infrastructure should be carried out in consultation with Highland Council ICT and Fujitsu Services. If the infrastructure is

responsible in whole or in part for the less than optimum performance, then possible solutions should be investigated and reported to the Board.   If the infrastructure is deemed not to be contributing to the performance issues then advice should be sought from procurement advisors regarding further options for appraisal and potential change. Any such appraisal would include the present software supplier.

The ERO has been advised that Highland Council Procurement Services lack the capacity to provide procurement advice to the Board in this regard. Such advice would therefore need to be sourced elsewhere.

It is considered desirable to appraise software options in either of the above scenarios with a view to providing the most efficient solution.

4. Sceduling

The electoral calendar provides limited periods in which significant change can be safely accommodated. If the EU referendum were to be held in 2017, then this would provide a period immediately after the Scottish Parliamentary Elections and prior to the annual canvass; however present indicators suggest a poll may be likely at some point in the early or late summer. Such timing would mean that significant change could only be contemplated after publication of the register in December at the earliest, although that is not ideal.

5.   **Recommendation**

The Board is invited to note the content of this report and sanction the investigative work as outlined.

Designation: Assessor and ERO

Date: 26 January 2016

Author: William Gillies

Assessor & ERO