

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

2 February 2017

Agenda Item	8
Report No	VAL/4/17

Departmental Report

Report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Summary

This report outlines the main business of the office of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer since the last meeting of the Board.

1. General

The main business of the department since the last meeting of the Board has been the finalisation of values for the 2017 Revaluation and the follow up registration process consequent to the 2016 canvass. The main outstanding tasks in relation to the 2017 Revaluation are the valuation of shooting rights and fishings. General maintenance of the Valuation Roll and Council Tax list has continued throughout this period. These matters are dealt with in greater detail below.

2. Electoral Registration

During the period since the last meeting of the Board the first phase of the annual canvass has been concluded and effect has been given to the revised boundaries as a consequence of the Local Government Boundary Review.

The revised register was published on 1 December and it was published on the new boundaries. The new system of electoral registration involves a two stage process involving discovery by way of a canvass followed by an invitation for an individual to register. It is only following that further registration process has been completed that a new elector is added to the register. This revised methodology was introduced by Individual electoral Registration (IER) and makes comparison with the number of electors in years prior to IER unreliable. A comparison can however be made with last year, although that comparison may also be tainted due to the removal of electors who had not completed the confirmation process. Last year the electorate fell by approximately 3%, however the position has recovered this year with an increase in the electorate of 3%. Meanwhile, work continues to ensure that eligible electors are registered in advance of the last date for registration prior to the Local Government elections in May of this year.

Work continues to ensure that those who shall be 16 or 17 at the time of the Local Government Election are properly registered. There has been an improvement of approximately 50% in the number of 16 & 17 year-olds on the register at this stage compared with last year and further engagement is being planned with a view to

encouraging registration by this grouping. Secondary schools are being encouraged to hold a registration event in March and we shall be in consultation with the sector to look at how this can be best supported.

Doorstep canvassing is continuing with a view to encouraging returns from those that have not already done so. The number of doorstep visits required by IER continues to be a financial burden although steps are being taken to try and mitigate this with some success.

The trial of handheld tablet devices for canvassers has on the whole been successful and we shall consider the business case for expanding their use.

While it is acknowledged that the performance of the IER software has improved, concerns remain and work shall be carried out after the Local Government elections to further consider options in some detail. In this regard it should by then be possible to use the experiences of other ERO's to assist in this process.

As mentioned in the last report to the Board, the network links between the Board's offices have been refreshed as part of the roll out of the "SWAN" project and there appears to be no obvious improvement in performance. Further consideration of this issue will prove difficult prior to the new contractual arrangements in April.

3. Valuation for Rating

The period since the last Board meeting has largely involved finalising valuations for the 2017 Revaluation.

Draft valuations are now available on the Scottish Assessors Association Portal and valuation notices shall be delivered during March.

Shootings and deer forests have been reintroduced into the valuation roll as part of the Land Reform Act, and work associated with the identification and valuation of these subjects is underway. This has involved a large exercise to ingather the necessary information and consultative meetings with representative organisations have also been held.

The department also takes a leading role in the valuation of independent hydroelectric generators and this area of valuation is attracting significant interest from the sector.

To date the 2017 Revaluation has been carried out with very little overtime when compared with previous years, although it is anticipated that the remaining additional tasks mentioned above will involve some overtime working.

As we approach the end of the financial year resource will also be allocated to maintenance of the current valuation roll.

4. Council Tax

Maintenance of the Council Tax List continues as routine and the general level of activity remains comparatively low.

5. Administration

The review of administrative policies continues and further policies will be tabled for the next meeting of the Board. The need to monitor and review existing policies will continue. Elements of the Records Management Plan will require to be addressed in the forthcoming period and this shall place further pressures on the Central Admin section. An analysis of the future resource requirement of the Central Admin section shall be carried out and reported to the Board.

6. Staffing

The two vacancies in the technical sections remain unfilled and shall be the subject of review.

7. Recommendation

The Board is invited to comment and otherwise note the recent activities of the department as set out in this report.

Designation: Assessor and ERO

Date: 26 January 2017

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