

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

24 November 2017

Agenda Item	10
Report No	VAL/22/17

Barclay Review of Business Rates in Scotland

Report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Summary

This report outlines the main recommendations made by the Barclay Review in respect of the duties, actions, responsibilities and services of the Assessors in Scotland and summarises the response by the Scottish Assessors Association.

Following publication of the Barclay Review, the Scottish Assessors met and agreed an action plan that has been submitted to the Scottish Government. An outline of the action plan is produced below.

Assessors recognise that the Review Group's recommendations accepted by the Scottish Government extends beyond the issues covered by this plan into areas such as the use of a rateable value finder product, reform of the appeals system, introduction of triennial revaluations, wider information gathering powers, a review of the treatment of plant and machinery and a re-examination of valuation methodology for the hospitality sector; all of which affect delivery of valuation services. In this regard, the Scottish Assessors Association has indicated a willingness to work with stakeholders to bring about improvements to the rating system that these recommendations seek to achieve.

Barclay Review Group Report SAA

Recommendation 12 Action Plan

Para	Recommendation	Action Plan 29 September	Action Plan Timeline
Rec 12	Assessors should provide more transparency and consistency of approach. If this is not achieved voluntarily, a new Scotland wide Statutory Body should be created which would be accountable to Ministers	Detail provided for 4.63(a)-(j)	Immediate

4.63(a)	All ratepayers should have access to consistent levels of service and advice, regardless of where they are located in Scotland	SAA will undertake an audit to identify variations in current service standards. Where significant differences are identified an issues log shall be created, maintained and action taken to provide mitigation and remedy. In addition the SAA shall undertake consultation with key stakeholders with a view to identify perceived service standard inconsistencies with a view to establishing a suite of national service standards.	Issues log established 1 October 2017. Initial consultation with stakeholders 1 November 2017 to 31 December 2017 Progress to be reported to the Scottish Ratepayers Forum and anticipated Scottish Rating Surveyors Forum. Outcome to be reported in SAA Annual Report.
4.63(b)	Assessors should consider an account manager based approach with named individuals in an Assessor's office given the role of key contact for individual sectors or property types within an individual area	At the national level a system of property category coordinators who could be considered "national account managers" is already in place through the SAA committee structure, working groups and practice note authors. SAA will publish on the SAA website the contact details for each national property category coordinator. At the local level Assessors shall provide contact names for each locality.	National property category coordinators list updated and checked for publication by 1 November 2017. Local contact names for each locality to be published online by 1 November 2017. Online publication may involve website development costs.
4.63(c)	Where local practice notes are used for valuation of any property, these must be made available online to all ratepayers	Currently where they exist Local Practice Notes are in the main made available on individual Assessor web sites. In order to improve the stakeholder journey the SAA shall conduct an audit of all existing Local Practice Notes with a view to making these accessible on the SAA website as an overall suite of national and local Practice Notes.	Audit completed by 1 November 2017. Publication by 1 January 2018. Online publication may involve website development costs.

4.63(d)	<p>Where the Assessors propose to change valuation practice notes this must be done in consultation with relevant external bodies and draft notes must be published online for comment for an appropriate period before they are finalised;</p>	<p>In advance of revaluations the SAA commits to undertake consultation, within the limitations which the revaluation timetable imposes, on proposed SAA Valuation Practice Notes, drawing particular attention to instance of significant change. Where published Practice Notes are subject to change following representation, appeal activity, or harmonisation requirements the SAA shall give notification of these changes through the SAA web site.</p>	<p>Notification of changes will be made from 1 October 2017. Consultation will precede the 2022 revaluation and will be timetabled as part of the R2022 plan.</p>
4.63(e)	<p>The point at which new build property is added onto the valuation roll should be consistent</p>	<p>The SAA has provided its support to the policy to see new build properties enter the Valuation Roll on occupancy and action on this matter has already been taken. The SAA would welcome the opportunity for discussions with the Government in order to establish clarity and examine the practical implications of this policy.</p>	<p>Immediate hold on new entries for unoccupied properties. Clarity on policy proposals required for 1 October 2017 with the practical implications closely examined in the short term. Legislative measures are likely to be required in the medium of long term</p>

4.63(f)	The Scottish Assessors Association (SAA) should produce and publish an annual report on valuation practice and outcomes. This is particularly important in a revaluation year where the report should be substantive and highlight the average and range of movements in rateable value across council areas and sectors, any changes to valuation methodologies and summarise engagement with national and local trade bodies.	The SAA shall publish its first annual report during June 2018. In addition a report specifically reflecting on revaluations and their implications shall also be published at the appropriate time.	30 June 2018
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<p>4.63(g)</p>	<p>Assessors should work through the SAA to standardise the level of service they provide, in particular to assist those ratepayers looking to build new or improve existing property to help them determine the potential estimated rateable value that will result</p>	<p>While the provision of estimated values is currently a non-statutory activity the SAA recognises the significance and potential benefits to both small and large non-domestic property occupiers. The capacity to meet this requirement is limited due to the requirement to continue to operate statutory functions in a challenging budgetary environment.</p>	<p>Clarity on the legal mandate to provide estimated values and indemnity for Assessors providing estimates is required and the SAA will work with Government and RICS to reach this clarity with immediate effect. As soon as this issue is resolved all Assessors will provide estimated values. SAA will monitor demand and timeframe for delivery which will be conditional upon resources with particular reference to the willingness of valuation authorities to fund non-statutory activities.</p>
<p>4.63(h)</p>	<p>The Assessors should provide more information on the evidence used at each revaluation to support valuations. While we appreciate that this will require detailed consideration in terms of what can be made available within the boundaries of data protection and commercial sensitivity, at the minimum ratepayers should be informed which comparator rental properties were used to inform their valuation.</p>	<p>SAA recognises the need to make more information surrounding the valuation levels adopted accessible and shall, following detailed consideration of data protection and commercial sensitivity issues along with consultation with stakeholders provide details of how this may be taken forward.</p>	<p>Online publication will involve website development costs and may require a legal gateway.</p>

4.63(i)	Appointments to the SAA should be more transparent	The current Constitution of the SAA that provides for the appointment of office-bearers shall be made available on the SAA website along with the names and contact details of the present office-holders.	1 October 2017
4.63(j)	Minutes of meetings with sector representatives should be published (with any commercially sensitive data redacted as necessary).	Minutes of meetings held between the SAA and the Scottish Ratepayers Forum are already published on the SAA website. The SAA intends to overhaul its consultation framework to increase accessibility and widen reach. SAA shall review the current position with the intention of publishing minutes of all meetings with external bodies, organisations and stakeholders, subject to the approval of parties present.	Complete review of consultation framework by 1 December 2017 Publication of minutes of all meetings held after 1 October 2017. Online publication may involve website development costs.

1. Recommendation

The Board is invited to comment and otherwise note the report.

Designation: Assessor and ERO

Date: 16 November 2017

Author: William J Gillies, Assessor & ERO