

# HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

18 January 2018

Agenda Item	9
Report No	VAL/4/18

## 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 (ERO) since the last meeting of the Board.

#### 1. General

The main business since the last meeting of the Board has been publication of the new Register of Electors, preparation for the next diet of valuation appeal hearings, running roll update and consideration of subjects for re-banding on sale. Given the close proximity to the previous meeting of the Board there is less to report than usual.

#### 2. Electoral Registration

The Household Enquiry Form (HEF) canvass was completed and the new Register was published on 1 December as required by statute.

The feedback received from users of the electronic (IVR) response to the Household Enquiry Form was positive, indicating that they found the system simple to use and that they were very satisfied with their experience. Many users cited their desire to try and help save money for the Council as being a main driver for using the system.

The follow up to the HEF canvass is now underway and invitations to register are being issued, followed up and processed on receipt.

Documentation relating to the Electoral Registration Officer's duties and responsibilities in the period leading up to an election is being revised and training has been arranged for additional staff members in an effort to improve the resilience of the process.

Further investigation of options for improvement of electoral systems is under consideration and it is anticipated that progress will be reported to the next meeting of the Board.

#### 3. Valuation for Rating

Approaching 1,000 citations have so far been issued for a series of hearings scheduled for the spring of the year. This diet of hearings shall clear down the last of the appeals from the 2010 Roll as required by law and commence disposal of the appeals from the 2017 Revaluation. The first hearings will deal with offices and unit shops and it is anticipated that this will be followed by small hotels in early summer.

Appeals against the valuations for shootings are now being received and logged. The appeal period is open until the end of March, at which time it will be possible to quantify the level of appeal.

In tandem with these activities, every effort is being made to engage with ratepayers who have made particular representations regarding their valuation. In many cases this will require a site visit.

The period until the end of March will also see activity to update the Valuation Roll to reflect changes during the financial year.

#### **4. Council Tax**

Maintenance of the Council Tax List continues. A sitting of the Valuation Appeal Committee was scheduled for December but no cases proceeded on the day. Cases requiring review of the valuation band following a sale are being addressed. Further measures are being put in place to identify subjects that are currently described as self-catering units in the valuation roll that should properly be placed in the Council Tax list.

#### **5. Administration**

The review of the Central Admin section's procedures, workloads and resources that is due to be carried out by Highland Council HR has yet to be fulfilled although a start has been made. Meanwhile the pressures on the section continue to be relieved by temporary staff. Consideration is being given to the best method of allocation of work to clerical and admin staff with a view to improving support for the valuation and technical sections.

#### **6. Staffing**

Staffing has been stable over the period since the last Board meeting.

#### **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: 11 January 2018

Author: William J Gillies, Assessor & ERO