

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

26 January 2015

Agenda Item	8
Report No	VAL 5/15

Departmental Report

Report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Summary

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

1. General

The main business of the department since the last meeting of the Board has continued to be that of Electoral Registration and in particular that of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). There have been two sittings of the Valuation Appeal Committee, one in respect of non-domestic rating and another for Council Tax. 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

Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was introduced on 19 September and we are currently in what is termed the transitional phase. In November all electors were written to either confirming their registration where their details matched with records held by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) or asking them to provide confirmation of their identity where no such match was possible. Household enquiry forms were also sent to selected properties. The return rate for these forms has been poor when compared with experience from previous annual canvasses. Reminders have been issued where there has been no response and a doorstep canvass of non-responders is about to start. 28 canvassers have been employed for the Highland area and 6 for the Western Isles.

There have been issues relating to the performance of the IER software. This became acutely apparent in the first week of this year when the system was running extremely slowly. This was reported to the software supplier, the Cabinet Office and Fujitsu. An initial remedy of increasing the system memory has been put in place and work is underway to transfer the system to an enhanced server. A marked improvement has been noted.

Work continues in co-operation with other EROs with a view to co-ordinating publicity efforts to complement those of the Electoral Commission and to fill any gaps that are identified through joint ventures where appropriate. Young people

generally and students in particular shall receive particular attention over the coming weeks.

There is to be a by-election in Ward 9 in the Western Isles in March 2015 (date to be confirmed) and all necessary information required at this stage has been supplied to the Returning Officer. Preparatory planning work has started in relation to the UK Parliamentary Election in May and initial meetings have been held to co-ordinate this with the Returning Officers.

3. Valuation for Rating

The period since the Board meeting in November has largely involved the continued maintenance of the valuation roll.

A valuation appeal hearing was held in November and this dealt with all appeals that had to be listed for hearing before 31 March 2015. A further hearing is to be scheduled for May and this should ensure that there is little backlog of outstanding appeals.

Negotiations continue in relation to a number of cases that are due to be cited for hearing by the Lands Tribunal. A better indication of the timetabling of these appeals is expected to be received from the Lands Tribunal shortly.

There is one valuation for rating case that has been appealed to the Lands Valuation Appeal Court and this has now been called for hearing on 3 February.

The next phase of work for the valuation sections relates to the 2017 Revaluation. The target date for the Revaluation is 1 April 2015 and initial efforts shall relate to ensuring that all available rental and cost information is properly gathered and analysed. Work in connection with the revaluation shall continue to intensify as the year progresses.

4. Council Tax

Maintenance of the Council Tax List continues as routine. The general level of activity remains comparatively low. The number of new houses being constructed remains at modest levels overall and there are low levels of appeal. An appeal hearing was held in December and another is planned for the spring of the year.

5. Administration

The main administrative business has been the updating and implementation of detailed plans for the implementation of IER. Work continues regarding the review of administrative policies and other issues of corporate governance. It had been intended to bring two reports relating to internal control and governance to this meeting of the Board but the volume of work relating to IER has resulted in these reports being delayed and they shall now be brought before the May meeting of the Board.

A Policy statement on Health, Safety and Wellbeing and a policy on Risk Assessment have been prepared for approval. Both policies are largely based on Highland Council Health & Safety team policies.

Following the filling of vacancies within the central admin team a reappraisal of duties and responsibilities has been carried out and the necessary training is underway.

6. Staffing

Since the last meeting of the Board three temporary electoral registration assistants and one permanent clerical assistant/typist have commenced in post.

Advertisements will be placed shortly with a view to filling vacancies at valuer level in preparation for the Revaluation.

7. Recommendation

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

Designation: Assessor and ERO

Date: 20 January 2015

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