

## Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held in Committee Room 2, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 26 November 2015 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

#### Representing The Highland Council:

Mrs H Carmichael  
Mr L Fraser  
Mrs M Paterson  
Mr K Gowans  
Mr A Graham

#### Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar:

Mr A MacLeod

### In attendance:

Mr W Gillies, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer  
Mr R Shepherd, Assistant Assessor  
Mrs F Wood, Finance Manager, Treasurer's Office  
Ms D Sutherland, Audit and Risk Manager, Treasurer's Office  
Miss M Murray, Clerk's Office

## Business

### Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Convener, on behalf of the Board, thanked his predecessor, Mrs H Carmichael, for her contribution and the manner in which she had carried out her duties. Mrs Carmichael responded in suitable terms.

#### 1. Apologies Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Bremner, Mr A Duffy, Mr J Ford and Mr J Mackay.

#### 2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 3. Minutes of Meeting of 17 September 2015 Geàrr-chunntas Coinneamh 17 Sultain 2015

The Minutes of the Board Meeting of 17 September 2015 had been circulated and were **APPROVED**.

#### **4. Internal Audit Report – Assessor’s Payroll Aithisg In-sgrùdaidh**

There had been circulated Report No VAL/26/15 dated 26 October 2015 by the Head of Audit and Risk Management, The Highland Council, which provided details of an audit of the Assessor’s Payroll which had been completed since the Board’s last meeting.

It was explained that the audit report had the audit opinion of Full Assurance as four out of the five audit objectives had been fully achieved. Whilst one audit recommendation had been made, it had subsequently been established that it could not be actioned at present. However, this did not impact upon the audit opinion as responsibility for the action fell upon Council officers rather than the Assessor and it did not affect the overall reliability of the payroll.

In response to a question, it was explained that there had been 13 new starts and 8 leavers in 2014/15, the majority of which had been temporary staff. Overall, the payroll was very stable and the moderate number of changes was not a significant administrative burden.

Thereafter, having commended the Assessor and his team for achieving Full Assurance, the Board **NOTED** the report and the audit opinion provided.

#### **5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Statement 2015/16 Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Teachd-a-Steach 2015/16**

There had been circulated Report No VAL/27/15 dated 17 November 2015 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which set out the revenue monitoring position for the period to 30 September 2015 and the projected year end position.

It was reported that net expenditure to date was £1.107m which represented 42% of the annual budget of £2.661m. At this point in the year, the overall outturn was expected to be an underspend of £0.010m. However, this projection was sensitive to the eventual outturn of the annual electoral canvas.

The Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

#### **6. Departmental Report Aithisg Roinneil**

There had been circulated Report No VAL/28/15 dated 16 November 2015 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which outlined the main business of the office of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer since the last meeting of the Board.

The report detailed progress in relation to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and preparation for the 2017 Revaluation as well as providing information on Valuation Appeal Committee caseload; general maintenance of the Valuation Roll and Council Tax list; the review of administrative policies; staffing issues; and premises.

Speaking to the report, the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer highlighted that, whilst the performance of the IER software had improved, there was still cause for concern in terms of speed of operation and capacity to provide user reports. Alternatives were being investigated and it was intended to present a report to the Board in January 2016.

In response to questions, it was explained that:-

- in relation to the number of new houses being constructed, the situation was improving but levels of construction were not what they were at the peak in 2007/2008; and
- temporary contracts were not the norm in the office of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer. However, temporary clerical assistants had been brought in to carry out IER and canvassing duties.

Thereafter, having welcomed the filling of clerical assistant vacancies in the Inverness and Dingwall offices, the Board **NOTED**:-

- i. the recent activities of the Department as set out in the report; and
- ii. that a report on electoral registration software options would be presented to the Board in January 2016.

## **7. Business Continuity Plan Plana Leantainneachd Gnothachais**

There had been circulated Report No VAL/29/15 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which comprised the Business Continuity Plan for the Board.

It was explained that the Business Continuity Plan had been prepared in response to an audit recommendation and set out what was envisaged in the event of an information systems failure. It was highlighted that the response to failure would be influenced by the envisaged downtime, the capacity for data loss and whether the failure occurred in a high impact period such as the lead up to an election.

The Board **NOTED** the Plan.

## **8. Financial Regulations Riaghailtean Ionmhasail**

There had been circulated Report No VAL/30/15 which comprised the Financial Regulations for the Board.

It was explained that the Regulations broadly mirrored the Council's Regulations, although the Valuation Board had no capital budget. They had been updated, in response to an audit recommendation, to take account of the Bribery Act 2010. A number of other minor amendments were highlighted.

The Board **APPROVED** the Financial Regulations as circulated.

## 9. Records Management Policy Poileasaidh Rianachd Chlàran

There had been circulated Report No VAL/31/15 which comprised a Records Management Policy for the Board.

It was explained that the Policy had been prepared in response to the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 which enforced good practice on public authorities in terms of records management and required them to have Records Management Plans in place. The Board had been asked to provide a Records Management Plan by the end of the calendar year and the purpose of the Policy was to enable that obligation to be fulfilled. The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer, with support from the Assistant Assessor, was responsible for ensuring compliance with the Policy.

It was highlighted that more electronic storage and monitoring of data was likely to be required in the future and, whilst the Board had the necessary software, it was not resourced to implement its use. A report on the potential financial implications would be presented to the Board in due course.

The Board:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Records Management Policy as circulated; and
- ii. **NOTED** that a report on the potential financial implications would be presented to the Board in due course.

## 10. Dates of Meetings 2016 Cinn-latha Choinneamhan 2016

The Board **AGREED**:-

- i. the following meeting dates for 2016:-  
  
Thursday, 28 January 2016  
Thursday, 19 May 2016  
Thursday, 15 September 2016  
Wednesday, 30 November 2016; and
- ii. that the May meeting take place in Stornoway, with the remaining meetings to be held at Council Headquarters, Inverness at 10.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

## 11. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Board **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**12. Trainee Valuer Appointment - Stornoway**  
**Cur an Dreuchd Neach-luachaidh ga Thrèanadh – Steòrnabhagh**

There had been circulated Report No VAL/32/15 dated 16 November 2015 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which outlined a proposal to fill an upcoming vacancy in the Board's Stornoway Office.

The Board **APPROVED** the proposal as set out in the report.

The meeting concluded at 11.05 am.