

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

January 2016

Agenda Item	7
Report No	VAL/4/16

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 have related to Electoral Registration and preparation for the 2017 Revaluation. There has been one sitting of the Valuation Appeal Committee, 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

The transitional phase of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) ended at 31 December 2015. As a consequence 4986 electors, who had not confirmed their registration, were deleted from the Electoral Register as required by law. The number of deletions will include electors who are no longer resident at the address. It is also anticipated that a number of these electors will now take action to register individually and have their names added back to the register.

The revised register was published on 1 December, however 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. The option to delay publication of the register as a consequence of by-elections being held during the canvass period was not exercised. Meanwhile, work continues to ensure that eligible electors are registered in advance of the last date for registration prior for the Scottish Parliamentary elections in May of this year. The new register indicates the current register is down in number by around 3%, however comparisons are difficult due to the two stage process referred to above.

Work continues to ensure that those who shall be 16 or 17 at the time of the Scottish Parliamentary Election are properly registered. Registration by young people is disappointing at this stage 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 are 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. There has been a very significant increase in the number of doorstep visits this year as a consequence of IER and this has implications for costs in this and future years.

While it is acknowledged that the performance of the IER software has improved, concerns remain and options that may offer an improved user experience continue to be investigated.

3. Valuation for Rating

The period since the Board meeting in September has largely involved the continued maintenance of the valuation roll, appeal clearance and preparation for the 2017 Revaluation.

A valuation appeal hearing was held in December. There are no significant backlogs of appeals and all appeals that had a statutory disposal date of 31 December 2015 have now been cleared.

There remain a small number of cases that await citing for hearing by the Lands Tribunal for Scotland.

We have now embarked on the process of preparation for the 2017 Revaluation. The first bulk issues of property enquiry forms have been issued and we continue to analyse the returned information. The valuation process has started with initial attention being directed towards subjects valued on the comparative basis.

4. Council Tax

Maintenance of the Council Tax List continues as routine and the general level of activity remains comparatively low. The number of new houses being constructed remains at modest levels and there are low levels of appeal. A valuation appeal hearing shall be arranged for the spring of the year to deal with any outstanding Council Tax appeals.

5. Administration

The review of administrative policies continues to be compromised due to the high level of activity experienced in the field of electoral registration and the necessary involvement of senior and administrative staff. The additional requirement to embark on the non-domestic revaluation adds further pressure on available resource. While progress continues, the pace of progress remains less than ideal and continues to be hampered by significant sick leave in the central administration team.

The Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 imposes a responsibility for the Board to submit a Records Management Plan to the Keeper of the Records of Scotland. The

records management plan was submitted as required before 31 December 2015 and we await feedback from the Keeper. The full implementation of the plan and its implications shall require to be addressed in the year ahead.

6. Staffing

There has been some improvement in sickness absence, but the situation continues to be monitored. The central administration section is particularly badly effected by sickness absence at the present time and this is having a significant effect on functionality.

Mr Angus MacDonald retires from his post as a senior technical assistant in the Stornoway office on 5 February after 25 years service. I wish to record my thanks to Angus for his sterling service over the years.

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: 18 January 2015

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