

## **AGENDA ITEM 11 REPORT NO. VAL/22/16**

### **Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board IT Strategy**

#### **Current Position**

The Board sources its core IT provision from The Highland Council and this is consequently provided via the outsourcing contracts that are in place. The current service is primarily provided through a contract with Fujitsu. The core IT provision consists of desktop and server infrastructure together with local area networks (LAN's) and wide area networks (WAN's). Basic desktop software including email is provided as part of this contract. Linkage is provided to governmental organisations through the government secure extranet and the communications are PSN compliant.

The Assessor & ERO operates two main databases, one for valuation and the other for electoral registration. The software elements are provided by way of contracts between the Board and two private companies. The valuation software is provided by Corona Services, a small IT firm based in Lanarkshire and the ERO software is provided by IDOX a large software company providing services to many local authorities throughout the UK.

All Assessors and ERO's in Scotland have a need of similar software to assist in carrying out their statutory duties. Five other ERO's in Scotland use IDOX for their electoral systems. The others either use one other company or else have their own in-house provision. One other Lands Valuation Assessor makes use of Corona Systems. One Assessor uses an alternative company and the remainder make use of in-house systems.

IT support is provided via Fujitsu in respect of both the infrastructure and desktop. Corona Services and IDOX provide support for valuation and electoral services respectively. There is an in-house Information Systems Manager who also provides some internal support in addition to information systems management.

#### **Options for Change**

While the current situation is continuously monitored, it is accepted that The Highland Council through their procurement services are required to provide best value in terms of desktop, server and network provision. It is further acknowledged that the requirements of Public Service Network compliance would be extremely onerous for the Board to provide independently. It is therefore currently accepted that the Board should continue to source its IT infrastructure through The Highland Council. It is however recognised that the Assessor & ERO has very particular software requirements that are not shared with any department of The Highland Council and these needs must be separately sourced by the Board.

While the current arrangement is that these needs are provided by external suppliers, this position should be monitored to ensure that the chosen solution continues to provide a

system that is fit for purpose, economically sound and with a tolerable risk profile. It is currently considered that providing these facilities in-house would carry a very high degree of risk with only very limited scope for cost savings, which could not in any case be guaranteed. Furthermore it is preferred that use is made of a resource that is shared with a number of other Assessors and ERO's. This level of shared provision allows scope for reduced risk, reduced costs and encouraging efficiency driven development while avoiding some of the potential failings that may relate to one large system covering the needs of all Assessors and ERO's.

## **Electoral Registration**

It is essential that an electoral registration system is robust and well supported. The modern electoral process is complex and requires multiple engagement with electors and householders. The supporting software must be capable of producing all required election materials timeously, accurately and efficiently. It must be capable of detailed data interrogation and manipulation. It must interface efficiently with other government resources. Ideally the system should be capable of handling electronic interaction with electors and householders and integrate with web solutions, emails and other devices.

## **Valuation**

The valuation systems must be capable of producing and maintaining the Council Tax List and Valuation Roll. Continued development is sought towards a position where all valuation details are held within the system with associated analysis and calculation capabilities. The system should control and monitor survey and provide electronic interfaces for information handling with the aim of increased efficiency and reduced cost.

## **Outworkers**

It is recognised that there is scope to digitise much of the work carried out in the field and this should be developed in accordance with further drives for increased efficiency and improved service.

## **Records Management**

The office continues to have paper as the basis of all of its records. Records management law, together with disaster recovery planning, require a move towards digitised records systems. Where possible this should be integrated with our valuation and electoral systems.

## **Monitoring**

This strategy will be monitored against developments made by other Assessors and ERO's and wherever possible options for potential improvement and change shall be sought through the collaborative work of the Scottish Assessors Association.