

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

22 September 2017

Agenda Item	10
Report No	VAL/17/17

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 undertaking the electoral canvass, dealing with enquiries relating to the 2017 Revaluation and the identification and valuation of shooting rights.

2. Electoral Registration

The canvass is well underway. Initial household enquiry forms and first reminders have been issued. Last year the covering letter was adapted to try and encourage a return by one of the automated methods that have been made available such as an online response. This year the letter referred directly to the savings that had been achieved previously by using these alternatives and that a postal response was the most costly for the Board.

Against this background, the return rate has remained stable, but there has been a very significant increase in the number of returns made online, by text or by phone. A total of 31612 responses have been made by these means at the 34 day point. This order of automated response was not achieved until day 115 last year. Overall approximately 25% of responses are being made by text, phone or online.

The final reminders will be issued at the beginning of October and the doorstep canvass shall start in earnest thereafter. Before the general doorstep canvass commences, a canvass targeted at areas with historically low levels of return shall be carried out.

A by-election in Ward 7, Tain and Easter Ross will be take place on Thursday, 28th September and preparations are underway according to timetable.

Recent changes in the software market will need to be considered in the context of future provision of our electoral registration management systems. The current supplier of electoral software to the Board has taken over one of the other two

suppliers who are active in the Scottish market, effectively leaving only one other supplier in the market.

3. Valuation for Rating

The high level of initial enquiry following the issue of revaluation notices in March subsided quite quickly. During the summer valuation the staff have endeavoured to make contact with ratepayers. Where a resolution has not been possible, ratepayers who have queried their valuation have been advised to lodge an appeal. The final date for lodging a revaluation appeal is 30 September 2017. So far the number of appeals lodged is broadly in line with the 2010 position, however it is too early to give any indication of the final total as it is expected to rise substantially as agents have traditionally lodged large numbers of appeals as the deadline approaches.

Shootings and deer forests have been reintroduced into the valuation roll as part of the Land Reform Act, and work associated with the identification and valuation of these is nearing completion. It is anticipated the valuation notices will be issued at the end of September.

The valuation of salmon fishings for the District Salmon Fishery Boards should be concluded shortly.

Consultation and discussion has continued throughout the summer in relation to the valuation of independent hydro electric generators.

The valuation appeal committee is scheduled to meet in November and discussions with ratepayers are underway. This will ensure that all appeals are disposed of by the Committee by their statutory deadline at the end of the calendar year.

A review of the non-domestic rating system was commissioned by the Scottish Government and the Barclay Commission has now issued its report. The Scottish Government has intimated its acceptance of most of the findings and the Scottish Assessors Association have indicated their willingness to work with Government in implementation of the recommendations that relate to Assessors in Scotland. Further details will be reported to the next meeting of the Board.

4. Council Tax

Maintenance of the Council Tax List continues as routine and the general level of activity remains comparatively low. A sitting of the valuation appeal committee was scheduled for September, however the hearing did not take place as all cases were settled by agreement. The citation process is now being handled entirely by the Panel Secretary and this may have cost implications for the Board.

5. Administration

The review of the central admin section's procedures, workloads and resources that is due to take place by the Highland Council HR is yet to take place. The pressures on the section remain acute, but this has been alleviated to some extent by temporary staff.

6. Staffing

An application for flexible retirement by one of the Assistant Assessors has been approved. One other application by a member of the valuation staff has been submitted.

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: 14 September 2017

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