

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

20 November 2018

Agenda Item	7
Report No	VAL/27/18

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 the disposal of a further tranche of 2017 revaluation appeals and the completion of the 2018 annual electoral canvass. Preparations are in hand for the Ward 5, Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh By-Election on 6 December 2018.

2. Electoral Registration

The 2018 annual canvass is now nearing completion. The final reminders were issued on 20 September. The overall return to date is 85.49% compared to 85.84% at the conclusion of last year's canvass.

The last date for applications to be included on the register that will be published on 1 December is 21 November.

There has been a further improvement in the number of canvass returns that have been made by the public using the automated process (IVR). At the conclusion of last year's canvass 28.76% of returns were made using IVR. A total of 49,124 returns have been made using IVR this year which equates to 35.49%. This results in savings in both mailing costs and staff time. The improvement follows significant changes to the messaging that appears on the covering letter.

A by-election has been scheduled in Ward 5, Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh on 6 December 2018. The ERO's preparations are on schedule with regard to all salient dates.

An issue has arisen with regards to IT contingency in the lead up to the election and a solution is being pursued with Wipro and Highland Council ICT.

3. Valuation for Rating

Since the last meeting of the Board there have been 2 sittings of the Valuation Appeal Committee at which 734 cases were cited for hearing. While most of these were resolved, over two hundred cases were continued to future hearings.

There are a further three hearings scheduled before the end of the calendar year. One of these hearings will be held in Stornoway. Appeals against the valuation of deer forests have been cited for December. The large diet of appeals listed for hearing this financial year has placed great demands on staff and it is as a result of their commitment and professionalism that we have succeeded in dealing with the volume satisfactorily.

The remainder of the period to the end of the financial year will see more specialist subjects being dealt with and this should release some staff resource to deal with update of the Valuation Roll.

4. Council Tax

Maintenance of the Council Tax List continues.

At the last meeting of the Board it was reported that engagement with local solicitors was to be pursued with a view to offering a rebanding advice service at the point of sale. The Board suggested that consideration should be given to making this a chargeable service. The matter has been reviewed and while it would appear to be possible to charge for this service there is a very real possibility that a charge would have a severe impact on uptake. It is therefore intended to introduce the option without charge in the first instance and then review the decision based on the level of uptake.

Council Tax appeals are being disposed of by the Valuation Appeal Committee on an ongoing basis.

5. Administration

The review of the Central Admin section's procedures, workloads and resources is now actively underway. Temporary staff continue to be employed to support the Central Admin Section in the meantime.

There has been no improvement in the computing environment although a network upgrade is currently underway in Moray House and it is hoped that this will see some improvement to performance, however the desktop environment is still outdated and in need of upgrade.

6. Staffing

The staffing situation is generally stable. A valuer in the Inverness office retires on 12 December after 27 years of service. The 2 posts of Divisional Valuer have been advertised with a closing date of 28 November.

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: 13 November 2018

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