

# HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

25 January 2019

Agenda Item	9
Report No	VAL/4/19

## 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 further disposal of revaluation appeals and the maintenance of the valuation roll and council tax lists. The Ward 5, Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh By-Election took place on 6 December 2018.

#### 2. Electoral Registration

The 2018 annual canvass was completed with an overall return rate which continues to improve on last year's performance. Publication of the register took place on 1 December as scheduled.

The Ward 5, Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh By-election was held on 6 December and the proximity to the register publication date presented a number of issues due to overlapping timetables relating to publication and provision of election materials which resulted in a compressed timetable, however this was managed satisfactorily. The election passed successfully from the Electoral Registration Officers perspective and there were no clerical errors.

The issue which arose regarding limited IT contingency in the lead up to the election was managed by a number of contingency measures including plans for manual intervention as provision of an IT solution was deemed not possible. Discussion took place with the Returning Officer's staff and it was agreed that additional staff could be deployed in relation to the checking and delivery of polling station registers in the event of a network failure impacting on the timetable. While this was feasible for an election of this scale, and could in this instance provide a solution in the event of a limited network failure, it was nevertheless not without risk and an alternative solution would require to be found for any forthcoming national poll.

### **3. Valuation for Rating**

Since the last meeting of the Board there have been a further 2 sittings of the Valuation Appeal Committee. The hearing that was scheduled to take place in Stornoway did not proceed as settlement was reached between the parties.

Appeals against the valuation of 281 deer forests were cited for hearing in December. Agreement was reached in approximately half of the subjects listed and the remainder were continued to future hearings.

The remainder of the period to the end of the financial year will see more specialist subjects being dealt with and this has released some staff resource to deal with update of the valuation roll which is now underway. There is a significant amount of work to be undertaken and resources are limited. The statutory requirement to undertake this work at this time is likely to have a consequent impact on Council Tax performance in the last quarter of the financial year as resource is diverted to undertake the task.

### **4. Council Tax**

Maintenance of the Council Tax List continues.

Consideration is being given to streamlining the process of entering a subject in the council tax list based on risk.

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

### **5. Administration**

Temporary staff continue to be employed to support the Central Admin Section.

There has been no improvement in the computing environment and although a network upgrade has been carried out in Moray House there is no discernible improvement in performance. The desktop environment remains critically outdated and is having a serious impact on departmental performance. It is regrettable that no timetable can be provided for its replacement.

### **6. Staffing**

The staffing situation is generally stable, although there is the potential for a serious shortage of professional staff.

A valuer in the Inverness office retired on 12 December after 33 years of service and this together with illness is further impacting on overall availability of technical

resource. It is becoming increasingly important that measures are taken to address this issue.

Interviews took place for the 2 posts of Divisional Valuer and appointments have been made. The appointments were both internal and this leaves further vacancies for chartered surveyors.

## **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: 17 January 2019

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