

AGENDA ITEM 4

Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held in Council Offices, Sandwick Road, Stornoway on Friday 21 June 2019 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Representing The Highland Council:

Mr B Boyd (substitute)
Ms K Currie
Mr A Graham (by video conference)
Mr J Gray (by video conference)
Mr L Fraser
Mr D MacLeod
Mrs M Paterson

Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar:

Mr J Mackay

In attendance:

Mr W Gillies, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Mrs M Grigor, Finance Manager, Treasurer's Office (by video conference)
Ms C Stachan, Accountant, Treasurer's Office (by video conference)
Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Treasurer's Office (by video conference)
Mr D Mackay, Democratic Services Manager, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Interim Chair

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Board were informed that in terms of the Board's video conferencing protocol the Convener could not Chair the meeting remotely and given that the Depute Convener had submitted his apologies for the meeting, the Board were invited to appoint an Interim Chair for this meeting.

Mr J Mackay was unanimously appointed as Interim Chair for this meeting.

Business

1. Apologies Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A MacKinnon, Mr A MacLeod and Mrs P Munro. The Board noted that only one substitute member had been appointed.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Meeting Geàrr-chunntas Coinneamh

The Minutes of Meetings of 25 January, 2019 and 29 March, 2019 were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes Gnothaichean Ag Èirigh on Gheàrr-chunntas

There were no matters arising from the Minutes.

5. Membership Ballrachd

The Board **NOTED** the following change in Highland Council appointments to the Board:-

- Mrs H Carmichael has been appointed as a Substitute Member.

6. Internal Audit Annual Report 2018/19 Aithisg Bhliadhnail In-Sgrùdaidh 2018/19

There had been circulated Report No VAL/7/19 by the Corporate Audit Manager, The Highland Council which included an assessment of the Board's framework of governance, risk management and control, and the associated opinion which provides information for the Board's Annual Governance statement.

It was reported that it was considered that the key systems operated in a sound manner and that there had been no fundamental breakdown in control resulting in material discrepancy. It was the audit opinion that reasonable assurance can be placed upon the adequacy and effectiveness of the Board's framework of governance, risk management and control for the year to 31 March 2019. As a measure to improve the Internal Audit process, meetings would be held every six months between the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer and the Corporate Audit Manager to discuss audit matters and to address any outstanding issues including action tracking.

Following consideration the Board **NOTED** the Report and the audit opinion provided.

7. Unaudited Accounts 2018/19 Cunntasan Neo-sgrùdaichte 2018/19

There had been circulated Report No.VAL/8/19 by the Unaudited Statement of Accounts for the financial year 2018/19.

The Report provided to the Board, indicated that the net budgeted expenditure of the Board in 2018/19 was £2.860m with actual expenditure of £2.780m. As the reserves were at the limit that could be transferred to the General Fund (restricted to 3% of total budget in the year of transfer and the cumulative balance should not exceed 5% of the total budget in that year) the £0.080m underspend was returned to the constituent authorities in the same proportion as requisition funding.

Thereafter, the Board **AGREED** that, once an unqualified Report from the Auditor was received, the Audited Accounts would then be incorporated into the Annual Report.

8. Departmental Report Aithisg Roinneil

There had been circulated Report No.VAL/9/19 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which outlined the main business of the office of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer since the last meeting of the Board.

It was reported that the main business since the last meeting of the Board has been the recent European Parliamentary Election. This was an electoral event that was not envisaged until quite late in what would be the normal planning process and even once formal notice had been given the UK Government continued to imply that it might be cancelled. One particular requirement of a European election is that nationals of other European states who are living in the UK and are listed on the Electoral Roll must confirm that they wish to vote in the UK at a particular European Election and not in their home state. The very short lead up to this election resulted in a very limited period for compliance in terms of the law. The ERO wrote to all European Electors giving them the opportunity to complete and return a form to comply with this requirement. This was supported by attempts to raise awareness in the press and social media. The number of electors who returned the necessary information was relatively good in national terms.

The valuation roll was successfully updated in the period leading up to the end of the financial year. This task stretched capacity to the limit given the resource that had been diverted to appeal resolution in the autumn of 2018.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

There have been no improvements made in the computing environment and although a network upgrade had been carried out in Moray House there was no discernible improvement in performance. There had been no confirmation of a timetable for the desktop refresh.

Recruitment of suitably qualified staff continued to present a challenge. Representations had been made to Napier and Strathclyde Universities' to increase the number of Chartered Surveyor course places. The University of Reading was exploring the potential for modelling a Scottish Chartered Surveyors Course.

In relation to appeals against the valuation of shooting rights most would be cited for hearing by 11 December 2019.

Mr Gillies recorded his condolences on behalf of the Board following the death of Mr M Fraser, who had recently retired in service, from his role as Technician.

Following discussion, the Board: -

- i. **NOTED** the recent activities of the Department as set out in the report;
- ii. **AGREED** to present Mr M Fraser's family with a presentation and monetary gift in recognition of his service; and
- iii. **AGREED** to write a letter of support requesting improvements be made in the computing environment for Assessor and Electoral Registration staff as a matter of urgency.

9. Recruitment and Selection Policy Poileasaidh Fastaidh agus Taghaidh

There had been circulated Report No.VAL/10/19 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

The Board **APPROVED** the updated Recruitment and Section Policy.

10. Equalities Mainstreaming and Equalities Outcomes Progress Report Aithisg Thoraidhean Àbhaisteachadh Co-ionannachd agus Co-ionannachd

There had been circulated Report No.VAL/11/19 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

There is a requirement on the Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board to review process and report on changes in relation to Equalities Mainstreaming and Equalities Outcomes. There remains a significant gender pay gap across the Board. Employees with an age profile over 55 years of age remain the dominate grouping. There is low level staff turnover and challenges in recruitment impact on efforts to address the gender pay gap.

A query was raised in relation to the consideration of remote working for employees. Laptop, rather than desktop computers, are being considered as part of IT revision in recognition that this will allow for greater provision for employees to work from home. The Report provided to the Board, will be used by Human Resources in order to address inequalities.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the contents of the Report.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am.