

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

12 September 2019

Agenda Item	7
Report No	VAL/13/19

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 associated with the disposal of revaluation appeals, the annual electoral canvass and the maintenance of the Valuation Roll and Council Tax lists.

2. Electoral Registration

The European Parliamentary Election took place in May and following the election the ERO wrote, as required, to all of those electors who had had their postal vote rejected inviting them to refresh their details.

The annual electoral canvass is currently underway. Household enquiry forms were issued in July and the first reminder has been issued to non-responders. A second reminder will be issued imminently. The percentage return is currently standing at 72.5%, which compares with 74% at the same stage last year. While this is slightly down on last year there are a batch of forms awaiting processing and it is envisaged that the final reminder run will be very close to last year's figure. The number of returns made by interactively via online or text options stands at 43,190 and represents a marginal increase on last year's figure of 42832.

While the benefits of the interactive return are clear in terms of savings in postages and staff time there has been a change to the software and the system had a number of issues this year. The consequence has been the necessity for significant manual intervention and checking, which clearly takes the edge off the benefits.

It would appear that in a year where we had not envisaged there being any national poll, it is now likely to that there will be two major electoral events. Initial planning is now being put in place for a general election.

3. Valuation for Rating

The main activity in this arena has been the resolution of revaluation appeals. There have been three valuation appeal hearings since the last meeting of the Board. Progress towards resolution of all appeals is now broadly in line with that in other valuation areas and currently stands at 58%. A further three Valuation Appeal Committee Hearings are scheduled before the end of the calendar year.

This quarter has seen the disposal of appeals against the valuations of subjects such as local authority schools, small and medium sized supermarkets and non-commercial forestry shooting rights. Commercial forestry shooting rights, hydro electric works, hotels and hospitals are scheduled for the remaining hearing dates this year.

4. Council Tax

Maintenance of the Council Tax List continues and a council tax hearing has been scheduled.

5. Administration

There has still been no improvement in the computing environment, however the Assessor has been invited to be represented on the ICT Implementation Board and this is seen as a positive step.

Work has been taking place over the summer to begin to digitally archive retained historic records. This forms part of our data management improvements and also serves to free up office space.

Highland Council have issued a notice to review the rent for the Wick Office. We have indicated that the proposal is not acceptable and a meeting is being arranged to discuss the issue.

6. Staffing

As previously reported it is proving difficult to recruit qualified valuation staff. Since the last Board meeting a further trainee valuer has been recruited.

Our capacity to provide professional training is limited and a staged approach to trainee appointments is therefore being sought. This should result in more manageable numbers requiring professional training and support at any one time.

Recruitment is underway to recruit two more trainee valuers as part of the "Barclay funding".

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: 5 September 2019

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