

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

19 March 2021

Agenda Item	6
Report No	VAL/1/21

**Revenue Monitoring Report
Period to 31 January 2021**

Report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Summary

This report sets out the revenue monitoring position of the Board for the period to 31 January and the projected year end position.

CURRENT POSITION

The attached monitoring statement shows the position for the period to 31 January 2021. Net expenditure to date is £2.231m and represents 67% of the annual budget of £3.340m.

YEAR-END PROJECTION

At this point in the year, the overall outturn is expected to be an underspend of £0.197m, however, preparation work for the Scottish Parliament election will fall in the final quarter of the financial year. In line with Scottish Government guidance on the Covid-19 pandemic, staff continue to work from home and as previously reported, it is unclear when a full return to the office can be expected.

Staff costs

Salaries including NI, superannuation and overtime

Salary costs indicate an underspend of £0.053m. With the implementation of a new electoral management system and the reformed annual canvass of electors carried out under homeworking conditions, there has been increased levels of overtime working. This is expected to continue in the lead up to the Scottish Parliament election in May 2021. Four clerical posts identified for Barclay implementation were filled in January with new staff taking up post in February and March. The post of Senior Valuer was filled internally in December. A permanent clerical assistant has been appointed to the Central Admin section.

Temporary staff are being recruited to assist with additional workloads anticipated with increased postal voting for the Scottish Parliament election in May 2021.

Travel and subsistence

An underspend of £0.045m is estimated under this budget heading. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, valuation and technical staff have been unable to carry out survey visits and electoral canvassers have been unable to carry out doorstep visits.

Property costs

Heating, Lighting and Cleaning

An underspend has been projected on heating and lighting costs as staff continue to work from home. With the new lockdown restrictions, staff are visiting the office occasionally and daily cleaning in all four of the Board's offices continues to be carried out.

Administrative Costs

Printing, stationery and photocopying

As staff are currently working from home, there has been a reduction in spend on stationery and printing costs however a return to the office by some staff may see an increase in expenditure under this budget heading in the lead up to the Scottish Parliament election.

Postages

Expenditure on postages for the period to date would indicate an underspend however, in the coming months, the ERO anticipates a significant increase in postal voting for the Scottish Parliament election in May 2021. A household notification letter confirming who is registered to vote at a property and which electors have a postal vote was issued at the beginning of February. An invoice for £0.052m for postage costs has still to be paid for this write-out.

A letter to all 16 and 17 year olds encouraging them to register to vote ahead of the Ward 12 by-election and Scottish Parliament election, was issued on 17 February.

A review of printing and postage provision has been undertaken. Although savings and improved working practices have been identified, the Assessor has been unable to make full use of the saving options available due to ICT restrictions. To date these issues are still not fully resolved and have been outstanding since early 2020 but have become critical with the ongoing Covid-19 situation and home working.

Telephone and fax costs

Due to home working, an underspend in telephone costs has been projected.

Legal Expenses

While the period to date indicates zero expenditure, some legal work has been incurred but has not yet been invoiced. The Valuation Appeal Committee have cited approaching one thousand material change of circumstance appeals in relation to Covid-19 which are likely to require legal advice and/or representation.

Other Administration Costs

Other administration costs are currently showing no spend to date. Audit Scotland invoices for the current financial year still need to be received and processed. It is projected that this budget head will be within budget.

Transport Costs

As the Assessor has been following Scottish Government guidance in relation to Covid-19, meetings that would normally have been held across Scotland with the Scottish Assessors Association and other stakeholders, have been carried out by MS Teams reducing the requirement for hire cars. This position may change if and when restrictions are lifted.

Supplies and Services

Computer charges

Payments for computer charges are projected as being over budget. Annual billing from Wipro of £0.173m will be billed at the beginning of March. Due to Covid-19 the ERO has made provision for the vast majority of electoral forms to be scanned using an external scanning bureau.

In preparation for the Scottish Parliament election, laptops have been borrowed from Wipro however, large screens and other equipment such as keyboards and mice will be required. As Wipro currently has no stock of these items, they will be purchased through external sources.

The Electoral Registration Officer is in the process of moving to a cloud hosting service for the electoral management software system. This will reduce costs from Wipro of carrying out upgrades and it is expected that this will improve slow network speeds experienced by electoral processing staff in the run up to elections.

Bulk printing from the Board's contracted print supplier which falls under this budget head, is likely to increase before the end of the financial year with issue of electoral forms including postal vote applications and invitations to register.

Board Expenses

With meetings being held using Microsoft Teams, a lower spend is predicted under this budget head.

Valuation Appeal Committee Expenses

There is uncertainty relating to the costs associated with Valuation Appeal hearings scheduled throughout the current financial year. The actuals to date for Valuation Appeal hearings show an overspend of £0.011m with an invoice for £0.014m for work carried out in December and January still to be paid. As previously reported, the Assessor has no control over this budget head. An overspend of £0.032m is currently projected.

Income

A funding allocation of £0.151m has been made available to the Electoral Registration Officer to increase capacity to process postal vote applications in the lead up to the Scottish Parliament election on 6 May 2021.

This funding will be used to procure services, such as the use of an external scanning bureau, printing/posting of postal vote application forms by a contracted print supplier, hosting service for the electoral management system and a citizen app which will allow electors to request postal vote application forms. Temporary staff will be recruited, and it is anticipated that resource can be made available from our pool of doorstep canvassers. An increase in postages, staff overtime and advertising costs has been factored into the election plan submitted to the Scottish Government.

Recommendation

The Board is invited to comment and otherwise note the content of this report.

Designation: Assessor and ERO

Date: 15 February 2021

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Office & Support Manager

HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

**REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21
MONITORING STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 January 2021**

Heading	Period to date		Annual Estimated		Year End
	Budget £000	Actual £000	Budget £000	Estimated outturn £000	Estimated variance £000
Staff costs					
Salaries including NI, superann and overtime	1,836	1,639	2,203	2,150	(53)
Travel and subsistence	60	17	72	27	(45)
Other staff costs	38	33	45	47	2
	1,934	1,689	2,320	2,224	(96)
Property costs					
Heating, lighting and cleaning	40	12	47	30	(17)
Rent, rates and water	174	168	198	198	0
Other property costs	6	4	7	7	0
	220	184	252	235	(17)
Administrative costs					
Printing, stationery and photocopying	22	2	26	16	(10)
Postages	108	89	130	190	60
Telephone and fax costs	9	2	12	8	(4)
Advertising	2	0	2	4	2
Legal expenses	25	0	30	30	0
Other administration costs	8	1	9	9	0
	174	94	209	257	48
Apportioned Costs					
Central service support	0	0	60	60	0
Transport costs	4	0	5	1	(4)
Supplies and services					
Computer charges	316	216	380	420	40
	316	216	380	420	40
Board expenses	9	0	10	5	(5)
Valuation Appeal Committee expenses	116	127	139	170	31
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	2,772	2,310	3,375	3,372	(3)
Income	(29)	(79)	(35)	(229)	(194)
NET EXPENDITURE	2,744	2,231	3,340	3,143	(197)