

Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday, 23 September, 2022 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Representing The Highland Council:

Mr M Cameron (remotely)
Ms T Collier (remotely)
Mr L Fraser
Mr A Graham
Ms J McEwan
Mr S Mackie (remotely)
Mr P Oldham (substitute) (remotely)
Mrs M Paterson

Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar:

Mr D Crichton

In attendance:

Mr B Gillies, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Mr F Finlayson, Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Mr S Fraser Clerk to the Board
Ms L Harrison, Accountant, Treasurer's Office
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Clerk's Office

Mr L Fraser in the chair

Business

**1. Apologies
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd and Mr G Murray.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntas Coinneamh**

The had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of 20 June, 2022, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

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

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. Appointment of Treasurer

Following the resignation of the previous Treasurer, the Board **AGREED** to appoint the Head of Corporate Finance, The Highland Council as Treasurer to the Board, with immediate effect.

6. Appointment of Monitoring Officer

Following the resignation of the previous Monitoring Officer, the Board **AGREED** to appoint the Democratic Services Manager, The Highland Council as Monitoring Officer with immediate effect.

7. Revenue Budget Monitoring Statement 2022/23 Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Teachd-a-Steach 2022/23

There was circulated Report No VAL/12/22 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

It was highlighted that for the period to 31 August 2022 net expenditure to date was £1.232m and represented 34% of the annual budget of £3.646m. At this point in the year, the overall outturn was expected to be an underspend of £0.180m, however, as in previous years, this projection was sensitive to the eventual outturn of the annual electoral canvass. There was an estimated underspend on salary costs as it had been difficult to recruit to some vacant clerical and valuer positions.

The Board **NOTED** the content of the report.

8. Departmental Report Aithisg Roinneil

There was circulated Report No VAL/13/22 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which outlined the main business of the department since the last meeting.

It was highlighted that the main priority for the valuation sections was the preparation of the 2023 Non Domestic Rates Revaluation. Preparatory work for the 2023 Revaluation was well underway. The process was time consuming and resource intensive. In total over twenty six thousand subjects had to be revalued and draft valuation notices must be issued to all proprietors, tenants and occupiers by the end of November 2022. In response to a query it was advised that revaluations were not all done individually and bulk subjects such as shops, offices, workshops, public buildings were revalued with computer assistance.

The Board **NOTED** the recent activities of the department as set out in the report.

9. Elections Act 2022

There was circulated Report No. VAL/14/22 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which provided an overview of the Elections Act 2022 from the Electoral Registration Officer's perspective.

It was highlighted that the Act required voters to show photo ID at polling stations before a ballot paper is issued. This change would require Electoral Registration Officers to issue free voter authority certificates, temporary voter authority certificates or anonymous electors documents to those without a valid form of photo ID.

It was queried what burden would be placed on staff as a result of the requirement in the Act to allow all British citizens living overseas to vote in UK Parliamentary elections, regardless of when they left the UK. It was advised that while the volume of people being allowed to vote may increase, this requirement would simplify the current administrative process and therefore there should be less burden on staff as a result of this change.

The recruitment challenges facing the Service, as reported at previous meetings, was an ongoing problem within the Service and workloads were stretched.

The timelines for implementation of the Elections Act remained subject to change. Two members of the management team had attended an Elections Act conference in Birmingham on 12 September 2022. The feedback from the conference was good as it provided further insight on how some of the policy may work in practice and it allowed Electoral Registrations Officers to share experiences in this area too.

The Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

10. Employee Review and Development Policy

There was circulated Report No. VAL/15/22 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

It was highlighted that staff continued to work from home, but more time was being spent in the office. It was known from staff surveys that staff preferred this hybrid approach to work and this helped with staff recruitment and retention. Overall homeworking had worked well, but there were elements of work that were still better carried out in an office environment, such as training of staff.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that there was enough space in the Service's offices if all staff wished to work in the office. Work to digitalise files would likely free up more space in offices.

The Board **APPROVED** the Employee Review and Development Policy.

11. Annual Code of Corporate Governance

There was circulated Report No. VAL/16/22 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

Following consideration, the Board **APPROVED** the Annual Code of Corporate Governance.

AOB

i Audited Accounts 2021/22 – It was **NOTED** that the Audited Accounts 2021/22 would be submitted to the next meeting of the Board.

ii Electoral Register – an undertaking had been given to check with the supplier if the layout of the paper copy of the Electoral Register could be improved. In particular, having postcodes on the Register was requested. It was advised that work was ongoing with the Software supplier on potential improvements to the layout of the Register.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 a.m.