

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 Tuesday, 21 March 2023 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Representing The Highland Council:

Mr M Cameron (remotely)
Ms T Collier (remotely)
Mr L Fraser
Mr A Graham
Mrs M Paterson
Mrs T Robertson (substitute)

Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar:

Mr D Crichton
Mr G Murray (remotely)

In attendance:

Mr F Finlayson, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Ms M Thomson, Office and Support Manager, Assessor and Electoral Registration Service
Ms L Harrison, Accountant, Treasurer's Office
Miss J MacLennan, Clerk's Office

Also in attendance:-

Ms E Scoburgh, Audit Scotland
Mr D Fraser, Audit Scotland

Mr L Fraser in the chair

Business

1. Apologies Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Ms J McEwan and Mr S Mackie.

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 25 November 2022, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

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

In relation to Item 10, Dates of Meetings 2023, the Clerk informed the Board that the arrangements for their visit to Stornoway had been put on hold given the decision by Loganair, the flight operator, to suspend flights to Stornoway. Also, there were no flights available for the Board meeting dates in June and September and it was suggested that the meeting be moved to Thursday 22 June 2023, when flights were available, once Loganair announced a resumption of service.

The Board **AGREED** the revised arrangements should they be required.

5. Revenue Monitoring Report Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Teachd-a-Steach

There was circulated Report No VAL/1/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

For the period to 28 February 2023 net expenditure to date was £2.724m, representing 75% of the annual budget of £3.646m. At this point in the year, the overall outturn was expected to be an underspend of £0.245m largely due to unfilled vacancies and an estimated reduction in both legal expenses and Valuation Appeal Committee costs for the year.

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

6. Proposed Revenue Budget 2023 Buidseat Teachd-a-Steach 2023 ga Mholadh

There was circulated Report No. VAL/2/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

In acknowledging the risk that the level of service might be compromised if staff recruitment issues were not addressed, the Assessor and ERO outlined the various vacant posts, including those that can deputise as Assessor or ERO. At present service delivery was manageable by moving the workforce around but a longer term approach was needed and discussions were to take place with the HR Team at Highland Council to look at innovation in filling posts. There were also difficulties in recruiting Electoral canvassers which had dropped from a peak of 70 to around 20. As a potential avenue of streamlining the process it was suggested that further approaches to telephone canvassing could be considered.

The Board:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed budget; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the Assessor and ERO investigate the possibility of exploring further options for telephone canvassing.

7. Annual Audit Plan 2022/23 Plana Sgrùdaidh Bliadhna 2022/23

There was circulated Report No. VAL/3/23 by the External Auditor, Audit Scotland setting out the 2022/23 Annual Audit Plan for the Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board. The report set out the planned work to be carried out in connection with the 2022/23 audit.

Audit Scotland had been appointed as the external auditor of the Joint Board for the period 2022/23 to 2026/27 inclusive and a brief biography of the team was provided. Members were taken through the responsibilities of the auditor and of the Board itself, the Financial Statements, wider scope and best value and the reporting arrangements, timetable and audit fee.

In discussion the impact of Covid-19 was explored, as was the move to hybrid working and the need to achieve a balance between on-site presence and being remote. In response, assurance was given that Covid-19 was unlikely to be an issue for the 2022/23 accounts and two of the audit team were based in the north of Scotland. Whilst being mindful of the need to avoid unnecessary travel for reasons of efficiencies and climate change, the Senior Audit Manager did intend to be present when the final audited account were laid before the Board.

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

8. Departmental Report Aithisg Roinneil

There was circulated Report No VAL/2/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which outlined the main business of the department since the last meeting.

The Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the recent activities of the department as set out in the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to grant 8 May 2023 as an additional Public Holiday to celebrate the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles.

9. Annual Complaints Report Aithisg Bhliadhnail Ghearanan

There was circulated Report No. VAL/5/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

In acknowledging that the low number was reassuring, the Board **NOTED** the Annual Complaints Report.

10. Records Management Policy Poileasaidh Rianachd Chlàran

There was circulated Report No. VAL/6/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

It was explained that the approach adopted by the service mirrored that of Highland Council and that the Assessor and ERO was confident that access to documents were restricted to only those required to see them. However, it was also pointed out that the service was continuing to move towards a more paperless approach.

The Board **APPROVED** the updated Records Management Policy.

11. Data Protection Policy Poileasaidh Dìon Dàta

There was circulated Report No. VAL/7/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

The Board **APPROVED** the updated Data Protection Policy.

12. Personal Data Breach Policy
Poileasaidh Briseadh Dàta Pearsanta

There was circulated Report No. VAL/8/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

The Board **APPROVED** the updated Personal Data Breach Policy.

13. Special Category Personal Data Policy
Poileasaidh Dàta Pearsanta Earrainn Shònraichte

There was circulated Report No. VAL/9/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

The Board **APPROVED** the updated Special Category Personal Data Policy.

14. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Board **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 & 14 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

15. Business Continuity Plan in Event of Information Systems Failure
Plana Leantainneachd Gnothachais Ri Linn Fàilligeadh Shìostaman Fiosrachaidh

There was circulated to Members only, Report No. VAL/10/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Following discussion, the Board **APPROVED** the updated Business Continuity Plan.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 a.m.