

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, 17 November, 2023 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Representing The Highland Council:

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

In attendance:

Mr F Finlayson, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Mr S Mackenzie, Assistant Assessor
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Clerk's Office

Also in attendance:-

Mr D Fraser, Auditor, Audit Scotland

Mr L Fraser in the chair

Business

1. Apologies for absence Leisgeulan

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

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Minutes of Meetings Geàrr-chunntas Coinneamh

The had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of 22 September, 2023, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

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

It was highlighted that Member attendance at Board meetings was still an issue. A reminder had been sent to Members to arrange a substitute if they were unable to attend Board meetings.

It was noted that no progress had been made as yet on a logo for the department, given the pressure of other business. Councillor A Graham asked that it be recorded

that he did not wish to take part in choosing a logo given his previous experiences on these matters and hoped it would be left to Officers to decide on this.

5. Departmental Report Aithisg Roinneil

There was circulated Report No VAL/26/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which outlined the main business of the department since the last meeting.

Following a summary of the report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- The SharePoint project, which improves the organisation of, and access to, electronic files was still progressing. Reference was made to the recent cyber attack on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar which had affected its IT systems and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency had also had a cyber attack a few years ago. The department held a vast amount of electronic data including sensitive information such as peoples names, addresses etc and an assurance was sought that there was a high awareness to the dangers of a cyber attack on the department. It was confirmed that the department was aware of the dangers of a cyber attack on its IT systems and the Assessor and ERO was to arrange a meeting about this with the Head of ICT and Digital Transformation, Highland Council as the department was very reliant on the Highland Council for its cyber security.
- It was queried what stage the budget preparation was at. It was advised that work on the draft budget for the Board would commence next week and would be submitted to the Board meeting early in the new year.
- It was queried that if the pay settlement was higher than budgeted how would this be covered. It was advised that the department had an underspend in its salaries budget, so the cost of a pay settlement over that budgeted for would be absorbed within the salaries budget.
- A by-election was held in Ward 7 – Tain and Easter Ross on 28 September 2023. From the Electoral Registration Officers perspective, this was a well-run election with no clerical errors and the department were congratulated for this.
- The vacant Valuer post had been advertised a number of times over the last few years without success due to there being a shortage of Valuers across the country. It was queried who was covering the work for this vacant post. It was advised that the workload for this vacant post was spread across the rest of the team which was not ideal. There was consideration to taking on a graduate or trainee for the Valuer post and an update on this would be provided at a future meeting.

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

6. Revenue Budget Monitoring Statement 2023/24 Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Teachd-a-Steach 2023/24

There was circulated Report No VAL/27/23 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

It was highlighted that at this point in the year, the overall outturn was expected to be an underspend of £0.141m however, as in previous years, this projection was sensitive to the eventual outturn of the annual electoral canvass. There were also unfilled

vacancies across the organisation. A meeting with the Head of ICT and Digital Transformation had been requested to discuss a number of ICT issues, such as the telephone system costs. Advertising costs were above budget due to promotional events held at UHI to encourage voter registration. Digitisation costs were expected to be within budget. Funding had been received due to work carried out on the Elections Act 2022. Due to an increase in postage costs, it was expected that this budget head will be overspent at the end of the financial year and there was a move to carrying out more electronic communications where possible.

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

7. Dates for meetings 2024
Cinn-latha Choinneamhan 2024

The Board **AGREED** the following meeting dates for 2024:-

early February- (date to be confirmed)

Thursday, 20 June (Stornoway)

late September (date to be confirmed)

Wednesday, 20 November (provisional date to be confirmed)

All meetings to commence at 10.30a.m.

The meeting concluded at 11.05 a.m.