

LANARKSHIRE VALUATION JOINT BOARD

Minutes of meeting held via Microsoft Teams on 7 June 2021

Convener:

Councillor Alex McVey, North Lanarkshire Council

Councillors Present:

South Lanarkshire Council

Councillor Walter Brogan, Councillor Poppy Corbett, Councillor Peter Craig, Councillor Isobel Dorman, Councillor Lynsey Hamilton (Vice Convener), Councillor Ann Le Blond

Councillors' Apologies:

North Lanarkshire Council

Councillor Bob Burgess, Councillor Tom Castles, Councillor Tom Johnston, Councillor Jim Reddin, Councillor William Shields, Councillor Caroline Stephen, Councillor Annette Valentine

South Lanarkshire Council

Councillor Geri Gray, Councillor Jim Wardhaugh

Attending:

Assessor and Electoral Registration Service

G Bennett, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer; J Neason, Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Clerk's Office

C Sneddon, Clerk; S McLeod, Administration Officer; L Wyllie, Administration Assistant, South Lanarkshire Council

Treasurer's Office

Y Douglas, Audit and Compliance Manager; P Manning, Treasurer; L O'Hagan, Finance Manager (Strategy), South Lanarkshire Council

Also Attending:

Audit Scotland

B Gillespie, Lead Auditor; A Kerr, Senior Audit Manager

Convener's Opening Remarks

The Convener advised that Andrew Kerr had replaced Dave Richardson, who had recently retired, as the appointed auditor for the Joint Board and welcomed him to his first meeting. Mr Kerr responded in suitable terms.

1 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 1 March 2021 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Board decided:

that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

3 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/2022 - Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Treasurer was submitted comparing the Board's actual expenditure at 23 April 2021 against the budgeted expenditure for 2021/2022 and providing a forecast for the year to 31 March 2022.

As at 23 April 2021, there was an underspend on the Board's revenue budget of £0.016 million. The financial forecast to 31 March 2022 was a breakeven position.

The Board, at its meeting on 7 December 2020, had approved a budget of £3.835 million for 2021/2022, which included a 1% reduction in the constituent authorities' requisition payments in anticipation of a 1% reduction in the grant funding provided by the Scottish Government. As a result of the Scottish Government settlement not being reduced, the budgeted requisition payments had been reinstated and had been offset by a reduction in the use of reserves to balance the budget.

The Scottish Government had granted funding totalling £0.704 million for 2021/2022 to address and identify costs to the Board arising from the Barclay Review. The sums from North and South Lanarkshire Councils, each amounting to £0.352 million, had been transferred to the Board through additional requisition payments.

As a result of the Canvass Reform, there was no longer Cabinet Office funding for Individual Electoral Registration which had resulted in the budgets for income and administration costs both being reduced by £0.020 million.

The adjustments and revised budget for 2021/2022 of £4.519 million, which reflected the level of requisitions and use of reserves, were detailed in Appendix A to the report.

The Board decided:

- (1) that an underspend of £0.016 million on Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board's revenue budget, as detailed in Appendix A of the report, be noted; and
- (2) that the forecast to 31 March 2022 of a break even position be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 7 December 2020 (Paragraph 4)]

4 Internal Audit Annual Assurance Report 2020/2021

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources), South Lanarkshire Council was submitted:-

- ◆ detailing progress on, and performance of, Internal Audit services to Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board in 2020/2021
- ◆ providing an independent audit opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Board's framework of governance, risk management and control arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2021

The Internal Audit Annual Report in relation to the Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board covered:-

- ◆ workload and performance
- ◆ basis of the audit opinion
- ◆ delivery of audit actions
- ◆ audit findings
- ◆ the opinion of Internal Audit on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Board's internal control systems

The opinion of Internal Audit for the year 2020/2021 was that a reasonable level of assurance could be placed on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Board's internal control systems and governance arrangements.

The Board decided:

- (1) that the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2020/2021 for the Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board be noted; and
- (2) that the opinion of Internal Audit be considered in the preparation of the 2020/2021 Statement of Governance for the Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board.

[Reference: Minutes of 1 June 2020 (Paragraph 4)]

5 Annual Governance Statement

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Treasurer was submitted on the Annual Governance Statement for 2020/2021 which would be included in the Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board's 2020/2021 Annual Accounts.

The Board's Annual Governance Statement 2020/2021, which was attached as an appendix to the report, provided details of the systems for internal control which were in place to ensure a robust governance structure. For 2020/2021, the Treasurer's opinion was that the systems for internal control were effective. Those would continue to be reviewed and improved, as appropriate, in 2021/2022.

The Board decided: that the Annual Governance Statement, attached as an appendix to the report, be approved for inclusion in the Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board's 2020/2021 Annual Accounts.

6 2020/2021 Annual Report and Accounts - Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Treasurer was submitted on the Board's Annual Report and Accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2021.

At its meeting on 1 March 2021, the Board had been advised of a probable outturn transfer to reserves of £0.140 million. Appendix 1 to the report detailed the actual position for the Board for the year ended 31 March 2021 which showed a transfer to reserves of £0.161 million. The unaudited Annual Report and Accounts, attached as Appendix 2 to the report, detailed the Revenue Accounts and Balance Sheet position as at 31 March 2021 which showed a net deficit position of £0.257 million. After implementing statutory accounting practice, the net position on the Board's General Fund Balance was a surplus of £0.161 million, as shown in Appendix 1. This sum, when added to the General Reserve of £0.947 million carried forward from 2019/2020, gave the Board a closing General Reserve position of £1.108 million at 31 March 2021.

The Board decided: that the unaudited Annual Report and Accounts for the Board for the year ended 31 March 2021, attached as an appendix to the report, be approved for submission to the external auditors, Audit Scotland.

[Reference: Minutes of 7 December 2020 (Paragraph 3) and 1 March 2021 (Paragraph 3)]

7 Change in Membership of the Board

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Clerk was submitted on a change to North Lanarkshire Council's membership of the Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board.

At the meeting of North Lanarkshire Council held on 1 April 2021, it was agreed that Councillor Tom Johnston replace Councillor Lynne Anderson as a member of the Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board.

The Board decided: that it be noted that Councillor Tom Johnston had replaced Councillor Lynne Anderson as a nominated representative of North Lanarkshire Council on the Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board.

8 Equality Reporting: Mainstreaming Equalities Report and Equalities Outcomes 2021 to 2025

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer was submitted on the progress of the Board's Mainstreaming Equalities Report and Equality Outcomes 2021 to 2025.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 and 2016 respectively required the Board to:-

- ◆ gather and use information on the composition, recruitment, development and retention of employees
- ◆ publish gender pay gap information together with a statement on equal pay and include information on occupational segregation

This information had been included in the Mainstreaming Equalities Report and Equality Outcomes 2021 to 2025 which was attached as an appendix to the report.

In response to a question from the Convener, the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer advised that there had been a reduction in the gender pay gap since the previous report had been published and that efforts continued to identify ways to further reduce the gap.

The Board decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 3 June 2019 (Paragraph 7) and 1 June 2020 (Paragraph 9)]

9 Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board Public Performance Report 2020/2021

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer was submitted on the Board's Public Performance Report for the financial year 2020/2021. The Public Performance Report, attached as an appendix to the report, outlined the Board's performance in its core service delivery areas during 2020/2021.

The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer responded to a question regarding the risk of appeals in terms of Council Tax bands and provided reasons why he considered the risk of appeals was low.

The Board decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 1 June 2020 (Paragraph 10)]

10 Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board Efficiency Gains 2020/2021

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer was submitted on the Board's efficiency gains for the financial year 2020/2021.

The report outlined Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board's efficiency measures implemented in 2020/2021 and detailed both cashable and non-cashable efficiency gains totalling £328,199.13.

Details of the efficiency gains for 2020/2021 were provided in the appendix to the report.

The Board decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 1 June 2020 (Paragraph 8)]

11 Monitoring of Complaints - 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Assistant Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer was submitted on complaints received by the Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

A total of 6 complaints had been received in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Of those, 2 related to Council Tax, 3 related to non-domestic rating and 1 related to electoral registration. No complaints had been classified as upheld, 5 had not been upheld and 1 had been partially upheld. One of the complaints partially related to equal opportunities and the equal opportunities element of the complaint had not been upheld.

No complaints had proceeded to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) during the year 2020/2021.

The Board decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 1 June 2020 (Paragraph 12)]

12 Progress Update

A report dated 25 May 2021 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer was submitted on:-

- ◆ an overview of the Service
- ◆ current issues and Service priorities, including the response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- ◆ an update on performance
- ◆ issues affecting the future direction of the Joint Board
- ◆ 3 complaints received and dealt with since the last quarterly report

Statistical information, illustrating progress made in terms of key areas of the work undertaken by Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board, was provided in the appendices to the report.

The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer responded to members' questions regarding arrangements for the Valuation Appeal Committee to hold virtual hearings.

The Board decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 1 March 2021 (Paragraph 8)]

13 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.