



# **SERVICE PLAN 2008-2011**

## **OUTCOMES**

## 1. **INTRODUCTION**

The Service Plan for Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board for the period 2008-2011 was originally presented to the Board meeting of June 2008.

Progress updates and review reports were provided to the Board over the 2008-2011 period. The Plan, in addition to LVJB's mission and vision statement, contained three parts, namely:

- Part one – Service Function
- Part two – Core Objectives
- Part three – Key Activities

Part two of the Plan set out the core objectives for LVJB covering key service delivery areas. This document reports on the outcomes linked to those core objectives of LVJB's Service Plan for 2008-2011.

## CORE OBJECTIVES - OUTCOMES

### 2. THE VALUATION ROLL

- 2.1 **Maintenance of the Valuation Roll**, including the addition of new subjects and the amendment of existing subjects, has been undertaken, year-on-year, in accordance with the Joint Board's established procedures for completion within the statutory timescales and annual targets. Valuation Notices have been issued to all Proprietors, Tenants and Occupiers and all relevant changes notified to the billing authorities. Over the three year period of the 2008-11 Service Plan, 4,700 alterations to the roll were made to reflect new, amended or demolished properties.

The valuation roll as at 1/4/08 contained 18,102 properties with a rateable value circa £680 million. As at 31/3/11 the valuation roll contained 18,548 properties with a rateable value of circa £945 million.

- 2.2 **The revaluation 2010** was carried out within statutory timescales, involving the substantial information gathering process associated with the revaluation of non domestic properties together with the development of valuation schemes for a range of specific subject types. Some 18,000 subjects were re-valued as part of the revaluation 2010 process. The rateable value for subjects in Lanarkshire as at 31/3/10 (pre-revaluation) was circa £685 million; as at 1/4/10 (post revaluation) that figure had risen to over £970 million. A series of reports on the revaluation were submitted to Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board covering both progress and outcomes.

New customer focused initiatives linked to the 2010 revaluation included for the first time the provision of online summary valuations for bulk class subjects (namely shops, offices and industrial subjects) resulting in approximately 13,000 summary valuations for subjects within the Lanarkshire area being able to be viewed at the Scottish Assessors Association Portal ([www.saa.gov.uk](http://www.saa.gov.uk)).

- 2.3 **7,494 non domestic 2010 revaluation appeals** were submitted before the statutory deadline for lodging such appeals against entries made in the 2010 Revaluation Roll for Lanarkshire. Over 6,900 2005 revaluation appeals were disposed of by the statutory deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008. Additionally, in the period 1/4/2008 – 31/3/2011 some 2,796 running roll appeals were disposed of compared to 701 for the preceding three year period. In March 2011 over 3,000 running roll appeals were received by ratepayers and professional agents citing the economic downturn as the main ground of appeal.

Several cases, both 2005 revaluation and running roll appeals, proceeded to hearing at the Lanarkshire Valuation Appeal committee, the decisions of which can be accessed at [www.lvap.org](http://www.lvap.org)

A customer focused initiative relating to the lodging of non domestic appeals was introduced at the SAA Portal allowing rating agents to lodge bulk appeals online.

- 2.4 **The Lands Tribunal for Scotland** heard various representations from the Lanarkshire Assessor, including procedural hearings relating to large industrial subjects and sites of auto teller machines at Post Offices. A full case proceeded in relation to two appeals where the agent sought one entry for both subjects in the valuation roll (to be treated as an Unum quid) with the decision of The Lands Tribunal upholding the position of the Lanarkshire Assessor. An appeal by the appellant to the Lands Valuation Appeal Court was subsequently dropped.
- 2.5 In relation to **electricity subjects**, remitted to the Assessor for Lanarkshire in accordance with The Non Domestic Rating (Valuation of Utilities) (Scotland) Order 2005, these were re-valued for the first time since their return to conventional rating from prescription. The revaluation of such subjects resulted in value levels for such entries rising from circa £180 million to over £400 million.

### **3. THE VALUATION LIST**

- 3.1 **Maintenance of the Valuation List**, in particular the addition of new subjects, was undertaken, year-on-year, in accordance with the Joint Board's established procedures. Over the period 2008-2011 some 6,890 new houses were added to the valuation list for council tax, with 1,282 houses deleted over the same timescale. Banding Notices were issued and all relevant changes notified to the billing authorities. As at 31/3/11, there were 292,847 houses on the Council Tax list in Lanarkshire.
- 3.2 **Band changes** following alteration and subsequent sale have continued to be effected in accordance with statutory requirements. Due to increased workload in other business areas, principally the voluminous number of council tax proposals and appeals received on the back of a nationwide media campaign, the timescales taken to effect such band changes was materially affected. Over the period of the 2008-11 Service Plan, circa 250 council tax bands were increased as a result of alterations affecting the value of a house followed by its subsequent sale.
- 3.3 **Proposals and appeals** of band levels of entries on the council tax list increased 15 fold to over 1500 following a nationwide media campaign. Resources were re-allocated to deal with the appeals as efficiently as possible. As at 31/3/11 there were 137 outstanding council tax proposals/appeals. In total over the period 1/4/08-31/3/11 some 1,843 council tax proposals and appeals were disposed of.

### **4. REGISTER OF ELECTORS**

- 4.1 **The Annual Canvass** was carried out each year (2008, 2009 & 2010) during August – November with reference to the qualifying date of 15<sup>th</sup> October. Each annual canvass included, where no form was returned, at least one reminder issued together with an incentivised door to door canvass to ensure the maximum possible return of completed canvass forms. A detailed canvass plan was developed and reviewed following each canvass. As at 1/5/2008, there were 489,288 electors registered in Lanarkshire. As at 31/3/2011, that figure was 489,852.

- 4.2 **Co-ordinated Online register of Electors – CORE:** in April 2008 the Secretary of State of Justice issued a directive pursuant of her powers under s.52(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 that from 1 December 2009 all Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain must ensure that any electoral registration data held on electronic systems is formatted in accordance with specific data standards. This involved a comprehensive data matching exercise with constituent authorities Corporate Address Gazetteers, and the inclusion of the CAG Unique property Reference Numbers into LVJB's electoral registration software application in preparation for the publication of the 2009 electoral registers.
- 4.3 Over the 2008-2011 period, a number of **initiatives were introduced to ensure the completeness and accuracy** of the electoral register, including:
- a detailed data matching programme with a number of other data sets including those held by constituent authorities council tax resources, targeting in the first instance houses believed to be occupied but with no entry on the register; over the period of the Service Plan this has seen such instances fall over 50% from circa 30,000 houses to circa 14,000 houses.
  - the introduction of structured registration reviews assisting in the improvement of the register
  - the annual review of the canvass form to ensure it remained updated and user friendly.
  - the introduction of in-house electoral registration forums
  - the introduction of joint electoral forums involving constituent authorities
- 4.4 **The 'Full' Annual and 'Edited' Registers** were published each year following the annual canvass carried.
- 4.5 **The Register** was updated on a monthly basis between January and August by the production of Lists of Alterations. Statutory Notices and Lists were timeously provided to relevant parties.
- 4.6 **Election Registers and Lists of Absent/Postal/Proxy voters etc** were produced as required by statute and by agreement with Returning Officers.
- 4.7 Work associated with the **European Parliament Election in June 2009, and the UK General Election in May 2010** was timeously completed. The introduction of a detailed election plan for each assisted in the allocation and execution of all related election tasks.
- 4.8 The introduction of a proprietary software solution (Delta) for the provision of registers has contributed towards **the secure and efficient supply of electoral registers**, paving the way for the cessation of the printing of voluminous paper copies of them.
- 4.9 The collection and verification of information relating to **postal voters** has been undertaken as required; as at 31/3/11 the number of postal voters stood at over 45,000.
- 4.10 Over the period of the 2008-2011 Service Plan LVJB either met or was above all 10 of the **performance standards introduced by the Electoral Commission** in 2008.

## 5. **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

- 5.1 ***The Valuation Joint Board held quarterly meetings each year*** over the period 2008-2011. A strategy for dealing specifically with the budgetary pressures as a result of the economic downturn continued to be discussed by the Board throughout the period of the Service Plan. A risk assessment of the adopted budget strategy was circulated to the Board at the meeting of November 2010, with an updated full risk register presented at the meeting of March 2011.
- 5.2 The officers of the Valuation Joint Board acted in accordance with the relevant ***Schemes of Delegation, Financial Regulations, Standing Orders and Codes of Conduct***. The area of Governance has been agreed with SLC Internal Audit as an area to be audited over the period 2011-2012.
- 5.3 ***Strategic and detailed Annual Service Plans*** were implemented, maintained and actioned. Updates on the Service Plan were provided to the Valuation Joint Board.
- 5.4 ***The strategic objectives of the organisation*** were communicated to staff via core briefs following the setting of the objectives at management team meetings. The monitoring of the objectives in terms of outcomes was reviewed at subsequent management team meetings.
- 5.5 ***Effective and detailed performance management systems*** have been implemented and monitored at both Valuation and Electoral Forums, with reviews being carried out at management team meetings.
- 5.6 ***Specific operational issues*** were discussed at the various Forums set up to ensure that operational policies are reviewed, updated and implemented, allowing best practice to be shared between working partners. Groups include Electoral Forums, Valuation Forums, Joint Finance forums, Health and Safety Working Group and an I.T. Group. All ensure that appropriate procedures and processes were adhered to. These groups in turn reported to the monthly management team meetings.
- 5.7 Throughout the period 2008-2011 senior management liaised ***with staff representatives*** when required.
- 5.8 Where deemed appropriate the Valuation Joint Board aligned its ***Personnel and other related policies*** with those of South Lanarkshire Council. An agreement was reached with SLC Personnel to tailor key policies for LVJB use, making them more appropriate to LVJB as a separate organisation with different corporate structure and designations to that of SLC.
- 5.9 ***The financial management and operations*** of the Valuation Joint Board were subject to internal and external audit (see later).

5.10 **Corporate Governance** will form an area for audit, to be carried out independently by South Lanarkshire Council's Internal Auditor, in order to seek assurance that the governance of LVJB is both standard compliant and at a satisfactory level.

## 6. **ACCOUNTABILITY**

6.1 **Annual Accounts** were submitted for external audit and published in accordance with the requirements of Audit Scotland throughout the period of the 2008 – 2011 Service Plan. The accounts were all passed without qualification by the external auditor.

6.2 **A Service Level Agreement** with SLC Internal Audit was agreed.

6.3 **Detailed Annual audit plans** were agreed with Internal Audit Services of South Lanarkshire Council and over the period of the Service Plan, the following business areas were reported to the Board following detailed audits by Internal Audit Services:

- Information management
- HRMS payroll controls
- Workforce Monitoring Statistics
- Business Continuity
- Partnership Working
- Reviews of Best Value and Community Planning
- Governance checks
- Efficient Government Statement
- Workplace Stress
- Shared Systems and Cross-cutting Reviews
- Performance management
- Email and Internet Usage

6.4 **Performance** across both valuation and electoral registration was monitored and reported internally and externally. Accordingly, a schedule of performance reports were developed and reported to at monthly management team meetings and also the Valuation and Electoral Forums. In response to changing external requirements and business need, the schedule was subject to continuous review. Performance was continually reported to the Board at the quarterly meetings.

6.5 **Decisions of the monthly Management Team meetings** were minuted and available for inspection.

## 7. **BEST VALUE**

7.1 LVJB recognises its duty, under **Section 1 of The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003**, to make arrangements to secure Best Value. The Valuation Joint Board is committed to the principles and practices of Best Value and to the integration of this theme into all areas of operation.

- 7.2 **Performance over the period 2008-2011** was planned and targeted according to business need and available resources. Key Performance Indicators, agreed in conjunction with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Assessor's Association, were reported to the Scottish Government and other key stakeholders annually; LVJB's Public Performance Report was prepared for the periods 2008/09, 2009/10 & 2010/11 and reported to the Board and to other stakeholders. Targets continued to be set mindful of any upsurge of workload, such as the heightened activity in relation council tax proposals and appeals experienced during 2008 & 2009, and having regard to budgetary constraints due to the sudden economic downturn in 2008.
- 7.3 **Performance Indicators** were used for year-on-year comparisons as well as comparisons with other bodies where deemed appropriate.
- 7.4 **Stakeholder Consultations** were continually developed and implemented and the outcomes taken account in Service Planning. The consultation process involves application of LVJB's Customer Care Policy and Customer Comments and Complaints procedures, together with initiatives co-ordinated via the Scottish Assessors Association such as consultation on future development of the SAA Portal ([www.saa.gov.uk](http://www.saa.gov.uk)).
- 7.5 **The Service Review Plan** was regularly reviewed in light of changing priorities and external factors, with updates being provided to the Board.
- 7.6 LVJB recognised its duty under the Government's '**Efficient Government**' initiative and prepared specific annual statements which were submitted to the Board.

## 8. **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

- 8.1 The Valuation Joint Board is committed to equality in respect of race, ethnicity, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation and religion or belief both in staffing and service provision. In pursuance of this it published its **Single Equality Scheme** in December 2009 in accordance with guidance issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- 8.2 LVJB participate in SLC led Equal Opportunities forums, represented by our designated Diversity Liaison Officer.

## 9. **STAFFING AND PERSONNEL MATTERS**

- 9.1 Following a comprehensive staff consultation exercise, a **new organisational structure** was implemented with effect from 1/4/2008. The new structure was principally introduced to meet the anticipated service delivery challenges envisaged for the forthcoming period.



- 9.2 **A comprehensive training schedule** was prepared for incorporation with each staff member's annual Personal Development Review allowing for a much more targeted organisational training strategy to be developed. The training schedule was (and will continue to be annually) provided to all members of staff with a view to continuously monitoring and delivering staff training based upon both individual employee development and business need.
- 9.3 **Resource requirements** in relation to service delivery are discussed at monthly management team meetings with more comprehensive staffing reviews carried out at year end management team meetings taking into consideration the anticipated workload for the forthcoming year. Reviews also have regard to matters such as previous year's performance, staffing levels, and budgetary constraints. Staff consultations are undertaken as part of any proposed change to structure; following such a consultation, a redistribution of staff resources will be undertaken for the period 2011-12 to help deal with, principally, the upsurge in activity associated with non domestic appeals.
- 9.4 The Valuation Joint Board continued to adopt the **Competence Initiative Scheme**, including an annual Performance and Development Review process. This encompasses a range of procedures for managing both organisational and employee performance and is a process which links the Joint Board's strategies and service objectives to tasks and employees. It provides a systematic approach to management which is based on setting objectives, assessing performance, appraising achievement and identifying ways to improve, through training and development, at both an organisational and individual level.
- 9.5 **Regular liaison meetings** were held throughout 2008-2011 with South Lanarkshire Council's Personnel Services and LVJB staff representatives. A revised Service Level Agreement was introduced, aligning the agreement more towards the requirements of LVJB.
- 9.6 LVJB were involved with a pilot scheme on the implementation of SLC's proprietary software application, **People Connect**, for managing personnel issues such as expenses and annual leave.
- 9.7 The incentivised **Staff Suggestion scheme** continued over the period 2008-2011 with all staff encouraged to suggest measures which would principally promote efficiency, particularly in light of the anticipated year on year budgetary cuts.

## **10 FINANCE AND BUDGETING**

- 10.1 Throughout the Service Plan period, officers of the Valuation Joint Board acted in accordance with the relevant **Financial Regulations and Standing Orders**.
- 10.2 In partnership with the Finance and IT Resources of South Lanarkshire Council, **budgets were prepared annually** and approved by the Joint Board.

- 10.3 Appropriate procedures for **procurement, authorisation and payment** were implemented.
- 10.4 **Financial monitoring reports** were received and verified on a monthly basis with variations in expenditure being reported both to management and to the Joint Board.
- 10.5 Plans for the phasing out of LVJB's in house **financial monitoring system** were agreed with an options appraisal exercise scoped for 2011-2012.

## **11. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

- 11.1 **The provision of Information Technology assets, systems and services** by South Lanarkshire Council were managed through regular liaison with the Business Systems Manager and Project Manager allocated to LVJB.
- 11.2 A full **PC refresh** was undertaken in accordance with the Service Level Agreement between SLC and their hardware suppliers.
- 11.3 LVJB adhered to the principles of **Data Protection** and reviewed its Notification to the Information Commissioner. LVJB's management team attended a number of training events in order to up skill the team on both data protection and freedom of information matters.
- 11.4 With regards to the **Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002**, the management team agreed to incorporate 'Information Issues' as a standing item on the management team meeting agendas to ensure both the continued development of mt members in terms of dealing with information requests, and also develop a consistent approach to dealing with such matters. The Model Publication Scheme for Assessor and Valuation Joint Boards was approved by the Scottish Information Commissioner, and noted by the Board at the meeting of 7 September 2009.
- 11.5 **Satellite systems** to support primary functions and reporting requirements were maintained and developed as required.
- 11.6 LVJB played an active role in the continued development of the **SAA Portal** with a view to continuing the provision of this web based joined up service delivery initiative. Over the period of the 2008-2011 Service Plan, a number of customer focused initiatives were implemented at the Portal, including the provision of summary valuations for bulk class subjects (namely shops, offices and industrial subjects) and the ability to lodge bulk appeals electronically via the Portal.
- 11.7 With regards to **LVJB's proprietary valuations software application**, a comprehensive development programme was undertaken in relation to the provision of summary valuations at the SAA Portal. This involved the development of the software's valuation tool which, in addition to catering for shops, offices and industrial subjects, was developed further to host valuations of public houses, advertising stations and contractors based subjects. The period 2008-2011 seen the number of subjects hosted on the valuation tool rise to over 75% of the total non domestic subjects in the valuation rolls for Lanarkshire.

- 11.8 A new LVJB **web site** was introduced over the period of the 2008-2011 Service Plan in consultation with SLC I.T. The implementation of the new site provided the opportunity to comprehensively review the contents of the web site, and in particular the downloadable forms relating to electoral registration, making the more accessible to service users.
- 11.9 LVJB participated in the workshops relating to **bulk mailing and printing contracts** and also undertook to liaise further with SLC procurement re the contract renewal of this specific service.
- 11.10 A comprehensive **disaster recovery strategy** was implemented for LVJB's I.T. systems in consultation with SLC's I.T. designated Business Manager.
- 11.11 **Information Technology initiatives** were continually considered by LVJB's Management Team and Forums/Groups in terms of their possible contribution to delivering services more efficiently and effectively. Initiatives introduced over the 2008-2011 period included a proprietary document imaging and management software system catering for all LVJB mail and the introduction of Delta software enabling the secure and efficient supply of electoral registers.

## **12. KEY PARTNERSHIPS**

- 12.1 Support services provided by **South Lanarkshire Council** were managed by regular liaison meetings with relevant persons in each of the supporting Resources.
- 12.2 Being the primary recipients of operational outputs (Valuation Rolls, Councils Tax Valuation Lists and Electoral Registers), LVJB recognises both **North and South Lanarkshire Councils** as key stakeholders, and consulted with these bodies in all areas relating to these matters, principally via the establishment of a Joint Finance Forum hosted by LVJB.
- 12.3 The Joint Board instigated and facilitated joint forums with key partners, namely a **Joint Finance Forum and Joint Electoral Forum** involving constituent authorities, with a view to both sharing and developing good practice with the overall objective of improving the service in terms of both quality and efficiency in key business areas to service users.
- 12.4 The Joint Board continued to commit resources to the workings of the **Scottish Assessors Association**, participating in Plenary, Committee and Working Group meetings and fully engaging in the exchange of information, ideas and knowledge provided by this association with a view to continuing the process of sharing services where possible, and sharing best practice.
- 12.5 Through the SAA, LVJB maintained liaison with bodies such as the **Valuation Office Agency (England and Wales), the Valuation and Land Agency (Northern Ireland), the Eire Valuation Office, The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and The Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation.**

- 12.6 Joint Board staff continued to be represented and participate in the workings of the **Association of Electoral Administrators**, including increased representation at the annual conference of the AEA.
- 12.7 LVJB, principally through the SAA, maintained dialogue with **The Electoral Commission** in respect of Electoral Registration matters.
- 12.8 **Staff are recognised as both key assets** of the Valuation Joint Board and primary stakeholders and continued to be consulted on matters such as improving service delivery both via team meetings and through representative organisations where appropriate over the period 2008-2011. Staff were actively encouraged to contribute towards LVJB's efficiency agenda, particularly in light of budgetary cuts.
- 12.9 **Relationships with external suppliers** of systems and services were subject to performance monitoring with feedback provided through liaison with the relevant account manager or similar representative.

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

- 13.1 The Valuation Joint Board is committed to various initiatives, not covered above but which have significant implications for **Service Planning**, priorities and actions. These tend to be of an ad-hoc nature and demand variable commitment.
- 13.2 LVJB have monitored **legislative changes** throughout the period 2008-2011 which directly impact on its business, and implemented where appropriate.
- 13.3 **Boundary changes**, as directed by the Boundary Commission for Scotland, were fully implemented within the period 2008-2011. Electronic systems were amended to incorporate all changes.
- 13.4 LVJB's **Customer Care Procedure** was reviewed and streamlined to ensure a more efficient approach to dealing with, in particular, customer complaints.
- 13.5 A **Data Protection Policy** was developed and formally approved by the Board on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2010.
- 13.6 Over the period 2008-2011 LVJB have continued to liaise with both South and North Lanarkshire Council's **corporate gazetteer** teams with a view to incorporating the corporate address gazetteer information, including the unique property reference number, into LVJB's property databases.