

Report to:	Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board
Date of Meeting:	29 November 2010
Report by:	Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Subject:	Progress Report
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ provide an overview of the service;
- ◆ outline current issues and service priorities;
- ◆ provide an update on performance;
- ◆ highlight issues affecting the future direction of the Joint Board

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Board is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the content of the report be noted

3. Service Overview and Priorities

3.1. Electoral Registration

3.1.1 The Annual Canvass

The workload in electoral registration has been dominated since September by the annual canvass of electors. At the stage of preparing this report, details of the final outcome are not yet available. Early indications are that many aspects of the canvass have been successful in meeting the Joint Board's twin aims of achieving improved Accuracy and Completeness in the Electoral Register.

Stage 1 of the door-to-door canvass targeted 27,545 houses which had no registered elector but were believed to be occupied. Of these, 10,610 households have made returns either by handing a form back to the canvasser or by posting back a form which was left by the canvasser. This has resulted in 16,550 new electors being added to the register. This compares to last year when 23,694 houses were canvassed at this stage with 6,442 household returning a form and 9,830 new electors being added.

The number of households using the telephone, internet and text registration service has also increased. In absolute terms, the number has increased from 38,803(2008), 44,820(2009) to 54,412 and in percentage terms from 13.32%(2008), 15.34%(2009) to 18.73%.

Stage 2 of the door-to-door canvass has targeted 3,125 houses where we believe there has been a change of occupier since the last canvass and where no return was

received from the initial postal issue of canvass forms. The results of this are still being collated.

3.1.2 Publication and Distribution of Registers

The revised register will be published on 1 December 2010. We are on track to publish in the new Scottish Parliamentary boundaries and the revised polling schemes for both North and South Lanarkshire.

A new more secure procedure for distribution of the register is also being put in place as part of our commitment to data security and continuous improvement in service delivery.

From 1 December, elected representatives and other authorised users will be able to download electoral registers via a secure website, allowing quick and easy access to the information that they need. We are encouraging all elected representatives to make use of this system instead of requesting paper copies of the registers.

How does it work?

In the next couple of weeks we will provide each recipient of the register with a username, password and direct link to the website. They will then be able to go to the website and download the electoral register in the format that suits them best. There will be a choice of downloading the register in either PDF format (where the files will appear as on the printed page) or in CSV format (which can be used, for example, to produce address labels).

What are the benefits?

- **Reduced production costs** – resources will no longer need to be spent on printing and distributing paper copies of the electoral registers or transferring files to disc and delivering them by car to users.
- **Added security** – the enhanced security features mean that only authorised people can access the registers. We can also ensure that the registers provided will be tailored to the area that the recipient represents.
- **Quicker availability** – by providing the registers electronically, users will get copies of the revised registers and monthly updates as and when they are published – rather than waiting several days for printed copies to be produced or files to be created, transferred to disc and distributed. Users will receive an automated email once the file is ready to download.
- **Increased efficiency** – the automated production of the registers means that staff can spend more time delivering customer-focussed services to the residents of Lanarkshire.
- **Contribution to sustainable development** – moving away from providing paper copies of the registers will save thousands of pieces of paper a year. Monthly deliveries of registers and updates by car will no longer be necessary.

Next steps

Further information on how to use the service will be provided when members are issued with log-in details. This will include a step-by-step guide to downloading the electoral registers from the secure website. Further information, in the meantime, can be obtained by contacting Marion Gray on 01698 476211 or at marion.gray@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

3.1.3 Individual Electoral Registration

On 15 September 2010, Mark Harper MP, the Minister for Constitutional Reform made a statement to Parliament confirming that the Coalition Government intend to speed up the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration.

From July 2014, all new electors and anyone wishing to retain an absent vote will have to be individually registered. Additionally, during the 2014 annual canvass, all existing registered electors will be invited to become individually registered. To be individually registered, electors will have to provide personal identifiers that can be used to authenticate their identity. At the present time, these are planned to be a signature, date of birth and National Insurance number. Provision will be made to "carry forward" electors who do not provide personal identifiers for the planned 2015 general election. From the 2015 canvass onwards no one will be registered without provision of personal identifiers.

This will add significantly to the workload of the Service when in place and it will be crucial to the success of the changeover to ensure that ongoing work to improve the completeness and accuracy of the existing registers continues in the years leading up to the change. The proposed resourcing of the additional workload has yet to be clarified by the Cabinet Office. The cost of the annual canvass is, however, likely to increase significantly.

3.1.4 Registration Appeals

Applications from prisoners detained in Shotts prison continue to be received on a regular basis. At time of writing, 159 prisoners had applied to be registered to vote.

Section 3(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 currently provides that such prisoners have a legal incapacity to vote and, as a consequence, cannot be registered as electors.

Although Section 3 has been held to be incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, Section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 provides that it is not unlawful for a public authority to act in a way which is incompatible with such a right if, as a result of primary legislation, the authority could not have acted differently. It is, therefore, necessary and correct for such applications to be refused.

The first 4 cases to be referred to the Sheriff are due to be heard on 24 November 2010.

3.2 Non-Domestic Valuation

A summary of performance in this area is provided in appendices 2.1 to 2.4.

3.2.1 2010 Revaluation

The last date for lodging Revaluation appeals was 30 September 2010 and the number of appeals lodged has risen from the equivalent position in 2005. The detail of these appeals is the subject of a separate report.

3.2.2 Valuation Appeals (2005 Valuation Roll)

As can be seen from Appendix 2.4, 121 appeals with a combined Rateable Value of over £87m are currently awaiting hearing by the Lands Tribunal for Scotland. 5 days have been set aside by the Tribunal from 6 to 10 December 2010 to hear 38 of these cases. It is likely that most of the remaining cases will be listed for hearing before the

summer of 2011. Disposal of these appeals continues to have significant cost and workload implications for the Service during 2010/11 and into 2011/12.

As a result of the current financial downturn, there has also been an increase in the number of valuation appeals from ratepayers seeking to have their rateable value reduced. 30 September 2010 was also the last date for lodging appeals against entries in the 2005 Roll on the grounds that there had been a material change of circumstances affecting the value of properties. Appendix 2.4 shows that there are over 600 such appeals lodged and awaiting disposal. This is an unprecedented increase and is likely to delay the commencement of disposal of 2010 Revaluation appeals.

3.2.3 Running Roll

As can be seen from Appendix 2.3, the number of changes to the Valuation Roll is considerably up on the same period last year. This is due, in part, to an increase in information on changes to properties being provided by ratepayers following receipt of their new valuations.

3.3 Council Tax

A summary of performance in this area is provided in appendices 3.1 to 3.4.

3.3.1 New Houses

As can be seen from Appendix 3.2, the number of new houses added to the Valuation (Council Tax) List is up by around 20% on the same period last year. This is primarily due to an attempt to catch up on a backlog of survey work arising from concentration of resources on carrying out the 2010 Revaluation and dealing with the increase in Council Tax appeal hearings.

3.3.2 Proposals/Appeal

Workload in this area continues to be a challenge. While new proposals have fallen significantly from the unprecedented peak of 2007 and 2008, they still remain at around 3 times the pre 2007 level. However, we continue to deal with more cases each month than are received and the outstanding balance has now reduced to a more manageable level. Council Tax appeal hearings will reduce to 4 per year in 2011. This reflects the lower number of appeals proceeding to hearing and the need to provide hearing dates for Revaluation appeals.

3.3.3 Band increases following extension and sale

A backlog of workload in this area has developed as a result of resourcing the 2010 Revaluation and Council Tax appeal hearings. In such cases, when a house has been extended and subsequently sold, the band must be increased back to the date of the sale. This backlog has now been addressed with 178 houses having had a backdated band increase applied during 2010. I anticipate a resulting increase in complaints as a result of the delay in dealing with these changes.

4. Staffing

4.1. 5.5 posts are currently being held vacant pending the outcome of budget discussions with the Board's funding authorities. It is unlikely that these will be filled. Absence levels continue to be monitored and are shown on appendix 4. Attendance levels continue to show an improvement on last year.

5. Employee Implications

5.1. See 4.1.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. See 3.1.3 and 3.2.2.

7. Other Implications

7.1. None.

8. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

8.1. The report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment is required.

9. Privacy Impact Assessment

9.1 The change to the method of delivery of registers of electors is in accordance with the Board's aim of handling personal data securely.

Edward P Duffy

Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

9 November 2010

Previous References

Progress report 30 August 2010.

List of Background Papers

None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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