

Report

Report to:	Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board
Date of Meeting:	5 December 2011
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. However, the 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 saw us target 20,688 houses which had no registered elector but were believed to be occupied. Of these, 5,679 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. The number of households included in this part of the canvass is down from last year following a decision to exclude 5,866 households which had failed to respond to household visits for 3 years or more. This followed post canvass feedback from canvassers who were in danger of becoming demotivated as a result of revisiting addresses where they had no success on previous visits. It also reduced the cost of this part of the canvass.

The number of households using the telephone, internet and text registration service continues to rise. The number has increased from 38,803(2008), 44,820(2009), 55,223(2010) to 69,620 at the date of this report. This is a further 26% increase. This improvement has two benefits. The marginal cost of an electronic return is 17 pence which is half the marginal cost of a postal return at 34 pence. In addition, the

efficiency savings achieved in reduced processing time have allowed us to absorb staffing reductions with no loss of efficiency in service delivery.

Stage 2 of the door-to-door canvass has targeted 3,859 houses where we believe there has been a recent change of occupier and where no return was received from the initial postal issue of canvass forms. 1,292 of these households returned a canvass form. We also took the opportunity to have canvassers, wherever possible, check the name on the door against the names of existing electors to confirm whether or not there was a change.

Appendix 1 provides a summary of some of this information broken down by Council area.

3.1.2 Publication and Distribution of Registers

The revised register for North Lanarkshire will be published on 1 December 2011. However, in order to facilitate the Hamilton West and Earnock by-election in South Lanarkshire on 8 December 2011, the revised register for South Lanarkshire will be published on 28 November 2011.

3.1.3 Individual Electoral Registration

As reported at our last meeting I participated in an expert panel workshop at the Cabinet Office on 16 September 2011. A full report on the outcome of this is still awaited. However, some practical solutions to the considerable challenges facing EROs were identified and proposed to the Cabinet Office.

The change to Individual Electoral Registration will add significantly to the workload of the Joint Board 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 recent developments we have made to increase the number of changes made to our registers between canvasses as reported at our last meeting, along with our efforts to increase uptake of electronic registration, will help to prepare us for the changeover. It is crucial that we continue to make such improvements to minimise the risk of losing large numbers of electors in 2014 and 2015.

The proposed resourcing of the additional workload has yet to be clarified by the Ministry of Justice. The cost of the annual canvass is, however, likely to increase significantly.

3.2. Non-Domestic Valuation

Workload in valuation in general has been dominated by appeal hearings resulting from the 2010 Revaluation.

3.2.1 2005 Revaluation Appeals

Progress in this area is steady. Preliminary hearings have been called by the Lands Tribunal for Scotland for all Telecommunications subject appeals and for Hamilton and Musselburgh racecourses. It is likely that these will be subject of full hearings before the summer of 2012. Preparations have, therefore, commenced for presentation of the cases. Further hearings are expected during 2012/2013. This may impact on the cost of legal representation in 2012/2013.

3.2.2 2010 Revaluation Appeals

As mentioned above, this area is currently the primary focus of workload in valuation. In total, 7,508 Revaluation appeals were received. In accordance with the statutory

timetable, these require to be disposed of by 31 December 2013. As at 30 September 2011, 1,592 of these had been resolved. Around 1,500 cases were also scheduled for hearings during October, November and December. The local Valuation Appeal Committee has also allocated 18 hearing dates during 2012 with a view to disposing of, at least, a further 3,500 appeals. This figure may rise if, as anticipated, there is a further increase in running roll appeals.

3.2.3 Running Roll Appeals

During the 5 year cycle of the 2005 Revaluation, a total of 3,716 running roll appeals were received. By 30 September 2011, the first 18 months of the current cycle, 4,258 such appeals had already been received. This unprecedented increase is primarily a result of the current economic downturn. The Scottish Ratepayers Forum has advised Assessors that a further significant increase should be expected by 31 March 2012.

Those appeals received to date and any received by 31 March 2012 also require to be disposed of by 31 December 2013. It is likely, therefore, that the Valuation Appeal Committee will require to fix additional dates for hearings or increase the number of cases listed for each hearing in order to meet this deadline. This may lead to an increase in the cost of legal representation for appeal hearings and the cost of funding the Valuation Appeal Committee.

3.2.4 Changes to the Valuation Roll

Appendices 2.1 to 2.3 provide a summary of performance in this area. As can be seen from appendix 2.3, the volume of changes made to the Roll is up 22% by comparison to the same period last year. It is too early to confirm whether or not this increased level will continue for the remainder of the year. Changes are also being made more quickly than last year and well within the performance targets set at the beginning of the year.

3.3. Council Tax

Workload in this area continues to be dominated by adding new houses to the Council Tax list and dealing with Council Tax proposals and appeals. Appendices 3.1 to 3.4 provide a summary of performance in this area.

3.3.1 New Houses

As can be seen from appendix 3.2, the volume of new houses added to the Valuation List is down by comparison to the same period last year. The figures from last year, however, included the transfer of around 200 houses from Glasgow to North Lanarkshire following a boundary change and the true fall in numbers is closer to 100. The new housing market generally remains depressed with fewer completions achieved, particularly in North Lanarkshire. However, an element of this decrease can be attributed to the transfer of resources to deal with Revaluation appeals and the increase in non-domestic survey workload and, consequently, less regular visits to house building sites. Figures may, therefore, recover to some degree later in the year. The time taken to enter houses in the list has, however, improved and is within performance targets set at the beginning of the year.

3.3.2 Proposals and Appeals

As can be seen from appendices 3.3 and 3.4, progress in this area is steady. Unfortunately, for the first time in the last 2 years, the number of cases resolved is lower than the number of new cases received. This is primarily the result of the Valuation Appeal Committee being unable to deal with as many cases as in previous years. They are currently giving priority to non – domestic appeals. We continue to

liaise closely with the Secretary and Chair of the Committee and will seek further hearing dates if this proves necessary.

4. Employee Implications/Staffing Issues

- 4.1. In light of the increased appeal workload, three vacancies in valuation which have arisen during the current year are currently being filled. Three new valuers are, therefore, expected to start at the beginning of January. However, in accordance with the current budget strategy, a further 6 FTE posts are being held unfilled.
- 4.2 Staff absence levels for last year are summarised in appendix 4.0. Performance continues to be satisfactory in this area. The absence figure has increased slightly since last year from 2.08% to 3.39%. This primarily reflects 2 members of staff with long term health problems.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 See 3.1.3, 3.2.1 and 3.2.3 above.

6. Other Implications

- 6.1 Non domestic appeal workload is up over 45% from the equivalent point in the last Revaluation cycle. In addition staffing levels have fallen from 75 FTE to 64 FTE over the same period. This means that current NDR appeal workload per FTE is up over 50% on the equivalent point in the 2005 Revaluation cycle. Since these appeals must be dealt with within a fixed statutory timetable, resources will have to be redirected from other tasks to accommodate this increased workload. This is likely to impact on service delivery elsewhere. Most at risk are the timescales for adding houses to Council Tax where there is a more flexible statutory regime for making changes to the Valuation List. Non-statutory tasks such as providing advice and provisional values for proposed developments may also be affected.
- 6.2 An internal reorganisation of staffing resources has been carried out to try to mitigate some of this risk. This has managed to keep performance within targets so far. It is inevitable, however, that requests to treat some cases as priority will have to be refused.
- 6.3 There are no implications for sustainability in terms of the information contained in this report.

7. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 7.1 This 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.

8. Privacy Impact Assessment

- 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.

Edward P Duffy
Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

16 November 2011

Previous References

Progress Report 5 September 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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