

# Report

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| Report to:       | <b>Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board</b>           |
| Date of Meeting: | <b>30 August 2010</b>                              |
| Report by:       | <b>Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer</b> |

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| Subject: | <b>Progress Report to the Joint Board</b> |
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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 is noted.

## 3. Background

### 3.1. Electoral Registration

#### 3.1.1 Rolling Registration

The workload in electoral registration has been dominated since June by preparations for and implementation of our duties in relation to the annual canvass of electors. Work has, however, been ongoing in maintaining the register as part of the normal business of rolling registration. Between 1 December 2009 and the register being in force from 1 September 2010, some 10,459 names were added to the registers for North and South Lanarkshire and 14,593 names deleted resulting in a net decrease in electors of 4,134. A breakdown of these figures is provided in appendices 1.1 and 1.2 together with a comparison with the equivalent figure for last year. The volume of changes is up 34% on last year. This reflects a more proactive approach adopted to registration reviews between canvasses. This is part of the ongoing strategy for improving the accuracy of the register.

#### 3.1.2 Annual Canvass

Work has begun on the annual canvass and the first issue of forms has now taken place. Like last year, this first phase is being carried out in two parts. Those properties which have no registered elector but which are believed to be occupied are being visited by a canvasser who will try to persuade the residents to register to vote. Those properties which have existing electors will receive their form by post. Those properties confirmed as empty at the moment will be issued with a form by post at the reminder stage to allow for the possibility that they become occupied in the near future. In total, 290,553 forms will be issued in this phase. Of these, 27,544 will be hand delivered by a canvasser. Reminders will be issued in October. A

breakdown of the numbers of properties to be canvassed is provided in Appendices 1.3 and 1.4.

### **3.1.3 Registration Appeals**

There has been a significant increase in activity in this area relating to prisoners at Shotts Prison. At the time of writing, some 80 applications are at various stages of the process. Numbers are rising on a daily basis. If previous experience is any guide, it is likely that these will result in a series of hearings at the Sheriff Court in Hamilton. This increase has perhaps been prompted by the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in April in the case of *Frodl v Austria*. This decision confirmed the 2005 decision in *Hirst v UK* that the current blanket ban on convicted prisoners voting was incompatible with Article 3 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

## **3.2. Non-Domestic Valuation**

Workload in valuation in general has been dominated by the 2010 Revaluation and resulting enquiries.

### **3.2.1 2005 Revaluation Appeals**

Progress in this area is steady. 30 outstanding appeals have been listed for hearing by the Lands Tribunal for Scotland from 6 to 10 December 2010. Preparations are ongoing for presentation of the cases. Further hearings are expected in the New Year.

### **3.2.2 2010 Revaluation Appeals**

At 30 June 2010, 551 such appeals had been received (see appendix 2.5). Numbers have been increasing steadily since and are at a similar level to the equivalent stage in 2005. 7,066 appeals were received in 2005. A campaign by local Chambers of Commerce to encourage members to appeal means it is likely that appeal numbers will be similar to or higher than 2005. The largest numbers of appeals are usually lodged in September before the final date for lodging such appeals which is 30 September 2010.

### **3.2.3 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 considerably 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. An element of this increase can be attributed to ratepayers advising us of changes in response to receiving their Revaluation Notice.

## **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 List is up considerably by comparison to the same period last year. An element of this increase can be attributed to a catch up on survey work following completion of the 2010 Revaluation.

### **3.3.2 Proposals and Appeals**

As can be seen from appendices 3.3 and 3.4, significant progress continues to be made in this area with cases resolved exceeding the number of new cases received.

### **3.3.3 Rebanding of houses following alteration and sale**

As previously reported, a backlog in this area of workload had developed as a result of dealing with the increase in proposals and appeals and the 2010 Revaluation. This has now been addressed. The resultant backdated rebandings have, however, led to an increase in complaints which will be reflected in the current year's customer feedback report.

## **4. Staffing**

In preparation for the 2010 annual canvass, 98 temporary staff have been recruited to carry out door-to-door visits to properties which now forms part of the required canvass procedure. Training was carried out in late August and they have commenced their visits throughout the Joint Board area.

Absence levels for Joint Board staff remain relatively low having fallen 2.54% in the current year from 4.34% for the equivalent period last year. These are shown in appendix 4.

We are currently involved in a formal dispute with Unison acting on behalf of our employees following a change to the Designated Car User scheme. Negotiations are ongoing to resolve outstanding issues.

## **5. Employee Implications**

5.1. None.

## **6. Financial Implications**

6.1. None.

## **7. Other Implications**

7.1. None

## **8. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**

8.1. 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.

## **9. Privacy Impact Assessment**

9.1 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.

12 August 2010

**Previous References**

Progress report 7 June 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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