

# QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT TO THE JOINT BOARD



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7 September 2009

## 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise and update members as to the service overview and priorities, current issues and the future direction of the Joint Board.

## 2.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION SERVICE OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

### 2.1 Electoral Registration – Service Overview 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 – 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009

#### 2.1.1 European Election 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009

The European Elections progressed without any problems being encountered.

This was the first election to be held with the Interim Election Management Board having a clear remit. The Electoral Commission has expressed their satisfaction with the election and will provide a formal report in due course.

This was also the first time that absent vote identifiers were used to check the validity of votes received by post. My staff were very busy during the period before the election applying late registration changes and updating personal identifier information. Numerous meetings had taken place with Returning Officer staff over the last year to ensure the image files held by the ERO were fit for purpose and software systems could adequately cope with reading the images and the volumes expected.

The number of postal voters on the list increased by 4,000 to 78,787 in the month prior to the election.

The number of ordinary electors added to the register on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2009, which was the last update to the election register was 3,353.

#### 2.12 Publicity for the European Election

To assist with the duty to encourage and maximise registration the election was used as a focal point to target potential electors who may not be registered. Publicity events were held at:-

Royal Infirmary  
The Gyle Centre  
Tesco, Haddington  
Central Library, Edinburgh  
The Penicuik Centre  
Buccleuch House, Dalkeith  
Almondvale Centre, Livingston

### **2.1.3 Rolling Registration**

During the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009 my staff actioned 9,553 additions, 13,367 deletions and 1,088 changes to the register.

### **2.1.4 Absent Voters List**

The number of electors on the absent vote list at the present day is 78,159.

### **2.1.5 Electoral Commission – Financial Return for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain**

The Electoral Commission ingathered Financial Returns for Electoral Registration Officers in July 2009. Lothian submitted the full return in due time. To date there has been no feed back from the Commission.

### **2.1.6 2009 Canvass**

The Royal Mail commenced delivery of Canvass forms from 19<sup>th</sup> August. 356,518 forms were provided to Royal Mail for delivery and 28,995 forms retained for door to door canvassing. As at 27<sup>th</sup> August approximately 133,000 forms have been returned.

Publicity in place for the canvass includes:-

Posters issued to libraries, council offices, community centres and schools  
Posters in place at Haymarket station, Omni Centre and Ocean terminal  
Adverts placed on Radio Ramadan and Radio Ramadan website  
Adverts placed inside Lothian and First buses  
Information pages updated on Bebo and MYspace.

## **2.2 Electoral Registration – Service Priorities September 2009 – December 2009**

### **2.2.1 The service priorities over the next 3 months**

- Carry out postal and door to door canvass of all Lothian households
- Continue with initiatives to encourage participation and improve registration rates

- Continue with data matching and cleansing in preparation for the first stage of CORE.
- Continue with user testing and integration of updated electoral software
- Complete Electoral Commission performance standards return

### **3.0 COUNCIL TAX OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES**

#### **3.1 Council Tax – Service Overview 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 – 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009.**

##### **3.1.1 Council Tax – New Dwellings**

As at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 there were 384,837 chargeable dwellings in Lothian which has risen to 386,048 as at 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009, an increase of 1,211 dwellings in almost 5 months. In Band 'D' equivalent terms the Council Tax List has increased from 391,909 to 393,278, an increase of 1,366. This is approximately 10% less than the equivalent period in 2008.

##### **3.1.2 Council Tax – Altered Bands**

During the period, as a result of alterations carried out prior to the date of sale and re-appraisal of bandings, the bandings of 32 dwellings have been altered.

##### **3.1.3 Council Tax – Altered Houses with no sales**

During the period, the records of 2,464 dwellings have been updated, as a result of alteration work being carried out to existing dwellings. The updated information should improve the time taken to alter the bands of any altered dwellings which are subsequently sold and also ensure preparation for any future revaluation or property tax.

##### **3.1.4 Council Tax – Proposals and Appeals**

The numbers of Council Tax proposals/appeals outstanding continues to stand at reasonable levels. As at 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009 there were 103 cases outstanding. A diet of appeal hearings has been arranged to ensure the disposal of most of the outstanding cases.

#### **3.2 Council Tax – Service Priorities September 2009 – December 2009**

The main service priorities in Council Tax are as normal:-

- To continue improvement on the time taken between completion of new dwellings and the insertion of the dwelling in the Council Tax List in accordance with performance targets;
- To continue improvement on the time taken between the sale of houses which have been altered and the date their Council Tax Band is changed;

- To update my records by carrying out the survey of Council Tax subjects which have been altered and not sold;
- To continue to resolve proposals and appeals against Council Tax banding.

#### **4.0 NON DOMESTIC RATING OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES**

#### **4.1 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Overview 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 – 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009**

##### **4.1.1 2005 Revaluation Appeals**

All appeals, with the exception of those referred to the Lands Tribunal for Scotland, were disposed of by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 in line with the Valuation Timetable Order. There are currently 31 Revaluation appeals plus associated Running Roll appeals referred to the Lands Tribunal and awaiting listing.

##### **4.1.2 Running Roll**

My professional and technical staff have continued to survey and value subjects that have been newly constructed, altered or demolished. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009, there have been 636 additions, 405 alterations and 315 deletions. The number of new subjects entering the Valuation Roll during this period is marginally more than the 624 new entries added during the comparable period in 2008. The number of alterations, down from 1138, has decreased substantially and deletions down from 490.

##### **4.1.3 Running Roll Appeals**

As a result of amendments to the Valuation Roll and in many instances the tram works, running roll appeals are constantly being received and dealt with. As at 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009, there were 1209 appeals outstanding. During the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009, 69 appeals have been resolved and a further 297 appeals received.

##### **4.1.4 2010 Revaluation Preparation**

My professional and technical staff have worked exceptionally well in the revaluation of all subjects in Lothian. Each Revaluation the time allocated by the Government officials for this task is shortened thus requiring excellent planning and increased reliance on quality IT systems. This Revaluation we were required to provide estimates by April and to complete the revaluation of all properties by 31<sup>st</sup> August 2009. I am very pleased to say that with professionalism and commitment of my valuation teams the task was completed on time.

The task is not however fully complete until 31<sup>st</sup> March when any alterations being carried out in this intervening period will be required to be valued for the current Roll and revalued for the Revaluation Roll.

With a view to increasing openness and transparency summary valuations of bulk subjects including shops, offices and industrials will for the first time be available on the internet to the ratepayers in Scotland. It is hoped that this initiative will enable ratepayers to check their Net Annual Values and increase the confidence of the ratepayer in the accuracy of the assessment.

#### **4.2 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Priorities September 2009 – December 2009**

The service priorities in Non-Domestic Rating are:-

- To prepare cases as may be required by the Valuation Appeal Committee, Lands Tribunal for Scotland and the Lands Valuation Appeal Court;
- To schedule and action the disposal of appeals resulting from Running Roll alterations;
- To survey, value and re-value new property or alterations to existing properties.
- To review, re-analyse and improve on information held and used for the 2010 Revaluation.

#### **5.0 HUMAN RESOURCES**

##### **5.1 UNISON**

Regular JCC meetings continue to be held and no items of significant note raised.

##### **5.2 Staffing**

There have been a few changes to staffing since my last report. I received one resignation, one member of staff has been dismissed and as previously reported J Fowler, Depute Assessor retired on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2009.

To ensure the canvass workload is efficiently dealt with I have employed 6 temporary staff on a week to week basis to cover the peak workload period. 43 canvassers have been employed to carry out door to door canvass duties.

##### **5.4 Equalities**

No items of concern have been received.

#### **7.0 RISK MANAGEMENT**

The risk register continues to be updated at each management meeting ensuring that all risks are considered and mitigated as soon as practicable.

The economic decline has been noted as a potential risk necessitating increased workload for the defence of appeals during 2009/10 and appeals against 2010 Revaluation Roll Net Annual Values.

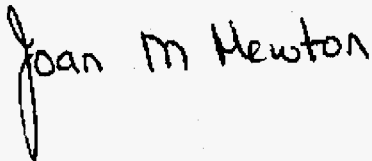
Swine Flu was added to the Risk Register and risk increased when a member of staff advised of a potential infection.

#### 8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### 9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Board is requested to note the contents of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan M Hewton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'J'.

**Joan M Hewton**  
**ASSESSOR & ERO**

**7 September 2009**