

QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT TO THE JOINT BOARD



29 March 2010

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 25th November 2009 – 1st March 2010

2.1.1 Rolling Registration

During the period 1st December 2009 to 5th February 2010, the last date for revisions to the March update of the published Register, my staff actioned 4,329 additions, 3,892 deletions and 1,345 changes to the register.

2.1.2 Absent Voters List

The number of electors on the absent vote list at the present day is 85,719 compared to 83,132 at the close of the canvass on 1st December 2009, an increase of 2,587. I expect the list to increase during the period running up to the election.

2.1.3 Electoral Commission

2.1.3.1 Report on performance standards for EROs in Great Britain

The Electoral Commission published their second annual report in March 2010. The performance standards are self assessed but are subject to random audit by the Commission. Lothian was audited last year but not this year. My assessments remain unchanged at 4 assessed as above the standards and 6 assessed as meeting the standards. Improvements required to enable greater performance assessments would in my opinion necessitate an increase in budget which would not constitute best value for Lothian. I do however intend to continue to strive where possible for improvement within the current budget.

I attach an appendix showing the performance attained for each EC standards assessed.

2.1.3.2 The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain

The Electoral Commission published their report in March 2010 and as you are aware the report has received some media attention with articles appearing in the Scotsman and Evening News. The main body of the research was based on 8 UK areas including Glasgow City Council and South Ayrshire Council areas.

Completeness is defined as 'every person who is entitled to have an entry in an electoral register is registered' and accuracy as 'there are no false entries on the electoral register'.

The Commission accepts that their report is based on data from several sources all of which are estimated figures which have deteriorated with time. The census which was used as the main comparator is almost 10 years out of date and assumes population growth which is almost certainly inaccurate. Numerous comments have been made to the Commission regarding the accuracy of the report and the broad interpretation of estimated facts and figures.

2.2 Electoral Registration – Service Priorities March 2010 – June 2010

2.2.1 The service priorities over the next 3 months

- Carry out preparatory work for the forthcoming General Election;
- Apply absent and proxy voting requests as received;
- Continue to update the register with additions, deletions and alterations;
- Continue with initiatives to encourage participation and improve registration rates;
- Investigate alternative electoral applications.

3.0 COUNCIL TAX OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

3.1 Council Tax – Service Overview– 25^h November 2009 – 17th March 2010

3.1.1 Council Tax – New Dwellings

As at 25th November 2009 there were 386,757 chargeable dwellings in Lothian which has risen to 387,521 as at 17th March 2010, an increase of 764 dwellings in 4 months. In Band 'D' equivalent terms the Council Tax List has increased from 393,836 to 395,133, an increase of 1,297.

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 38 dwellings have been altered.

3.1.3 Council Tax – Altered Houses with no sales

During the period, the records of 1,153 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 17th March 2010 there were 104 cases outstanding. Appeal hearings continue to be arranged regularly to ensure the disposal of most of outstanding cases.

3.2 Council Tax – Service Priorities March 2010 – June 2010

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

- 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;
- Continue improvement on the time taken between the sale of houses which have been altered and the date their Council Tax Band is changed;
- Update my records by carrying out the survey of Council Tax subjects which have been altered and not sold;
- 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 25th November 2009 – 17th March 2010

4.1.1 2005 Revaluation Appeals

All appeals, with the exception of those referred to the Lands Tribunal for Scotland, were disposed of in line with the Valuation Timetable Order. There are currently 31 Telecommunication Networks, 6 Bingo Halls, 2 Canal Undertakings and 3 Racetrack

and stables subjects on the outstanding appeal list. Hopefully by the next meeting of the Board the Bingo Halls and Racetrack subjects will have been resolved.

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 25th November 2009 to 17th March 2010, there have been 509 additions, 698 alterations and 347 deletions. The number of new subjects entering the Valuation Roll during this period is substantially greater than the 333 new entries added during the comparable 3 month period in 2008/9. The number of alterations, up from 393; also show an increase, as do deletions which are up from 212.

4.1.3 Running Roll Appeals

As a result of amendments to the Valuation Roll and, in the majority of cases, the tram works, running roll appeals are constantly being received and dealt with. As at 25th November 2009, there were 873 appeals outstanding. During the period 25th November 2009 to 17th March, 637 appeals have been resolved and a further 293 appeals received.

The disposal of appeals is proving to be a major burden on the staff with many more appeals proceeding to formal hearing than in previous years. The cost in terms of staff time, legal costs and staff moral is concerning.

4.1.4 Lands Tribunal and Lands Valuation Appeal Courts

Since my last report I have initiated 4 appeals against decisions of the Lothian Valuation Appeal Panel, all of which relate to disturbance caused by tram works. I am hopeful that the appeals will be heard by the Lands Valuation Appeal Court in May and the decision of the Court will help to allow the majority of future appeals to be resolved without further litigation.

4.1.5 2010 Revaluation

My professional and technical staff worked exceptionally well to achieve the revaluation of all subjects in Lothian. The task is now almost fully complete with only subjects containing petrol throughput still to be revalued. The vast majority of Valuation Notices were issued on 16th March and I expect the remaining few Notices to be issued prior to the end of this month. We have received numerous phone call enquiries which hopefully my staff have managed to answer to the satisfaction of the ratepayer.

The total number of subjects in the Lothian valuation roll as at 1st April 2010 will be approximately 30,120. The Net Annual value of subjects has increased from £1,057,510,000 to £1,251,592,000 as a result of the revaluation, an increase of 18.35%. We are at present reviewing subjects previously exempted from entry in the valuation roll to ensure the exemptions still apply.

4.2 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Priorities March 2010 – June 2010

The service priorities in Non-Domestic Rating are:-

- Prepare cases as may be required by the Valuation Appeal Committee, Lands Tribunal for Scotland and the Lands Valuation Appeal Court;
- Schedule and action the disposal of appeals resulting from Running Roll alterations;
- Survey and value new property or alterations to existing properties to ensure the Valuation Roll is as complete and accurate as possible;
- Continue to update databases with rent, cost, turnover and throughput information to ensure analysis is as complete and accurate as possible.

5.0 HUMAN RESOURCES

5.1 UNISON

Regular JCC meetings continue to be held on a regular basis and no items of note have been raised.

5.2 Staffing

There have been no changes to staffing since my last report.

5.3 Equalities

No items of concern have been received. I am currently working on a review of the various Joint Board equalities policies with a view to amalgamating all the policies into one document.

6.0 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 strategic risk register continues to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Job specific risk registers are currently under development to meet audit recommendations.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

8.0 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

17 March 2010

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICERS

Self-Assessment Form

<p>Performance standard 1 : Using information sources to verify entries on the register of electors and identify potential new electors Subject : Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records</p>	<p>Supports vision themes:</p> <p>Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting</p>
<p>This standard aims to ensure EROs use appropriate sources of information to verify records on the register of electors and identify potential new electors.</p>	
<p>Above the performance standard</p>	<p>The ERO takes a proactive approach throughout the year to identify and contact potential electors who may have moved into, or within, the local authority area, such as by using council tax records to identify residents of newly occupied properties.</p>
<p>Performance standard 2 : Maintaining the property database Subject : Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records</p>	<p>Supports vision themes:</p> <p>Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting</p>
<p>This standard aims to ensure EROs use all appropriate sources of information available to them to ensure all relevant properties are included in the property database.</p>	
<p>Above the performance standard</p>	<p>The ERO also uses relevant external sources, such as Royal Mail and/or Land Registry/Registers of Scotland, and undertakes other activities to update the property database.</p>
<p>Performance standard 3 : House-to-house enquiries Subject : Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records</p>	<p>Supports vision themes:</p> <p>Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting</p>
<p>This standard aims to ensure EROs make the necessary house-to-house enquiries to ensure that all eligible residents are registered (Section 9A and 10(5) of RPA 1983).</p>	
<p>Above the performance standard</p>	<p>The ERO has developed and put in place a specific strategy for carrying out house-to-house enquiries. This should include:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying when and how house-to-house enquiries should be carried out; • considering any needs or difficulties associated with particular areas and preparing accordingly; • the monitoring of canvasser performance; • providing for personal visits to be carried out throughout the year in connection with the identification of eligible residents in conjunction with plans for identifying potential newly eligible residents.
<p>Performance standard 4 : Maintaining the integrity of registration and absent vote applications Subject : Integrity</p>	<p>Supports vision themes:</p> <p>Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting</p>
<p>This standard aims to ensure EROs have a process in place to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate electoral malpractice.</p>	
<p>Performance standard</p>	<p>The ERO has a comprehensive written plan outlining what steps are to be taken to deal with concerns about specific registration or absent vote applications. Suspicious registration and absent vote applications that meet the criteria identified in the plan are referred to local Police/Single Point of contact (SPOC), with whom the ERO has appropriate links. The ERO also has in place a threshold number of absent vote applications being directed to any one address. The ERO retains registration forms for the life of the register and original absent vote applications are kept until the application is cancelled, or replaced by a new form.</p>

Performance standard 5 : Supply and security of the register and absent voter lists Subject : Integrity	Supports vision themes: Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting
This standard aims to ensure that, once published, EROs ensure the full register is made available for public inspection and supplies copies of the register and absent voter lists to those prescribed in legislation.	
Above the performance standard	The ERO has a recorded complaints procedure in respect of the supply and publication of the electoral register. The ERO maintains a written record of any complaints received and action taken. The ERO records all transactions of sales and supply of the full and edited register and maintains an up to date record of the details of those organisations entitled to receive it.
Performance standard 6 : Public awareness strategy Subject : Participation	Supports vision themes: User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors
This standard aims to ensure that EROs develop and maintain an effective and appropriate public awareness strategy.	
Performance standard	The public awareness strategy is documented including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying target audiences; • clearly defined objectives and success measures; • risks – identification and mitigation; • resources (financial and staffing); • evaluation plan which records the results of the activities undertaken.
Performance standard 7 : Working with partners Subject : Participation	Supports vision themes: User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors
This standard aims to ensure that EROs have researched the merits in working with appropriate partners, and work with them where appropriate to promote electoral participation.	
Performance standard	The ERO has consulted other departments of the Local Authority to promote electoral participation and has evaluated the costs/benefits of a joint working arrangement, and has ensured that duplication of effort and unnecessary expenditure is avoided.
Performance standard 8 : Accessibility and communication of information Subject : Participation	Supports vision themes: User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors
This standard aims to ensure that EROs effectively communicate electoral registration information and provide a simple and user friendly way to access the information to encourage registration applications.	
Performance standard	The ERO takes note of relevant legislation and specific research that has been carried out and/or consultation with appropriate organisations to determine the appropriate languages and formats to communicate with the relevant audiences. The ERO then communicates information in the most accessible way (website/hard copy/telephone services) in the appropriate languages and formats. The ERO ensures that all outgoing communication provides the contact details of the local office to allow interested parties to respond and find out further information.
Performance standard 9 : Planning for rolling registration and the annual canvass Subject : Planning and organisation	Supports vision themes: Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery
This standard aims to ensure that EROs have developed robust planning processes for rolling registration and the annual canvass.	
Performance standard	The ERO has put in place formal, written plans for rolling registration and the annual canvass. These should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly defined objectives and success measures; • risks – identification and mitigation; • recruitment of temporary/permanent staff where needed; • financial resources; • evaluation plan recording the results of the activities undertaken.
Performance standard 10 : Training Subject : Planning and organisation	Supports vision themes: Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery
This standard aims to ensure that EROs have provided appropriate training for staff to deliver the rolling registration and annual canvass processes.	
Performance standard	The ERO provides the relevant training to both permanent and temporary staff to ensure awareness and understanding of legislative requirements.