

QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT TO THE JOINT BOARD



6 September 2010

1 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 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION SERVICE OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

2.1 Electoral Registration – Service Overview 11th May 2010 – 23rd August 2010

2.1.1 Rolling Registration

During the period 11th May 2010 to 23rd August my staff actioned 5,148 additions; 4,816 removals and 227 changes to the register.

2.1.2 Absent Voters List

The number of electors on the absent vote list reported at the last meeting of the Board was 89,629 which included 454 proxies and 98 postal proxies. The number of electors on the absent voters list has fallen slightly and now stands at 89,616 which include 448 proxies and 98 postal proxies.

2.1.3 Electoral Commission – Financial Return for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain

The Electoral Commission again ingathered Financial Returns for Electoral Registration Officers in July 2010. Lothian submitted the full return in due time. To date there has been no feed back from the Commission.

2.1.4 2010 Canvass

The Royal Mail commenced delivery of Canvass forms to the area covered by Ward 16 Liberton/Gilmerton on 12th August. 15,171 forms were provided to Royal Mail for delivery. To ensure all registrations are appropriately applied in time for the by-election, to be held on 9th September 2010, a different colour of envelope has been used to ensure easy identification on return and thus speedy processing.

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2.1.4/ The Royal Mail then commenced delivery of remaining Canvass forms from 26th August. 349,433 forms were provided to Royal Mail for delivery and 41,628 forms retained for door to door canvassing. 77 canvassers have been employed to carry out door to door canvassing between 20th August and 12th September.

Publicity in place for the canvass includes;-

- Posters issued to libraries, council offices, community centres and schools;
- Poster in place at Haymarket railway station;
- Posters in place at the Vue cinemas at Omni centre, Ocean Terminal and Livingston;
- English and Urdu audio adverts and web adverts placed on Radio Ramadan and Radio Ramadan website;
- Advertising panels placed inside Lothian and First buses;
- Adverts on selected bus shelters in all Lothian Council areas;
- Participation in West Lothian schools democracy challenge initiative;
- Adverts in Council newspapers and magazines;
- Information pages updated on Bebo and MYspace.

2.2 Electoral Registration – Service Priorities September 2010 – December 2010

2.2.1 The service priorities over the next 3 months

- Carry out preparatory work for the forthcoming By-Election;
- Apply absent and proxy voting requests as received;
- Carry out postal and door to door canvass of all Lothian households;
- Continue with initiatives to encourage participation and improve registration rates;
- Complete Electoral Commission performance standards return;
- Complete statutory statistical return;
- Conclude investigation into alternative electoral applications.

3 COUNCIL TAX OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

3.1 Council Tax – Service Overview– 1st June 2010 – 23rd August 2010

3.1.1 Council Tax – New Dwellings

As at 31st May 2010 there were 388,105 chargeable dwellings in Lothian which has risen to 388,684 as at 23rd August 2010, an increase of 579 dwellings in 3 months. In Band 'D' equivalent terms the Council Tax List has increased from 395,791 to 396,482, an increase of 691.

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 18 dwellings have been altered. The number of band changes remains at a very low level compared to previous years.

3.1.3 Council Tax – Altered Houses with no sales

During the period, the records of 675 dwellings have been updated, as a result of alteration work being carried out to existing dwellings. As previously reported 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 23rd August 2010 there were 86 cases outstanding. Appeal hearings continue to be arranged regularly to ensure the disposal of most of outstanding cases.

As a result of appeal discussions it has been necessary to carry out a review of some Council Tax Bandings in the Drum Brae/Gyle area of Edinburgh. The Councillors for the area in question have been notified of the proposed changes.

3.1.5 Court of Session

Since my last report 4 appeals initiated by me have been heard by the Court of Session. The Court considered that the local Valuation Appeal Committee had seriously erred in arriving at their conclusions and referred them back to the Committee to review their decision. The Committees have reviewed their conclusions and reversed their decision for 2 appeals but retained their position in the other 2 appeals. I am waiting advice from Counsel as to the appropriate course of action to be taken.

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3.2 Council Tax – Service Priorities September 2010 – December 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 NON DOMESTIC RATING OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

4.1 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Overview 1st June 2010 – 23rd August 2010

4.1.1 2005 Revaluation Appeals

There still remains the same number of 2005 Revaluation appeals, held by the Lands Tribunal for Scotland. Categories outstanding at the Lands Tribunal include Telecommunication Networks, Bingo Halls, Canal Undertakings, Racetrack and Stables. I expect the Bingo Halls, Racetrack and Stables to be removed from the list in the near future. The Mobile Telecommunication subjects are expected to be listed for hearing in February 2011.

4.1.2 2010 Revaluation Appeals

The total number of appeals received against the new 2010 Revaluation Rateable Values now stands at 3,355 appeals with a total RV of £325,555,723. Of these, 61 appeals have been resolved leaving 3,294 presently outstanding. It is anticipated that the vast majority of Revaluation appeals will be lodged during the month of September, the last month permitted by statute. The last date for reaching agreement on the 2010 Revaluation appeals is 31st December 2013 and a diet of hearings will be scheduled to take place from early 2011.

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 1st June 2010 to 23rd August 2010, there have been 395 additions, 515 valuation alterations and 199 deletions. The property market continues to be very sluggish with limited construction commencing.

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4.1.3 Running Roll Appeals

As a result of amendments to the Valuation Roll running roll appeals continue to be received and dealt with. As at 31st May 2010, there were 816 appeals outstanding. During the period 1st June 2010 to 23rd August 2010, 224 appeals have been resolved and a further 175 appeals received. All running roll appeals are cited for hearing between September and December this year to allow commencement of the Revaluation appeals in early 2011.

4.1.4 Lands Tribunal and Lands Valuation Appeal Courts

Since my last report 4 appeals initiated by me and which include around 40 subjects relating to disturbance caused by tram works were heard by the Lands Valuation Appeal Court. Unfortunately the Court agreed with the decision of the Committee and the Rateable Values of the retail properties which were facing the tram construction works have now been reduced by 20% for the period of the disturbance.

4.2 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Priorities September 2010 – December 2010

The service priorities in Non-Domestic Rating are:-

- Prepare cases as may be required by the Valuation Appeal Committee;
- 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;
- Schedule appeal hearings to assist the disposal of Revaluation 2010 appeals.

5 HUMAN RESOURCES

5.1 UNISON

Regular JCC meetings continue to be held and no items of note have been raised. We are currently discussing my proposed reviewed schemes for the career development of Valuers and Technicians and hope to have agreed schemes for the December Board meeting.

We continue to review, adapt and promote the LVJB Performance Review and Development Scheme. Although a version of the scheme has previously been to the Board I believe that the process should be allowed to evolve as work processes and structures change. I intend to provide the Board with a copy of the scheme currently in use at the next Board meeting in December.

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- 5.1/ I have been advised that a 3 year pay offer has been put to UNISON members and they are currently being balloted for acceptance or otherwise. Non-acceptance may lead to possible strike action mid October; this has been added to the Risk Register.

5.2 Staffing

The post of Head of Valuation Services has been offered and accepted by Nick Chapman who takes up the role on 1st October 2010. I welcome him to the post and hope he enjoys the challenges in his new role.

As part of the annual canvass of electors I have employed 74 part-time electoral canvassers mostly from constituent council's staff. The canvassers are employed to carry out door to door canvassing of households from mid August to mid September.

I have presented 4 Long Service Awards to staff with 25 years service. I have many long serving staff that provide valuable experience and expertise to the organisation and I thank them for their continued commitment.

My Personnel & Finance officer requested further training to assist her in carrying out her duties to her maximum potential. She has now commenced a part-time MSc in Human Resource Management at Napier University.

5.3 Equalities

No items of concern have been received. The various Joint Board equalities policies are proposed to be superseded by one amalgamated policy document which is separately itemised on the agenda.

6 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. Further job specific risk registers are currently under development to meet audit recommendations.


7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

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8 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

6 September 2010