

# QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT TO THE JOINT BOARD



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24 June 2011

## 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 April 2011 – 31 May 2011

#### 2.1.1 Rolling Registration

During the period 11 March 2011 to 15 April, which was the last date for voter registration applications to be considered for the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary Election and UK Referendum on 5 May, my staff actioned 5,323 additions; 3,768 removals and 272 changes to the register which is considerably less than alterations to the register at this time last year (8,970 additions; 3,749 removals and 1,256 changes). This is probably due to the lower level of house sales.

The June update to the register covered the period 16 April to 10 May 2011; during this period my staff actioned 1,088 additions; 935 removals and 62 changes.

#### 2.1.2 Absent Voters List

At the time of the announcement of the date of the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary Election & UK Referendum the absent voters list stood at 93,405. On the last date for receipt of absent vote applications for the election, the total number of absent voters had risen to 100,560, an increase of 5,155. Since then the number of electors on the absent vote standing list has fallen slightly and at present the total stands at 96,918.

#### 2.1.3 Scottish Parliamentary Election and UK Referendum

The elections progressed very well with all tasks completed on time and all checks and verifications implemented. Staff carried out their tasks using the new electoral software system which was recently introduced to the organisation. There were significant changes to procedures required by electoral managers and I am pleased to say that the team worked with great commitment during this very busy period.

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2.1.3/ Post election reviews of processes, procedures, timetables have been carried out together with meetings to discuss successes and difficulties both with returning officer staff and printing contractors.

#### **2.1.4 Cabinet Office Data Matching Pilot**

Having volunteered and been successful in attaining inclusion in a data matching pilot being run by the Cabinet Office, we have now had several meetings, exchange of documentation and are now ready to transfer data for the first stage of the matching exercise. Although this exercise will involve a great deal of work for our administration and IT staff I am hopeful that the exercise which is providing additional resources will improve the completeness and accuracy of the Lothian registers.

### **2.2 Electoral Registration – Service Priorities June 2011 – August 2011**

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

- Apply absent voting requests as received;
- Continue to update the register with additions, deletions and alterations;
- Continue with initiatives to encourage participation and improve registration rates;
- Work with the Cabinet Office in the Data Matching Pilot exercise;
- Carry out advance work in preparation for the 2011 Canvass

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

#### **3.1 Council Tax – Service Overview– 1 April 2011 – 31 May 2011**

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

As at 1 April 2011 there were 390,642 chargeable dwellings in Lothian which has risen very slightly to 390,926 as at 31 May 2011, an increase of just 284 dwellings in 2 months. In Band 'D' equivalent terms the Council Tax List has increased from 398,558 to 398,894, an increase of 336.

##### **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 23 dwellings have been altered. The number of band changes is at a very low level compared to previous years.

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

During the period, the records of 478 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 31 May 2011 there were 56 cases outstanding. Appeal hearings continue to be arranged regularly to ensure the disposal of most of outstanding cases.

### **3.1.5 Court of Session**

Since my last report I have appealed against one Valuation Appeal Committee<sup>1</sup> decision to the Court of Session. I am hopeful that the appeal can be heard by one Judge thus limiting legal costs.

## **3.2 Council Tax – Service Priorities June 2011 – August 2011**

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 1 April 2011 – 31 May 2011**

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

All 2005 Revaluation appeals, with the exception of those referred to the Lands Tribunal for Scotland, were disposed of by 31 December 2008 in line with the Valuation Timetable Order. Categories which remain outstanding at the Lands Tribunal include Telecommunication Networks, Bingo Halls, Canal Undertakings, Racetrack and Stables.

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#### **4.1.2 2010 Revaluation Appeals**

A total of 10,739 appeals were received against the 2010 Revaluation Roll as published. The number of subjects appealed was 10,390. A diary of courts has been arranged to ensure the appeals can all be disposed of by the 31 December 2013, the last date permitted by statute. A total of 2,382 appeals have been resolved to date with 878 of those appeals being dealt with during April and May 2011.

I am pleased with progress to date but staff are aware that, due to the extremely large number of Running Roll appeals now received that the appeals progress will need to take top priority. Progress is under close monitoring.

#### **4.1.3 Running Roll**

My professional and technical staff have continued to survey and value subjects that have been newly constructed, altered or demolished. From 1 April 2011 to 31 May 2011, there have been 160 additions, 378 valuation alterations and 161 deletions.

#### **4.1.4 Running Roll Appeals**

As a result of amendments to the Valuation Roll and, issues relating mainly to the economic decline, running roll appeals are constantly being received and dealt with. As at 1 April 2011, there were 6,464 appeals outstanding. During the period 1 April 2011 to 31 May 2011, 25 appeals have been resolved and a further 118 appeals received.

The number of appeals lodged throughout Scotland just prior to the end of March 2011 is probably the highest number of Running Roll appeals ever received. It is this extremely high number of appeals that will certainly cause a strain on the organisation in terms of finance and staff resources. There is a further risk that as long as the economic decline continues that appeals will now be lodged on an annual basis instead of five yearly.

#### **4.1.5 Lands Tribunal and Lands Valuation Appeal Courts**

Since my last report I have numerous appeals against a Valuation Appeal Committee decision, initiated by me, progressing through to a stated case. The appeals relate to a downturn in value of the shops located at the Gyle shopping centre.

I am also working, with my Head of Valuation Service in the preparation of pharmacy shop appeals progressing to hearing to the Lands Tribunal of Scotland.

#### **4.2 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Priorities June 2011 – August 2011**

The service priorities in Non-Domestic Rating are:-

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- Prepare cases as may be required by the Valuation Appeal Committee and Lands Tribunal for Scotland;
- Schedule and action the disposal of appeals resulting from the 2010 Revaluation;
- 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 and no items of note have been raised.

A Procedure for the Conduct of Reviews was prepared, agreed with UNISON and has now been implemented.

### 5.2 Staffing

I am pleased to report that one of my Trainee Valuers has now completed his professional exams and has gained Membership of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

Unfortunately one Trainee Valuer did not pass at his final attempt. As he had been seconded from the post of Technician on 1 January 1999 he has now reverted back to his original post.

As there are insufficient valuers and too many technicians for the current workload I am now considering the options available.

### 5.3 Equalities

No items of concern have been received.

The Lothian Valuation Joint Board website is currently being restructured. A facility is now available to read the website in greater sized fonts and also for translation services ensuring equal access.

The Annual Equalities Report is dealt with under a separate report to the Board.

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

The Business Continuity Plan is under review and is to be updated to take cognisance in staffing structure, IT changes and more efficient working practices.

## **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.