

# QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT TO THE JOINT BOARD



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5 September 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 12<sup>th</sup> May 2011 – 19<sup>th</sup> August 2011

#### 2.1.1 Rolling Registration

The 1<sup>st</sup> July update to the published register encompassed applications received during the period 11<sup>th</sup> May and 9<sup>th</sup> June 2011, and during this period my staff actioned 1,558 additions; 1,575 removals and 54 changes. The update for August included applications received during the period 10<sup>th</sup> June and 11<sup>th</sup> July 2011, and during this period a total of 1,812 additions; 1,658 removals and 50 changes were applied. The 1<sup>st</sup> September revisions include applications received between 12 July and 10 August, but these have yet to be incorporated into the 2011 Register.

#### 2.1.2 Absent Voters List

At the time of the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary Election & UK Referendum the absent voters list stood at 100,560. Since then the number of electors on the absent vote standing list has fallen slightly and at present the total stands at 96,655

#### 2.1.3 Edinburgh Central Local By- Election

The election progressed well with all tasks completed on time. The number of electors on the register for the election was 14,810 including 2,506 who opted for postal votes, and 30 proxies. A total of 172 electors were added to the register for the by-election. I understand that the voter turnout was only 23.4%

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

I gave a brief report at the last Board meeting on the Cabinet Office data matching pilot which we are participating in. The first stage of the matching exercise is now complete with registration forms being issued to 10,080 possible residents and a door to door canvass of 103 households.

The exercise is looking at the benefits of data matching, issues arising and costs incurred. An analysis of the tasks undertaken is being carried out at each stage to measure the effectiveness of door to door canvassing and postal canvassing using data matched information. Information will be supplied at regular stages of the exercise and a full report will be produced by the Cabinet Office in Spring 2012.

#### **2.1.5 2011 Canvass**

The Royal Mail commenced delivery of Canvass forms from 25<sup>th</sup> August. 351,915 forms were provided to Royal Mail for delivery and 39,536 forms retained for door to door canvassing. 73 canvassers have been employed to carry out door to door canvassing between 26<sup>th</sup> August and 19<sup>th</sup> September.

Publicity has been reviewed and reduced to only participate in advertising which is considered beneficial the resultant actions in place for this canvass includes:-

- Poster in place at Haymarket railway station;
- Advertising panels placed inside First buses throughout Lothian;
- Participation in West Lothian schools democracy challenge initiative;
- Press release to Local Area newspapers;
- Advert in the Edinburgh and area Service (HM Forces) community official guide

### **2.2 Electoral Registration – Service Priorities September 2011 – December 2011**

#### **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;
- Complete Electoral Commission financial and performance standards return;
- Complete statutory statistical return;
- Apply absent voting requests as received;
- Work with the Cabinet Office in the Data Matching Pilot exercise;

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

#### **3.1 Council Tax – Service Overview– 1<sup>st</sup> June 2011 – 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2011**

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

As at 1<sup>st</sup> June 2011 there were 390,926 chargeable dwellings in Lothian which has risen very slightly to 391,298 as at 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2011, an increase of just 372 dwellings in 3 months.

##### **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 36 dwellings have been altered. The number of band changes remains at a very low level.

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

During the period, the records of 767 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 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2011 there were 62 cases outstanding. Appeal hearings continue to be arranged regularly to ensure the disposal of most of outstanding cases with hearings arranged for 15<sup>th</sup> September, 14<sup>th</sup> October and 4<sup>th</sup> November.

##### **3.1.5 Court of Session**

I appealed against a Valuation Appeal Committee<sup>1</sup> decision to the Court of Session. The appeal was heard and decided in favour of the Assessor giving clear guidance for future hearings.

#### **3.2 Council Tax – Service Priorities September 2011 – December 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<sup>st</sup> June 2011 – 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2011**

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

There has been no change in the number of appeals which remain outstanding at the Lands Tribunal. The listing of such appeals is in the hands of the Tribunal.

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

A total of 10,927 appeals were received against the 2010 Revaluation Roll as published. The number of subjects appealed was 10,386. A diary of courts is arranged to ensure the appeals are all disposed of by the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013, the last date permitted by statute. A total of 3,664 appeals have been resolved to date with 1,087 of those appeals being dealt with during June and August 2011. As reported at the last Board meeting I hope to have cleared 8,700 Revaluation appeals by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. 11 Revaluation appeal courts are scheduled to the end of December 2011 with further courts to be arranged for 2012.

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.

##### **4.1.2 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> June 2011 to 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2011, there have been 249 additions, 496 valuation alterations and 169 deletions.

##### **4.1.3 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<sup>st</sup> April 2011, there were 6,464 appeals outstanding. As at 22<sup>nd</sup> August this number had risen to 6,826. Courts to deal with this type of appeal are scheduled to commence on 3<sup>rd</sup> November with 3 hearings scheduled this year and a probable further 6 by the

end of the financial year. The appeals are required to be cleared, within the same statutory framework as the Revaluation appeals, by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013.

I have previously highlighted the extremely high number of economic circumstance appeals that have been lodged with the expectation that appeals will now be lodged on an annual basis instead of five yearly.

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

I am working, with my Head of Valuation Service in the preparation of pharmacy shop appeals progressing to hearing by the Lands Tribunal of Scotland. The Lands Tribunal has now set a date of 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> January 2011 for hearing the appeals.

#### **4.2 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Priorities September 2011 – December 2011**

The service priorities in Non-Domestic Rating are:-

- 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.

I previously reported that a Procedure for the Conduct of Reviews had been prepared, agreed with UNISON and implemented. The first minor review was of the organisational supporting services. The review was concluded and minor changes to customer service delivery implemented.

I am currently preparing the Terms of Reference for a review of job descriptions within the office. The main purpose is to ensure that the statutory duty of Best Value is contained in the job descriptions for all posts. In addition I hope to include duties pertaining to Electoral Registration within all job descriptions to ensure that, if necessary, additional staff can be utilised at times of extreme surges in workload. Additionally, in preparation for 2014, I consider that it may be essential to involve many

more staff in electoral tasks to ensure all statutory duties are delivered on time in that particularly hectic and unique year

## **5.2 Staffing**

I advertised internally for a trainee valuer and only one application was received. The person has been interviewed, offered the post and I wait to hear if the offer has been accepted.

I received a letter of resignation from a job sharing Technical Support Assistant. The post will not be filled.

I have also received notification of a retirement from one of my Divisional Assessors after 37 years of service. This is a senior post with the number of appropriately skilled and trained staff in the job market small in numbers. I consider it necessary to fill this post and I intend to advertise this post in the coming weeks

## **5.3 Equalities**

No items of concern have been received.

## **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 has been reviewed and updated to take cognisance of 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.

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

**5 September 2011**