

ASSESSOR'S QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT TO THE JOINT BOARD



17 March 2014

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 Valuation Joint Board.

2.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION SERVICE OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

2.1 Electoral Registration – Service Overview 12th November – 7th March 2014

2.1.1 2013/14 Canvass

The 2013/14 canvass commenced with the delivery of forms by Royal Mail from 9th October 2013. As you may recall the canvass period was delayed by Parliament to improve the completeness and accuracy of the register prior to the transition to individual electoral registration.

Reminder canvass forms were delivered to matched households by Royal Mail from 22nd November 2013. 176 canvassers were employed to visit approximately 75,000 unmatched households.

A final reminder was issued to all households who had failed to return a completed canvass form on 5th February 2014. This reminder although not required by legislation was considered appropriate because of the heightened electoral activity this year.

In line with legislative requirements 22,696 deletion letters have been issued to electors who have failed to return a canvass form and who could not be matched to Council Tax payers data.

I am delighted to say that the door to door canvass visits, added reminder and perhaps media coverage has resulted in an increased return rate this year. The overall hard return increased from 78% to 83%.

The following table gives a break down of the electorate number in each local authority area.

	Canvass Return Rate		Number of Electors	
	2012	2013/14	1 December 2012	10 March 2014
City of Edinburgh	85	88	345,150	358,653
East Lothian	93	94	78,226	79,880
Midlothian	94	94	65,064	66,962
West Lothian	92	93	131,149	133,906
Lothian Total	88	90	619,589	639,401

2.1.2 Absent Voters List

As at 1st November 2013 the number of postal voters on the list was 100,810.

As a result mainly of request for postal voting applications during the canvass 52,000 postal vote application forms have been issued. There are approx 4,500 which are still to be processed and we continue to receive returned applications on a daily basis. The number of postal voters will continue to increase.

At 7th March the number of postal voters on the list is 103,859.

2.1.3 European Parliamentary Election 22nd May 2014

Preparation towards the European Parliamentary Elections is progressing as planned. Polling district boundary changes have been applied to the electoral management system.

27,000 EU voter registration application forms have been issued to European Union citizens to allow them to register to vote in this country at the European Parliamentary Elections if they choose, rather than their home state. To date just over 6,000 applications have been returned.

The first dispatch of poll cards and postal poll letters are expected to be delivered to electors around 17th/18th April. Postal vote packs should be delivered around 2nd /3rd May.

There will be subsequent issues for new and altered electors, postals and proxies.

The following table gives deadline dates when applications **must be received by me**.

Application deadlines	
Register to vote	Tuesday 6 May 2014
New postal vote applications (including proxies applying to vote by post)	5pm on Wednesday 7 May 2014
To cancel or alter postal and proxy votes, or to change from postal to proxy voting	5pm on Wednesday 7 May 2014
New proxy vote applications	5pm on Wednesday 14 May 2014
Applications, made after 5pm on 14 May, to vote by proxy on the grounds of a medical emergency or where you learn you cannot go to the polling station because of work reasons	5pm on Thursday 22 May 2014

2.1.4 Scottish Independence Referendum 18th September 2014

Each household received both a household form and a young person's voter registration form during the 2013/14 canvass. The number of young electors, currently on the local government register or young persons polling list, who will be under 18 years on 18th September 2014 is 13,306.

Young persons who are not currently registered and where we have names and addresses supplied by education bodies will be issued a further invitation to register during March.

We continue to build up contacts with a view to improve registration rates of young persons, students and transient persons living in Lothian. As well as improving the register for the Scottish Independence Referendum it will ensure a smoother transition to individual electoral registration post Referendum.

2.1.5 Transition to Individual Electoral Registration

Lothian Valuation Joint Board is well represented by senior staff on the various groups and committees that have been formed to ensure legislation, IT capabilities, training and delivery are fit for purpose.

We have commenced work on job descriptions for call centre staff and canvassers and appropriate furniture, PCs, telephones etc. are being sourced to ensure the team is recruited, trained and ready for duties required during both the referendum period and mainly for the transition to IER which commences on 19th September 2014.

Negotiations with printers is well underway and the contract should be in place in the very near future. All household enquiry forms, individual application forms and envelopes are prescribed with the majority of letters either being prescribed or strongly recommended.

Staff continue to be kept informed of progress and are currently undergoing Disclosure Scotland checks as required by the Cabinet Office.

2.2 Electoral Registration – Service Priorities March 2014 – June 2014

2.2.1 The service priorities over the next 3 months

- Distribute the 2014 Electoral Register;
- Carry out reminder issue to young electors;
- Apply all EU citizen European Parliamentary Election application forms;
- Apply absent voting requests as received;
- Update the electoral register to include new electors, amend registration data and delete as required;
- Prepare for European parliamentary Election;
- Continue preparation work for transition to individual electoral registration.

3.0 COUNCIL TAX OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

3.1 Council Tax – Service Overview 26th November 2013 – 7th March 2014

3.1.1 Council Tax – New Dwellings

As at 11th November 2013 there were 397,856 chargeable dwellings in Lothian which has risen very slightly to 399,130 as at 7th March 2014, an increase of 1,274 dwellings over 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 93 dwellings have been altered. The number of band changes remains at a low level.

3.1.3 Council Tax – Altered Houses with no sales

During the period, the records of 489 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 Council Tax 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 7th March 2014 there were 50 cases outstanding. Appeal hearings continue to be arranged regularly to ensure the disposal of cases at least equates to the number received thus maintaining low numbers outstanding.

3.2 Council Tax – Service Priorities March 2014 – June 2014

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

- Insertion of the dwelling in the Council Tax List in accordance with performance targets;
- Alteration of Council Tax Bands for sold houses that had been altered prior to sale;
- Update records for subjects which have been altered and not sold;
- Continue to resolve proposals and appeals against Council Tax banding;
- Continue with the transfer of house data from paper to electronic format.

4.0 NON DOMESTIC RATING OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

4.1 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Overview 26th November 2013 – 7th March 2014

4.1.1 Running Roll

My professional and technical staff have continued to survey and value subjects that have been newly constructed, altered or demolished. From 12th November 2013 to 7th March 2014, there have been 404 additions, 467 valuation alterations and 246 deletions. This is an increase in activity over previous quarters.

4.1.2 Running Roll Appeals

As at 11th November the number of outstanding running roll appeals stood at 528; the number of appeals outstanding as at 7th March was 532. Courts to deal with this type of appeal are scheduled to continue to the end of the calendar year. We are now in a period of continual receipt and disposal of appeals at relatively low numbers.

4.1.3 Lands Tribunal and Lands Valuation Appeal Courts

I am pleased to say that appellants for a Distribution Warehouse and Exclusive Use Venues are no longer proceeding to the Lands Tribunal. Unfortunately much of the work had already been carried out and legal costs incurred. Subjects awaiting hearing by the Lands

Tribunal for Scotland include, Edinburgh Airport, Clinics & Health Centres, Tennis Centres, Ikea, a Large Industrial unit, and Telecommunication sites. Hearings are expected to re-commence mid-2014.

The Lands Valuation Appeal Court sat during the week commencing 10th March with one Lothian appeal heard.

4.2 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Priorities March 2014 – June 2014

The service priorities in Non-Domestic Rating are:-

- Prepare cases as may be required by the Valuation Appeal Committee;
- Prepare cases as may be required by the Lands Tribunal for Scotland;
- Schedule and action the disposal of running roll appeals;
- 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. Two policies have recently been agreed and further review of policies are under discussion. There are no outstanding issues or concerns.

5.2 Staffing

I am pleased to say that we were successful in recruiting a replacement IT Support Manager.

I am preparing job descriptions and hope to advertise for call centre staff and canvass staff to commence work around July 2014.

We have introduced a Policy for the Management of Work Related Stress which has been agreed with Unison and notified to staff. **Appendix 1**

5.3 Equalities

I have no equalities issue at present. I continue to work towards reaching appropriate equalities reporting targets.

6.0 RISK MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

6.1 Risk

The risk register continues to be updated at appropriate management meetings 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 continue to be developed to meet audit recommendations.

6.2 Information Technology

My IT team have continued to be heavily involved in hardware, software and premises security measures required by the Cabinet Office for the introduction of individual electoral registration.

Large screen monitors have been purchased to improve processing of A3 forms which will be the main size of form in use under individual electoral registration.

We are currently considering the use of tablets for canvassers to use for individual electoral registration.

An updated internet and email policy has been agreed with Unison and is now on our intranet. Staff have been briefed on the contents and need for compliance.

7.0 BUILDING ISSUES

7.1 Repair and Maintenance

It has been necessary to have a full inspection of the air conditioning, facilities and services as ongoing problems have not been able to be resolved.

Inherent faults have been discovered in the air conditioning system and works to rectify the problems arranged. Likewise the installation of the WCs and WHBs have not been carried out properly and the pipework needs to be repaired and re-aligned.

In preparation for additional staffing we are currently assessing the requirement for additional cabling and power and media outlets.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications within this report.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Board is requested to approve the Policy for the Management of Work Related Stress.

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

**Joan M Hewton
ASSESSOR & ERO**

10th March 2013



POLICY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

March 2014

POLICY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF WORK-RELATED STRESS
(covering all employees)

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POLICY ON MANAGEMENT OF WORK RELATED STRESS

(covering all employees)

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Joint Board is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees. The Lothian Valuation Joint Board recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.
- 1.2 This policy will apply to all Lothian Valuation Joint Board employees. Managers are responsible for implementation and Heads of Department are responsible for providing the necessary resources.

2 DEFINITION OF STRESS

- 2.1 The Health and Safety Executive define stress as *“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”*. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress, which can be detrimental to health. An expanded definition of stress is given in Appendix 1

3 AIMS OF THE POLICY

- 3.1 The aim of this policy is to assist in the identification and reduction of stressors in the workplace, especially in the key categories of the HSE risk factors as described in 6.1.
- 3.2 The policy will seek to:
 - a) Raise awareness generally of stress, risk factors and the signs and symptoms of stress in the workplace and how personal stress can be managed. Where necessary appropriate training will be provided;
 - b) Promote a culture that recognises that reactions to stress will vary from person to person, identify those adversely affected and provide appropriate support to those employees at these times;
 - c) Encourage managers to pro-actively deal with stress before it becomes a health issue e.g. by effectively managing and matching employees' abilities, skill levels and workloads; and
 - d) Ensure that risk factors associated with stress are identified by line management using the process of risk assessment.

4 POLICY STATEMENT

- 4.1 In seeking to ensure the effectiveness of this policy, the Lothian Valuation Joint Board will:
- a) Identify, as far as is reasonably practicable, all workplace stressors, and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress, or control the risks from stress. Risk assessments will be regularly reviewed;
 - b) Consult with staff representatives on the implementation of all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress;
 - c) Provide adequate resources to ensure the implementation of this policy; and
 - d) Provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.

5 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 Although there is currently no specific statutory legislation dealing with stress, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 employers must take all reasonably practicable measures to protect the health, safety and welfare of employees at work. There is, however, a growing legal framework in which the courts and tribunals have adjudicated on stress cases.
- 5.2 Additionally, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess health and safety risks and to introduce prevention and control measures based on those risk assessments.

6 MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

- 6.1 In 2005 the Health and Safety Executive introduced 'Tackling Stress: The Management Standards Approach'. The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:
- a) **Demands** – such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
 - b) **Control** – such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
 - c) **Support** – such as the encouragement and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
 - d) **Relationships** – such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
 - e) **Role** – such as whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
 - f) **Change** – such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

7.1 The roles and responsibilities for the effectiveness of this Policy are set out below. It should be noted that, in each instance, the list is not exhaustive:-

7.2 **Manager's Responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of Managers to:

- a) Conduct and implement recommendations of risk assessments within their area of responsibility;
- b) Ensure that staff are fully trained to discharge their duties;
- c) Ensure that staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities;
- d) Ensure good communication with employees, particularly where there are, for example, service provision and procedural changes;
- e) Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded;
- f) In accordance with the Lothian Valuation Joint Board's Managing Attendance Policy, conduct "return to work interviews" immediately after all periods of sickness absence;
- g) Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking;
- h) Attend training related to good management practice and health and safety in general;
- i) In accordance with the Lothian Valuation Joint Board's Policy on Fair Treatment at Work, ensure that inappropriate behaviour is not tolerated within their area of responsibility, also ensuring that the provisions of the policy are fully implemented; and
- j) Be vigilant and offer support to an employee who is experiencing both work and/or non work-related stress.

7.3 **Employee's Responsibilities**

Employees have a shared responsibility for dealing with the issue of stress, working with managers towards the common aim of ensuring that potential or existing problems are identified and dealt with at an early stage. This will involve both personal and work-related stress.

Therefore, employees should:

- a) Take responsibility for managing their workload;
- b) Raise issues of concern with their safety representative, line manager or with Occupational Health; and
- c) Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.

7.4 **Responding to stress related concerns**

Where it is identified that the stress causing concern has arisen outside the workplace in the employee's domestic life, their attention should be drawn to the support measures available to them. These include information leaflets, Lothian Valuation Joint Board policies and procedures which can support employees with family care or dependency needs. Where necessary, the help of the occupational health service provider can be sought through the assistance of Human Resources staff.

8 INDIVIDUAL STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Where managers are concerned about an individual's level of stress, e.g. highlighted by high sickness absence, stress documented as the reason for absence by a General Practitioner, or if an individual identifies that they are under undue stress, they should ensure that an Individual Stress Risk Assessment is completed. A copy is given at Appendix 2.

9 PROVIDING SUPPORT

- 9.1 In considering appropriate support, management will take account of the circumstances surrounding the individual case. Managers will discuss problems and explore possible work-related solutions.
- 9.2 These solutions may include consideration of training and development opportunities where gaining new skills and specialist counselling through management referral (e.g. to the Lothian Valuation Joint Board's occupational health service provider).
- 9.3 It is recognised that some employees may not consider it appropriate to discuss their situation with management. In such circumstances, employees should be encouraged to consult with their own doctor regarding any health concerns they may have. Alternatively, employees may wish to access, on a self-referral basis, any confidential telephone counselling/advisory services operated by the Lothian Valuation Joint Board.

10 PROVISION OF INFORMATION

- 10.1 Heads of Departments will ensure that employees are made aware of this policy and are provided with a range of appropriate information to assist understanding of stress and how it can be relieved.
- 10.2 This information may take the form of leaflets, advice from appropriate internal contacts and policy information which is available on the intranet.

11 REVIEW

- 11.1 This Policy is not a local collective agreement and will be reviewed from time to time. The Lothian Valuation Joint Board reserves the right to make changes to the Policy in light of experience or changing circumstances.

Appendix 1

The HSE defines stress as:

“The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed upon them.”

Stress varies at different times in our lives and can occur in personal or workplace situations.

Individuals will have different tolerance levels in response to escalating pressures. Some people like to work under pressure and some do not. However, it is recognised that there will always be some degree of pressure at work.

Under normal circumstances individuals develop coping strategies. However, some individuals, when subjected to prolonged exposure to raised levels of stress and/or short-term exposure to high stress levels, cannot cope. This can lead to physical, psychological or emotional problems.

Where stress occurs in the workplace it is the joint responsibility of employees and employers to manage it. Where it arises from personal circumstances employees need to take the primary responsibility for resolving it, seeking support where necessary. Employers are required to reduce any stress which arises and adversely affects their employees as a result of work.

It is accepted that any job can cause stress and also that it is not just about overwork. Boredom and monotony can also be stressful. Some of the most common causes of stress are:

- dealing with clients or the public
- reduction in resources, reorganisations and lack of job security
- poor working conditions
- threats of violence, harassment and bullying
- lack of childcare or flexibility
- lack of control over work
- too demanding a job or too high a workload
- monotonous or boring work
- lack of training
- excessive hours and shift work
- working in isolation
- working relationships
- unreasonable expectations

The above list is, however, not exhaustive

Appendix 2

THE MANAGEMENT OF STRESS INDIVIDUAL STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT

1. As set out in Lothian Valuation Joint Board's Policy for the Management of Work-Related Stress, it is the responsibility of managers to carry out a stress risk assessment and implement recommendations of risk assessments within their area of responsibility.
2. Where managers are concerned about an individual employee's level of stress, e.g. highlighted as the result of an Occupational Health referral, by high sickness absence, stress documented as the reason for absence by a General Practitioner, or if an individual identifies that they are feeling stressed, they should ensure that the employee is interviewed using the questions in the Individual Stress Risk Assessment (ISRA). A blank ISRA form is included in this document.
3. The individual employee should first be given the form and asked to answer the questions by ticking the most appropriate column. Stress affects people in different ways and what one person finds stressful can be normal to another. Managers should not ask individuals to change any of the information in the columns, even if they personally do not agree.
4. The manager and individual should then meet jointly to complete the "comments" column and to agree who will take what action in order to address the causes of the stress. The hazards should be identified from this risk assessment and the Risk Assessment Action Plan (RAAP) completed.
5. The individual employee may wish to have a friend or trade union representative with her/him when she/he meets with their line manager. Where the individual employee identifies the relationship with their line manager as a stressor, attention is drawn to the facility for the individual to discuss the completed ISRA with a person other than their manager e.g. a human resource staff member or other line manager whose participation has been agreed by the individual and her/his line manager.
6. It is the manager's responsibility to ensure that all agreed actions are followed up by the agreed date. If actions or stressors are beyond the control of that manager, they should ensure that these issues are passed up through the line management structure.
7. Actions to be taken in order to reduce the stressor(s) should be documented on the RAAP and reviewed in accordance with the timescales agreed.
8. On the agreed review date it will be necessary to consider whether all action points have been met. Where they have not, then a further review date and actions should be agreed.
9. Once all actions have been completed, the individual may choose to complete the ISRA again to see whether the stressors have been effectively reduced.
10. All documents should be retained in the individual's personal file.

Individual stress risk assessment

Statement	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always	Comments
I am clear what is expected of me at work						
I can decide when to take a break						
Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine						
I know how to go about getting my job done						
I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour						
I have unachievable deadlines						
If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me						
I am given supportive feedback on the work I do						

Statement	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always	Comments
I have to work very intensively						
I have a say in my own work speed						
I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are						
I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do						
I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department						
There is friction or anger between colleagues						
I have a choice in deciding how I do my work						
I am unable to take sufficient breaks						
I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation						
I am pressured to work long hours						

Statement	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always	Comments
I have a choice in deciding what I do at work						
I have to work very fast						
I am subject to bullying at work						
I have unrealistic time pressures						
I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem						
I get help and support I need from colleagues						
I have some say over the way I work						
I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work						
I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues						
Staff are always consulted about change at work						

Statement	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always	Comments
I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work						
My working time can be flexible						
My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems						
When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice						
I am supported through emotionally demanding work						
Relationships at work are strained						
My line manager encourages me at work						
Date Completed	Signature of Line Manager				Signature of Employee	
	Print Name				Print Name	

RISK ASSESSMENT ACTION PLAN

This Action Plan must be completed where any risk assessment activity highlights a potential stress hazard for the individual employee interviewed. Support is available in this process from your line manager. The Lothian Valuation Joint Board as a whole, and you as a line manager, have a statutory responsibility to identify, assess, and resolve any stress issue which may, if reasonably foreseeable, result in a member of staff suffering from significant harm as a result of any stress related illness.

Hazard Identified (from risk assessment)	Remedial Action Required	Person Responsible	Review/Completion Date

If you are not the person responsible for any action noted above, then you must discuss with and get agreement from the named person before completing this form. A copy of this completed form must then be passed to the person responsible.

Date Completed	Signature of Line Manager	Signature of Employee
	Print Name	Print Name