

ASSESSOR'S QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT TO THE JOINT BOARD



1 September 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 Joint Board.

2.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION SERVICE OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

2.1 Electoral Registration – Service Overview 1st April 2014 – 22nd August 2014

2.1.1 Absent Voters List

As at the publication of the Registers on 10th March 2014 the number of postal voters on the list was 103,859 compared to the current number which stands at 123,604. This surge in postal votes can be attributable in part to the European Election held in May but mainly to the Referendum. The current number of postal voters across the 4 constituent councils are approximately;-

- East Lothian 14,930
- Edinburgh 73,078
- Midlothian 12,292
- West Lothian 23,304

2.1.2 Rolling Registration

Since the register publication date, during the rolling registration update periods, my staff processed a total of 24,202 additions to the register, 19,205 removals and 3,814 amendments. To allow comparison to normal registration activity the number processed during the same period in 2013 was 9,844 additions to the register, 8,623 removals and 341 amendments. There has therefore been a significant increase in electoral activity.

2.1.3 European Parliamentary Election

The administration of the registers for the election progressed well with all tasks completed on time. The number of eligible electors on the Lothian registers for the election was

613,445 including 122,044 who opted for postal votes. A total of 7,576 electors were added to the register for the election by the closing date for applications.

2.1.4 Scottish Independence Referendum

The temporary canvassers have been canvassing households where no electors were registered and also trialling the use of Tablets for electronic engagement with a view to encouraging electronic registration from 19th September onwards. During the month of August almost 20,000 households have been canvassed across the Lothians with over 1,200 registration applications completed at the door.

Call centre staff are currently answering telephone calls relating to the Scottish Independence Referendum and have proved invaluable in this regard. Call numbers to my office have reached in excess of 2,000 per day during the past 3 weeks reaching a peak on the few days after poll card delivery.

Mail items arriving in my office have reached in excess of 3,000 per day during the last few weeks with many of the items being applications for postal or proxy voting. We have again had problems with some organisations holding applications and not providing timeously to me as required.

The workload and priorities have been extremely closely monitored with priorities across the organisation being reassessed on a daily basis. Staff have worked overtime in the evenings and at weekends to ensure that all communications are answered, all registration applications applied and all postal votes processed.

The Referendum has generated an exceptionally high volume of work and I am very pleased to say that my staff have willingly given their time and their commitment to ensuring all work items are processed appropriately.

2.1.5 Transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

The preparations towards the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration are almost complete.

I have now received a certificate of PSN compliance which will permit me to carry out confirmation of electors with the Department of Work and Pensions database through a government digital service hub.

Due to the ongoing need for door to door enquiries to be carried out at numerous stages of the IER write out it has been necessary to review staffing requirements for this task. I have employed 12 temporary canvassers for one year to ensure that I have sufficient staff available to carry out this statutory duty. The staff have been in place since 14th July with a view to improving the completeness of the registers prior to the introduction of IER.

The transition to IER will undoubtedly cause confusion for many electors. The Electoral Commission are required to carry out appropriate publicity and provide educational

materials to the electorate, this however may prove to be insufficient to deal with the probable confusion that will arise. In preparation for an expected surge in telephone calls I have recruited 10 call centre staff and installed appropriate telephone monitoring equipment. The call centre staff commenced employment on 28th July for a period of seven months.

The final staffing resource that I have reviewed is mail room support. I have recruited 2 staff again for a period of seven months to ensure the efficient workflow of mail items into and out of my office.

Expected key dates for electors

- 19th September 2014; IER commences and all applications to register must have elector personal identifiers provided and must be submitted to the Department of Work and Pensions for verification.
- 15th October 2014; Expected first postal delivery of IER forms and letters to electors and households.

2.2 Electoral Registration – Service Priorities September 2014 – December 2014

2.2.1 The service priorities over the next 3 months

- Update the Referendum register to amend registration data by the 2nd September for elector changes and 3rd September for Postal Vote changes;
- Update Polling lists to ensure appropriate names are marked as postal or proxy electors;
- Ensure Postal Vote data is provided to Returning Officers of the 4 constituent councils to enable verification of PV statements;
- Provide electoral service to the 4 Returning Officers and the electorate up to and including the Referendum day;
- Continue to carry out personal door to door canvass of targeted Lothian properties;
- Ensure the transition to Individual Electoral Registration is as efficient as possible;
- Send electoral data to the DWP for data matching on 22nd September 2014;
- Send appropriate communication to all electorate around 15th October 2014;
- Process all applications and answer all electoral enquiries emanating from the IER write out;
- Send reminder letters and forms as required by statute.

3.0 COUNCIL TAX OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

3.1 Council Tax – Service Overview 1st April 2014 – 22nd August 2013

3.1.1 Council Tax – New Dwellings

As at 1st April 2014 there were 399,276 chargeable dwellings in Lothian which has risen very slightly to 400,583 as at 22nd August 2014, an increase of 1,307 dwellings in 4½ months. This figure can be compared to the same period in 2013 where 1,229 dwellings were added.

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 77 dwellings have been altered which compares to 66 altered bands during the same period in 2013.

3.1.3 Council Tax – Altered Houses with no sales

During the period, the records of 1,136 dwellings have been updated, as a result of alteration work being carried out to existing dwellings compared to 549 dwellings during the same period in 2013. 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 1st April 2014 there were 67 cases outstanding. As at 22nd August 2014 there were 76 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 September 2014 – December 2014

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 1st April 2014 – 22nd August 2014

4.1.1 2010 Revaluation Appeals

The number of 2010 Revaluation appeals outstanding at Lands Tribunal has reduced slightly with agreement on value reached for 17 subjects. The remaining appeals are expected to be heard in the next 18 months.

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 April 2014 to 22nd August 2014, there have been 644 additions, 642 valuation alterations and 332 deletions. This can be compared to the previous period in 2013 where there was 431 additions, 1,211 valuation alterations and 323 deletions.

4.1.3 Running Roll Appeals

During the period 1st April to 22nd August 2014 409 appeals have been resolved. As at 22nd August the number of outstanding running roll appeals stood at 475. Courts to deal with this type of appeal are scheduled to continue through the rest of the calendar year.

4.2 Non-Domestic Rating – Service Priorities September – December 2014

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 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 AND OFFICE MANAGEMENT

5.1 UNISON

Regular JCC meetings continue to be held.

Policies are timetabled for review to ensure that all policies meet current legal, management and staff requirements.

5.2 Staffing

As stated previously I have employed 12 temporary canvass staff for a period of 12 months commencing 14th July 2014, 10 temporary call centre staff plus 2 temporary mail support staff for a period of 7 months commencing 28th July 2014.

I have recruited a trainee valuer who commenced work on 28th July 2014.

I have received a resignation from one of my admin assistants who will leave my organisation on 2nd October. I intend to fill this post.

5.3 Equalities

Analysis and collection of staff data continues with a view to improve the data I hold to ensure the submitted equality outcomes can be met.

6.0 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 Risk Registers

The job specific risk registers continue to be updated at each service 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.

6.2 Information Technology

My IT team have been heavily involved in hardware, software and premises security measures required by the Cabinet Office for individual electoral registration and I am pleased to say that we attained PSN accreditation in July.

In preparation for IER my IT team have installed large screen double monitors to aid the processing of A3 forms. They have installed appropriate printing, scanning and mail room machinery to cope with the different form size and increased mailings.

7.0 BUILDING ISSUES

7.1 Building Maintenance

I continue to have problems with my office building and also problems in having issues rectified by the landlord. I commissioned Mitsubishi to carry out a full report on the air conditioning system which has been ineffective since occupation. Their report gives details of a major installation error which should be rectified by the replacement of all pipework.

The report was provided to the landlord on 23rd July 2014 and I still await a response with how the matter can be rectified.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

As there are no financial implications, nor approvals sought, the Joint Board is requested to note the contents of this report.

**Joan M Hewton
ASSESSOR & ERO**

22 August 2014