

PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/2016

1 INTRODUCTION

This report is provided to accompany the unaudited accounts to allow members of the Board to consider performance and budgetary achievements together. Key Performance Indicators for the work of Assessors in Scotland are in place for Valuation Roll and Council Tax and are submitted annually to the Scottish Government. Internal performance standards are also set for staff to ensure the organisation meets appropriate standards in all work undertaken. Performance standards for the work of EROs continue to be revised on an ongoing basis by the Electoral Commission. It is anticipated that once a “business as usual” position is reached under IER that the Electoral Commission shall re-established a suite of appropriate performance standards.

2 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

The transition to IER created a period of major change with every element of the electoral process including internal procedures subject to review and revision. This transition was essentially complete at the conclusion of the 2015 Household Canvass, the first under IER legislation. The overall cost of IER has however caused concern and instead of now entering a period of stability EROs are now preparing for new work processes and possible changes to legislation to reduce the overall cost of the processes. Cuts to external funding are to be made in each of the forthcoming 4 years

2.1 General Election 7th May 2015

The turnout at the General Election in May showed that in Scotland there was considerable engagement by the electorate. This was reflected not just at the ballot box but also through electoral registration and associated processes. For ERO’s throughout the country this election held additional pressures as it was the first major election event conducted under Individual Electoral Registration.

IER also introduced on-line and telephone registration. This proved to be very successful with many electors and resulted in reduced numbers of paper applications being received.

From close of nominations to Election Day we dealt with 13,158 telephone calls and 4,722 emails. The impact on the register during the election period was significant with 10,068 electors added, 11,382 additional postal vote applications processed, 2,206 proxies were applied and 104 emergency proxies approved. On Election Day itself 55 clerical errors were identified and the electors affected were able to cast their vote.

Following discussions with Returning Officers procedures were put in place on Election Day that enabled polling staff direct contact with senior ERO staff. 250 calls were received. This ensured that any registration enquiries encountered by polling staff could be quickly resolved.

Overall I was delighted with the performance throughout the election period.

2.2 2015 Electoral Canvass

The 2015 canvass commenced on the 3rd August with the issue of 357,238 Household Enquiry Forms (HEF). 190,545 first reminders were issued between 1st and 3rd September and 118,087 second reminders were issued on 30th September. Because of the poor response it was decided to issue a third reminder in an attempt to gain a more complete and accurate 1st December electoral register. 85,500 third reminder forms were issued during the first week in November.

The insertion of a simple explanatory leaflet with the form at the first reminder did little to increase the return. Advertising and publicity events were likewise not cost effective.

As you know when names are added to the returned HEF I am required to send an Invitation to Register (ITR) to any new or altered name advised. Only on return of the ITR or an on-line application can I add any potential elector to the register. The return rates for ITR forms is particularly low and this is similar across the country.

The Electoral Commission now accepts that the canvass does not stop on publication of the register on 1st December each year and it is now seen as a year round process. This acceptance has accepted that initiatives to encourage registration continue at appropriate times of the year targeted to certain groups of the electorate at particular times.

2.3 Publicity and Engagement

Encouraging engagement with the electoral registration process is now established as a key activity which assists with the requirement to produce complete and accurate registers. While publicity is in place throughout most of the year the periods in advance of elections and the annual canvass are prime times to pitch the registration message.

Examples of the activities undertaken during 2015/2016 are advertising on bus rears and at bus stops/shelters, on phone boxes, within the Service Guide and Mascot magazines (Armed Forces) and the Edinburgh Service Community guide, posters were issued to elected members, housing associations, sheltered housing complexes, carers associations and associations dealing with the homeless and young people leaving care. Staff attended promotional events such as Holyrood Rocks organised by the Electoral Commission, Public Life and the Democratic Process events organised by Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council (ELREC), the Edinburgh MELA, and numerous Citizenship ceremonies.

Door to door canvass is an ongoing activity where returns to outstanding household and registration forms are sought. During the period August 2015 to March 2016 in excess of 145,000 door calls were made. In the event no person is available an "invitation to register" calling card is left advising on how to register.

Care homes receive particular attention with regular visits made throughout the year to assist with the registration process.

21,000 emails were issued to students encouraging registration and providing links to the on-line government registration service plus a facility to indicate that they are already registered at their home address.

Considerable effort commenced during 2015/2016, ahead of the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in May 2016, in respect of Young Persons registration. Staff, with the assistance of the education authorities, visited a number of schools throughout Lothian to encourage registration and a further two letters of encouragement were issued directly to Young Persons where appropriate. Currently in excess of 80% of Young Persons whose name appears on education authority lists have registered to vote.

3 VALUATION ROLL

The Valuation Roll is legislated to operate under a five year rolling programme with the last revaluation being effective from 1 April 2010. During the quinquennium the Roll is constantly updated to take account of internal and external changes to properties which affect value and this consequently generates an additional appeals workload. The Scottish Government made the decision to postpone the 2015 revaluation to 2017.

The statistics provided in this report give sufficient history to allow comparison with similar or corresponding years' pressure points.

3.2 Alterations to the Valuation Roll

The principal indicator in this area relates to the length of time taken to amend the Valuation Roll to reflect changes which have taken place. The number of amendments is shown and also the change in the total annual value of the Valuation Roll in each year.

In general terms, stakeholders prefer the Valuation Roll to be amended as quickly as possible after a change has taken place in order to facilitate stable financial planning and improving the cash flow to the rating pool. The KPIs show actual performance against estimated performance for 2010/11 to 2015/16 and targets we aim to achieve for 2016/17.

Valuation Roll	No changes	Rateable Value 1/4	Rateable Value 31/3	0 – 3 months %		3 – 6 months %		> 6 months %	
				Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
2010/11	3,476	1,259,913,732	1,274,347,293	82	78.02	14	13.55	4	8.43
2011/12	3,114	1,274,347,293	1,277,889,313	80	71.77	15	15.35	5	12.88
2012/13	3,188	1,277,889,313	1,275,905,939	75	74.09	13	12.30	12	13.61
2013/14	3,275	1,275,905,939	1,269,386,086	75	74.32	15	13.07	10	12.61
2014/15	3,489	1,269,386,086	1,274,141,333	78	75.78	12	13.44	10	10.78
2015/16	2,234	1,274,141,333	1,269,773,514	75	72.11	13	15.36	12	12.52
2016/17		1,269,773,514		50		25		25	

The organisation did not achieve the performance target for 2015/16. This has been principally due to the work being focussed on preparation for the 2017 Revaluation but also probably reflects the reducing workforce and budgetary constraints. I anticipate even greater resources will be required during the 2016/17 year and I have adjusted targets accordingly.

4 COUNCIL TAX

Council Tax continues in a rolling programme with no revaluation allowed for within the legislation.

The main work involves updating details of alterations carried out to properties, inspection and banding of all new dwellings, consideration of all domestic sales evidence and re-banding when a property which has been previously altered has been sold.

4.1 Council Tax – New Dwellings

The number of new dwellings entering the Council Tax List is important to local taxation as this is a potential source for additional revenue.

The table below shows that the number of new houses added in the year 2014/15 was around 6% lower than the previous year. However, the new houses added continue to indicate a general increase in comparison to the post recession years. This is the change we have all hoped for and suggests that the Lothian housing market continues to strengthen.

Valuation List	No. of CT Entries @ 1 st April in each year	New houses added
2011/12	410,440	3,410
2012/13	412,859	3,171
2013/14	415,450	4,315
2014/15	419,652	4,049
2015/16	422,492	4,688
2016/17	426,756	

4.2 Council Tax Performance

The criteria used in establishing Council Tax indicators are derived in a similar way to those for the Valuation Roll.

Council Tax payers require notification of their banded valuation, and hence their financial liability, as soon as possible after they have taken occupation of the new property. Cash flow to the authority, arising from insertions of new entries is also affected by how quickly entries are made on the Valuation List.

The KPIs show actual performance for 2010/11 to 2015/16 and the performance targets for 2016/17.

Valuation List	0-3 months	3-6 months	Over 6 months
2010/11	94.98	4.06	0.96
2011/12	96.72	2.35	0.93
2012/13	95.52	3.09	1.39
2013/14	94.9	3.01	2.09
2014/15	95.73	2.77	1.50
2015/16	96.46	2.98	0.56
2016/17	(95)	(3)	(2)

The time taken to add new dwellings to the Council Tax List continues at a very high level, 96.46% of alterations were notified within 3 months of entry date exceeding the target of 95%, my aim is to continue to maintain this high standard.

4.3 Council Tax – Altered Bands

Council Tax Bands are altered for properties where the property has been extended and subsequently sold, i.e. the new tax payer will pay tax on the altered Band. Council Tax Bands are not altered when a dwelling is extended or improved, it is only when the property is subsequently sold that the new Band takes effect.

Valuation List	Point of Sale Band Changes	Sales Added
2010/11	163	14,537
2011/12	180	15,492
2012/13	172	15,863
2013/14	203	19,397
2014/15	257	21,077
2015/16	270	20,893

The above table shows that the number of Council Tax Bands altered as a result of dwellings having been altered and subsequently sold are higher than the previous year. The number of house sales taking place has dipped very slightly.

5 MANAGEMENT, STAFFING & BEST VALUE

5.1 Policies & Procedures

The organisation reviews policies and procedures on a continuous basis to ensure it complies with any legislative employment changes and we operate within a Best Value framework at all times.

The major policies reviewed in 2015/2016 were the LVJB Standing Orders, Contract Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and scheme of Delegation.

Additional policies reviewed included;-
Managing Retirement,
Special Leave,

Shared Paternity Leave,
Death Benefit Scheme,
Code of Conduct for Employees,
Managing Attendance,
Recruitment & Selection,
Records Management and
Discretion Policy Statement.

5.2 Staffing

I consider we have continued to review requirements to meet the demands of the organisation but maintain efficiencies for the Board.

You will recall that in the year 2014/2015 I employed 12 temporary customer support assistants, 12 temporary canvassers. There remains 6 customer support assistants on fixed term contracts to March 2017 and 12 canvassers also on fixed term contracts to March 2017. The temporary staff have been employed to assist in the duties required under Individual Electoral Registration and the salaries are met within the budget allocation provided by the Cabinet Office.

As at 31 March 2016 the LVJB headcount stood at 114.11 FTE's, this compares to 123.68 FTE's in the preceding year.

6.0 CONCLUSION

I am reasonably happy with the overall performance achieved during this year and particularly with the ability to attain that performance level within budget.

The constant threats caused by budget cuts, possible changes to local taxation and the indecisions about electoral registration could have been detrimental to a workforce but I am pleased that staff have continued to work positively in delivery of their statutory duties.

Reviews of structure are now carried out regularly and I am pleased to say that all changes have moved seamlessly into operation this due in no small way to my dedicated senior management team who work together with a view to attaining best practice and an efficient and effective organisation.

Joan Hewton
Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

20 June 2016