

PERFORMANCE REPORT 2016/2017



1 INTRODUCTION

This report is provided to accompany the unaudited accounts in order for elected members to consider performance and budgetary outcomes together. Key Performance Indicators for Valuation Roll and Council tax activities were agreed with Scottish Government some time ago and returns are made annually by all Assessors in Scotland. The introduction of Individual Electoral Registration saw the Electoral Commission move away from its existing suite of statistical performance indicators for Electoral Registration Officers to a more modern regime that seeks evidence on aspects of preparation in advance of electoral activity.

2 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

In summary, 2016/17 was a very busy year for Electoral Registration. During the year both a Scottish Parliamentary election and European Union referendum were held, in addition preparations commenced for the Scottish Local Government elections held on 4th May 2017. Such events give rise to a general increase in registration activity and this, in-conjunction with the annual household canvass saw the total net electorate within Lothian rise from 632,708 as at 1st April 2016 to 657,858 at 31st March 2017. This involved in excess of 65,000 additions and 40,000 removals from the register. In addition the total number of standing absent voters rose from 120,205 to 128,166 during this period.

2.1 Scottish Parliamentary Election 5th May 2016

There was considerable engagement by the electorate for this election. Not only was this reflected in the number of electors being added, some 25,504 during the relevant period, and 11,749 additional absent votes applications processed, but also by the level of direct contact from the public with 10,882 telephone calls received in addition to 4,912 emails.

On the day of the election the 650,892 electors were registered and held the qualifying franchise entitling them to take part. This included 11,116 16 and 17 year old electors.

At an election the Electoral Registration Officer works closely with Returning Officers in order to ensure that all necessary data that supports the production of poll cards and absent ballot packs is available for extraction and delivery to appointed printers in accordance with agreed timetables and in the required format. Data is also provided that supports the absent vote personal identifier checking procedure. The ERO is also responsible for the production of registers or part register to political parties and candidates, and also for the production of poll registers. This again is carried out in accordance with agreed timetables providing the Returning Officers with as much time as possible to prepare ballot box contents.

On the day of the election a direct line phone service was established between polling place staff and ERO staff in order for any queries to be dealt with quickly. This proved highly successful.

The Lothian and Borders Electoral Working Group comprising electoral registration and returning officer staff meets on a regular basis and is particularly effective as part of the preparatory work in advance of elections.

2.2 Referendum on Membership of the European Union 23rd June 2016

The referendum on UK membership of the European Union created a high level of engagement. During the period from receipt of poll cards to last dates for registration and postal vote applications, 21,771 electors were added to the register and an additional 21,095 absent vote applications processed. Also, 13,582 telephone calls and 8,173 emails were answered during the same period.

On the day of the referendum 620,218 electors were registered and held the qualifying franchise entitling them to take part. 16 and 17 year olds and European electors were not entitled to vote in the referendum.

Arrangements, as previously outlined, with Returning Officers were in place and again proved successful.

The Referendum, outcome aside, is best remembered for the outage suffered by the government's on-line registration system hours before the deadline for registration was reached. This led to a national extension of the registration deadline which created additional pressures. The on-line system has since been enhanced in terms of capacity.

2.3 Local Authority Election 4th May 2017

While not strictly falling within the 2016/17 performance year it is worth noting that preparations for elections commence many months in advance of the election date. In this particular case considerable work was undertaken to ensure that new polling

schemes reflecting changes to ward boundaries which were to be effective from this election were received from Returning Officers in sufficient time for changes to be made to the electoral management system.

2.4 Household Canvass 2016

Annual canvass of all households remains part of the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) requirement. This took place between 1st August and 30th November 2016. The process involves the issue of a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) to every address on the electoral register in Lothian. Dependant on the information that is returned an additional form called an Invitation to Register (ITR) shall be issued. Registration as part of the annual canvass is a two-step process although every encouragement is given to new electors to use the on-line registration system. This system has been operational since IER was introduced in 2014 and is being increasingly adopted as the preferred method to register, with registration by paper or by telephone the alternatives.

During the 2016 Canvass a total of 686,443 HEF's, including reminders, were issued. During the canvass period 74,155 ITR's were issued. The HEF is accompanied by an insert that advises on and encourages the different methods that can be used to return information, such as on-line, text, and telephone. In addition information on the on-line registration system is also provided.

The overall return rate of HEF's for the 2016 Canvass was 70.28%. This is a lower level than in previous years and presents a challenge in terms of future engagement. There is no doubt that frequent electoral events are a major encouragement to registration, as the increasing electorate demonstrates, however it appears that such regular recourse to the ballot box has an impact on the effectiveness of the annual canvass.

The annual canvass and the system of IER is supported by ongoing door to door canvass activity. There is a legal requirement to follow up all non-returned HEF's and ITR's with reminders and a door visit. To achieve this a dedicated team of canvassers is used throughout the year. These canvassers also provide valuable support to the telephone call and mail centre facility during election periods. During 2016/17 a total of 167,170 door visits were made.

The Canvass Team are supported by the use of hand held devices which make the requirement to carry paper unnecessary, and through this ICT enabled approach are able to chase multiple form types and be supplied with canvass address information on a constant streaming basis. The canvasser is also able to facilitate on-line registrations applications at the door, and record any other information that may be of assistance.

2.5 Engagement and Publicity

Engagement and publicity are key activities that support the registration activity and the drive to achieve high levels of completeness and accuracy.

There is no doubt that the periods prior to elections and referendums are prime in terms of engagement. At this time during 2016/17 a range of activities were undertaken ranging from external advertising on buses, at bus stops, and phone boxes to selected publicity in the Services magazine and other publications. Posters and additional information were supplied to elected members, housing associations, sheltered housing, carers associations and similar. Through the Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council information was disseminated and useful contacts have been established that have allowed targeted material to be created, in particular for the Polish community. Wherever possible collaborative work is undertaken with partner councils and use is made of their web sites and messaging facilities and in particular support was provided to the lamppost wraparound campaign within Edinburgh for the EU referendum.

The Canvass Team also support the engagement process ensuring that at every door visited where no answer is forthcoming material advising and promoting the registration process is left.

Specific engagement was undertaken with care homes where regular visits ensure elector information is up to date. In addition direct contact with university students was achieved by email following the supply of email addresses by university administrations.

During the EU Referendum overseas electors were positively encouraged to engage and considerable effort was taken to ensure that all overseas electors renewed their registration applications and had absent votes in place in sufficient time for postal ballot packs to be delivered and returned.

Particular attention also was paid to 16 and 17 year olds who now hold the franchise to vote at particular elections in Scotland. Throughout 2016/17 and specifically in the periods before the election on 5th May 2016 direct contact with schools was made that allowed staff access to schools to encourage registration. This resulted in the percentage of 16 and 17 year olds appearing on the register as set against the supplied school pupil lists rising from 80% to nearly 88%.

3 VALUATION ROLL

The Valuation Roll exists for a five year life cycle at the end of which a new Valuation Roll is made up and maintained for the next five. It is possible for this period to be

extended by government intervention and the expected 2015 Revaluation was so extended until 1st April 2017.

3.1 Revaluation 2017

On the 1st April 2017 the Revaluation Roll went live. During March all proprietors, tenants, and occupiers of property appearing in the Roll were issued with Valuation Notices indicating the new rateable values. This amounted to in excess of 70,000 issued Notices.

The process of delivering the 2017 Revaluation started during 2015/2016 with the gathering of information relating to rents, costs, turnover etc., this in itself being a considerable logistical process. Following this stage, during 2016, a period of analysis and further investigation commenced which culminates in the creation of schemes of valuation for different categories of properties. These schemes of value in the majority of instances are created as part of a collaborative approach within the Scottish Assessors Association thereby ensuring a high level of consistency throughout Scotland in terms of the valuation approach to be adopted for differing property types. The final stage is the creation of levels of value and the application of these to property details to create the final value.

An added complexity for this Revaluation was the need to give effect to a Supreme Court ruling (*Woolway v Mazars*). This led to circa 3,000 additional entries being added to the 2017 Revaluation Roll and involved a considerable additional effort within a pressurised timetable.

In order to give sufficient time to the Scottish Government to consider various aspects such as poundage rates and relief schemes, all the new values were required to be completed by the end of September 2016 and draft values were made available to the public via the SAA Web Portal during December 2016.

The process of Revaluation is highly resource hungry and at times during 2016 all available resource was diverted to support the process and ensure delivery of the Revaluation on time. This had an impact on other annual tasks surrounding the Valuation Roll.

Considerable ratepayer reaction to the proposed values took place during January to March 2017. This reaction escalated to involve elected members at all levels and considerable time was taken by senior staff to provide information on various aspects of the Revaluation and its outcomes. This aspect has been documented in previous reports to the Board.

Ratepayers have until 30th September 2017 to lodge appeals against the rateable values shown in the new Roll and work has commenced to determine a disposal timetable.

3.2 Alterations to the Valuation Roll

The key performance indicator for the Valuation Roll relates to the length of time taken to amend the Roll to reflect changes, inserts and deletes. In addition the number of amendments and change to total annual value is shown in the table below.

While the statutory requirement is to make alterations to the Roll within the financial year in which changes affecting value take place, it is preferable that the time taken to make amendments is kept to as limited a period as possible. This is reflected in the target periods noted on the table below. It can be seen that for 2016/17 the level of performance set against these targets has fallen considerable from previous years. This is a result of the impact of carrying out and concluding a Revaluation in the same year. The effect is that normal annual activity for the Roll is carried out in a much restricted time frame with the bulk of the annual workload carried out within half the normal time available.

Taking this into account and the number of changes made, I am satisfied with the performance achieved.

Valuation Roll	No Changes	Rateable Value 1 /4	Rateable Value 31/3	0 – 3 %		3 – 6 %		> 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	1,227,889,313	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	3,510	1,269,773,514	1,271,629,649	50	47.15	25	21.05	25	31.79

4 COUNCIL TAX

Council Tax is an ongoing activity where the Council Tax List is maintained on a continuous basis. There has been no Council Tax revaluation since its inception in 1993.

The principal activities are the inspection and banding of new dwellings entering onto the List, consideration of point of sale re-bandings, and the maintenance of domestic property details following physical alteration.

In terms of a key indicator, performance in Council Tax, in a similar vein as the Valuation Roll, is measured in terms of the time taken to add new dwellings to the list. The table below indicates the performance achieved for 2016/17. This should be set against the principal target of 95% in 3 months. Given the numbers of entries made and the use of Council Tax resource to assist with Revaluation 2017 tasks, I am satisfied with this outcome.

The table also provides information on the number of Council Tax entries on the List, the number of dwellings added and the number of point of sale re-bandings carried out.

A point of sale re-banding is considered when at the point of sale of a dwelling alterations have been carried out by the previous occupier that are deemed to have a material impact on the value of the property sufficient to alter its banding. The re-banding is effective from the date of sale.

Valuation List	No of CT Entries @ 1 st April in each year	New houses added	0-3 months	3-6 months	Over 6 months	Point of Sale Band Changes
2011/12	410,440	3,410	96.72	2.35	0.93	180
2012/13	412,859	3,171	95.52	3.09	1.39	172
2013/14	415,450	4,315	94.9	3.01	2.09	203
2014/15	419,652	4,049	95.73	2.77	1.50	257
2015/16	422,492	4,688	96.46	2.98	0.56	270
2016/17	426,756	4,868	93.86	4.25	1.89	254

5 OFFICE MANAGEMENT

We have continued to monitor vacancy levels throughout the year and this led to the Assessor at the Board meeting of 28th November 2016 intimating the intention to undertake recruitment to various entry level posts. The subsequent recruitment process was only partially successful and it is anticipated that the Transformation and Cultural Change Programme outlined to the Board at its meeting on 6th February 2017 shall fully address the matter of required future staffing resource levels as one of its outcomes.

During 2016/17, 17 requests under Freedom of Information legislation were received, and 10 complaints were dealt with under the Boards Complaint Procedure.

Sickness Absence levels within the organisation are monitored on an ongoing basis. During 2015/16, 772 days were lost to sickness absence, equating to 2.54%. In 2016/17 this lowered to 476 days lost from a total number of 30,420 working days, equating to 1.56%.

During 2016 the ICT Network that drives all the organisational systems was subject to a ransomware virus attack. This had entered our system via an innocuous email opened inadvertently by a member of staff. Quick action by ICT staff led to the virus being isolated and remedial steps taken. A complete restore of the affected servers from clean back-up files was carried out. Following this incident improved security awareness training for staff was carried out, and enhanced anti-virus and security software installed.

Regular Joint Consultative Committee meetings between the Trade Union and senior management took place during 2016/17 with all issues being resolved. Management acknowledges the supportive approach taken by the Trade Union during early discussions in respect of the Transformation Programme.

6 CONCLUSION

The office dealt with a number of workload challenges during 2016/17 particularly with regard to Revaluation 2017, the General Election and EU Referendum. I am in no doubt that the successful outcomes achieved were in no small way due to the hard work and dedication shown by all the staff.

7 RECOMMENDATION

I would ask that the Board note the content of this report.

Graeme Strachan
Interim Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

August 2017