

ASSESSOR'S PROGRESS REPORT TO THE LOTHIAN VALUATION JOINT BOARD

24 April 2023

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide members with an overview of current service delivery, priorities, risks, and future direction.

2.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION – MAINTENANCE

- 2.1 Since the last progress report to the Board in January 2023 all maintenance tasks supporting the registration process have continued.
- 2.2 Processing volumes over the past few monthly update periods, from 1 February 2023 until 3 April 2023, show significant volumes of changes with 22953 transactions undertaken. A breakdown of the numbers of additions and deletions by ward for each of the statutory dates is shown as appendix (A).
- 2.3 During the period 1 February 2023 to 12 April 2023 there were 17262 Invitation to Register forms issued by post to new potential electors.

3.0 POSTAL VOTES

- 3.1 As previously reported a total of 18337 annual personal identifier refresh documents for postal votes were issued w/c 9 January. Reminders were issued on 26 January three weeks after original issue. The return rate was 84% with 2890 postal votes cancelled. The current total of postal voters along with total electorate is shown as appendix (B).

4.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION – VOTER AUTHORITY CERTIFICATES

- 4.1 At present we have had over 100 Voter Authority Certificate applications via the government portal. The processing of some of these can be time consuming due to the quality of photographs some applicants are providing and where further identity checks are required.

5.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION – ELECTIONS

- 5.1 The by election in Edinburgh, ward 6 (Corstorphine/Murrayfield) took place on 9 March 2023. This appeared to run smoothly with no registration issues to report. There were 34 electors whose postal votes were rejected as their personal identifiers did not match. We have written to these electors asking them to provide a fresh PI or, if required, a waiver application.

6.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION ENGAGEMENT

6.1 We continue to engage with electors and promoting the functions of the Electoral Registration office.

The Electoral Commission has recently presented a report on reformed canvass. Our work on engagement with attainers has been highlighted as good practice in a case study report copied below:-

EROs across Scotland continue to engage with 16 and 17 year-olds using a variety of methods including direct mailing, phone/text communications, contact with schools and universities, issuing press releases, social media activity, distributing newsletters, and local advertising, as well as local activity with partner organisations.

Case study – Lothian Valuation Joint Board

Lothian Valuation Joint Board – covering the City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian Council areas – uses a combination of approaches to encourage 16 and 17 year-olds to register, including direct emails, attending events and data mining. In the days after they sent a targeted email, there was a spike in registration applications. Across four events attended, they reported directly registering 357 students and engaging with a great deal more. Data mining school lists and subsequent follow up activities were attributable to a 6.6% increase in registered school pupils over the age of 16 (equal to approximately 1,075 applications), and an overall increase of 18.9% for school pupils over the age of 14 (approximately 5,754 applications).

6.2 Foreign Nationals

Given the uncertainty on the future status of MS Victoria the ship docked in Leith where Ukrainian nationals are being temporarily accommodated we added this to our Electoral database. There are 51 electors currently registered.

6.3 Prisoners

Prisoner ITRs continue to be issued to all eligible prisoners with postal and proxy forms included.

6.4 Home Movers

We continue to data mine using new council taxpayer lists provided by each of the four constituent councils to identify home movers, and issue ITRs to any not already registered to vote. Visiting properties to encourage and help potential electors register by canvass team is ongoing.

7.0 VALUATION ROLL – MAINTENANCE

7.1 Since the last report to the Board 2510 alterations, covering the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, have been made to the valuation roll with respect to running roll activities. These changes comprised 662 amendments to existing entries, 1126 deletions, 722 inserts. For the same period last year amendments and inserts are down. There is usually a general trend downward toward the end of the valuation roll in force but it will also be due specifically to the processing of the valuation roll changes being completed a month earlier due to the revaluation and the more complex data transfer

protocols to local authorities that exist when that occurs. Decisions concerning more minor value alterations will also have been pragmatically absorbed by the Revalued figure rather than disturb the existing valuations. There were also fewer appeal committees meaning amendments from settlements would also be reduced. Deletions were up but the continued issue of ATM's being deleted from the VR as a direct result of a Supreme Court decision, will be a factor for that.

	Edinburgh	Midlothian	W. Lothian	E. Lothian	Total
Inserts	481	56	131	54	722
Deletions	788	67	170	101	1126
Amendments	435	62	108	57	662

8.0 VALUATION ROLL – APPEALS

- 8.1** The Valuation Appeal Committee ceased to exist on 31st March 2023.
- 8.2** We have adopted a policy of direct engagement with agents to secure withdrawals of Covid 19 appeals. We have recently closed off 9,500 cases and we have approximately 7,400 remaining, which is less than half of the total we started with. Several agents have indicated their willingness to withdraw their remaining Covid appeals but haven't yet confirmed in writing – staff are continuing to push for these to be withdrawn as soon as possible.
- 8.3** We have approximately 1,023 non Covid Revaluation 2017 appeals that must be disposed of by 31st December 2023. Staff have been actively involved in trying to resolve as many of these as possible without the need to proceed to Hearing.

9.0 2023 REVALUATION UPDATE

- 9.1** The revaluation roll went live on 1st April 2023. There are currently 36,859 properties in the valuation roll.

My thanks to all involved in achieving this significant achievement on time.

The scoping and implementation of a new proposals and appeals system to comply with the new legislation is continuing and good progress is being made on this project.

An Assistant Assessor is continuing to head the project and is liaising closely with 2 Principal Surveyors & ICT and others to make sure this important project is delivered.

Total number of Revaluation notices issued by post – 56,724

Total number of electronic notices issued – 4,391. Electronic PDF's were emailed to 12 separate organisations/companies including our 4 local authorities.

For the 2023 revaluation enquiries have been lower than we anticipated, I would suspect we will get a significant spike in activity once the councils send their billing notices.

We have received approx. 17 proposals as a result of the issue of a Revaluation 2023 notice. Again, we expect this number to increase significantly as we move towards the final date for lodging Revaluation 2023 proposals, which is 31st July 2023.

10.0 COUNCIL TAX – MAINTENANCE

- 10.1 Over the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, 5,950 new houses have been added to the list, this compares to 5,680 for the same period in 2021/22.

Band					
	Edinburgh	Midlothian	West Lothian	East Lothian	Total
A	84	13	8	4	109
B	314	25	108	33	480
C	442	42	216	51	751
D	593	109	219	150	1071
E	725	165	166	214	1270
F	434	244	304	236	1218
G	440	163	184	185	972
H	68	3	3	5	79
Total	3100	764	1208	878	5950

- 10.2 There are currently 171 outstanding Council Tax appeals. A number of cases were cited for 3 hearings before the VAC in March. As a result of these 3 hearings 45 council tax appeals were dealt with.

11.0 COVID/HYBRID WORKING – UPDATE

- 11.1 There has been a slight increase in staff attending the office with around 40% coming in on a regular basis against the previously reported 25%. This isn't attributable to specific management requests, but perhaps shows a more natural trend towards the benefits of office based communication and interaction.

12.0 GOVERNANCE STRATEGY GROUP

- 12.1 The latest Governance Strategy Group meeting was held on the 27th March 2023. In attendance were myself, LVJB Head of Governance, Councillors Conn, Beal and Russell. The topic for discussion was Phase 3 of the Transformation and Cultural Change Program (TCCP) which I have renamed as the Continual Improvement Programme (CIP). I presented early findings from initial CIP analysis and reported on forthcoming draft proposals to the group.

13.0 CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

- 13.1 The CIP group meets on a weekly basis and progress to date has been excellent. A Project Initiation Document (PID) has been created to scope the project, consider risks and define relevant workstreams and objectives.

13.2 The main items for consideration are

- Improving internal communication.
- Engagement
- Review of internal valuation systems
- Performance and training
- Digitalisation
- Office accommodation review
- Ongoing cultural change
- Structure review.

13.3 I have held regular briefing sessions with all staff in small groups to make all aware why structural change is needed and to emphasise the significant financial challenges facing the Board. Frank and open discussions have taken place and feedback has generally been positive from these sessions. Where operational or organisational issues have been raised, I have taken the necessary steps to ensure they are reviewed and acted on accordingly. It is vitally important for the successful implementation of the CIP that these issues, identified by staff with intimate knowledge of key functions of our services, are incorporated, and delivered, in our strategic objectives and any required structural change as we move forward. Taking this new approach to the transformation programme, where it is not a primarily “top down” driven method, will provide my organisation with the best opportunity to fully adjust to the future fundamental changes we must deliver to continue to maintain core service operability.

13.4 The group has considered and assessed all available staffing and non-staffing costs to see if budget savings can be made. As expected, there is little to be derived from general running costs, but several process and procedural efficiencies have been identified and we are actively engaging with CEC regarding our office accommodation options.

13.5 The group recognise the continued need for the drive towards process digitalisation and further development of an agile workforce to ensure we have the flexibility required to meet peak activity periods, with sustained focus on best value and efficiency. Work is well underway to fully define how agile working can be implemented.

13.6 I have prepared a draft paper on the Continual Improvement Programme which is now approaching completion. We received updated pension strain costs on 13th April 2023 for one member of staff which will need a fresh business case to be considered.

I continue to consult with the Union and the next date in the diary, at the time of writing, for discussions is 14/4/23.

I will be happy to give the Board an outline of what the report contains at the meeting.

14.0 THE 22/23 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

14.1 This statement conveys assurance that our organisation continues to provide key valuation and electoral registration services under an appropriate governance and internal control framework whilst hybrid working is in place.

- 14.2 Our strategic targets and deliverables encompass the 7 principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework for Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. Quality assurance activity, corporate & service plan goals and current and future objectives are also included in the report.
- 14.3 Corporate, service and project risk registers undergo continual maintenance and review by the LVJB Governance Committee, with items of significant risk being considered at Corporate Leadership Team meetings and subsequently reported to the Board where required.
- 14.4 The Governance Strategy Group (GSG) convenes regularly to discuss matters of organisational strategy and risk. Annual internal and external audit work plans with the City of Edinburgh Council and Audit Scotland continue to be progressed.
- 14.5 A copy of the statement can be found in the appendices to this report at Appendix 3.

15.0 INTERNAL AUDIT

- 15.1 I have attached at Appendix 4, a copy of this years internal audit report, undertaken by CEC, on our current non-domestic rates appeals process.
- 15.2 It is an extremely positive report, which indicated an overall rating of “Substantial Assurance”. This is further defined as “A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited”.
- 15.3 I am pleased to say that 2022/23 audit went smoothly, with excellent communication and interaction between LVJB and CEC during the, now primarily, remote operation of the audit process. I would like to take the opportunity to thank our internal Technical and Governance Teams, and to our colleagues within CEC IA for their effective undertaking of the non-domestic rates appeals audit.

16.0 HR POLICY UPDATES

- 16.1 I have attached at Appendix 2, a summary of 2 new policies and 5 updated policies, for the Board’s approval.

17.0 MyPath

- 17.1 We have successfully embedded MyPath performance software into our organisation. It allows staff and managers to engage in meaningful conversations around performance, staff development, career progression and properly identifying training needs.

I have reviewed the operation of the first years round of the new system and have concluded it is an excellent tool to improve staff performance.

It also makes the planning of future training provision more efficient as training provided mirrors what has been identified in the appraisal process.

18.0 RECOMMENDATION

18.1 The Board is asked to note the content of this report and approve the 2 new policies and 5 updated HR Policies .

Michael Wilkie

INTERIM ASSESSOR & ERO

Attached:

Appendix 1- Electoral Statistics

Appendix 2- HR Policies updates

Appendix 3 Annual Governance Statement

Appendix 4- LVJB Internal Audit Report

Appendix 1- Electoral Statistics

Appendix (A) Table Registration Changes by month

Eligibility Date	WARD	Additions	Deletions
		Total	Total
	01 Almond	174	68
	02 Pentland Hills	124	57
	03 Drum Brae/Gyle	107	39
	04 Forth	119	76
	05 Inverleith	112	82
	06 Corstorphine/Murrayfield	77	60
	07 Sighthill/Gorgie	135	89
	08 Colinton/Fairmilehead	80	41
	09 Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart	96	50
	10 Morningside	185	67
	11 City Centre	121	87
	12 Leith Walk	203	103
	13 Leith	127	54
	14 Craigentinny/Duddingston	143	80
	15 Southside/Newington	159	81
	16 Liberton/Gilmerton	139	76
	17 Portobello/Craigmillar	135	56
1 Feb 2023	Total	2236	1166
	06 Corstorphine/Murrayfield	78	33
6 Feb 2023	Total	78	33
	06 Corstorphine/Murrayfield	71	
15 Feb 2023	Total	71	
	01 Almond	250	92
	02 Pentland Hills	150	81
	03 Drum Brae/Gyle	157	71
	04 Forth	211	98
	05 Inverleith	216	139
	06 Corstorphine/Murrayfield	29	81
	07 Sighthill/Gorgie	212	105
	08 Colinton/Fairmilehead	128	71
	09 Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart	145	82
	10 Morningside	196	138
	11 City Centre	294	123
	12 Leith Walk	294	161
	13 Leith	361	113
	14 Craigentinny/Duddingston	223	119
	15 Southside/Newington	259	114
	16 Liberton/Gilmerton	242	100
	17 Portobello/Craigmillar	251	72
1 Mar 2023	Total	3618	1760
	06 Corstorphine/Murrayfield	195	47
2 Mar 2023	Total	195	47

	01 Almond	242	102
	02 Pentland Hills	154	79
	03 Drum Brae/Gyle	154	91
	04 Forth	219	102
	05 Inverleith	263	153
	06 Corstorphine/Murrayfield	78	109
	07 Sighthill/Gorgie	231	134
	08 Colinton/Fairmilehead	114	69
	09 Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart	140	104
	10 Morningside	202	114
	11 City Centre	271	132
	12 Leith Walk	303	161
	13 Leith	198	129
	14 Craigentinny/Duddingston	276	106
	15 Southside/Newington	227	124
	16 Liberton/Gilmerton	206	128
	17 Portobello/Craigmillar	266	111
3 Apr 2023	Total	3544	1948
<u>Total Changes to Date</u>		<u>9742</u>	<u>4954</u>
<u>CEC</u>			
		Additions	Deletions
		Total	Total
	01 Musselburgh	42	45
	02 Preston, Seton and Gosford	29	31
	03 Tranent, Wallyford and Macmerry	59	40
	04 North Berwick Coastal	30	24
	05 Haddington and Lammermuir	57	37
	06 Dunbar and East Linton	32	24
1 Feb 2023	Total	249	201
	01 Musselburgh	84	59
	02 Preston, Seton and Gosford	93	57
	03 Tranent, Wallyford and Macmerry	126	47
	04 North Berwick Coastal	75	53
	05 Haddington and Lammermuir	121	53
	06 Dunbar and East Linton	113	52
1 Mar 2023	Total	612	321
	01 Musselburgh	171	61
	02 Preston, Seton and Gosford	110	48
	03 Tranent, Wallyford and Macmerry	161	42
	04 North Berwick Coastal	117	35
	05 Haddington and Lammermuir	118	46
	06 Dunbar and East Linton	115	54
3 Apr 2023	Total	792	286
<u>Total Changes to Date</u>		<u>1653</u>	<u>808</u>
<u>ELC</u>			

		Additions	Deletions
		Total	Total
	01 Penicuik	17	28
	02 Bonnyrigg	15	24
	03 Dalkeith	35	24
	04 Midlothian West	38	41
	05 Midlothian East	32	28
	06 Midlothian South	32	30
1 Feb 2023	Total	169	175
	01 Penicuik	49	27
	02 Bonnyrigg	73	58
	03 Dalkeith	77	41
	04 Midlothian West	97	53
	05 Midlothian East	64	38
	06 Midlothian South	72	28
1 Mar 2023	Total	432	245
	01 Penicuik	80	29
	02 Bonnyrigg	109	48
	03 Dalkeith	107	48
	04 Midlothian West	157	44
	05 Midlothian East	78	36
	06 Midlothian South	100	28
3 Apr 2023	Total	631	233
<u>Total Changes to Date</u>		<u>1232</u>	<u>653</u>
<u>MLC</u>			
		Additions	Deletions
		Total	Total
	01 Linlithgow	16	30
	02 Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh	41	45
	03 Livingston North	36	46
	04 Livingston South	55	38
	05 East Livingston and East Calder	63	23
	06 Fauldhouse and the Breich Valley	26	35
	07 Whitburn and Blackburn	32	33
	08 Bathgate	44	52
	09 Armadale and Blackridge	18	29
1 Feb 2023	Total	331	331
	01 Linlithgow	83	39
	02 Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh	82	32
	03 Livingston North	100	68
	04 Livingston South	156	53

	05 East Livingston and East Calder	108	50
	06 Fauldhouse and the Breich Valley	62	38
	07 Whitburn and Blackburn	79	55
	08 Bathgate	83	55
	09 Armadale and Blackridge	67	38
1 Mar 2023	Total	820	428
	01 Linlithgow	137	58
	02 Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh	169	51
	03 Livingston North	192	61
	04 Livingston South	237	55
	05 East Livingston and East Calder	194	60
	06 Fauldhouse and the Breich Valley	124	39
	07 Whitburn and Blackburn	176	54
	08 Bathgate	159	75
	09 Armadale and Blackridge	120	40
3 Apr 2023	Total	1508	493
<u>Total Changes to Date</u> <u>WLC</u>		<u>2659</u>	<u>1252</u>

(B) Table-Postal Voters and Total Electorate

Council	Postal Voters	Total electorate
CEC	93540	398338
ELC	21618	88591
MLC	17559	75857
WLC	30104	145880
TOTAL	162821	708666

APPENDIX 2



LVJB Board Meeting – 24th April 2023 Summary of HR Policies for Review and Approval

Policy Name	New/Updated	Summary of Additions and Amendments	Approval/Consultation
Fire Safety and Evacuation Policy	Updated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A basic evacuation procedure exists but is not currently published to staff. New comprehensive policy and evacuation procedures created. Roles and responsibilities clearly outlined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT - 25.01.2023 Unison - 21.02.2023 Board - 24.04.2023 TBC
Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure	Updated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five individual documents pertaining to the management of sickness absence current exist: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Absence Management Policy 2. Managing Attendance Procedure 3. Sickness Absence Notification and Certification 4. Sickness Absence Reporting Employee Chart 5. Sickness Allowance Changes One document has been created to enable a better flow for the reader. The following improvements have been incorporated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Removed reference to timekeeping – this is conduct, not sickness absence. ➤ Clearly defined short term absence vs long term absence. ➤ Added guidance on return to work review discussions. ➤ Added that long term absence should be reviewed every four weeks. ➤ Added guidance around phased return to work. ➤ Added guidance on fit notes. ➤ Added guidance on maintaining contact, particularly with long-term absence. ➤ Added that the HR Manager should be present at staged meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT - 25.07.2022 Unison - 20.03.2023 Board – 24.04.2023 TBC

Policy Name	New/Updated	Summary of Additions and Amendments	Approval/Consultation
Customer Service Policy	Updated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy reviewed. Target response times reviewed and updated from 7 days to 15 working days in recognition of available resources within LVJB. Amendments endeavour to enable flexibility required to meet the demands and pressures on our existing resources, to manage customer and stakeholder expectations and to avoid late responses resulting in disappointment or dissatisfaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT – 01.03.2023 Unison – To be noted. Board – 24.04.2023 TBC
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy	Updated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General review and updating. Added roles and responsibilities. Updated protected characteristics. Added information on bi-annual Equalities Mainstreaming Report. Added a glossary of terms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT – 29.03.2023 Unison consulted 03.04.2023 Board – 24.04.2023 TBC
My PaTH Policy and Procedure	New	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new policy and procedure to underpin our performance and development framework, which has recently completed the first annual cycle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT – 29.03.2023 Unison consulted 03.04.2023 Board – 24.04.2023 TBC
Contribution Award Policy and Procedure	New	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new proposal to recognise and reward a selection of employees for their contributions and endeavours. Suggested annual process, comprising employee nominations to be considered by a select panel to rank and reward three employees with vouchers (£250, £150 and £100). Annual cost to LVJB = £500 per year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT – 29.03.2023 Unison consulted 04.04.2023 Board – 24.04.2023 TBC
Special Leave Policy	Bereavement Leave Updated	<p>The Special Leave Policy is not included in the papers (it was reviewed at 30th January 2023 Board meeting), however, the Board are asked to note the following amendment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existing Special Leave Policy allows for up to five days of paid bereavement leave for family members. Additional leave beyond this is unpaid. The Corporate Leadership Team recently agreed to increase paid bereavement leave for next of kin or equivalent to up to 10 days, at line manager discretion. This decision is reflective of reviewing instances of bereavement leave at LVJB and ensuring the wellbeing, health and welfare of our staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT – 01.03.2023 Unison – 12.04.2023 Board – 24.04.2023 TBC

Draft

Fire Safety and Evacuation Policy

FIRE POLICY	
Approved By	Lothian Valuation Joint Board
Date of Approval	TBC
Owner	Hannah Carruthers, HR Manager
Issue	1
Identity	Fire Policy
Location of electronic copy	SharePoint
Location of paper copy	Human Resources
Change Authority	Human Resources, Corporate Leadership Team and Trade Unions
Review Frequency	Annual or as required by legislation
Next Review Date	April 2024

Issue	Author	Date	Details of Change
1	Hannah Carruthers	December 2022	New Policy incorporating "Fire Evacuation Procedure for 17A South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh"

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1.0 Aims and Objectives

- 1.1 Fire is a hazard that has the critical potential for the loss of life and significant organisational damage. The aim of this policy is to provide managers and employees with guidance on fire safety and procedures.
- 1.2 In compliance with the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and associated subordinate legislation, this policy is intended to ensure the safety of employees and others in the course of LVJB activities.

This Fire Safety Policy outlines the way we, collectively, will respond to Fire Regulation arrangements in terms of the way we:

- Organise ourselves in terms of managerial and employee responsibility and competency.
 - Establish, implement and operate procedures and the way we take remedial corrective actions.
 - Evaluate, measure and review our performance.
- 1.3 As fires can occur with little or no warning it is both vital and a legal requirement that our Fire Safety Policy has the capacity to:-
 - Prevent loss of life or injury.
 - Minimise damage to property.
 - Restore as soon as possible the operational condition of the building or provide an alternative service.
 - 1.4 To be effective our policy will:
 - Be in writing.
 - Be as simple as possible but provide the basis for actions to achieve the plans objectives.
 - Detail responsibilities of key staff.
 - Nominate key personnel and detail their responsibilities.
 - Take into account the availability of employees on duty at all times of the day.
 - Make the most effective use of existing fire precautions as outlined this policy.
 - Be brought to the attention of and be understood by staff and relevant others.
 - Be regularly reviewed and updated.

2.0 Scope of the Policy

- 2.1 This policy relates to all employees of LVJB.

3.0 Monitor and Review

- 3.1 This policy has been created and will be maintained in accordance with the LVJB Policy Approval Framework. It has been agreed by CLT (and the Board as required), in consultation with the Trade Union where appropriate.

- 3.2 Human Resources is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and supporting procedures and will conduct reviews at appropriate intervals.
- 3.3 Anyone who feels they have been unfairly treated or discriminated against should contact the HR Manager.

4.0 Equal Opportunities

- 4.1 LVJB is committed to equality of opportunity for all its employees and the terms of this policy and its supporting procedures and guidance notes are designed to ensure the fair and transparent treatment for all staff irrespective of age, race, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender or contractual status. An Equality Impact Assessment is undertaken on this policy each time it is reviewed and updated.

5.0 Responsibility for this Policy

- 5.1 Human Resources. Any changes to this policy and supporting procedures will be made in consultation with appropriate bodies.
- 5.2 LVJB reserves the right to update HR Policies in line with new or updated Employment Legislation.

6.0 General Statement of Fire Policy

- 6.1 LVJB recognises and accepts responsibilities as an employer for ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety of our staff, and others who may be affected, in respect of harm caused by fire in the workplace.
- 6.2 To facilitate fire safety, we will create and promote a positive fire safety culture that secures the commitment and participation of all staff to help us achieve high standards of fire safety in our buildings.
- 6.3 We will achieve our objective by providing and maintaining:
- fire risk assessment processes to identify fire risks and specify control measures
 - suitable means of detecting fire and raising the alarm
 - appropriate arrangements to fully evacuate the buildings in the event of fire
 - sufficient appliances to fight fires
 - information, instruction, training and supervision so that staff and relevant others know how to avoid fire hazards and contribute positively to overall fire safety

7.0 Roles and Responsibilities

7.1 Employer Responsibilities

7.1.1 LVJB shall, so far as is reasonably practicable, ensure the safety of employees in respect of harm caused by fire in the workplace. LVJB (or nominated specialist) shall:

- Carry out an assessment of the workplace or relevant premises for the purpose of identifying any risks of harm caused by fire in the workplace, ensuring the assessment is regularly reviewed where applicable.
- Implement fire safety measures in the workplace as necessary to enable the employer to comply with the duty imposed.

7.1.2 Fire safety measures shall be taken on the basis of the following considerations:

- avoiding risk,
- evaluating risks which cannot be avoided,
- combating risks at source,
- adapting to technical progress,
- replacing the dangerous with the non or less dangerous,
- developing a coherent overall fire prevention policy which covers technology, organisation of work and the influence of factors relating to the working environment,
- giving collective fire safety protective measures priority over individual measures,
- giving appropriate instructions to employees.

7.1.3 LVJB will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons not in their employment are not exposed to risks to their health or safety and that they are provided with all relevant information regarding fire safety.

7.2 Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) Responsibilities

7.2.1 Safety and wellbeing management is a managerial responsibility.

7.2.2 It is the role of CLT to provide organisational leadership, strategic planning and strategic decision making when considering the issue of fire. Additionally, this group will authorise the appropriate resources to meet the requirement of this Policy to ensure statutory compliance.

7.3 Line Manager Responsibilities

7.3.1 It is the role of this line management to ensure that the areas within their control, implement, operate and conduct business in accordance with this policy and the general conditions within the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005. This level of management provides functional leadership to the majority of staff and therefore should be active in pursuing operational fire safety and maintaining adequate control, specifically:

- All operational activities that could present a fire hazard are adequately assessed and controlled.
- Suitable arrangements for evacuation are in place for vulnerable persons, i.e. disabled, pregnant employees, etc (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans PEEPS).
- Suitable arrangements for evacuation are in place for visitors and contractors.

- Ensuring the means of escape within their area of control/influence remain unobstructed and free from combustibles. Corridors, passageways and staircase enclosures forming part of the means of escape should not be used for any other purpose than access or egress.
- Ensure provision of adequate information and instruction in relation to risk from fire and consider the appropriate disciplinary action against any individual compromising fire safety.
- Nominate staff to train and act as fire wardens in their areas of control.

7.4 Employee Responsibilities

7.4.1 All employees are required to:

- Take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and of other persons who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work.
- Read and understand the actions to be taken in the event of discovering a fire, fire alarm and emergency fire evacuation. They should make themselves familiar with the escape routes from their area of work and alternatives in the event of their primary escape route being compromised.
- Ensure the area they are working in is conducive to the implementation and operation of fire safety arrangements and ensure that fire exits are not blocked, where applicable checking the fire exits from their rooms and ensuring that materials are not stored in means of escape.
- Ensuring they evacuate the building and attend the designated assembly point, in the event of the fire alarm sounding.
- Staff are required to carry out the online fire safety training at the start of their employment and annually thereafter

Action: Consider external online courses or create in house presentation/video.

7.5 HR Manager (in association with the Health and Safety Committee)

7.5.1 The HR Manager is responsible for implementing the Fire Policy and implementing the fire evacuation procedures at 17A South Gyle Crescent.

7.5.2 The HR Manager shall put safe systems of work and processes in place with regards to Fire Evacuation.

7.5.4 The HR Manager shall:

- Ensure that all physical fire safety measures are maintained to the appropriate British Standard or Manufacturers' Instruction, i.e. Automatic Fire Detection Systems, Emergency Lighting, Fire Doors, Fire Signage, Portable Fire Extinguishers, Evacuation Chairs etc. by competent persons. Records will be kept of such tests.
- Ensure weekly test of fire alarm systems and equipment.
- Ensure that escape routes and fire doors are not compromised or obstructed.

- Check that fire extinguishers are where they should be.
- Periodically making sure fire doors are not wedged open.
- Check that fire signs are not missing and are in good repair.
- Implement Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans for staff as required.
- Undertake a review of the fire policy annually, monitoring and auditing its effectiveness and make improvements or take remedial corrective actions as necessary or where there has been significant change in procedures or legislation that affects the policy.
- Ensure fire risk assessments are reviewed annually.
Action: Review Spring2023. Last reviewed 2018? Saved [here](#).
- Ensure fire drills are carried out and that these are recorded.
- Provide full support to the Fire Wardens and Senior Fire Wardens to ensure they have the means and competency to carry out their roles.
- Provide suitable training and instruction to all staff and give advice and guidance when required.
- Manage any disciplinary issues which may arise from non-compliance with the fire policy.

8.0 Fire Alarm

8.1 When the fire alarm activates the call is sent directly through a collector service to the remote monitoring company. The Senior Fire Warden shall back this up by a telephone call to 999 stating their name, the location of the building and any other information requested by the Fire Service.

8.2 The Senior Fire Warden will be the LVJB representative when engaging with the Fire and Rescue Service.

8.3 Fire Alarm Testing

8.3.1 The HR Manager is responsible for the weekly testing of the fire alarm.

8.3.2 The fire evacuation signal at 17A South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh is an electronic sounder.

8.3.3 Fire alarm sounders are situated throughout the building and the signal is designed to reach all parts of the building.

8.3.4 The system is tested every Thursday between 10.00am and 10.15am by sounding the alarm signal for a few seconds. If you cannot hear the signal, or it is difficult to hear in any area you are in during the weekly test, you should report this to the HR Manager.

8.3.5 Please note, before the weekly fire test the fire alarm requires to be isolated temporarily, that is, although the alarm goes off here it does not ring through to the Fire Brigade. If during this time period you detect a fire you should still break the glass at a call point and make a 999 call to alert the Fire and Rescue Service.

8.3.6 Fire alarm tests other than the regular Thursday test will be declared in advance by an e-mail to all staff. The sounding of the fire alarm, unless so notified as a test, will signal an evacuation of the building.

9.0 Fire Drills

- 9.1 The HR Manager shall conduct two full evacuations (Fire Drills) per year. A record of fire drills will be kept.
- 9.2 A record of any activation where the Fire and Rescue Service attends will be documented.

10.0 Passenger Lift

- 10.1 The lift is integrated with the fire alarm system to ensure that lift carriages in transit during fire alarm activation will fail safe.
- 10.2 The lift carriage will automatically return to the lowest level – other than the level where activation is in progress and will lock off in the doors open position.
- 10.3 When lifts are stationary during a fire alarm activation the doors will lock off in the open position.

11.0 Fire Evacuation Procedure for 17A South Gyle Crescent

11.1 If you discover or suspect a fire:



- **If you discover a fire** you should activate the nearest safe break glass alarm call point and leave the building immediately by the nearest emergency exit.
- The nearest escape route is clearly signed and will be the safest and quickest way out of the building - you should not follow your normal route into or out of the building.
- You must not stop to pick up personal belongings.
- You should not use the lift.
- You should go to the assembly point.
- At the assembly point you should report to a Fire Warden exactly where the fire is. The Fire Warden or Senior Fire Warden will relay this information to the Fire and Rescue Service. You should stay beside the Fire Warden at the assembly point in case they need more information.



Only tackle the fire with an extinguisher if it is safe to do so, you have received formal training on how to use them and you do not put yourself or others at any risk. Never use more than one extinguisher when trying to tackle a fire.

11.2 If you hear an alarm:

The building is fitted with an automatic fire alarm. The alarm will sound continuously during the evacuation phase. The fire alarm system will also automatically summon the Fire and Rescue Service.

Anyone can raise the alarm by activating the nearest break glass alarm point. These are clearly signed throughout the building and are near exit doors. All relevant areas also have smoke and heat detectors that automatically activate the alarm system if necessary.

- **If you hear the alarm** you should evacuate the building quickly but calmly by the nearest emergency escape route. The nearest escape route is clearly signed and will be the safest and quickest way out. Do not assume this is a test or a false alarm. All alarms must be taken seriously.



- If you have visitors with you, you must direct them from the building and to the nearest assembly point.
- Help and advise others, especially visitors, people unfamiliar with the building, people with disabilities, children, elderly people and members of the public.
- **Do not use the lifts.**
- Do not stop to pick up your personal belongings or files and papers.
- Do not carry tea, coffee or anything else which may cause injury or otherwise hinder the evacuation.
- Do not stop to finish phone calls.
- Do not attempt to tackle fires yourself with fire extinguishers, unless you have had training and the fires are very small and localised.
- Where possible, unless there are people immediately behind you, close doors and windows as you leave.

- If the alarm sounds for a period of time and then stops, you must continue to evacuate the building.
- **Make your way to the assembly point** which is located in the car park to the rear of the building. It is important to correctly identify the correct escape route and assembly point for a given part of the building you are working.



- Do proceed all the way to the designated fire assembly point, do not wait close to the final exit doors and do not walk along the front of the building—go via the footpath adjacent to the main road.
- Once you are within a staircase, proceed towards the designated fire-exit. You should not re-enter the office area to change your route to use the other staircase (unless the staircase you were in becomes blocked or otherwise unsafe). The staircases are specially protected and are safe from fire, the general office areas are not protected in the same way.
- It is important that you leave your floor by the nearest fire exit staircase for three reasons:-
 1. You reach a protected area in the shortest possible time.
 2. You avoid congestion at the doors leading to the staircases by utilising all available staircases, rather than tending to use only one.
 3. You avoid congestion at the final fire exit doors from the building.
- It is essential each individual is fully aware of the escape routes from the building.
- All escapes routes have emergency lighting. If the main electrical supply to the building fails the emergency lighting will activate to enable persons to find their way out of the building in an emergency situation.
- Internal escape routes incorporate Refuge Areas. These are areas where disabled persons may resort whilst fire investigations are being made by the Fire Service. These refuges are defined as protected areas, protecting the occupants from heat and smoke for an extended period of time.
- If you exit by fire-exit staircase east you must walk to the assembly point by way of the footpath adjacent to the main road and enter the car park by the main entrance. Do not walk under the front of the building as this could be dangerous if the building is on fire.
- If you exit by fire-exit staircase west go to the assembly point via the pedestrian access to the car park.
- You will recognise the Fire Warden/s in control of the assembly point by their high visibility jacket.
- Fire Wardens have had training and specific instructions to manage fire evacuations. They are there to make sure you are safe. You must co-operate with the Fire Wardens and follow any instructions they may issue.
- When you get to the assembly point, tell the Fire Warden/s about anyone you know was in the same part of the building as you were in but who is not at the assembly point.
- Do not leave the assembly point unless the Fire Warden tells you it is safe to do so. If your car is in the car park, do not attempt to drive it away.
- You must remain at the assembly point until you are told it is safe to re-enter the building.
- Silencing of the fire alarm does not automatically mean you can re-enter the building. Do not **re-enter** the Building until authorised to do so.

12.0 Special Arrangements for Persons with Disabilities

- 12.1 The evacuation of people with disabilities is based on the use of Refuge Areas which are the two protected stair landings. People with disabilities which prevent evacuation within a safe period of

time should be assisted by a fire warden to the nearest fire exit stair landing. The stair landings have a greater degree of fire resistance and protection and may be utilised as a safe resting place whilst evacuation is taking place.

12.2 Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans

- 12.2.1 Staff with a physical disability shall undergo an assessment in the form of a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP).
- 12.2.2 The PEEP will be completed in conjunction with the line manager and the HR Manager. PEEPS will be shared with the relevant Fire Wardens and Senior Fire Wardens.
- 12.2.3 Where PEEPS have been completed for staff they will be recorded by the HR Manager.
- 12.2.4 Deaf and hearing impaired employees will be offered visual indicating devices which alert them when the fire alarm has been activated.
- 12.2.5 Blind and partially sighted staff will be offered orientation training where applicable. This may include alternative ways out of the building. If a blind person uses a guide dog it is important that the dog is also given ample opportunity to learn these routes.
- 12.2.6 It is not logistically possible to prepare PEEPs for disabled visitors. It is the responsibility of the host to escort visitors, who require assistance to evacuate, to the nearest stair core refuge point and notify the Senior Fire Warden of the need for assistance.

13.0 Fire Wardens Responsibilities and Training

- 13.1 A core team of LVJB employees will be trained as Fire Wardens to manage full evacuations of the building, with agreed areas of responsibility.
- 13.2 Fire Wardens will all be familiar with all areas and levels of both buildings.
- 13.3 Fire Wardens will be provided with high visibility jackets bearing the legend 'Fire Warden'.
- 13.4 A record of current Fire Wardens can be found on signage around the building, and below:

Name	Location	Active or New	Attendance
Greg McIntosh	Ground Floor	Active	5 days per week
Diane Mouat	Ground Floor	Active	2 days per week
Louise Hall Mackenzie	First Floor	New	5 days per week
Aiden Stenton	First Floor	New	1 day per week?
Kirsteen Robertson	First Floor	New	1 day per week?
Louise Murray	First Floor	New	1/2 days per week?
Hannah Carruthers	Second Floor	New	1 day per week
Bernie Callaghan	Second Floor	Active	1 day per week
Fiona Cameron	Second Floor	Active	1 day per week
Callum Pigott	Second Floor	Active	5 days per week
Ian Logie	Second Floor	Active	5 days per week

Michael Wilkie	Second Floor	Active	1 day per week
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Action: Training and refresher training to be arranged asap for Fire Wardens.

13.5 Fire Drills

13.5.1 During planned practice fire drills, Fire Wardens will perform the duties listed above and will:-

- confirm that fire alarm sounders in their allocated area are working.
- confirm that fire doors are closing correctly.
- confirm that automatically closing fire doors are working correctly.
- make sure that everyone in their allocated area evacuates the building.

13.6 Fire Alarm Activation

13.6.1 On hearing the fire alarm, Fire Wardens will carry out the following duties:-

- If safe to do so make sure that everyone in their allocated area evacuates the building.
- If safe to do so go to the entrance of their allotted staircase (via protected route) and direct those leaving the building to the relevant assembly point.
- Help people with special needs to get to the relevant refuge point and notify the Senior Fire Warden.
- Under no circumstances should Fire Wardens search the building for the fire or search for missing persons.
- Visually check that everyone has evacuated their designated area, including meeting rooms. It is not necessary for fire wardens to attempt a head count or name check of people normally located on their floor - the primary duty is to ensure that their areas are empty of people.
- At the assembly point, advise the Senior Fire Warden as to whether their area was clear and if they are aware of anyone missing.
- At the assembly point assist Senior Fire Warden to control and care for those evacuated, as necessary.
- Prevent any cars from entering or leaving the car park.
- Perform any other duties consistent with the parameters of their training as directed by the Senior Fire Warden.

13.7 Fire Warden Safety Training and Information

13.7.1 Fire Wardens will be provided with training in the following subject areas:-

- fire safety theory
- fire evacuation plans
- actions in the event of fire alarm evacuation
- fire safety practical – including use of fire extinguishers
- comprehensive use of evac-chairs Action: Consider purchase of these
- moving and handling people
- detailed understanding of fire action plans
- making sure traffic on site does not endanger pedestrians or hinder the progress of emergency services attending the incident

- coordinating what they do under the direction of the Senior Fire Warden

13.7.2 Refresher training will be provided every twelve months.

13.7.3 All new employees appointed to the core team will be trained upon appointment.

13.7.4 It will be ensured that Fire Wardens are familiar with:

- all areas on their floors or total area of responsibility (including storage areas, location of keys to locked rooms, corridors, toilets, staircases etc), all fire escape routes and potential hazards.
- Ensure that they are aware of all staff normally based within their area of responsibility, including temporary staff.
- Ensure that they are aware of the special needs of any people with disabilities within their area.

14.0 Senior Fire Wardens Responsibilities and Training

Action: Appoint and train Senior Fire Wardens – CLT members, DVs and Admin Managers.

14.1 At all fire evacuations, whether for a real fire or practice, the Senior Fire Warden on duty is empowered to take control of the incident and to instruct people as necessary to ensure the Fire Policy is implemented.

14.2 LVJB has trained selected staff as Senior Fire Wardens forming a core team available to manage evacuations, supplemented by Fire Wardens from a trained pool of staff.

14.3 The Senior Fire Warden on duty is responsible for:

- Taking overall control of the situation when there is a fire alarm activation.
- Ensuring Fire Wardens have taken the relevant actions as specified in the Fire Policy.
- Accounting for everyone known to have been in the premises via communication with Fire Wardens deployed to assembly points.
- Initiating additional response in relation to the care of staff or visitors with special needs.
- Taking specific cognisance of the possibility of members of the public being in the building and not understanding how to evacuate when necessary.
- Liaising with the HR Manager to initiate contingency arrangements for shelter and accommodation for those evacuated if the incident is likely to continue for some time, or if the weather is bad, or if the fire has damaged any area of the building.

14.4 When attending LVJB, the Fire and Rescue Service will have certain expectations. The Senior Fire Warden meeting them should give them full assistance and be able to provide:

- Access to the property for Fire Appliances.
- Relevant information on the status of the fire or building condition.
- The status of the evacuation i.e. is the building fully evacuated, are there any persons unaccounted for.
- The location of the fire alarm panel(s).

14.5 The Fire and Rescue Service may ask for:

- The alarm(s) to be silenced as they undertake investigations.
- Information as to the processes in certain parts of the buildings, e.g. storage of chemicals or gas cylinders, etc.
- Information on electrical, gas and water intakes/valves.

- Assistance to lead them to the area affected (they will never put anyone at risk through this activity).
- Plans of the buildings if available.

14.6 After the Fire and Rescue Service give the 'all clear', the Senior Fire Warden should:




- Reset the alarm if required.
- Confirm the all clear to Fire Wardens.
- Organise for staff at the assembly point to be allowed to return to the building.
- Check all exits and fire exits have been secured.

15.0 Homeworking and Fire Safety in the Home

15.1 Please find below information on how to prevent fire at home:

- ❖ [Gov.UK - make you home safe from fire](#)
- ❖ [Scottish Fire and Rescue – safety at home](#)
- ❖ [Scottish Government – home fire safety](#)

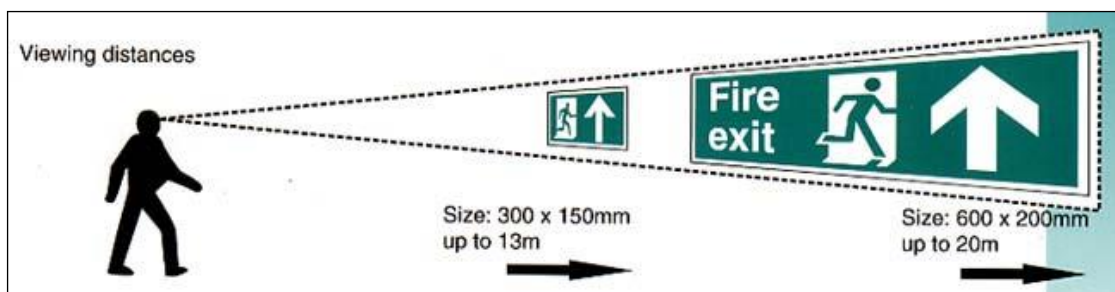
Appendix 1 - Signs and Notices

Symbol	Sign Category	Meaning	Use of Sign
	Safe Procedure	SAFE emergency escape route or first aid.	<p>To show the way to medical assistance.</p> <p>To show the way to an area of safety and indicate that a course of action is safe to take.</p>
	Mandatory	Indicates safe fire escapes.	<p>To convey actions that must be carried out.</p> <p>To confirm emergency procedures in the event of fire.</p>
	Fire Equipment	FIRE - Fire Fighting	<p>To indicate the location of fire equipment.</p> <p>To comply with the fire precautions (workplace) regulations, which require any non automatic fire fighting equipment to be indicated by signs.</p>

Recommended height for installation:

Above Doors: 2.0m to 2.5m from floor level to bottom of sign

Wall Mounted: 1.4m to 1.7m from floor level to bottom of sign



Appendix 2 - Portable Fire Extinguishers

All portable fire extinguishers shall comply with BS EN 3-7:2004 portable fire extinguishers characteristics, performance requirements and test methods.

Fires have been classified into five groups A, B, C, D and F







- **Class A fires** - are fires involving organic solids like paper, wood, etc.
- **Class B fires** - are fires involving flammable Liquids.
- **Class C fires** - are fires involving flammable Gases.
- **Class D fires** - are fires involving Metals.
- **Class F fires** - are fires involving Cooking Oil and Fat.

Electrical fires are not included, as they can fall into any of the classifications. However if you use a water extinguisher you must isolate the electric supply first as you could be electrocuted. In addition it must be remembered that certain electrical apparatus maintains a lethal charge for some time after it has been switched off.

The first thing that you should remember is that fire spreads very quickly. Even a small contained fire can quickly spread, producing smoke and fumes which can kill in seconds. If you are in any doubt do not tackle the fire, no matter how small. If in doubt raise the alarm and get out of the building, and stay out until you are told you can re-enter.

Extinguisher bottles are coloured red with the appropriate colour code label showing which fire it can be used on i.e. A, B, C, D, F.



						
Type of Fire	Fires involving freely burning materials. For example wood, paper, textiles and other carbonaceous materials.	Fires involving flammable liquids. For example petrol and spirits. NOT ALCOHOL OR COOKING OIL.	Fires involving flammable gasses. For example propane and butane.	Fires involving flammable metals. For example magnesium and lithium	Fires involving electrical equipment. For example photocopiers, fax machines and computers	Fires involving cooking oil and fat. For example olive oil, maize oil, lard and butter.

Water	✓					
Foam	✓	✓				
ABC Dry Powder	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Dry Special Powder				✓		
CO ₂ Gas		✓			✓	
Wet Chemical	✓					✓

Before you tackle a fire

Many people put out small fires quite safely. However, some people die, or are injured, by tackling fires which are beyond their capabilities. Here is a simple fire code to help you decide whether to put out or get out.

Only tackle a fire in its very early stages

- Only tackle a fire if you have had appropriate training in the fire fighting equipment and you feel competent to do so.
- Always put your own and other peoples safety first. Make sure you can escape if you need to and never let a fire block your exit.
- Fire extinguishers are only for fighting a fire in its very early stages. Never tackle a fire if it is starting to spread or has spread to other items in the room or if the room is filling with smoke. Around 70% of fire deaths are caused by people being overcome by smoke and fumes.

You should know the **PASS**word for using portable fire extinguishers.

Pull the pin. Some extinguishers require releasing a lock, pressing a puncture lever or other motion.

Aim low, pointing at the base of the fire with the discharge nozzle.

Squeeze the handle. This releases the extinguishing agent.

Sweep from side to side; aim at the base of the fire.

Always test the extinguisher before approaching a fire.

Appendix 3 - Powers of the Fire and Rescue Service



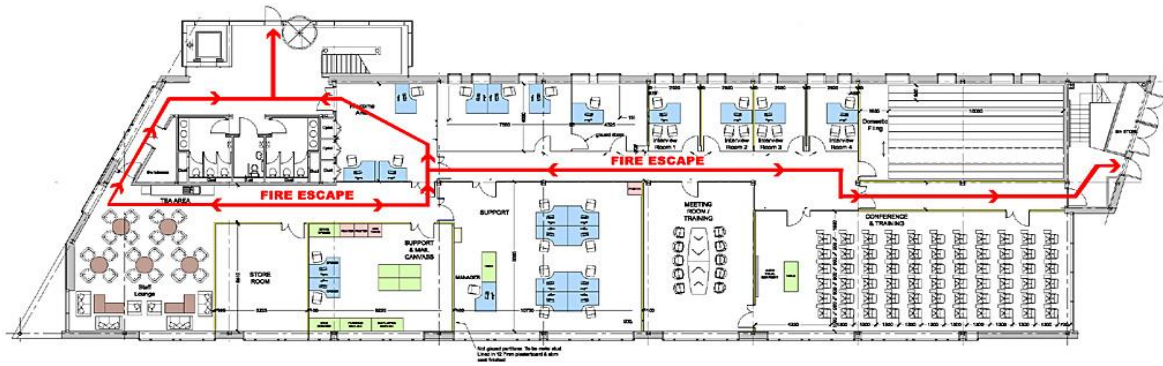
Where the Fire and Rescue Service have been summoned to a premises for the purposes of fire or alarm, the Fire Service have full control of that premises. This means that they can take any actions they feel necessary to remediate the condition. They have powers of entry to any part of the LVJB building.

What to expect from the Fire and Rescue Service:

- An attendance (generally) within 8 minutes of the alarm sounding and receiving the call.
- At least one Fire Appliance and crew to attend the alarm.
- A courteous and professional service.
- A full examination of the effected zone in which the fire alarm panel has shown.
- Full guidance and advice throughout the incident.
- A written report for unwanted calls.

It is an offence to obstruct a fire officer in the course of their duty.

Appendix 4 – 17A South Gyle Crescent Floor Plans



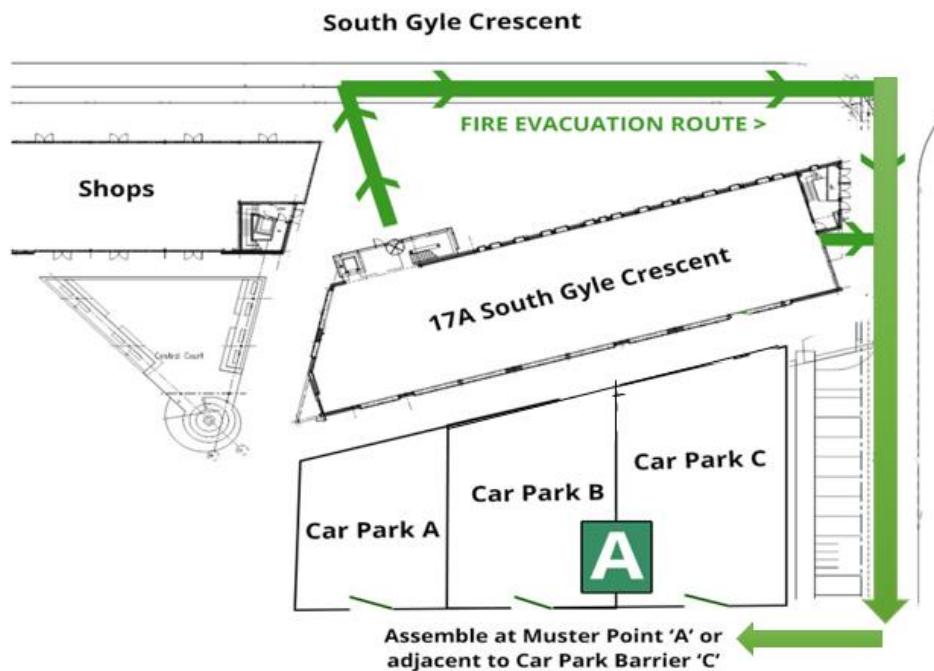
GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



Second Floor



Appendix 5 - Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan Template

Name:	
Job Title:	
Line Manager:	
Work Location:	
Reason PEEP is required:	
The method of alert in an emergency is:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing fire alarm system • Pager • Visual alarm system • Members of the work team • The fire wardens on the floor
Description of suitable evacuation plan:	
Assistance is required from:	
Specialist Equipment Required:	
Do you require a copy of the Fire Policy in an alternative format:	
Date Plan Created:	
Plan Created By:	
Employee Signature:	<p>** I consent to this PEEP being shared with the relevant Senior Fire Wardens and Fire Wardens.</p>
Line Manager Signature:	
HR Manager Signature:	

Draft

**Sickness Absence Management
Policy and Procedure**

SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURE	
Approved By	Lothian Valuation Joint Board
Date of Approval	From 11 th September 2000
Owner	Hannah Carruthers, HR Manager
Issue	4
Identity	Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure
Location of electronic copy	SharePoint
Location of paper copy	Human Resources
Change Authority	HR, CLT and Trade Unions
Review Frequency	Annual or as required by legislation.
Next Review Date	April 2024

Issue	Author	Date	Details of Change
2	Bill Kerr	28 June 2013	Reviewed no changes
3	Bill Kerr	8 February 2019	Reviewed no changes
4	Hannah Carruthers	22 June 2022	Reviewed. Absence Management Policy, Managing Attendance Procedure, Sickness Absence Notification and Certification, Sickness Absence Reporting Employee Chart, Sickness Allowance Changes, Sickness Absence Certificate and Return to Work Discussion Form all consolidated into one document.

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SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

1.0 Aims and Objectives

- 1.1 The aim of this policy is to provide managers and employees with guidance on sickness absence management to ensure that this is applied fairly and consistently across LVJB in accordance with equality and diversity principles.
- 1.2 Arrangements for managing sickness absence must establish a fair and consistent approach as well as taking into account both the interests of the employee and the operational requirements of LVJB.
- 1.3 This document sets out the procedure to measure absence levels and a framework for management and HR intervention where appropriate.

2.0 Scope of the Policy

- 2.1 This policy relates to all employees of LVJB.
- 2.2 The Assessor and HR Manager shall be responsible for communicating the provisions of this policy to all employees and, through appropriate feedback, satisfy themselves that the Policy's provisions are understood. In addition, new employees will be fully informed of these provisions as a part of their induction.
- 2.3 The Assessor and HR Manager shall also seek to ensure that line managers are fully aware of their role and responsibilities in the management of absence. In this regard, training, support, and guidance will be provided, as required.

3.0 Monitor and Review

- 3.1 This policy has been created and will be maintained in accordance with the [LVJB Policy Approval Framework](#). It has been agreed by CLT (and the Board as required), in consultation with the Trade Union.
- 3.2 HR is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and supporting procedures and will conduct reviews at appropriate intervals.
- 3.3 Any amendments to the policy and procedure will be discussed with the Trade Union.
- 3.4 Anyone who feels they have been unfairly treated or discriminated against should notify the HR Manager.

4.0 Equal Opportunities

- 4.1 LVJB is committed to equality of opportunity for all its employees and the terms of this policy, and its supporting procedures and guidance notes are designed to ensure the fair and transparent treatment for all staff irrespective of age, race, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender or contractual status. An Equality Impact Assessment is undertaken on this policy each time it is reviewed and updated.

5.0 Responsibility for this Policy

- 5.1 Human Resources. Any changes to this policy and supporting procedures will be made in consultation with appropriate bodies.
- 5.2 LVJB reserves the right to update HR Policies in line with new or updated Employment Legislation.

6.0 General Principles

- 6.1 LVJB and the Trade Unions recognise that high attendance levels are vital to providing effective and efficient operation of Joint Board Services. High levels of attendance will contribute positively to the provision of direct quality service provision in the context of a best value regime. Where low levels of attendance exist, employees at work may experience additional workloads which, over a period of time, can have an adverse effect on their morale and motivation.
- 6.2 LVJB is committed to encouraging and supporting regular attendance at work. LVJB is also committed to supporting and assisting those employees who suffer enforced absence. This support and assistance may include consideration and approval of appropriate temporary arrangements to facilitate a return to work. In addition, the Joint Board recognises its statutory obligations in respect of individuals in the area of disability discrimination and will comply with relevant legislation in this area.
- 6.3 In relation to absence which occurs as a result of an accident at work, this must always be reported using the [Report of an Injury, Disease, Condition, Dangerous Occurrence or Incident form](#).
- 6.4 The Joint Board and the Trade Union recognise the importance of employee co-operation in and commitment to the achievement of consistently low levels of absence and to minimise unplanned and unauthorised absences. In this regard, it is recognised that procedures for managing absence, arrived at through agreement with the Trade Union, provide a properly objective basis for handling absence issues in a fair and consistent manner.

7.0 Health & Safety

- 7.1 LVJB affirms its responsibilities as an employer for safeguarding, the health, safety and welfare of its employees. In this regard, LVJB, through its Occupational Health and Safety Policy Statement and supporting procedures will take all reasonable steps to provide:-
- (a) a safe place of work;
 - (b) safe systems and methods of working;

- (c) a safe and healthy working environment;
- (d) sufficient information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure the health and safety at work of all employees; and
- (e) adequate welfare facilities ensuring confidentiality, where appropriate.

7.2 The main aims of LVJB's commitment to health and safety are to prevent ill-health and to promote health at work. LVJB and the Trade Union recognise that improved attendance levels can result from the ongoing development of a positive and supportive occupational health provision.

8.0 Well-Being and Preventative Action

- 8.1 LVJB encourages employees to adopt and pursue healthy lifestyle options which can contribute to a positive work-life balance and lead to lower employee sickness absence levels.
- 8.2 LVJB offers supportive measures such as a confidential employee counselling service and physiotherapy.

Employee Assistance Programme:

Website: www.pamassist.co.uk

- Username: CEC
- Password: CEC1

- 8.3 Further information on health and wellbeing can be found [here](#).

9.0 Monitoring Absence Levels

- 9.1 In order to respond consistently to unacceptable absence levels it is important to establish arrangements for monitoring the level, pattern and trends of absence. Monitoring will enable a fair and consistent management response where a review of attendance identifies a pattern/level of absence which requires further action. Such arrangements will enable the identification of problem areas and provide a reliable basis for action should it be required.
- 9.2 The collation of relevant information may include an examination of appropriate documentation, contact with appropriate external sources and personal contact with the employee either at the workplace or, where appropriate, at the employee's home. In relation to individual employees, information shall be processed, communicated and where necessary, acted upon in a confidential manner, recognising any statutory requirements and/or national agreements relating to access to medical records etc.
- 9.3 It is recognised that cases may arise where, following a period of satisfactory attendance, the employee's absence level returns to a level which gives cause for concern. In such cases, the individual circumstances should be considered, along with any new information, medical or otherwise. It may be appropriate for the employee to return to the last stage previously reached in the procedure. Further advice should be sought from the HR Manager, GP and Occupational Health if appropriate.

10.0 Unauthorised Absences

- 10.1 Established unauthorised absences shall be treated as misconduct and shall be dealt with in accordance with the LVJB Disciplinary Procedure. It is recognised, however, that following an investigation, an absence may be authorised retrospectively.

SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This procedure is designed to help line managers monitor and improve attendance levels and to reduce the adverse impact of sickness absence on staff and service delivery. All sickness absence will be dealt with using this procedure.
- 1.2 Key to the operation of the procedure will be the consistent application of its provisions. Management discretion used appropriately will, when used in conjunction with other supportive policies and procedures, provide employees with appropriate support to improve their attendance levels where possible/practicable.
- 1.3 The effective management of sickness absence must be a high priority for all line managers.
- 1.4 LVJB sickness absence trigger points have been set and will be reviewed regularly.
- 1.5 To promote continuous improvement in the area of sickness absence, it is mandatory for line managers to continuously monitor their staff's attendance.
- 1.6 A key tool in the effective management of absence is the Return-to-Work Review. It is mandatory to undertake a return to work interview each time an employee returns to work from a period of sickness absence, even where the absence duration is only one day.
- 1.7 The procedure provides a process for managing attendance which may result in action being taken up to and including dismissal on capability grounds.
- 1.8 Medical information relating to cases will be kept strictly confidential.
- 1.9 Where sickness absence relates to an employee with a disability, line managers require to comply with the Equality Act and the duty to make reasonable adjustments. Equally, where there are mitigating circumstances for an absence they will be taken into account. Advice must be sought from the HR Manager.
- 1.10 An employee has the right to be represented by a Trade Union representative or a work colleague at any formal stage meeting convened under this procedure.
- 1.11 Unless good reason is given, failure to comply in full with this procedure may result in loss of pay and/or disciplinary action.

2.0 Notification of Sickness Absence

- 2.1 Employees must contact their line manager or alternative designated contact as early as possible and no later than 10.00am on the first day of absence, unless other arrangements have been notified by the line manager.
- 2.2 The following information must be provided:

- the reason for absence
- the likely duration of absence and anticipated return to work date
- any work commitments that may need to be rearranged or re-allocated

- 2.3 Where sickness absence arises part way through the working day, that date should be recorded as the first day of absence on the self-certificate, along with the time the sickness began.
- 2.4 If an employee cannot make personal contact, they must ensure that notification, is always made on their behalf, in line with the appropriate contact arrangements, as far as reasonably practicable.
- 2.5 Failure to notify the designated contact without good reason will lead to the absence being deemed unauthorised and will result in the withholding of sickness absence payments and possibly disciplinary action. If a satisfactory explanation is provided after investigation of the circumstances, payment will be re-instated.
- 2.6 If an employee appears to be absent but has not notified their line manager or other designated person, then the line manager should attempt to make contact with the employee. If contacting the employee is unsuccessful, the line manager should escalate to the HR Manager to consider contacting the employee's registered emergency contacts to ensure the safe welfare and wellbeing of the employee.
- 2.7 Managers must notify personnelandfinance@lothian-vjb.gov.uk of all sickness absences on the first day of absence or as soon as possible thereafter.

This information is used to:-

- ◆ Ensure timely notification of changes in sick pay level (ie a reduction to half pay or to zero pay).
- ◆ Produce absence reports.
- ◆ Produce reports of formal action taken.
- ◆ Monitor the effectiveness of LVJB's Sickness Absence Management arrangements.

- 2.8 Where an employee is aware in advance that they will require to take a period of sickness absence, e.g. for a scheduled operation or post-op recovery, they should discuss this with their line manager as early as possible.

3.0 Sickness Absence Certification

3.1 Self-Certificate – up to 7 calendar days

- 3.1.1 For an absence of seven calendar days or less, the employee must submit a self-certificate form to their line manager on the day they return to work unless a Medical Practitioner has issued a Fit Note for the entire period of the absence.

3.2 Fit Note – more than 7 calendar days

- 3.2.1 For an absence continuing for more than seven calendar days, the employee must consult a Medical Practitioner and obtain a Fit Note. Fit notes can legally be issued by GPs, Nurses, Occupational Therapists, Pharmacists and Physiotherapists. The Fit Note must be forwarded immediately to the HR manager.
- 3.2.2 The 'fit note' continues to serve as certification that an employee is unfit for work where the box is ticked to indicate 'you are not fit for work'.
- 3.2.3 The purpose of the 'fit note' is to facilitate return to work in a more meaningful way. The 'fit note' provides the opportunity for the Medical Practitioner to specify that the employee may be fit for work taking into account their advice. The Medical Practitioner will be given the opportunity to suggest ways in which LVJB can facilitate a return to work. There are four options available for the Medical Practitioner to highlight on the 'fit note', these are:
- A phased return
 - Amended job duties
 - Altered hours of work
 - Workplace adaptations
- 3.2.4 The Medical Practitioner also has the option to make any other suggestions that they think would be appropriate and/or provide any other relevant information.
- 3.2.5 Upon receipt of a 'fit note' for an employee, the line manager, with the support of Human Resources and in consultation with the employee will fairly consider the recommendations made by the Medical Practitioner as to whether it will be possible to accommodate the suggestions made. Occupational Health advice may be sought if appropriate.
- 3.2.6 LVJB has a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' for employees covered under the Equality Act 2010 (see Equality Act 2010, section 15). Where employees are concerned that LVJB has not acted in accordance with its duty they should contact the HR Manager.
- 3.2.7 Any changes to an employee's hours or work duties, whether permanent or short term will be taken in consultation with the employee.
- 3.2.8 Where it is not possible to accommodate the recommendations stated on the 'fit note' this will be discussed with the employee. In this situation the employee will then be treated as unfit for work for the period of the certificated absence without it being necessary for the employee to return to their Medical Practitioner. In these circumstances, advice must always be sought from Human Resources.
- 3.2.9 If the fit note is preceded by a period of self-certified absence, the self-certificate [\(link TBC\)](#) should be completed and submitted by email as early as possible.

- 3.2.10 If the absence is likely to continue beyond the date shown on the medical certificate the employee should consult their Medical Practitioner again and submit additional Fit Notes to cover the period of their absence.
- 3.2.11 If the employee's health improves, they will be expected to return to work at the end of the period and under any specific workplace/working time adjustments/restrictions specified in the most current Fit Note if operationally feasible. Any adjustments which are deemed reasonable and able to be accommodated will be made.
- 3.2.12 Employees who seek to return to work whilst still covered by a Fit Note must obtain a new Fit Note to confirm that their medical practitioner has deemed them fit to return to their normal duties. Where the employee is not able to return fully to their normal duties, any written recommendations and adjustments must be discussed, considered and implemented.

4.0 Maintaining Contact

- 4.1 Contact made with employees in accordance with this procedure is considered reasonable and in the best interests of both the employee and LVJB. Keeping in contact with employees is neither harassment nor an invasion of privacy.
- 4.2 The employee must update their line manager on their absence on the fourth and seventh day of absence and weekly thereafter. Failure to do so will result in the withholding of sickness absence payments. If a satisfactory explanation is provided after investigation of the circumstances, payment will be re-instated. In the case of a long-term absence appropriate contact periods will be agreed with the employee.
- 4.3 Maintenance of contact is particularly important in cases of long-term sickness absence, as this will enable management decisions to be taken on the basis of up-to-date information and with the interests of the employee as well as LVJB in mind. A review meeting every four weeks is recommended.
- 4.4 Depending on the information available at the review meeting, the following options will be considered:
- ◆ Taking no immediate action, but maintaining contact with the individual member of staff and monitoring the position on an ongoing basis
 - ◆ Arranging a further review meeting in four weeks to consider their current state of health and the likely duration of their sickness absence
 - ◆ Obtaining consent from the individual member of staff to request a medical report from our Occupation Health provider or their GP
- 4.5 It is essential that contact is handled sensitively by the line manager in conjunction with the HR manager and with due consideration for the nature of the member of staff's illness. Contact should be flexible and depend on the circumstances in each case.
- 4.6 On some occasions it may be appropriate to visit a member of staff at home with their prior agreement. Where a home visit is arranged, the member of staff should be informed that they have the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative.

4.7 Case Conferences

4.7.1 In particularly complex cases, for example where a disability is a feature, a case conference may be used to identify a way forward. This would normally be attended by the employee and their representative, line manager and the HR Manager. Recent occupational health reports or advice should be available to inform the meeting.

5.0 Occupational Health Advice

- 5.1 The purpose of a medical assessment is to obtain an up-to-date medical opinion on occupational health matters relating to the member of staff and to seek advice on reasonable adjustments which could be made to ensure that work does not have a detrimental effect on the employee's health and wellbeing.
- 5.2 Where appropriate, an employee may be required to undertake a medical assessment by our Occupational Health provider. The employee will be advised of the reason(s) for seeking external medical advice,
- 5.3 Where a referral to Occupational Health is being considered, the line manager to discuss this with the HR Manager. The HR Manager will initiate a referral where it is considered necessary or advisable.
- 5.4 The HR Manager will provide our Occupational Health provider with relevant details concerning the employee including: -
 - (a) The employee's sickness absence record and any other appropriate supporting documentation
 - (b) A summary of the employee's main duties; and
 - (c) Any information provided by the employee.
- 5.5 The employee and the line manager will be provided with a copy of the referral and be invited to make any amendments to it prior to it being submitted to Occupational Health.
- 5.6 It is recognised that an early referral can have a positive effect on absences related to stress, mental illness and Musculo skeletal conditions.
- 5.6 In any Occupational Health referral, advice should be sought to determine if the employee could be covered by the disability provisions in the Equality Act and, if so, whether the circumstances of the case therefore require consideration of any reasonable adjustments, as provided for in the Equality Act and what they might be.
- 5.7 Following the medical assessment a report will be provided to the HR Manager and the employee in advance of any meeting. The report will be reviewed in consultation with the employee and line manager to determine the best course of action.

- 5.8 Where, in a case of frequent and persistent short-term sickness absence, the medical assessment reveals no underlying health problem, the issue may be regarded as one of conduct rather than capability and in such cases the Disciplinary Procedure may be followed.

6.0 Sick Leave Allowances and Pay

6.1 Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

- 6.1.1 To qualify for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) the employee must have average weekly earnings of £123 per week or more.
- 6.1.2 SSP will be paid from the fourth day of absence for a maximum of 28 weeks.
- 6.1.3 The current rate of SSP can be found at [Gov.UK](https://www.gov.uk).
- 6.1.4 SSP is not additional to but is included in any pay provided by LVJB under our conditions of service.

6.2 Occupational Sick Pay (OSP)

- 6.2.1 Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) depends on your length of continuous service with LVJB as at the first day of absence.
- 6.2.2 OSP calculations are applied retrospectively and include all sickness absences over the past 365 days.
- 6.2.3 Entitlement to OSP is based on length of service at the start of the current period of sickness absence. An increase in entitlement due to length of service reached will not be applicable during the current period of sickness absence.
- 6.2.4 Entitlements for OSP are displayed below:

Service at commencement of absence from duty	Full Allowance for:-	Half Allowance for:-
<i>Less than 26 weeks</i>	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>
<i>26 weeks or more but less than 1 year</i>	<i>5 weeks</i>	<i>5 weeks</i>
<i>1 year but less than 2 years</i>	<i>9 weeks</i>	<i>9 weeks</i>
<i>2 years but less than 3 years</i>	<i>18 weeks</i>	<i>18 weeks</i>
<i>3 years but less than 5 years</i>	<i>22 weeks</i>	<i>22 weeks</i>
<i>5 years or more</i>	<i>26 weeks</i>	<i>26 weeks</i>

- 6.2.5 Where an employee is absent from work and is approaching a half pay or no pay date, the HR Manager will inform the employee in writing as early as possible, normally around one month prior to the date that their salary will reduce.

- 6.2.6 Where an employee is receiving reduced or no pay due to sickness absence, there may be implications for the employee's pension. Further information can be sought from [Lothian Pension Fund](#).

6.3 Suspension of Sickness Payments

- 6.3.1 Sickness payments will be suspended where an abuse of this procedure constitutes misconduct and it will be dealt with under the provisions of [LVJB's Disciplinary Procedure](#). This will not prevent an absence itself being dealt with under the provisions of this procedure.
- 6.3.2 Fraudulent claims for sickness payments are likely to constitute gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal.

7.0 Return To Work Review

- 7.1 In all cases, the Return-to-Work Review should normally happen within 24 hours of the member of staff returning to work.
- 7.2 Return to work reviews should be conducted sensitively and in private by an appropriate manager who will normally be the **immediate** line manager. Where the immediate line manager is unavailable a more senior manager or the HR Manager will conduct the review.
- 7.3 This review should be a discussion between the line manager and the employee, aimed at facilitating their resumption of duties and clarifying any outstanding aspects of their sickness absence.
- 7.4 Where a fit note has been provided with recommendations for consideration the return-to-work review should be used as an opportunity to discuss the suggestions made.
- 7.5 Return to work reviews should follow each occasion of ill health absence and include a discussion of the circumstances of the ill health absence and, where appropriate, the employee's general sickness record. The return to work discussion should not be approached in a prescriptive way, but be tailored to the individual employee's circumstances and may include the following areas:-
- The employee's current state of health
 - The reason(s) for absence to be included on Self-Certificate
 - Establishing if the employee is fit enough to resume their duties
 - Did the employee seek medical advice?
 - Does the employee require any form of support or assistance?
 - Consideration of workload issues
 - In the event that the most recent absence breaches the defined attendance standards, this will trigger a management review to be progressed.
- 7.6 In the case of short-term sickness absence, the return-to-work review should also be used to ensure the Self-Certificate is completed accurately and submitted to [Personnel and Finance](#).
- 7.7 In cases of a prolonged absence it may be appropriate to arrange this review shortly before the date of return to work. This can allow detailed arrangements to be made for the member of staff's return.

8.0 Phased Return To Work

- 8.1 Prior to an employee returning to work, especially following a prolonged absence, LVJB will consider, in consultation with the employee concerned and also, where appropriate, any medical opinion, whether it is desirable for the employee to return to work initially on a part-time basis or on a full-time basis undertaking alternative duties on a temporary basis. Induction into the temporary work environment may also be required.
- 8.2 In cases where a phased return to work is agreed this will normally be for no longer than 4-6 weeks and starting with no less than 50% of the employees contractual working hours. The phased return to work plan will be agreed between the employee, line manager and HR and will be reviewed at regular intervals by the employee, line manager and HR.
- 8.3 Incremental increase to the employees working hours is expected throughout the phased return to work, resulting in the employee working their full contracted hours at the end of the phased return. Where the employee is not ready to work their full contractual hours at the end of the phased return an extension of no more than 4 weeks may be considered. A referral or re-referral to occupational health should also be considered to ascertain the employee's fitness for work. Where the employee remains unable to return to their contractual hours over a reasonable time period consideration should be given to a permanent reduction in contractual hours or re-deployment to a more suitable position.

9.0 Annual Leave and Periods of Sickness Absence

- 9.1 Where an employee becomes unwell during a period of annual leave, they may be able to reclaim their annual leave. The employee should follow the normal reporting and documenting procedure as detailed in the LVJB Sickness Absence Management policy and procedure, reporting to their line manager on day one of their sickness absence. The days on which the employee is unwell will be classified as sickness absence, not as annual leave. The normal Sickness Absence Certificate (or Fit Note for absences in excess of 7 days) must be provided. The employee and line manager should discuss arrangements for the employee to take the missed annual leave at a later date.
- 9.2 For the duration of the period of sickness absence, the employee will be paid appropriately, in accordance with their entitlement to occupational sick pay.
- 9.3 Where an employee is unwell on a public holiday, they will not be able to claim this day of leave back into their personal entitlement.
- 9.4 Where an employee is on sickness absence leave, they continue to accrue annual leave at the normal rate. This can lead to a build-up of annual leave which may need to be carried forward into the following annual leave year. The maximum amount of leave that is permitted to be carried over to the next leave year will be subject to the statutory level (currently 20 days per leave year).
- 9.5 In cases of sickness absence over 3 months, an employee's annual leave will be abated, to an amount pro-rated to the period of actual service given during the year, however this should not fall below the statutory minimum figure (currently 28 days, including public holidays).
- 9.6 In the case of significant periods of long-term sickness absence, the outstanding leave can be taken at any point during the leave year subject to the normal arrangements for authorising annual leave.

- 9.7 Where an employee is on annual leave and requires to self-isolate for health reasons under Government legislation, they will not be able to claim the annual leave back, except where the leave is converted to sickness absence leave. If the employee does not have grounds to certify as on sickness absence, they may discuss with their line manager the possibility of converting the days into working from home and using their annual leave another time. This discussion must take place before the employee commences working from home.

9.8 Abatement of Annual Leave

- 9.8.1 Certain National Schemes of Salaries/Pay and Conditions of Service allow Authorities the discretion to make a proportionate reduction in the Annual Leave entitlement of an employee who has been absent through sickness or industrial injury for a period exceeding 3 months during the leave year (i.e. January to December).
- 9.8.2 Where such discretion exists and an employee is absent for a period exceeding 3 months during the leave year, the Joint Board will normally abate Annual Leave. In exceptional circumstances the Assessor may, agree to grant the full period of annual leave.
- 9.8.3 This means, for the appropriate employees, that the Joint Board will limit their Annual Leave to a period in compliance with the Working Time Regulations 1998.

10.0 Procedural Recording and Monitoring

- 10.1 Each line manager is required to monitor attendance levels within their team and apply the formal stages of this procedure.
- 10.2 Effective monitoring of sickness absence can identify issues which, if tackled early, can impact positively on an employee's well-being/absence level, for example sickness absence related to stress or musculoskeletal problems.
- 10.3 Line managers must maintain records of actions taken and when they were taken. All formal documentation must be passed to Human Resources for retention in personnel files.
- 10.4 The HR Manager must be consulted prior to the exercising of any managerial discretion which results in the formal stages of the procedure not being used.

10.5 Terminal Illness

- 10.5.1 Where an illness or medical condition is diagnosed as one from which the individual will not recover i.e. their illness/condition is terminal, the formal stages of this procedure will not operate and any medical referral will only be to assist in the employee's wellbeing.

10.6 Trigger Points and Disability

- 10.6.1 In the case of employee with a disability, it may be appropriate to increase the trigger levels as a reasonable adjustment where it is evident that the disability is adversely impacting on the employee's efforts to attend work.

10.7 Sickness Absence Patterns

10.7.1 Recurring or recognisable patterns of absence may occur. Examples include:-

- ◆ On a Friday and/or a Monday.
- ◆ Before or after public holidays or periods of annual leave.
- ◆ Before, during or after school holidays.
- ◆ Regular patterns of sickness absence in a year or in successive year's ie specific recurring dates when sickness absence occurs.

10.7.2 Where a pattern of absence has been identified, advice should be sought from the HR Manager.

11.0 Trigger Points

11.1 Sickness absence is categorised into either short term or long term, which determines the way in which it is measured and managed.

- Short-term sickness absence: Absences of less than 4 continuous weeks.
- Long-term sickness absence: Absences of 4 continuous weeks or more.

11.2 Sickness absence will be considered as problematic and having an adverse impact on individual and/or team performance and service delivery where any of the following trigger points are reached:

Short-term:

- Three instances of sickness absence within a 6 month rolling period; or
- Eight days of sickness absence within a 6 month rolling period.

Long-term:

- Eight weeks of continuous sickness absence.

****Employees may have a combination of long and short-term absence ****

11.3 Management Review of Circumstances and Action

11.3.1 Progression into any of the formal stages of the procedure will not be automatic when a trigger is reached but will be subject to consideration of the circumstances. In certain circumstances, discretion may be applied. Below is a list of examples (please note this is not an exhaustive list):

- a surgical intervention
- management enforced absence relating to a contagious or other infection or notifiable disease that is required by law to be reported to government authorities
- where up to that point the employee has had very low or no sickness absence over an extended period of a year or more.

This list is only indicative and doesn't mean all such situations would be excluded from the formal absence management process. It's vital that individual circumstances are considered so that sensible and contextual decisions can be reached, and there may be other situations where your manager chooses not to progress to a formal absence meeting.

- 11.3.2 In such circumstances line managers must consult with the HR Manager when wishing to apply discretion and not apply the normal stages of the procedure. Line managers must keep records of actions taken, when they were taken and forward copies to the HR Manager.

11.4 Counselling

- 11.4.1 Whenever sickness absence causes concern and it is considered appropriate, the employee may be counselled by an appropriate line manager of the Joint Board, which will normally be the employee's **immediate** line manager. During counselling the line manager will, taking account of all the circumstances, discuss sensitively with the employee the acceptable level of attendance at work, the employee's level of sickness absence and the reasons for the absences.
- 11.4.2 The line manager should indicate clearly to the employee the improvement in attendance required and should consider taking any other action which may assist the employee to achieve this improvement.

12.0 Staged Approach

- 12.1 Where a review determines that action in line with this procedure is required, there are 4 formal stages to managing absence cases:
- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Stage 1 | if no improvement or sustained return to work, move to |
| Stage 2 | if no improvement or sustained return to work, move to |
| Stage 3 | if no improvement or sustained return to work, move to |
| Stage 4 | final assessment and potential dismissal on the grounds of capability due to ill-health |
- 12.2 Line Managers must apply the formal stages of this procedure when an employee's absence level or pattern reaches a trigger point, except in instances where discretion is being applied as described above.
- 12.3 Where action has led to the issuing of a staged warning, any subsequent sickness absence which does not meet improvement targets will result in a progression to the next procedural stage. This means that additional long or short-term absence or a continuation of recognisable sickness absence patterns will mean progression to the next stage if improvement targets are not met.

12.4 Review Periods

12.4.1 Stage 1, 2 and 3 have specific monitoring periods. Line managers are required to assess if progression to the next stage is required at an earlier point in the monitoring period due to a significant adverse impact on service delivery.

12.4.2 Review periods for employees placed on a stage warning for sickness absence will normally be:

Stage 1:	6 months
Stage 2:	9 months
Stage 3:	12 months

STAGE 1

12.5 In cases where an employee reaches a trigger point, the line manager will review the absence record and **may seek appropriate medical advice**, both to comply with this procedure and to identify what additional support/measures can be provided to improve the employee's attendance and wellbeing. **This does not necessarily require a referral to the Occupational Health Provider for LVJB.**

12.6 The line manager will arrange a Stage 1 meeting giving seven calendar days' notice. Along with the invitation to the meeting, written details of the sickness absence record and any other relevant information, e.g. any current occupational health report, should be provided and the employee informed of the right to be represented by a trade union representative or work colleague. The HR Manager will also be in attendance.

12.7 The meeting may take place at either 17A South Gyle Crescent, on Microsoft Teams, at the employee's home or at another mutually agreed location.

12.8 The purpose of a stage 1 meeting between the line manager and the employee is to:-

- a) Explore reasons for absence and consider any mitigating factors;
- b) Discuss the absence record and any adverse operational impact;
- c) Consider any Occupational Health advice and identify what could reasonably be done to facilitate an improvement in attendance or an early return to work;

12.9 During the meeting line managers should:-

- assess the overall situation to determine if there are any mitigating factors (including any medical condition; disability; absence as a result of stress in the workplace),
- consider reasonable adjustments to support the employee to improve their attendance.

At the conclusion of the meeting the following will apply:-

- a) Where there are no mitigating factors which would prevent it, a Stage 1 warning for unsatisfactory attendance will be issued and a formal monitoring period put in place, this will normally be for a period of **6 months**;

- b) A realistic and achievable target for improved attendance will be agreed between the line manager and the employee, taking into account the individual circumstances;
 - c) Any reasonable adjustments such as changes to workload, work practices are identified and implemented if required (including any requirements supporting a phased return).
- 12.10 A record of the meeting will be made and the outcome of the meeting will be confirmed in writing to the employee and any representative attending the meeting within 7 calendar days. A copy must be sent to Human Resources to be placed in the employee's personal file.
- 12.11 **Stage 1 Outcomes:**
- 12.12 Where the employee achieves the improvement target set at stage 1, the line manager will confirm that in writing and normal monitoring arrangements will apply thereafter.
- 12.13 Where an acceptable level of attendance or a return to work is not achieved or maintained during the stage 1 warning period, the line manager will activate stage 2 of the process.

STAGE 2

- 12.14 The line manager will arrange a stage 2 meeting, giving 7 calendar days' notice, where:
- The required level of improvement in attendance has not been achieved or maintained during the monitoring of the stage 1 warning period i.e. additional periods of short-term or a new period of long-term-term absence occurs during the monitoring period, or
 - There has not been a return to work.
 - For long-term absence cases, stage 2 will normally be activated if a return to work is not achieved within 6 months of the first day of absence or earlier if the absence is having a significant adverse impact on service delivery.
- 12.15 At this meeting, the line manager will confirm the issues discussed at previous meetings and:-
- a) Explore reasons for absence and consider any mitigating factors.
 - b) Discuss the absence record and any adverse operational impact.
 - c) Discuss any updated Occupational Health report obtained prior to the meeting, if relevant and available.
 - d) In cases of continuous long-term absence, consider whether the employee may be eligible for ill-health retirement.
 - e) Identify any support already provided and what further support may be appropriate including consideration of reasonable adjustments.

- f) Where circumstances permit, discuss whether redeployment on medical grounds might allow the employee to reach an acceptable level of attendance or a return to work. See Appendix 3 for Redeployment Guidelines.
 - g) Refer to a previous warning issued at Stage 1 that is still “live”.
 - h) Where there are no mitigating factors which would prevent it, issue a Stage 2 warning for continued unsatisfactory attendance and set a further formal monitoring period, which will normally be a further period of **9 months**.
 - i) Advise that attendance/absence will continue to be closely monitored.
 - j) Agree with the employee a realistic and achievable target for improved attendance, taking into account the individual circumstances;
 - k) Highlight the action that may be taken if the required improvement or a return to work is not achieved (including the possibility of dismissal).
- 12.16 A record of the meeting will be made and the outcome of the meeting will be confirmed in writing to the employee and their representative within 7 calendar days and a copy will be sent to Human Resources to be placed in the employee’s personal file.
- 12.17 Where the employee achieves the improvement target set at stage 2, the line manager will confirm that in writing and normal monitoring arrangements will apply thereafter.

STAGE 3

- 12.18 The line manager will arrange a stage 3 meeting, giving 7 calendar days’ notice, where:
- the required level of improvement in attendance has not been achieved or maintained during the monitoring of the stage 2 warning period ie additional periods of short-term or a new period of long-term-term absence occurs during the monitoring period, or
 - There has not been a return to work.
 - For long-term absence cases, Stage 3 will normally be activated if a return to work is not achieved within 9 months of the first day of absence or earlier if the absence is having a significant adverse impact on service delivery.
- 12.19 At this meeting, the line manager will confirm the issues discussed at previous meetings and:-
- a) Explore reasons for absence and consider any mitigating factors.
 - b) Discuss the absence record and any adverse operational impact.

- c) Discuss any relevant and available Occupational Health report obtained prior to the meeting.
- d) In cases of continuous long-term absence, consider whether the employee may be eligible for ill-health retirement.
- e) Identify any support already provided and what further support may be appropriate including consideration of reasonable adjustments.
- f) Discuss whether redeployment on medical grounds might allow the employee to reach an acceptable level of attendance or a return to work. See Appendix 3 for Redeployment Guidelines.
- g) Refer to a previous warning issued at Stage 2 that is still “live”.
- h) Where there are no mitigating factors which would prevent it, issue a Stage 3 warning for continued unsatisfactory attendance and set a further formal monitoring period, which will normally be a further period of **12 months**.
- i) Advise that attendance/absence will continue to be closely monitored.
- j) Agree with the employee a realistic and achievable target for improved attendance, taking into account the individual circumstances.
- k) Highlight the action that may be taken if the required improvement or a return to work is not achieved (including the possibility of dismissal).

12.19 A record of the meeting will be made, and the outcome of the meeting will be confirmed in writing to the employee and her/his representative within 7 calendar days and a copy will be sent to HR to be placed in the employee’s personal file.

12.20 Where the employee achieves the improvement target set at stage 3, the line manager will confirm that in writing and normal monitoring arrangements will apply thereafter.

12.21 Where steps taken at stages 1, 2 and 3 have not been successful in improving attendance levels, the manager should consider:

- If the monitoring period should be extended. This may be a relatively short period to allow an employee who has just fallen short of meeting their defined targets to succeed or a longer period depending on exceptional individual circumstances. Extension to the monitoring period should be discussed and agreed with the HR Manager.
- If an aspect of their job has an adverse effect on an employee and if redeployment is a possibility that might enable them to make a return to work or reach an acceptable attendance level. See Appendix 3 – Redeployment Guidelines.

STAGE 4

- 12.22 Progression to Stage 4 need not be delayed until the end of the 12 -month monitoring period, or any extension to it, where the absence is creating severe adverse operational difficulties.
- 12.23 For long-term absence cases, Stage 4 will normally be activated if a return to work is not achieved or likely to be achieved within 12 months of the commencement of the absence or earlier if the absence is having an unsustainable impact on service delivery.
- 12.24 As a Stage 4 meeting can result in dismissal, an up-to-date Occupational Health report must be available before a Stage 4 meeting is convened. The report should include advice on reasonable adjustments where appropriate or if redeployment could be considered. In appropriate cases, the referral should request information as to whether early retiral on the basis of permanent incapacity is a possibility.
- 12.25 When that report is received, a Stage 4 meeting will be arranged to consider, in the light of the occupational health advice, whether there are any further actions that LVJB can take to assist the employee to continue in employment or whether employment should be terminated due to ill - health.
- 12.26 The Assessor or Assistant Assessor will chair the meeting and the HR Manager will attend in an advisory capacity.
- 12.27 The employee will be given at least 7 days' written notice of the intention to hold a Stage 4 meeting which will outline the grounds for convening the meeting and that one possible outcome may be dismissal by reason of lack of capability due to ill-health.
- 12.28 If for any reason the employee cannot attend the meeting, one further date will be set and the employee informed that non-attendance will result in a decision being taken in their absence on the basis of the information available and that it could result in dismissal. Alternatively, the employee can be advised that a Trade Union representative or work colleague can attend the meeting on their behalf or provide a written submission.
- 12.29 At the meeting the manager or designate who chaired the stage 3 will present a report on the employee's attendance record and on the content of the previous meetings held, including any measures taken to assist the employee to improve their attendance record or return to work, such as reasonable adjustments to help overcome a disability or consideration of a redeployment opportunity. See Appendix 3 – Redeployment Guidelines.
- 12.30 The employee and/or the representative will be given an opportunity to provide a full response and to put forward any suggestions as an alternative to dismissal. Any options identified as an alternative to dismissal will be discussed and may require further consideration.
- 12.31 When reaching a decision about whether or not to terminate employment, the Assessor or Assistant Assessor will consider issues such as:-
- The employee's absence record and its impact on other employees and service delivery.
 - The likelihood of a sustained return to work in the foreseeable future.

- Financial implications of continuing sickness absence.
- Submissions made by the employee and/or their representative.
- What actions have been taken or adjustments made to attempt to enable the employee to continue in employment.
- Any mitigating factors.
- The medical advice received including consideration of termination of employment due to ill-health.

This list is not exhaustive and the weight attached to each will depend upon the circumstances of the case, balancing the needs of LVJB and the employee.

MEETING OUTCOMES

12.32 Action Short of Dismissal

Where the use of discretion or the existence of mitigating factors means that further action short of dismissal is appropriate (such as extending Stage 3 monitoring on an exceptional basis), this will be set out in a letter and the employee's situation will continue to be monitored. The letter confirming the decision will normally be issued within 7 calendar days of the meeting.

A further meeting may be necessary should the expected improvement not happen or sickness absence re-occurs.

12.33 Ill-Health Retiral (Termination of employment on grounds of capability due to permanent ill-health)

Where LVJB's Occupational Health provider considers that the employee is permanently unfit to carry out the duties of their post or a comparable post, the Assessor or Assistant Assessor will meet with the employee to inform them of this decision. Where no suitable alternative employment can be found within Lothian Valuation Joint Board, in conjunction with any training or retraining which would facilitate alternative employment, the employee will be informed that:

- for staff covered by the provisions of the Local Government Pension Scheme, their services will be terminated on grounds of capability due to permanent ill-health with Tier 1 or Tier 2 benefits; or
- Staff who are not members of the pension Schemes and therefore cannot access the Schemes' provisions will be dismissed on the grounds of capability due to ill health.

12.34 Where an employee provides written evidence that their GP or medical specialist disagrees with the Occupational Health decision, the Assessor and HR Manager will review the case and, if necessary, a further, independent, medical opinion will be obtained which will be used to reach a final decision.

Dismissal

- 12.35 At a stage 4 meeting where it is decided that no other options, including redeployment, can be pursued which will improve attendance or facilitate a sustained return to work, the employee will be informed that they are to be dismissed on grounds of capability due to ill-health. This letter will normally be issued within 7 calendar days of the meeting. This letter will: -
- a. Refer to meetings held to discuss the member of staff's absence;
 - b. Refer to the most recent medical opinion and any earlier relevant medical opinions obtained from the Medical Adviser;
 - c. State the reason for dismissal;
 - d. State the effective date of dismissal;
 - e. Indicate that the member of staff will receive a payment in lieu of their entitlement to notice in conjunction with the normal termination payments;
 - f. Refer to the member of staff's right of appeal and indicate the date by which notice of appeal should be received.

13.0 Right of Appeal

- 13.1 An employee has the right to appeal against any action taken against them in line with the formal stage of this policy.
- 13.2 The appeal must state the grounds for the appeal and must be submitted in writing to the HR Manager, within **5 working days** of the notification of the action or dismissal.
- 13.3 The appeal will normally be heard by someone senior to the manager who conducted the formal meeting. If a case has reached Stage 4 or above, the appeal will be heard by the Assessor or another appropriate member of the CLT, depending on the individual circumstances.
- 13.4 If an appeal is lodged, any dismissal does not take effect until the appeal has been heard, but the employee can be suspended on full pay from the date of the decision letter.
- 13.5 If the employee raises any new matters in their appeal, these may need to be investigated appropriately.
- 13.6 The employee will be invited to attend an appeal hearing within **15 working days** of receiving the written request to appeal and will normally be given at least three working days' notice. The employee has the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or by a trade union representative to the appeal hearing.
- 13.7 The appeal hearing will be a review of the original decision considering any new information. The outcome of the appeal hearing will be given in writing within **5 working days** of the date of the appeal. The decision at the appeal hearing is final and there is no further right of appeal.
- 13.8 Where an appeal is upheld, the manager, employee and HR Manager will discuss and agree the most appropriate, suitable and reasonable way for the employee to move forward in their role within LVJB.

14.0 Local Agreement

- 14.1 This document is a local collective agreement between LVJB and Unison. Every effort will be made by both parties to ensure that this document will be maintained as a local collective agreement and adjusted by agreement to meet changing future needs. In the event of a failure to reach agreement both parties reserve the right to terminate this local agreement by giving four months' notice in writing. In such circumstances the terms of the local agreement will cease to apply to existing and future employees.

15.0 Summary of Procedural Timescales

PROCEDURAL STEP	TIMESCALE	ACTION
Trigger reached	During a rolling 6 months	Review: <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Consider mitigation and discretion.➤ Otherwise move to Stage 1.
Stage 1 Meeting	7 calendar days' notice	Stage 1 outcome letter within 7 calendar days.
Stage 1 monitoring	6 months*	Breach of triggers leads to stage 2.
Stage 2 Meeting	7 calendar days' notice	Stage 2 outcome letter within 7 calendar days.
Stage 2 monitoring	9 months*	Breach of triggers leads to stage 3.
Stage 3 Meeting	7 calendar days' notice	Stage 3 outcome within 7 calendar days.
Stage 3 monitoring	12 months*	Breach of triggers leads to stage 4.
Stage 4	7 calendar days' notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breach of Triggers.• Can extend stage 3 monitoring.• Dismiss.• Approve ill -health retiral.
Stage 4 outcome	Letter of outcome within 7 calendar days	Right of appeal if dismissal.

- * *Appropriate action can be taken within monitoring period where the absence has a significant adverse impact on service delivery.*

Appendix 1 - Sickness Absence Certificate

Upon completion, please email to personnelandfinance@lothian-vjb.gov.uk

GUIDANCE NOTES:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ This form must be completed for all instances of sickness absence. ◆ For absences of 7 days or less, this form will be recorded as the Self-Certificate. ◆ For absence of more than 7 days, the fit note should be attached upon submission. 	
EMPLOYEE DETAILS:	
Name:	
Address:	
Date of Birth:	
National Insurance No:	
EMPLOYMENT DETAILS:	
Employee Number:	
Designation:	
Department:	
DETAILS OF SICKNESS:	
FIRST day of sickness (day and date)	
LAST day of sickness (day and date)	
Reason for Absence 'illness', 'unwell' or 'sick' are not sufficient.	
If injured at work, please complete the Report of an Injury, Disease, Condition, Dangerous Occurrence or Incident form.	

RETURN TO WORK REVIEW:				
Date of Review:				
Has the employee consulted their GP?	Yes		No	
If yes, what advice or treatment has been advised?				
Is the illness or injury a recurring problem?	Yes		No	
If yes, please provide details:				
Was the absence work-related?	Yes		No	
If yes, please provide details:				
ABSENCE RECORD:				
Has the employee's current absence record been discussed?	Yes		Not Required	
If yes, please provide details of discussion:				
ACTION REQUIRED:				
Recommended referral to HR/Occupational Health:				
Adjustments to working pattern/duties/environment:				
Counselled regarding breach of triggers:				
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:				
Line Manager Comments:				
Employee Comments:				

DECLARATION:				
After discussion with the employee are both parties in agreement that a return to work is appropriate?	Yes		No	
Employee Signature:				
Date:				
Line Manager Signature:				
Date:				

Appendix 2 - Sickness Absence Reporting - Employee Responsibilities

Duration of Absence	Time	Guidance
Up to 7 days	Day One	<p>Contact your line manager as soon as you can and no later than 10.00am (unless other arrangements exist).</p> <p>Confirm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Why you are absent ◆ How long you are likely to be absent for ◆ Any important work tasks which need to be covered ◆ If there is any support your manager/HR can provide <p>You should only text or email to notify your manager if a local agreement is in place.</p> <p>If required, arrange for someone to make contact with your manager on your behalf</p>
	Day 2 – Day 7	<p>You must make contact with your line manager on day 4 and day 7 of your absence.</p> <p>If you fail to contact your line manager, they will attempt to contact you.</p> <p>If your line manager cannot make contact with you, they will make reasonable investigations regarding your absence.</p>
	Return to Work	<p>You will meet with your line manager on your return to work to discuss your absence and if there are any measures or adjustments that should be put in place to support your return to work.</p>

		The self-certificate must be completed in conjunction with your line manager and submitted to Personnel and Finance.
More than 7 days	Day 8	<p>Seek a fit note from your GP/Medical Practitioner and send it to your line manager.</p> <p>Contact your line manager weekly.</p> <p>If you are going to be off for a period of long-term sickness absence, make your GP appointments timeously to ensure fit notes are received by your line manager on time.</p>

Appendix 3 - Redeployment Guidelines

General Principles

The opportunity for redeployment is dependent on a suitable vacancy being available. A role cannot be created to achieve redeployment for an individual.

Redeployment is made in agreement and will not be imposed on an employee. However, should the employee refuse an opportunity of redeployment the employee will be fully advised of the potential consequences (i.e. potential dismissal).

Employees who wish to pursue redeployment will need to apply for the vacant role in line with the normal recruitment process. Redeployment will be an open recruitment and selection process alongside other candidates who wish to apply.

Consultation

Working in partnership with the HR Manager, it is the responsibility of the manager to highlight the options available to the employee. This conversation should also include retraining and development needs as well as potential secondment opportunities. Consideration must be given to the individual employee's needs and abilities and managers may wish to consider some of the following areas:

- Gaining a clearer understanding of the employees skills, abilities and strengths. This may be by the use of various assessment tools such as practical exercises or psychometric developmental assessment tools.
- Areas in which the employee is currently effective.
- Skills that have been used in the past and are retained by the employee, even if not currently used.
- Specific areas of interest to the employee.
- Areas of interest outside of work that requires skills and abilities that are not currently in use in the work context.
- Employee personal circumstances, such as those that might affect working hours.
- Training and development requirements and availability.

Training and Development

In some cases, the employee will require an element of retraining to the new role, and this may require a specific training plan. Retraining should be relevant, appropriate to ability of the individual and their circumstances and focused on the needs of the redeployment role. Ideally any arrangement should be accompanied by coaching or mentoring as well as potentially on the job training.

Offer of Redeployment

Any offer of alternative employment, or change in terms of employment, will be detailed in writing in a formal offer. This will include a probationary period in the new role. To ensure the employee gets the best start in their new role, a tailored induction plan should be created by the manager.

Draft Customer Service Policy

CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY	
Approved By	Lothian Valuation Joint Board
Date of Approval	30th August 2019
Owner	Hannah Carruthers, Human Resource Manager
Issue & Date	3
Identity	Customer Service Policy
Location of electronic copy	SharePoint
Location of paper copy	Human Resources
Review Frequency	Annually
Next Review Date	April 2024

Issue	Author	Date	Details of Change
1	Bill Kerr	January 2020	General review & update
2	Bernie Callaghan	April 2022	General review
3	Nick Chapman	March 2023	Review focusing on service delivery

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CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Board is responsible for the creation and maintenance of the Valuation Roll, Council Tax List and Electoral Register. To undertake these activities the Board staff are in regular contact with our stakeholders.
- 1.2 This contact comes in many forms from issue of questionnaires, telephone calls, emails, face to face meetings, and the public promotion of our services. Our customers are from all sectors of the community and their requirements are many and varied.
- 1.3 As a result of our activities and level of contact, customer care is a vital and important component of service provision to our stakeholders. By formalising the steps currently taken, a base can be established upon which a reasonable level of quality service can be delivered.
- 1.4 This policy underlines our commitment to Customer Service and provides information of our current approach.
- 1.5 This policy recognises the available resources of the Board.

2.0 CUSTOMER CONTACT

- 2.1 While our customers make contact in the normal way through letters, e-mails and telephone, they also use appointed representatives and agents, and employees regularly visit commercial and domestic properties. Often, this is the first point of contact with our stakeholders and during this meeting important information is provided and received. To ensure this meeting is productive employees must communicate in a polite, and informative manner.
- 2.2 To satisfy the legal requirements surrounding the Valuation Roll, Council Tax List and Electoral Register the Board undertakes extensive collection of data and information by electronic and paper format. For this to be effective, the forms and questionnaires supplied to our stakeholders must be customer friendly and easily understood.
- 2.3 Where further communication arises, a delegated employee will deal with all enquiries and provide additional information and guidance as requested. Correspondence should be timeously issued and be concise and provide clarity to meet any language and easy to read standards.

3.0 OUR STANDARDS

3.1 Performance Targets

- 3.1.1 The Board operates a range of performance targets relating to all its functions. These organisational targets are aimed at achieving and delivering effective service standards recognising available resources.

- 3.1.2 These performance targets are used to assist with the process of improvement and ensuring that a reasonable level of service to our customers is achieved.

3.2 Response Times

- 3.2.1 Maximum response times are specified by function in appendix 1.
- 3.2.2 Staff at all times should aim to respond to any contact as quickly and efficiently as possible avoiding maximum response times becoming the norm.

3.3 External Appointments

- 3.3.1 Where employees are required to meet with customers out with the office they shall conduct themselves in accordance with the Board's approved policy on Code of Conduct.
- 3.3.2 At all times employees will behave professionally and approach the customer in a fair, honest and helpful manner.
- 3.3.3 Without request, employees shall present their Board identification badge in all instances when visiting individual customers and organisations. On all occasions staff must ensure that the reason for the visit is fully explained.

3.4 Telephones

- 3.4.1 We will answer calls within a short period or if the line is busy the call will transfer to another line or to an answer phone. We will greet all callers in welcoming manner and aim to answer enquiries satisfactorily at the first call. Answerphone messages will be returned within 48 hours with the exception of weekend and public holidays. A dedicated team of employee's provide a telephone answering service and the majority of incoming telephone enquiries are dealt with by this group in an efficient and standard manner.

3.5 Requests for Information

- 3.5.1 Throughout the year the Board issues many questionnaires seeking different information. A number of these are issued under statutory authority where a return is a legal requirement. To assist with this process, all forms are regularly reviewed to ensure that, where possible, concise language is adopted and completion is straight forward.
- 3.5.2 While some forms can be provided in a number of foreign languages we can also provide a translation service via the telephone and hard copy, which is regularly utilised by customers.

3.6 Hearing Loop

- 3.6.1 At the Joint Board office a hearing loop system is in operation. This facility provides assistance to those members of the public with hearing difficulties.

3.7 Code of Conduct

- 3.7.1 The Board operates a code of conduct policy, which outlines a set of standards by which all employees must abide to in performance of their duties.

3.8 Equality Policy

- 3.8.1 The Board has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, the main aims of which are diversity and inclusion for everyone.

4.0 PROVIDING INFORMATION

- 4.1 It is important that our customers are able to access information about our services through a variety of different media. The Board hosts a website www.lothian-vjb.gov.uk which provides information and interactive methods of communication that allow direct access to the organisation. The Valuation Roll, Valuation List and Electoral Register are publicly available documents and we ensure access to these by providing copies at the Joint Board office, libraries and other council offices. In addition, as a member of the Scottish Assessors Association, further access to interactive services and information is available at www.saa.gov.uk
- 4.2 In order to promote electoral registration to our customers the Board has a number of information and display stands which are used at such locations as community centres, libraries, universities and other public events.
- 4.3 Also specific, targeted advertising is undertaken throughout the year, at election periods and at the annual canvass promoting various aspects of the registration process.

5.0 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

- 5.1 While it can be seen that the Board is committed to providing customer focused services, it is essential that facilities exist which allow proper feedback and the views of our customers to be made known. It is important to establish accurate customer perception of our performance.
- 5.2 Currently, this is achieved by ensuring full contact details are provided with any communications issued and through feedback facilities on our website, social media channels and that of the Scottish Assessors Association. The Board also has a Complaints Procedure through which customers can seek resolution.
- 5.3 In addition the Board has and shall continue to participate in customer based consultative forums.

Appendix 1

Maximum Timescales for Dealing with Enquiries

ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

ENQUIRIES	
Telephone Calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Immediate response if certain of facts otherwise advise enquirer of how we intend to resolve. o If not immediately resolved then prepare a brief note of the circumstances. o Provide full reply within 10 working days or further advise the enquirer. o Ensure to advise that any appeal must be made in writing.
E-mails & online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Out with peak activity periods we will respond within 10 working days or advise enquirer of how we intend to resolve.
Letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Out with peak activity periods we will respond within 10 working days or advise enquirer of how we intend to resolve.
Counter Calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Immediate response if certain of facts otherwise advise enquirer of how we intend to resolve. o If not immediately resolved then prepare a brief note of the circumstances. o Provide full reply within 10 working days or further advise the enquirer. o Ensure to advise that any appeal must be made in writing.

VALUATION ROLL AND COUNCIL TAX

ENQUIRIES	
Telephone Calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Immediate response if certain of facts otherwise advise enquirer of how we intend to resolve. o If not immediately resolved then prepare a brief note of the circumstances. o Provide full reply within 15 working days or further advise the enquirer. o Ensure to advise that any proposal must be made in writing.
E-mails & online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Out with peak activity periods we will respond within 15 working days or advise enquirer of how we intend to resolve.
Letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Out with peak activity periods we will respond within 15 working days or advise enquirer of how we intend to resolve.
Counter Calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Immediate response if certain of facts otherwise advise enquirer of how we intend to resolve. o If not immediately resolved then prepare a brief note of the circumstances. o Provide full reply within 15 working days or further advise the enquirer. o Ensure to advise that any proposal must be made in writing.



Draft

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Policy**

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY	
Approved By	Lothian Valuation Joint Board
Date of Approval	TBC
Owner	Hannah Carruthers, HR Manager
Issue	2
Identity	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
Location of electronic copy	SharePoint
Location of paper copy	Human Resources
Change Authority	Human Resources, Corporate Leadership Team and Trade Unions
Review Frequency	Annual or as required by legislation
Next Review Date	April 2024

Issue	Author	Date	Details of Change
1	Bill Kerr	30/01/2019	Replaces the Equality Policy
2	Hannah Carruthers	07/03/2023	

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1.0 Aims and Objectives

- 1.1 This policy forms the basis of our commitment to help us meet our obligations under the Equalities Act 2010 and to oppose and avoid all forms of discrimination.
- 1.2 The aim of this policy is to provide managers and employees with guidance to ensure that all staff are treated fairly and consistently across LVJB in accordance with equality and diversity principles and that we do not discriminate against employees on any basis.
- 1.3 LVJB must ensure that all our employees are treated fairly, equally and with respect. This includes all aspects of working life including:
 - Pay and benefits and terms and conditions of employment;
 - Dealing with grievances and disciplinary issues, dismissal, redundancy;
 - Leave and flexible working;
 - Selection for employment, promotion, training and other developmental opportunities.

2.0 Scope of the Policy

- 2.1 This policy relates to all employees of LVJB, all customers receiving a service from LVJB, candidates applying for vacancies and all other stakeholders.

3.0 Monitor and Review

- 3.1 This policy has been created and will be maintained in accordance with the LVJB Policy Approval Framework. It has been agreed by CLT (and the Board as required), in consultation with the Trade Union where appropriate.
- 3.2 Human Resources is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and supporting procedures and will conduct reviews at appropriate intervals.
- 3.3 Anyone who feels they have been unfairly treated or discriminated against should contact the HR Manager.

4.0 Equal Opportunities

- 4.1 LVJB is committed to equality of opportunity for all its employees and the terms of this policy and its supporting procedures and guidance notes are designed to ensure the fair and transparent treatment for all staff irrespective of age, race, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender or contractual status. An Equality Impact Assessment is undertaken on this policy each time it is reviewed and updated.

5.0 Responsibility for this Policy

- 5.1 Human Resources. Any changes to this policy and supporting procedures will be made in consultation with appropriate bodies.
- 5.2 LVJB reserves the right to update HR Policies in line with new or updated Employment Legislation.

6.0 General Principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 6.1 We value the diversity and inclusion of all people and communities in Edinburgh and the Lothians and in our workforce. We are committed to meeting the needs of all our residents, employees and stakeholders.
- 6.2 We strive to create a fair workplace and society where all forms of inequality are reduced or diminished and where everyone can participate and has the same opportunity to fulfil their potential.
- 6.3 Diversity, inclusion and equality legislation can be defined as below:

Diversity	The collective mixture of differences and similarities that include, for example, individual and organisational characteristics, values, beliefs, experiences, backgrounds, preferences and behaviours.
Inclusion	The achievement of an environment, in our workplace and externally, in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the success of our organisation.
Equality Act 2010	This is the legal requirements to ensure we don't discriminate against individuals. Not only do we need to meet these requirements but we strive to exceed them.

- 6.4 We recognise that to achieve our vision we require to provide services that are tailored to people's needs, by treating people differently where necessary to ensure fairness. We also recognise, respect and value the diversity of our workforce as an asset and key resources in enhancing and maximising performance to effectively meet the diverse needs of our service users. We are committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging a culture that values and promotes equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation.
- 6.5 Under the Equality Act 2010 we need to have policies and working practices which ensure we don't discriminate against groups with protected characteristics. These characteristics are: age, race, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender or contractual status.

7.0 Our Commitment

- 7.1 LVJB is committed to ensuring that no employee, job applicant, client or stakeholder receives less favourable treatment on the basis of their of age, race, disability, gender reassignment,

marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender or contractual status, political belief or trade union membership.

7.5 The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is supported by a number of over-riding aims and objectives that LVJB shall endeavour to achieve. These are indicated below:-

- To eliminate discrimination on the grounds of age, race, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender or contractual status.
- To support employees who are representative of all sections of society and for all our colleagues to feel respected.
- To support equal pay and a culture where work of equal value gets paid equally.
- To advance equality of opportunity.
- To create a working environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination.
- To promote dignity and respect for all our colleagues.
- To encourage diversity and inclusion, recognising individual differences between all colleagues and recognising everyone's contribution.
- To advance equality in the workplace, not just because it's the law but because it improves colleagues' lives.
- To train all employees about their rights and responsibilities under this policy.
- To protect all stakeholders from unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation in their experience of receiving a service from LVJB.
- To support employees and stakeholders by investigating thoroughly any relevant issues raised and addressing appropriately.
- To invest in reasonable adjustment as appropriate.

8.0 Key Areas

8.1 While issues of equality and diversity cover all aspects of the work of LVJB there are a number of key areas where equality has particular significance. These are outlined below to highlight how this will be achieved, in conjunction with an indication of the actions and requirements that are necessary.

8.2 Recruitment and Selection

- Ensure job vacancies are accessible to people from all sections of the community by ensuring vacancies are advertised on our website and are accessible in different formats and languages.
- Ensure that job applicants are not discriminated against on the grounds of any protected characteristic.
- Ensure that all employees and job applicants are not discriminated against because they have a responsibility for dependent children or adults.
- Ensure that applicants are not discriminated against on the basis that they have been unemployed for a long term.

- Ensure job adverts focus on the job needs to attract all suitable applicants.
- Regular review of the Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure to eliminate discrimination and promote inclusion. Ensure that recruiting managers are aware of the policy, understand its requirements and are able to apply it.

8.3 Dignity at Work

- Have policies and procedures in place to eliminate harassment or bullying in the workplace.
- Ensure dignity at work and ensure any abuse is dealt with under the LVJB Disciplinary Procedure.

8.4 Policies and Procedures

- Carry out an Equality Impact Assessment on all policies and practices to ensure any negative impacts towards any group are eliminated or minimised.
- Monitor and ensure that all policies and working practices comply with relevant equalities legislation.
- Ensure consultation with staff representatives.
- Consider any reasonable change to the workplace or to working practices to help colleagues continue in their role or help them return to work.
- Ensure managers have the best advice they can get when it comes to making decisions on adjustments, including advice from Occupational Health.
- The Assessor shall ensure that the allocation of financial resources within the organisation shall as appropriate take into account equality considerations.
- It will be ensured that all staff within LVJB are aware of this policy and understand the need to consider and address equality issues during their daily work.

8.5 Performance, Training and Development

- Ensure that My PaTH includes all staff and is applied fairly and equally.
- Make opportunities for training, development and progress available to all colleagues, who will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential, so their talents and resources can be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the organisation.
- Ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training is available to all employees.

- Encourage all staff who meet the relevant criteria to develop and progress in their career pathways and all decisions in this regard will be based on merit.

8.6 Equal Pay and Benefits

- Eliminate discrimination against any group of staff.
- Ensure that all staff benefits are applied equally and fairly to all staff.

8.7 Services

- Ensure that equality considerations are integrated into all relevant areas of service planning, management, and delivery.
- Improve our awareness and understanding of the needs of different groups through liaison, involvement, dissemination of information and training.
- Ensure that LVJB services are accessible and delivered appropriately and sensitively in order to facilitate equality of treatment.
- Ensure our website is reviewed to ensure the information is presented in an easy-to-understand manner and that where possible different formats and aids are available.
- Ensure that information about services is readily available, easily accessible and offered in appropriate formats and languages.
- Ensure that equalities are mainstreamed into the organisation's policies, practices, and services.
- Ensure that data is obtained to monitor the demographic of protected characteristics.
- Ensure that our [Complaints Handling Procedure](#) is accessible for everyone.

9.0 Roles and Responsibilities

9.1 Corporate Leadership Team

- 9.1.1 The Corporate Leadership Team has overall responsibility for ensuring that this policy is implemented and for ensuring that monitoring takes place to check its effectiveness.
- 9.1.2 The Corporate Leadership Team have a role to play in demonstrating active leadership in the area of equality, diversity, and inclusion.

9.2 Managers

- 9.2.1 Managers are responsible for ensuring that all aspects of their work comply with the policy, that they demonstrate equality practices in their leadership and take steps to advance equality in their service areas.
- 9.2.2 Managers are responsible for taking action when equalities issues are brought to their attention, including ensuring that any allegation of harassment or bullying is fully investigated and appropriate action taken if necessary.
- 9.2.3 Managers are responsible for ensuring that their team is able to access appropriate equality training and development opportunities.
- 9.2.4 Managers should ensure due diligence is given to equalities in any decision made regarding a service, policy, criterion, or practice.
- 9.2.5 Managers must ensure knowledge of this policy and The Equality Act 2010.
- 9.2.6 Managers must ensure reasonable adjustments are made for employees as required.

9.3 Employees

- 9.3.1 All employees are responsible for making sure that our actions at work support the duty to advance equality and eliminate discrimination in employment and service delivery, in line with legislation and this policy.
- 9.3.2 Employees should strive to prevent bullying, harassment and victimisation and be aware that we can be held liable for these acts and unlawful discrimination that takes place at work against fellow employees, customers, suppliers, and the public.
- 9.3.3 Employees must not behave, or induce other colleagues to behave, in a way that is discriminatory or offensive.
- 9.3.4 Employees who feel they are being discriminated against or harassed or bullied, or that a colleague is being discriminated against or harassed or bullied, should report it to their line manager.
- 9.3.5 Employees who feel they cannot raise an issue with their line manager should report it to a more senior manager or the HR Manager.
- 9.3.6 Employees must not victimise anyone who has made a complaint or helped an investigation into discrimination or harassment.
- 9.3.7 Employees are required to ensure fairness towards colleagues, service users and other members of the community in carrying out their duties and must not discriminate against any person or group when at work or in the course of their duties in interactions with the public.
- 9.3.8 Employees should help promote the policy in the workplace in all aspects of service delivery and to work towards the elimination of discrimination.

10.0 Equalities Mainstreaming Report

- 10.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty a monitoring report is published on the LVJB website bi-annually.
- 10.2 The [Equalities Mainstreaming Report](#) includes all relevant statistical data collected in the previous two years. We actively encourage our employees to share their personal equality monitoring data so that we can be better informed and take action to eliminate discrimination.
- 10.3 The report is circulated to the Corporate Leadership Team, enabling an opportunity for consideration, suggested improvements and amendments to our policies and practices. The monitoring report is also circulated to the Joint Board's Elected Members.
- 10.4 The report includes information on:
- Workforce profile and salary range by age, disability, gender, ethnicity, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, caring responsibilities.
 - The work undertaken to ensure we inclusively engage with our stakeholders.
 - Review of job applications by age, disability, gender, ethnicity, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation and marriage or civil partnership.
 - Training and development of staff on the subject of equality, diversity and inclusion.
 - Equal Pay and Gender Pay Gap.
 - Equalities Outcomes and Promises.
- 10.5 Information gathering and monitoring associated with the Equalities Mainstreaming Report will inform the contents of this policy when it is reviewed and will ensure that issues are identified and addressed.

11.0 Related Policies

- [Complaints Handling Policy](#)
- [Code of Conduct for Employees](#)
- [Grievance Procedure](#)
- [Fair Treatment at Work Policy](#)
- [Disciplinary Procedure](#)

12.0 Local Agreement

- 12.1 This document is a local collective agreement between the Board and the recognised Trade Unions. Every effort will be made by both parties to ensure that this document will be maintained as a local collective agreement and adjusted by agreement to meet changing future needs. In the event of failure to reach agreement, both parties reserve the right to terminate this local agreement by giving four months' notice in writing. In such circumstances the terms of the local agreement will cease to apply to existing and future employees.

Appendix 1 – Glossary of Definitions

Equality	This is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It is about understanding that no one should have poorer life chances because of where, what or whom they were born, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. Equality recognises that historically, certain groups of people with particular characteristics eg race, disability, sex and sexuality, have experienced discrimination.
Diversity	This is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences between individuals and groups. It is not about treating everyone in exactly the same way, but treating people as individuals and creating a working culture and practices that harness and appreciate differences.
Protected Characteristic	The Equality Act 2010 refers to the groups who are protected from discrimination because of a characteristic they share ie age, sex, race, sexual orientation etc. This is a protected characteristic.
Discrimination	This is where you treat a person or a group differently or unequally in comparison with other people or groups, based on a characteristic they have or that you think they have.
Unlawful Discrimination	This is discrimination based on the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010. It includes: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, discrimination arising from a disability and discrimination by perception or by association.
Direct Discrimination	This where someone is treated unfairly or unequally because of their protected characteristic. For example, not employing someone because they are black or because they are disabled.
Indirect Discrimination	This is where organisation's practices, policies or procedures have the unintentional effect of disadvantaging people who share certain protected characteristics.
Discrimination by Perception	This is where someone thinks that you have a characteristic and treats you less favourably. For example, where an employer believes an employee is gay or is of a particular race, and treats them less favourably as a result.
Discrimination by Association	This is where you're treated less favourably because a colleague, associate, family member or friend has a protected characteristic.
Harassment	Unwanted behaviour related to a protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or which creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.
Victimisation	This is treating someone unfavourably because they have taken some form of action relating to the Equality Act, eg made a complaint under the Act or supported somebody who is doing so, such as appearing as a witness.
Reasonable Adjustment	This is any change that we can make to the workplace or to working practices that could help prevent a colleague being at a disadvantage. This could be equipment, a change to working hours, a change of working location or anything else that could reasonably be done to help the employee continue in their post or help them return to work.

Draft

My PaTH

Policy and Procedure

MY PaTH POLICY AND PROCEDURE	
Approved By	Lothian Valuation Joint Board
Date of Approval	TBC
Owner	Hannah Carruthers and Rory Mackenzie
Issue	1
Identity	My PaTH Policy and Procedure
Location of electronic copy	SharePoint
Location of paper copy	Human Resources
Change Authority	Human Resources, Corporate Leadership Team and Trade Unions
Review Frequency	Annual or as required by legislation
Next Review Date	April 2024

Issue	Author	Date	Details of Change
1	Hannah Carruthers and Rory Mackenzie	March 2023	New Policy.

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1.0 Aims and Objectives

- 1.1 My PaTH stands for My Performance and Training Hub.
- 1.2 The overall aim of My PaTH is to develop a shared understanding about what is to be achieved by LVJB and how the employee contributes to its overall direction. This shared understanding supports the approach that is taken toward staff development. The aim is to ensure such approaches locally align to support the organisational direction.
- 1.3 The main aim of My PaTH is to ensure the appropriate structures, support and opportunities are in place to achieve the organisation's strategy.
- 1.4 As part of the overall enhancement of LVJB performance, the specific aims are:
- Discuss the Corporate Service Plan, linking to the employee's role and activities, contributing towards it.
 - Create a shared understanding of the role
 - Help to prioritise workload and objectives effectively
 - Provide feedback on performance and agree the level of performance expected
 - Provide the opportunity to discuss career aspirations and development plans

2.0 Scope of the Policy

- 2.1 This policy relates to all employees of LVJB.

3.0 Monitor and Review

- 3.1 This policy has been created and will be maintained in accordance with the LVJB Policy Approval Framework. It has been agreed by CLT (and the Board as required), in consultation with the Trade Union where appropriate.
- 3.2 Human Resources is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and supporting procedures and will conduct reviews at appropriate intervals.
- 3.3 Anyone who feels they have been unfairly treated or discriminated against should contact the HR Manager.

4.0 Equal Opportunities

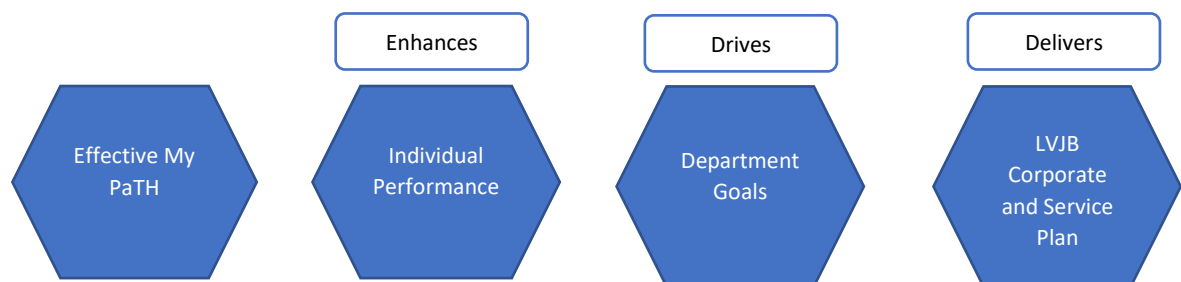
- 4.1 LVJB is committed to equality of opportunity for all its employees and the terms of this policy and its supporting procedures and guidance notes are designed to ensure the fair and transparent treatment for all staff irrespective of age, race, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender or contractual status. An Equality Impact Assessment is undertaken on this policy each time it is reviewed and updated.

5.0 Responsibility for this Policy

- 5.1 Human Resources. Any changes to this policy and supporting procedures will be made in consultation with appropriate bodies.
- 5.2 LVJB reserves the right to update HR Policies in line with new or updated Employment Legislation.

6.0 My PaTH Core Principles

- 6.1 My PaTH is an essential activity led by employees and enabled by interaction with supportive managers.
- 6.2 LVJB employees are expected to seek to maximise the quality of their work and are entitled to access the appropriate processes and support which they need to achieve this.
- 6.3 LVJB has an expectation that employees will contribute to, and participate in, the strategic objectives of the organisation, which may vary from time to time. My PaTH facilitates a consistent process across LVJB which all employees and managers are required to engage with.



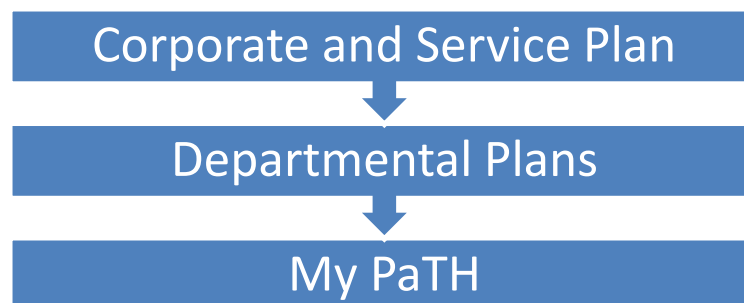
6.4 Roles and Responsibilities

- 6.4.1 The Corporate Leadership Team is responsible for the effective implementation of My PaTH across the organisation. It is expected that the My PaTH process is cascaded downwards.
- 6.4.2 Line Managers are responsible for supporting employees to set their objectives and identify training and development needs. They should provide support and encouragement throughout the year to enable the employee to reach their full potential, leading to increased job satisfaction.
- 6.4.3 Employees are responsible for positively engaging in the process, preparing for review meetings, contributing during the meetings and updating their My PaTH forms.

- 6.4.4 The My PaTH project team is responsible for supporting managers and employees in the process and for the ongoing development of the system. The project team will provide guidance, coaching and development solutions for both staff and line managers. The project team is responsible for producing progress reports for CLT.

7.0 My PaTH and The LVJB Corporate and Service Plan

- 7.1 My PaTH is a fundamental element of LVJB's planning process. It provides the interface between the Corporate and Service Plan and all staff. It aligns the objectives developed in the Corporate and Service Plan with individual objectives of all staff and their professional development.



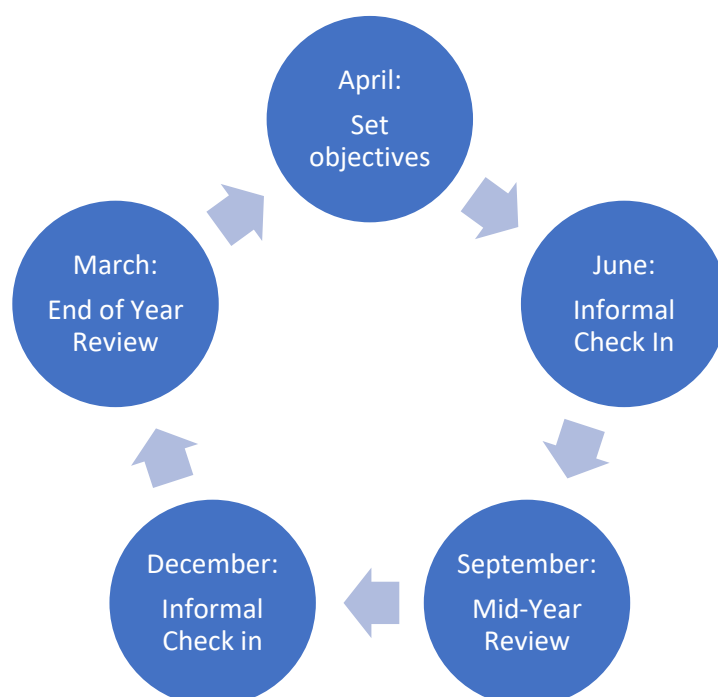
8.0 Objective Setting

- 8.1 Individual objectives can be expressed as activities to be undertaken or targets to be achieved.
- 8.2 Objectives should be directly work-related and include results and targets to be achieved.
- 8.3 Objectives should be clearly defined and agreed and relate to all the various aspects of the job that contribute to achieving the role purpose.
- 8.4 All objectives defined and set should be SMART:

Specific	The objective is detailed, focussed and defined. Activities are straightforward and emphasise actions and required outcomes. Actions need to be straightforward and communicate what you would like to see happen.
Measurable	Measurable means the activity can be tracked, ensuring a progress towards completion. This can highlight when something is not progressing and what might be preventing progression.
Achievable	Objectives should develop and stretch the individual, but not so it over-stretches creating demotivation. Unachievable objectives could be too far in the future which is difficult to maintain motivation.
Realistic	Realistic does not mean easy. It means that resources can be allocated to succeed in the objective. The achievement of an objective requires resources, skills, time, equipment, etc. Objectives may be achievable but may require a change in resource priorities to achieve them.
Time-Bound	Time-bound means setting a realistic, achievable deadline. An unrealistic deadline, or not deadline, can reduce motivation.

9.0 The Process

9.1 Although My PaTH is a continuous and integrated process, it is underpinned by five main stages. The aim is to create and maintain a circle of individual and organisational development.



- 9.2 The annual cycle is supported by an electronic system, which automates the My PaTH process, in conjunction with a timeline, as outlined above.
- 9.3 Employees and Line Mangers can access the My PaTH system on [this link](#).
- 9.4 All employees have been provided login information. Any problems logging in should be reported to mypath@lothian-vjb.gov.uk.
- 9.5 Guidance on using the system can be found [here on SharePoint](#).

9.6 Stage 1 – April – Set Objectives for the Current Year

- 9.6.1 In April each year, the employee should log into the My PaTH system and complete the following sections of the Evaluation Area:

Tab Name	Purpose
Objectives	Record objectives for the current year.
Training and Development	Record training and development requirements for the current year.
Career Pathway	Record career aspirations and potential pathways for development.

- 9.6.2 The employee and line manager should meet to have a private discussion about the employee's submission. The aim of the meeting is to ensure the employee:
- Knows and understands what is expected of them.
 - Has the opportunity to discuss, contribute to and agree objectives.
 - Agrees a best approach to their objectives with their line manager.
 - Has the opportunity to identify, discuss and agree training and development needs.
 - Is supported to develop their capability, skills and experience.
- 9.6.3 At the meeting the employee and the line manager should discuss each section of the form in turn. The line manager may feedback to the employee regarding their draft objectives and make suggestions for change. The line manager may also suggest training and development opportunities which would be advantageous for the employee. Any changes should be fully discussed and agreed.

- 9.6.4 The line manager's role is to support the employee to finalise their My PaTH and ensure the objectives relate to the LVJB Corporate and Service Plan. To ensure an effective My PaTH process the employee must be fully familiar with the plan and how their role contributes to it.
- 9.6.5 Targets may not necessarily be numerically quantifiable. Quality is as important as quantity and it will be important, in some instances, to build quality-related considerations into the objectives.
- 9.6.6 As a rough guide, the My PaTH discussion should detail about four or five performance objectives, however, the emphasis is on realism and feasibility of what is achievable and what can be supported to be delivered.
- 9.6.7 The line manager and the employee should discuss and agree the best approach to their My PaTH. In some cases employees' performance enhancement and professional development is best achieved through mentoring, networking, collegiate discussion or personal reflection. At other times a more or less frequent My PaTH is more appropriate. Employees should indicate to their line manager the level of support most appropriate to their own professional development and performance enhancement.
- 9.6.8 Performance levels sit alongside objectives. It is recognised that individuals may perform at different levels. For example, new members of staff will be likely to contribute at a different level to that of a more experienced member of staff. Line manager should recognise this and apply understanding to create an effective My PaTH, tailoring conversations and agreeing developmental objectives/career plans to the position, abilities and aspirations of the individual. For an objective to be managed effectively, individuals and line managers must know and agree the basis on which performance will be measured.

9.7 Stage 2 – June – Informal Check In

- 9.7.1 Ongoing informal check ins are recommended throughout the year. This might be included in a regular one to one. In some cases a more frequent schedule of My PaTH meetings may be desired. In other instances, particularly when longer term objectives are being agreed, a less frequent review period may be preferred.
- 9.7.2 Meetings may also take place outside the published My PaTH schedule to discuss performance related issues e.g. if the employee requires assistance or additional resource to achieve an objective, these meetings should be arranged as and when required.
- 9.7.3 My PaTH conversations are discussions that focus on future direction of the individual with reflection on previous performance used to enhance future performance. The aim is to link the focus and direction of LVJB with the individual's abilities and career aspirations.

9.7.4 My PaTH is a continuous development process and regular dialogue around performance enhancement and progress against objectives is encouraged at regular intervals.

9.7.5 An effective informal check in is one in which:

- The meeting is positive, motivational with agreed objectives that sustain and enhance future performance.
- Achievement is recognised and reinforced.
- There is an opportunity for analysis and for reflection.

9.8 Stage 3 – September – Mid Year Review

9.8.1 To be truly effective, My PaTH should be accompanied by review meetings and the mid-year review should be completed by the end of September.

9.8.2 It may be agreed that the review meeting will take place when either the manager or the employee feels they would be most useful.

9.8.3 The aim of the Mid-Year Review meeting is to:

- Provide time to discuss progress updates.
- Identify what is going well.
- Jointly problem-solve objectives that may have become 'stuck'.
- Ensure the performance objectives remain 'live'.
- Provide an update on LVJB direction or significant organisational priority changes and allow for a re-prioritisation of objectives.
- Review progress against the training and development plan and follow up on any outstanding training requirements.

9.8.4 Prior to the Mid-Year Review meeting the employee should update progress against their objectives in the My PaTH system.

9.8.5 Employees are encouraged to document their progress in My PaTH using "Journal Entry" throughout the year, to support the review process and minimise the amount of time required to prepare for the Mid-Year Review.

9.8.6 The Mid-Year Review outcomes should be captured in My PaTH, particularly where this has led to a change in objectives or CPD. The employee and line manager are responsible for documenting the key points from the Mid-Year Review.

9.8.7 It is important to note that both the individual and line manager are jointly responsible for following through on objectives agreed. Therefore essential management activities such as ongoing coaching and feedback in between meetings are essential. Managers are a fundamental source of support and facilitation in helping individuals and teams achieve their goals.

9.9 Stage 4 – December – Informal Check In

9.9.1 A further informal check in is recommended by the end of December.

9.10 Stage 5 – March - End of Year Review

9.10.1 Prior to the End of Year Review meeting the employee should update progress against their objectives in My PaTH. Employees are encouraged to document their progress using “Journal Entry” throughout the year to support the review process and minimise the amount of time required to prepare for the End of Year Review.

9.10.2 The End of Year Review provides the opportunity for discussion and feedback on how the year has gone which can be used to inform the ‘Previous Performance’ section on the My PaTH form. The aim of this stage is to encourage both the individual and the line manager to reflect on the progress of activities/projects and to consider possible future professional development options.

9.10.3 At the End of Year Review meeting the employee and line manager should discuss the status of each objective.

9.10.4 Objectives which are linked to time-limited project work or had a clear deadline during the annual cycle can be relatively easily identified as complete or incomplete.

9.10.5 Objectives which relate to the ongoing responsibilities of the employee may not be complete in the sense that they are closed or finished but, where the employee has achieved the aims of the objective throughout the year, then they may be considered complete in relation to the end of the year review.

9.10.6 When discussing objectives which are considered to be incomplete or still in progress, the line manager and employee should focus on the barriers and challenges that have prevented progress and consider solutions and support to overcome these.

9.10.7 This meeting should also be used to discuss priorities for next year, this will provide the employee with useful direction when drafting their objectives.

9.10.8 Ideally, the meeting should enable the employee to:

- Identify their achievements during the period
- Describe objectives where challenges and obstructions were experienced

- Identify what they enjoy about the work and how they might want to develop themselves and the role
- Identify any areas of the work where improvement is needed – with ideas as to how this might be achieved
- Identify learning and development needs and aspirations
- Discuss the level of support, coaching and guidance required from the line manager
- Identify aspirations for the future - both in the current role and in possible future roles
- Draft objectives for the following year

The Line Manager should consider:

- How well the individual has performed since the last meeting
- The extent to which any agreed development has been implemented
- The feedback to be given at the meeting supported by meaningful examples
- The factors that have affected performance, both within and outside the individual's control
- The points for discussion on the possible actions that could be taken by both parties to develop or improve performance
- Potential directions the individual's career or job might take

11.0 My PaTH and Unsatisfactory Performance

- 11.1 My PaTH can help to identify performance problems but it is not in itself designed to address ongoing unsatisfactory performance. Unsatisfactory performance is defined as a level of performance that does not meet the required standard expected of the employee. Unsatisfactory performance needs to be addressed as soon as it is identified using the [Management of Capability Procedure](#). The HR Manager will provide further guidance.

12.0 Disagreement of the Employee My PaTH

- 12.1 My PaTH aims to provide an opportunity for the line manager and individual to discuss, agree and prioritise the objectives and development.
- 12.2 In the event of the line manager and employee being unable to agree the My PaTH form, the next most senior manager should be consulted in the first instance. This senior manager will aim to reach agreement on the plan in conjunction with all the parties. This may include support from the HR Manager.
- 12.3 In the event of an employee being concerned that they are being unfairly treated over any aspect of My PaTH they should contact the HR Manager for guidance.

13.0 Local Agreement

- 13.1 This document is a local collective agreement between the Board and the recognised Trade Unions. Every effort will be made by both parties to ensure that this document will be maintained as a local collective agreement and adjusted by agreement to meet changing future needs. In the event of failure to reach agreement, both parties reserve the right to terminate this local agreement by giving four months' notice in writing. In such circumstances the terms of the local agreement will cease to apply to existing and future employees.

Draft

Contribution Award

Policy and Procedure

CONTRIBUTION AWARD POLICY AND PROCEDURE	
Approved By	Lothian Valuation Joint Board
Date of Approval	TBC
Owner	Hannah Carruthers, HR Manager
Issue	1
Identity	Contribution Award Policy and Procedure
Location of electronic copy	SharePoint
Location of paper copy	Human Resources
Change Authority	HR, CLT and Trade Unions
Review Frequency	Annual or as required by legislation.
Next Review Date	April 2024

Issue	Author	Date	Details of Change
1	Hannah Carruthers	March 2023	New Policy.

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1.0 Aims and Objectives

- 1.1 LVJB wishes to recognise and reward employees who make an exceptional contribution that furthers the implementation of our [Corporate Service Delivery Plan](#), advances our aims and objectives or meets and overcomes significant work-related challenges.
- 1.2 This framework is designed to:
 - Reward staff whose contribution exceeds that normally expected in their role.
 - Ensure that LVJB attracts and retains high quality staff.
- 1.3 This policy provides guidance on the application of Contribution Awards to ensure that this is undertaken fairly and consistently across LVJB in accordance with equality and diversity principles.

2.0 Scope of the Policy

- 2.1 This policy applies to all LVJB employees who make an exceptional contribution, with the exception of CLT members.
- 2.2 Applications will require to show evidence that the contribution meets the criteria standard as set out in this document, and the specific process requirements for an award to be approved.

3.0 Monitor and Review

- 3.1 This policy has been created and will be maintained in accordance with the LVJB Policy Approval Framework. It has been agreed by CLT (and the Board as required), in consultation with the Trade Union where appropriate.
- 3.2 Human Resources is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and supporting procedures and will conduct reviews at appropriate intervals.
- 3.3 Anyone who feels they have been unfairly treated or discriminated against as part of acting up arrangements should contact the HR Manager.

4.0 Equal Opportunities

- 4.1 LVJB is committed to equality of opportunity for all its employees and the terms of this policy and its supporting procedures and guidance notes are designed to ensure the fair and transparent treatment for all staff irrespective of age, race, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender or contractual status. An Equality Impact Assessment is undertaken on this policy each time it is reviewed and updated.

5.0 Responsibility for this Policy

- 5.1 Human Resources. Any changes to this policy and supporting procedures will be made in consultation with appropriate bodies.
- 5.2 LVJB reserves the right to update HR Policies in line with new or updated Employment Legislation.

6.0 Roles and Responsibilities

- 6.1 **Assessor and Corporate Leadership Team:**
- Set the overall framework for the reward and recognition of all staff.
 - Initiate the Contribution Award process, in accordance with the annual timetable.
 - Provide leadership for the implementation of this policy across LVJB.
- 6.2 **Human Resources:**
- Facilitate the application of the Contribution Award Procedure.
 - Provide any management information required to facilitate effective decision making.
 - Implement decisions reached at Contribution Award Panel meetings
 - Provide advice, support and guidance on the application of the Contribution Award Policy.
- 6.3 **Contribution Award Panel:**
- Consider applications for Contribution Award.
 - Approve or decline applications for Contribution Award.
 - Rank applications for Contribution Award and agree final outcome.

7.0 Application of Awards

- 7.1 The Contribution Award Panel will review and analyse submissions against the criteria set out in this document and will appoint the following awards:

Applicant Outcome	Award
1 st Award	£250 vouchers (consider £250 cash)
2 nd Award	£150 vouchers (consider £150 cash)
3 rd Award	£100 vouchers (consider £100 cash)

**** Tax implications for vouchers being investigated ****

8.0 Types of Nomination

- 8.1 The Contribution Award Panel invites applications for the award on the basis of:
- sustained excellence, or
 - single excellence.
- 8.2 Contribution Awards are only applicable to employees who have at least 12 months of continuous service in their current post within LVJB.
- 8.3 Applications will not normally be accepted for employees who have a current disciplinary sanction or performance improvement plan on record.

9.0 Nomination Criteria

Nomination Type	Overview	Criteria (not exhaustive)
Sustained Excellence	Employee has made an excellent and sustained contribution, over and above the normal expectations for their grade, role and level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achievement of agreed objectives to a consistent and exceptionally high standard.• Contribution has had a positive impact on the employee's team.• Contribution has had a positive impact on LVJB's reputation.• Consistent and sustained delivery of innovative and high-quality customer service, with demonstrable positive impact on LVJB's reputation.• Taking on significant additional responsibility on an ongoing basis, where the level of responsibility exceeds the employee's current grade.• Enhanced productivity, maximising the use of resources in support of the delivery of financial sustainability.• Continuous professional development, contributing to the delivery of sustained individual or team contribution.• High level of contribution at meetings or project meetings.• Achievement of all tasks or project deadlines ahead of/on schedule.
Single Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employee has made a single one-off exceptional contribution, which is significantly over and above the normal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completing a task or project ahead of schedule, coupled with resultant savings in time, resources or money.• Contributing to the handling of an one-off event showing an exceptional commitment beyond that normally required of employees at that grade.• Successfully tackling an unplanned or unexpected project or incident of complexity.

	<p>expectations of their role, grade and level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee continues to manage their normal day to day responsibilities to a high standard, in addition to making the exceptional contribution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrating exceptional flexibility which contributed directly to the achievement LVJB objectives. Contributing ideas which have led to greater efficiency, cost savings, improved quality etc. Achieving particularly challenging goals or objectives, e.g. overcoming significant obstacles to ensure deadlines were met. Suggesting, scoping and implementing key projects or high level solutions.
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10.0 Nomination Procedure

- 10.1 Applications for a contribution award will normally be made by a manager on behalf of an individual employee. Line managers may inform employees of any nominations made in which they are included. The application form can be found at Appendix 1.
- 10.2 Self-nomination is permitted, in which case the employee would submit the application to their manager, who will be required to verify the factual accuracy of the submission. Self-nominations must be supported by the line manager to go ahead to the panel.
- 10.3 Nomination of an employee by a colleague or peer is permitted. Peer nominations require to be submitted to the nominated person's manager to both support and verify the factual accuracy of the nomination.
- 10.4 The criteria for assessing contribution must be applied fairly and consistently and judgements for nominations will be based on objective evidence of the contribution made.
- 10.5 Managers must remain aware of the contributions made by all of their employees so that they can identify where applications for awards under this policy may be appropriate.
- 10.6 Assessment of the contributions made by employees will be based on LVJB objectives and activities which are likely to contribute to the future success of the organisation.
- 10.7 An application must contain as much specific and relevant detail as possible in support of the case. This will include evidence of the contribution and an explanation of how this has been of benefit to LVJB.

- 10.8 A copy of the employee's current My PaTH should be included with the application so that the panel can compare what is normally expected of the employee, to the contribution they have made over and above that.
- 10.9 Application forms must be submitted to the HR Manager in accordance with the annual published timetable.

11.0 Contribution Award Panels

- 11.1 Contribution Award Panels will consist of:
- The Assessor and ERO (and/or delegated Assistant Assessor)
 - Head of Governance
 - Head of Admin
 - 1 x Union Representative
 - HR Manager
 - 1 x panel Secretary will be in attendance.
- 11.2 The role of the Contribution Award Panel is to carry out an evaluation of the application against the criteria set out in this policy and decisions taken will be based solely on the assessment of contribution, irrespective of irrelevant factors, including employment status, working hours, and personal circumstances. The Panel will normally approve only applications where it has been demonstrated that the employee is working at a level of performance which is greater than expected of the role.
- 11.3 All panel members will have received appropriate training or guidance about the policy and operation of the panel prior to considering nominations.
- 11.4 All panel members will be strongly encouraged to be trained in unconscious bias and equality, diversity and inclusion.
- 11.5 Every effort should be made to achieve a diversity balance in the panel.
- 11.6 Panel members must declare any potential, actual or perceived conflict of interest to the HR Manager and appropriate action will be taken. If possible, any conflict of interest should be identified prior to the panel meeting in order that consideration of any required action can be undertaken. However, advance notice may not always be possible therefore, at the beginning of each panel, any remaining potential conflicts of interest should be identified, and agreement reached on how to deal with these.
- 11.7 Contribution Award Panels will meet annually, in line with the published timetable.

12.0 Notification of Outcomes

- 12.1 The HR Manager will write to all line managers and, subsequently, nominated employees, in accordance with the annually published Contribution Award timetable.

- 12.2 HR may publish a list of names of those who have received the awards, subject to agreement with the relevant employees.
- 12.3 There is no right of appeal for non-award.

13.0 Feedback

- 13.1 Feedback on the outcome of nominations will be cascaded from the Contribution Award Panel to the relevant line managers.
- 13.2 Where applicable, all feedback should form a core part of future My PaTH discussions.

14.0 Related Policies

- [My PaTH information](#).

15.0 Local Agreement

- 15.1 This document is a local collective agreement between the Board and the recognised Trade Unions. Every effort will be made by both parties to ensure that this document will be maintained as a local collective agreement and adjusted by agreement to meet changing future needs. In the event of failure to reach agreement, both parties reserve the right to terminate this local agreement by giving four months' notice in writing. In such circumstances the terms of the local agreement will cease to apply to existing and future employees.

CONTRIBUTION AWARD APPLICATION FORM

Employee Details	
Name of Employee:	
Job Title:	
Current Grade and Scale Point:	
Line Manager:	
Type of Contribution Award being applied for	
<i>Please mark "X" in the appropriate box</i>	
Sustained Excellence <input type="checkbox"/>	Single Excellence <input type="checkbox"/>
Consideration should be given to the following notes:	
<p style="text-align: center;">Sustained Excellence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What has been exceptional about the contribution made - how is it different? How long and what have been the challenges in sustaining this level of contribution? What is the importance of this contribution to LVJB? How is the contribution helping LVJB to deliver it's longer-term objectives or be more effective? How does the contribution enhance the reputation of LVJB? What additional responsibilities have been undertaken beyond those expected of someone with the same level of skills/experience? What enhanced skills and knowledge have been acquired - how has this benefited LVJB? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Single Excellence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What contribution has been made to the successful management/delivery of an exceptionally challenging project or piece of work? What particularly challenging goals have been achieved to overcome challenges in processes? Has there been demonstration of exceptional flexibility responding to changes in deadlines/targets to contribute to LVJB's objectives? Is there ability/ willingness to take on additional responsibilities, e.g. one off project work?
Achievements to Support Application	
<i>Type the main contribution and achievements here and set out how they exceed the normal requirements for the job and help LVJB to achieve it's objectives. You are also encouraged to provide a statement on what the employee shall do in the future and the career trajectory they are on.</i>	
Signature:	Date:

Contribution Award Timetable - 2023

Action	Responsibility	Completion Date
Annual Launch - Notify all staff of policy and procedure available on SharePoint.	HR Manager	
Application Deadline	Line Manager	4 weeks after launch.
Papers submitted to Contribution Award Panel	HR Manager	2 weeks after closing date.
Contribution Award Panel Meeting	HR Manager/Panel	
Outcome communicated to Applicants	HR Manager	Within 5 days of panel meeting.
Feedback provided	Panel/Line Managers	My PaTH check ins.
Awards Applied	HR Manager	

2022/23

Annual Governance Statement



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1. Introduction

Lothian Valuation Joint Board (LVJB) has responsibility for ensuring that it conducts its business in accordance with legislation and proper standards, and that public money is properly accounted for and expended to achieve maximum value. LVJB are committed to pursuing continuous improvement in the way in which services are delivered to attain organisational efficiency.

In discharging this responsibility, LVJB have established comprehensive arrangements for the governance of its activities and the operational exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management and oversight of risk.

LVJB acknowledges its duty for ensuring that there is effective governance within the organisation and as such has developed a Code of Corporate Governance defined by three main principles.

Accountability

- as a public body we are held accountable to citizens and stakeholders
- we implement good practice in reporting, quality assurance and auditing

Transparency

- processes, procedures and data are accessible to those who need them, and sufficient information is provided to understand and monitor them
- we engage with our stakeholders and help them understand the services we provide

Effectiveness & efficiency

- the organisation produces service oriented results while making the best use of its resources
- we operate in an environment of continuous improvement

LVJB's Governance Committee provides internal assurance and quality control over the primary functions and services of the organisation. There is also an external Governance Strategy Group that meets regularly with Board members to ensure consistency in respect of governance and service assurance matters. The responsibility for leading and directing the annual reviews of the effectiveness of LVJB's governance arrangements and providing ongoing oversight and robust challenge are City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) Internal Audit and external auditors, Audit Scotland.

2. Establishing a foundation for future ways of working

LVJB have now formally adopted a hybrid model of working. Staff were provided with the opportunity to work occasionally, regularly or permanently from home with the necessary health & safety checks being undertaken to support their choice. The model gives staff a healthy work/life balance whilst enabling the organisation to maintain required service levels.

This year has seen the introduction of our Continuous Improvement Programme (CIP - previously known as the Transformation and Cultural Change Programme, TCCP). The CIP will continue to build on the foundations of our transformation to date, seeking to simplify the message behind our drive for change;

“With clear understanding of our ongoing budget challenges, we will adopt a sustainable programme of continual improvement that provides increased cost and operational efficiency across all aspects of our valuation and electoral registration services. By supporting the creation of a positive work environment, delivery of these services will be carried out by investing in a motivated, skilled, and flexible staffing resource.”

We are actively reviewing all staffing and non-staffing costs to help support us in meeting a substantial budget shortfall in 2023/24. This will involve;

- making the most of digitalisation, improving our service delivery models and creating an agile workforce equipped to deal with major events and peak activity periods
- reviewing the use of our office space at South Gyle and examining sub-letting, alternative locations or on-site property consolidation opportunities
- targeted use of our Voluntary Early Release Arrangement with employees to help achieve business efficiencies
- discussion with constituent councils regarding increasing future annual budget requisition

Risk management, assessment and evaluation continues to be monitored via the LVJBs Governance Committee, Project Management Framework, Quality Assurance procedures and Corporate Leadership Team. This provides appropriate levels of assurance which are reviewed through our annual Internal & External audits and are incorporated in this Annual Governance Statement.

3. Governance Assurance Framework

Our governance framework comprises the culture, values, systems and processes by which the organisation is directed and regulated. It enables the LVJB to monitor the attainment of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services in an efficient manner.

Internal control is a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It assures that in conducting its business, LVJB reflects the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government.

Principle 1	Behave with integrity, has strong ethical values and respects the rule of law
Evidence	The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) actively promote a culture of integrity and core values. We have a code of conduct for Board members which complements our existing employee code. This, combined with other internal policies such as public interest disclosure, scheme of delegation, anti-bribery, disciplinary codes, etc. all falling under a regular review framework, ensures a well-defined understanding of the importance of exemplary behaviour and ethics in every area of the Joint Board's activities.
Improvement plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Publish our 2023 equalities mainstreaming report 2) Continued review and creation of new policies and procedures where required by the organisation

Principle 2	Ensure openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
Evidence	We continue to assess and develop new ways of engaging with our stakeholders to ensure the service we provide is of a high quality and readily understood. We are evaluating the use of podcasts and an enhanced social media presence to improve our existing communication channels and provide alternative platforms for interaction and information exchange. Investigation is underway to simplify messaging within our valuation service. We have recently published a Council Tax user manual on our website and have created a podcast on the Revaluation process as examples of this.
Improvement plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Continue to assess and develop new ways of engaging with stakeholders 2) Consider what additional information can be made available to ratepayers particularly from a digital accessibility perspective

Principle 3	Seek outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits
Evidence	Following a period of reflection and review, we have created a new Continual Improvement Programme (CIP) which is initially tasked with assessing all potential staffing and non-staffing cost savings. This will enable the creation of a strategic plan to assist the organisation in meeting a substantial financial shortfall forecasted in the 2023/24 budget year. Formal hybrid working has now been introduced in the organisation and we are evaluating more efficient and environmentally friendly ways in which to undertake surveys and home visits.
Improvement plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Create a strategy to deal with the 2023/24 financial shortfall 2) Continue to investigate opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint

Principle 4	Determine interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes
Evidence	Our "MyPaTH" performance management system has been fully operational over the last year. Its use has enabled a more transparent and open operational exchange between Management & Staff and underpinned the progression of our objective delivery and training goals. An annual review is currently underway to identify key improvements and further refinement of its use going forward. Project assurance and governance continues to play a key role in the delivery of anticipated outcomes and objectives. This oversight will be

	essential as the organisation continues to evolve and adapt to the forthcoming changes to service models and delivery methods required to meet our budget challenges.
Improvement plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Review the operation of the MyPaTH system and implement functionality & usage enhancements 2) Continued application of the LVJB Project Management Framework to monitor and evaluate positive project outcomes

Principle 5	Develop capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
Evidence	LVJB continues to develop the multi-skilling of staff and flexibility of its work resource to meet peak activity periods and deal with major events. This is facilitated by our performance management system and identification of internal and external training requirements. Members of our corporate team have developed their leadership, communication and influencing skills by undergoing coaching and mentoring sessions. We have an established Training Framework Group who assess, monitor and deliver organisational and individual coaching and development requirements within the organisation.
Improvement plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Continue to assess and provide tailored training and personal development opportunities to staff. Fully utilise the Flexible Workforce Development Fund to support this.

Principle 6	Manage risk and performance through robust internal control and strong financial management
Evidence	Risk is a standing item on the bi-monthly LVJB Governance Committee agenda and any identified significant risks are escalated for review at CLT. Corporate risks are discussed at the Governance Strategy Group (GSG) and where required, presented to the Joint Board. LVJB's internal Governance team are responsible for ensuring all information compliance and statutory obligations are met.
Improvement plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Continue to promote risk management as an integral part of all organisational activities which must be considered in all aspects of the decision making process 2) Monitor service delivery effectively and continue to undertake post implementation reviews

Principle 7	Implement good practice in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability
Evidence	LVJB produce and publish a suite of reports on its external website. These include statements on annual corporate & service plans, financial regulations, records management, standing orders, annual corporate assurance statements, etc. The organisation is subject to annual internal and external audit review with the identification of any control weaknesses and provision of assurance recommendations. We actively rotate our senior staff who engage with the auditors to ensure the importance of the audit process and knowledge and capabilities of those staff are developed and fully understood. Ongoing specific KPI and overall performance statistics and financial statements are presented to the Joint Board. A suite of audit and QA reports (see Section 4) is presented at Governance Committee meetings, delivering assurance over key service provision.
Improvement plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Continue to create and communicate information for stakeholders in a readily understood style which is appropriate to the intended audience and is easy to access and interrogate 2) Ensure that management recommendations for corrective action made by internal/external audit are acted upon

4. The role of Quality Assurance

We continue to maintain and promote the role of quality assurance within the organisation. Emphasis is placed on providing stakeholder confidence that the level of service provided meets expectation and offers additional protection against inaccuracies. The Governance Committee has overall scrutiny of all reported actions and recommendations. The current suite of QA activity checks is shown below.

Council Tax

- Weekly interface audit reports are produced, checked and emailed weekly to the four constituent councils.
- Point of sale reports are checked to confirm the accuracy of sales date which is applied as the effective and liability date for any change in banding.
- Senior staff carry out a 10% check of all self-verified transactions. QA will carry out a further assurance check on 10% of all self-verified and verified transactions. Any anomalies or transactions incorrectly processed are reported and rectified.

Valuation Roll

- Weekly interface audit reports are produced, checked and emailed weekly to the four constituent councils.
- Senior staff carry out 100% checks on any business growth accelerator entries and a 10% check on self-verified transactions. QA carry out follow up checks on these to provide second line assurance. Any anomalies or transactions incorrectly processed are reported and rectified.
- Valuation Roll names updates processed by Technical & Support staff receive a 10% check by QA.

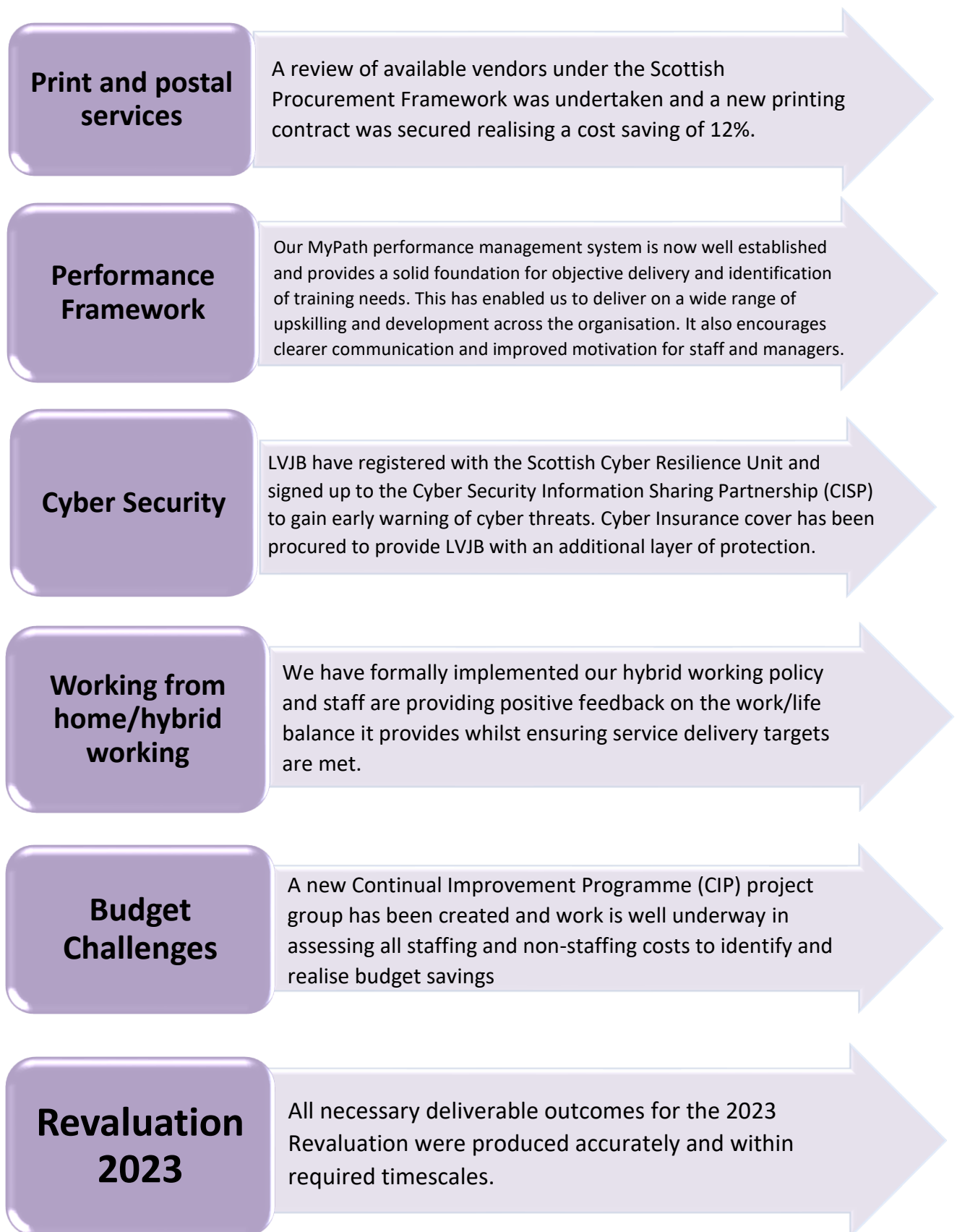
ER support processing

- Examine system reports to ensure that electors are correctly processed, absent voting arrangements are applied correctly and ensure the accuracy of the register. A QA check takes place on 10% of the transactions in reports produced for electoral activities.

Miscellaneous

- Produce monthly KPI stats for review and follow up by CLT & the Technical Management Team.
- QA carry out a 10% check on a sample of building warrants and planning permissions each quarter. A full end to end check is carried out. Filtered cases on sample Planning Permissions are checked to ensure that they are removed in accordance with procedure.
- Validate the quarterly return of RVAPP stats provided to Scottish Government.
- Assurance carried out on all domestic and commercial sales data received from the RoS where there is a matched entry on the Valuation Roll or Council Tax List.

5. What have LVJB delivered?



6. Corporate and Service Plan

Our Corporate and Service plan sets out the key activities and outcomes that we will deliver within the financial year and the way in which we will measure our performance.

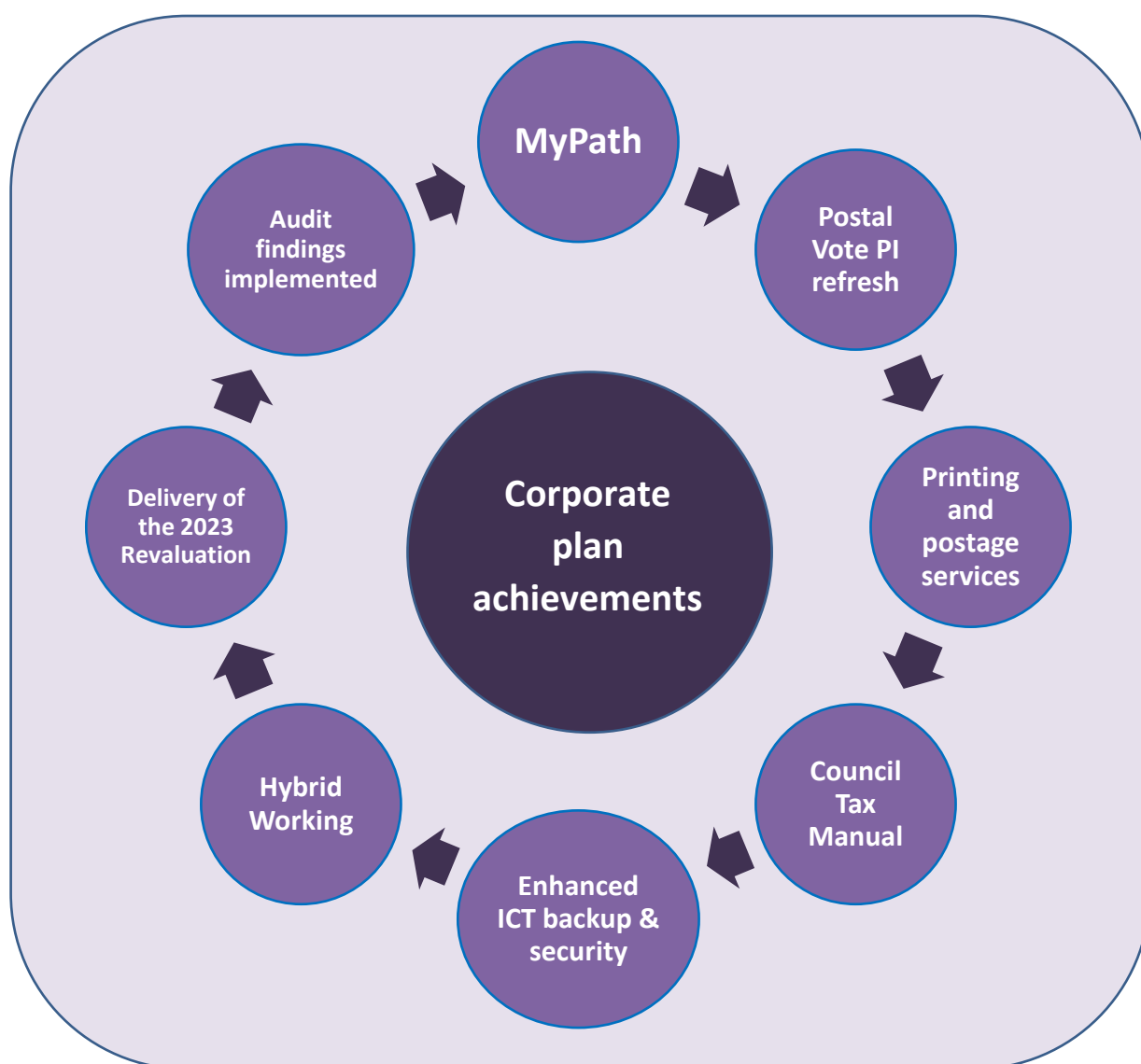
Our key Corporate and Service priorities for 2022/23 were;



7. Corporate and Service plan – achievements

We have been working hard to improve the transparency and understanding of the services we deliver to stakeholders. A key target in this, which was identified during our 2021/22 internal audit of our Council Tax Valuation procedures, was the creation of easily absorbed information that explained in general terms how this process works. To deliver this we have created, and published on our website, a manual to explain how properties are valued and added to the Council Tax list. The document also provides information on how an individual can challenge the band on their property and how the appeal process works. The manual is referenced in our external points of contact with members of the public and is helping to reduce the volume of incoming emails and calls to our technical staff.

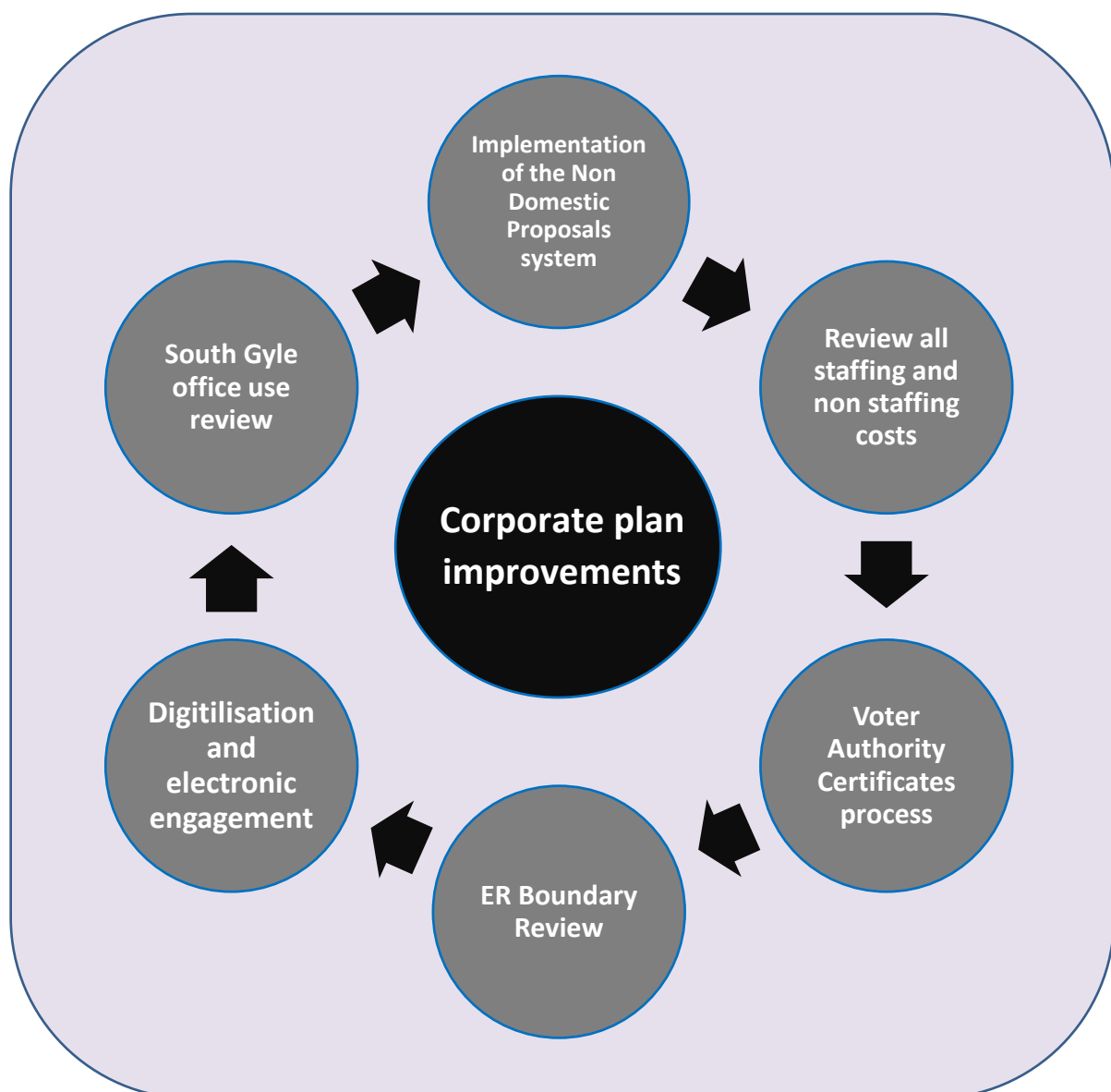
Our MyPath performance management software platform has been successfully utilised over the last year. This underpins our aspiration of providing a continuous environment of improved communication, training & support that identifies performance expectation objectives in alignment with the organisations strategic goals and service delivery requirements.



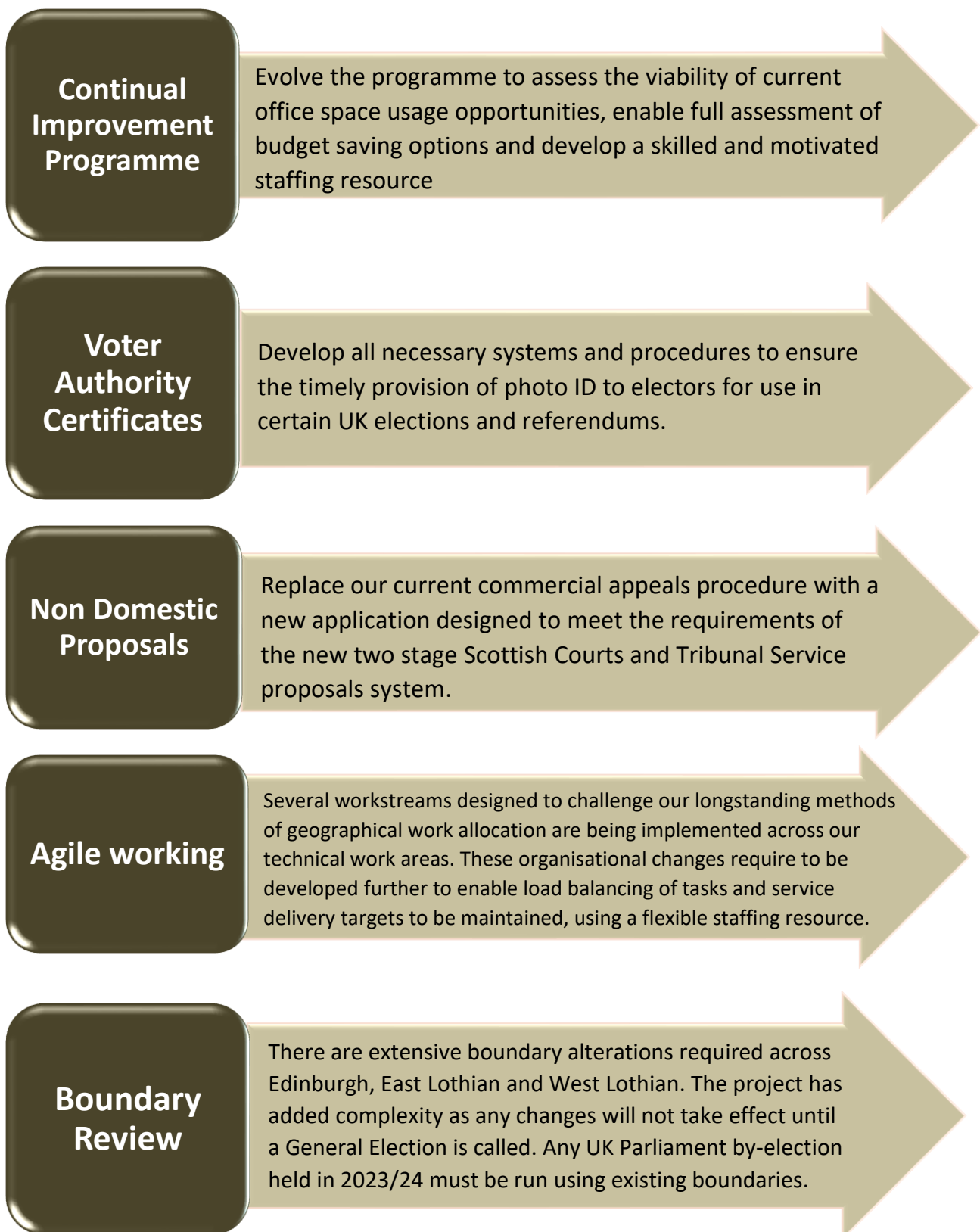
8. Corporate and Service plan – work in progress

LVJB recognises the importance of seeking new ways in which to deliver improvements in organisational efficiency and performance. We acknowledge that the organisation must continue to challenge traditional ways of working and regularly reflect on how well we function both internally and when engaging with stakeholders.

The ongoing activities below are targeted at supporting this process of improvement and enabling the business to adapt to forthcoming legislative change.



9. Future work in 2023





Lothian Valuation Joint Board Internal Audit Report

Non-Domestic Rate Appeals

28 March 2023

OO2203

Overall Assessment	Substantial Assurance
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Contents

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This Internal Audit review is conducted for the Lothian Valuation Joint Board by the City of Edinburgh Council Internal Audit Function under the auspices of the 2022/23 internal audit plan. The review is designed to help the Lothian Valuation Joint Board assess and refine its internal control environment. It is not designed or intended to be suitable for any other purpose and should not be relied upon for any other purpose. The City of Edinburgh Council accepts no responsibility for any such reliance and disclaims all liability in relation thereto.

The internal audit work and reporting has been performed in line with the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and as a result is not designed or intended to comply with any other auditing standards.

Although there are specific recommendations included in this report to strengthen internal control, it is management's responsibility to design, implement and maintain an effective control framework, and for the prevention and detection of irregularities and fraud. This is an essential part of the efficient management of the Lothian Valuation Joint Board. Communication of the issues and weaknesses arising from this audit does not absolve management of this responsibility. High and Critical risk findings will be raised with senior management as appropriate.

Executive Summary

Overall
Assessment

Substantial
Assurance

Overall opinion and summary of findings

The design of the controls in place to support the processing of non-domestic rate appeals, are generally satisfactory. This provides assurance that processes are in place to effectively manage risks and ensure that LVJB's objectives are met.





We noted the following areas for improvement:

- where appeals are received via email or post, no reconciliation is performed to ensure that all have been added to the Civica and CVS Appeals systems for processing.
- there are no documented technical guidance notes/procedures in place detailing how to process NDR appeals
- established key performance indicators relate to appeal outcomes only and are not aligned to statutory milestones along the appeals process. There is also a lack of scrutiny of these at relevant governance forums.

Areas of good practice

- work allocation rules are in place to assign appeal cases to teams by location
- LVJB has access to a Legal Library and subscriptions to relevant publications to remain up to date on legal precedents set through NDR appeal decisions
- oversight and approval controls are in place to ensure Principal Surveyors provide guidance and support to expert witnesses ahead of committee and ensure they are adequately prepared.
- there is a structured approach to preparation for the 2023 Revaluation, including an internal working group led by the Assistant Assessor
- regular training sessions are held to discuss the outcomes of significant appeal decisions and any lessons learned
- countdown sheets aligned to statutory timeframes are used as a management tool to track the progress of appeals.

Audit Assessment

Audit Area	Control Design	Control Operation	Findings	Priority Rating
1. Receipt and allocation of appeals		N/A*	Finding 1 – Reconciliation of received appeals	Low Priority
2. Processing of appeals		N/A*	Finding 2 – NDR appeals procedures	Medium Priority
			Finding 3 – Development and scrutiny of KPIs at governance forums	Low Priority
3. Preparation for committee		N/A*	No issues noted	N/A
4. Readiness for 2023 Revaluation		N/A*	No issues noted	N/A

* N/A Design-only audit - control operation not tested

[See Appendix 1 for Control Assessment and Assurance Definitions](#)

Background and scope

The rates payable on non-domestic and business properties are determined using the rateable value of that property and multiplying by a set poundage. Certain reliefs can then be applied for eligible properties that reduce the amount payable. The rateable value is determined based on an assessment of the annual rent the property would achieve if it were let on the open market at a fixed date. Lothian Valuation Joint Board (LVJB) are responsible for assessing the rateable value on an approximate five-year cycle determined by legislation. The last revaluation was as of 1 April 2017 and the next is due on 1 April 2023, following which the Revaluation cycle will move to three-yearly.

Following a revaluation, a new Valuation Roll is produced which contains revised rateable values for all non-domestic properties in the Lothian area. These values will remain unchanged until the next revaluation, unless the property is altered, or other changes take place. New properties are added to the Roll as they come into existence or are occupied and entries are deleted when, for example, properties are demolished.

Rate payers are notified of changes to rateable value, and thus to the amount of business rates payable, via issue of a Valuation Notice. To appeal against the assigned rateable value of a property, rate payers can submit an appeal to the assessor. This can be done either online, in writing or via email. If the appeal is valid and unresolved, it is heard by an independent Valuation Appeal Committee. The deadline for submitting a proposal is 6 months following receipt of the Valuation Notice or 6 months from acquiring an interest in the property for new owners, tenants, or occupiers.

From 1st April 2023 there are legislative changes to the way appeals are processed. [The Non-Domestic Rates \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#) creates a two-stage appeal system whereby owners, tenants or occupiers must lodge a proposal under section 3ZA of the [Local Government \(Scotland\) Act 1975](#) with the assessor if they disagree with the valuation of their property. Under the new system, owners, tenants, or occupiers will have to lodge a proposal with the assessor as a precursor to lodging an appeal with the Scottish Tribunals Service. The two-stage appeals system is intended to improve

information-sharing between parties early in the process without requiring the involvement of Scottish Tribunals. [Draft procedures](#) supporting this process were laid before Scottish Parliament in December 2022.

Scope

The objective of this review was to assess the adequacy of design of the current key controls established to support the processing of non-domestic business rate appeals. We also assessed the adequacy and completeness of preparations made by LVJB in advance of the upcoming changes to legislation ahead of the 2023 Revaluation.

The review also confirmed implementation of 7 of the 8 actions raised in the following previously completed internal audit review:

- Council Tax Valuation Process Review – January 2022.

Risks

This review will help to provide assurance over the following risk on the LVJB risk register:

- failure to identify risks within the Barclay Roadmap process.

Limitations of Scope

This audit only considered the design of the controls in place for the current non-domestic appeals process. Control effectiveness was not assessed.

We also did not consider the design or operating effectiveness of controls supporting how rateable values are assessed.

Reporting Date

Testing was undertaken between 7 December 2022 and 7 March 2023.

Our audit work concluded on 7 March 2023 and our findings and opinion are based on the conclusion of our work as at that date.

Findings and Management Action Plan

Finding 1 – Reconciliation of received appeals

**Finding
Rating**

Low Priority

The majority of NDR appeals are submitted via the Scottish Assessors Association (SAA) portal. When submitted through the portal appeals are automatically uploaded to Civica and CVS and a case reference generated.

However, our review identified that, for appeals received via email or letter (approximately 15% of total appeals received), there are no controls in place to ensure that all of these are captured and added to the Civica and CVS systems for processing.

Risks

- some appeals received via letter and email may be overlooked and not added to Civica and CVS for processing
- missed appeals result in complaints

Recommendations and Management Action Plan: Reconciliation of received appeals

Ref.	Recommendation	Agreed Management Action	Action Owner	Contributors	Timeframe
1.1	A reconciliation process should be established to confirm that all appeals sent by email and letter have been identified and added to relevant systems for processing.	We will tolerate this risk.	Michael Wilkie, Interim Assessor.	Rory Mackenzie, Interim Assistant Assessor Bernie Callaghan, Head of Governance.	N/A

Finding 2 – NDR appeals procedures

**Finding
Rating**

**Medium
Priority**

Our review notes that the processing of NDR appeals is a complex process that is only allocated to experienced team members to perform. However, it was identified that there are limited procedure notes in place detailing how each appeal should be processed on the Civica and CVS systems.

Risks

- key person dependency – knowledge about processes may be lost if key posts were to become vacant.

Recommendations and Management Action Plan: NDR appeals procedures and training

Ref.	Recommendation	Agreed Management Action	Action Owner	Contributors	Timeframe
2.1	Procedures should be documented that provide a technical guide for processing appeals on Civica and the CVS Appeals systems.	We are currently developing a new Non-Domestic Proposals system. As part of this development, we will create a comprehensive guide for processing appeals in this new application.	Michael Wilkie, Interim Assessor.	Rory Mackenzie, Interim Assistant Assessor Bernie Callaghan, Head of Governance.	29/09/2023

Finding 3 – Development and scrutiny of KPIs at governance forums

Finding
Rating

Low Priority

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are in place to report on the number of appeals settled and withdrawn at individual and team level, however we found that these are not being reported to governance forums for review and scrutiny.

In addition, no KPIs have been established to monitor and report on performance throughout the appeal journey and ensure statutory timescales, such as the 105 day minimum citation period, are being consistently met.

Risks

- performance issues are not identified and rectified in a timely manner
- appeals are not processed in line with statutory timescales.

Recommendations and Management Action Plan: Development and scrutiny of KPIs at governance forums

Ref.	Recommendation	Agreed Management Action	Action Owner	Contributors	Timeframe
3.1	Review of KPIs should be included as a standing item at relevant governance forums, i.e. Corporate Leadership Team and the Technical Management Group. At each meeting KPI performance should be reviewed and action taken where appropriate.	Key performance indicators shall be introduced as a standing item at future Technical Management Group meetings.	Michael Wilkie, Interim Assessor.	Rory Mackenzie, Interim Assistant Assessor Bernie Callaghan, Head of Governance.	28/07/2023
3.2	Key performance indicators should be developed to support monitoring and reporting of performance in line with statutory timescale requirements. Such KPIs should be included in the reporting to governance forums at 3.1	Key performance indicators on the proposal process will be created for review at Technical Management Group meetings.			28/07/2023





Appendix 1 – Progress with findings raised in the Council Tax Valuation Process Review completed in January 2022

The status of the recommendations raised in the Council Tax Valuation Process Review as at 7 March 2023 is set out below.

In October 2022, the Council introduced a risk based approach to follow-up of previously raised audit actions. Low rated actions are now closed following a self-attestation from management that actions are complete. A sample of medium rated actions are closed via self-attestation, while the remaining medium and all high rated actions are reviewed and verified by Internal Audit.

	Finding	Rating	Recommendation	Current status	Validation review	Further actions to be undertaken and revised implementation date
1	Performance and Quality Assurance	Medium	Performance Monitoring and Oversight	Implemented	Self-attested	Close
2			Valuation Requests Notification and Reconciliation	Implemented	IA Validated	Close
3			Performance Reporting	Implemented	IA Validated	Close
4	Procedures, Employee Performance and Training	Medium	Council Tax Valuation Policies and Procedures	Partially Implemented	IA Validated	Review of council tax policies and procedures to be completed and communicated with teams. Revised implementation date: 30 June 2023
5			Employee Performance Monitoring and Training	Implemented	Self-attested	Close
6			Review of Complaints	Implemented	Self-attested	Close
7	Technology Controls	Low	User Access Controls Checks	Implemented	Self-attested	Close
8			Identification and Mitigation of Cyber-Security Risks	Implemented	Self-attested	Close

Appendix 2 – Control Assessment and Assurance Definitions

Control Assessment Rating		Control Design Adequacy	Control Operation Effectiveness
Well managed		Well-structured design efficiently achieves fit-for purpose control objectives	Controls consistently applied and operating at optimum level of effectiveness.
Generally Satisfactory		Sound design achieves control objectives	Controls consistently applied
Some Improvement Opportunity		Design is generally sound, with some opportunity to introduce control improvements	Conformance generally sound, with some opportunity to enhance level of conformance
Major Improvement Opportunity		Design is not optimum and may put control objectives at risk	Non-conformance may put control objectives at risk
Control Not Tested	N/A	Not applicable for control design assessments	Control not tested, either due to ineffective design or due to design only audit

Overall Assurance Ratings	
Substantial Assurance	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Reasonable Assurance	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Limited Assurance	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
No Assurance	Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Finding Priority Ratings	
Advisory	A finding that does not have a risk impact but has been raised to highlight areas of inefficiencies or good practice.
Low Priority	An issue that results in a small impact to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Medium Priority	An issue that results in a moderate impact to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
High Priority	An issue that results in a severe impact to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Critical Priority	An issue that results in a critical impact to the achievement of objectives in the area audited. The issue needs to be resolved as a matter of urgency.