

ASSESSOR'S PROGRESS REPORT TO THE LOTHIAN VALUATION JOINT BOARD

27th October 2021

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide members with an overview of current service delivery, priorities, risks and future direction.
- 1.2 It should be noted that the majority of staff remain working at home during current Covid restrictions. However, since 9th August a limited number of staff have attended the office to carry out their normal duties. Attendance has been on a rota basis to allow all members of staff the opportunity to work from South Gyle should they wish to do so and also take account of ongoing risks in relation to Covid-19. The number of staff taking advantage of this opportunity is encouraging. It is my intention to introduce the formal working from home policy during the early part of 2022.

2.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION – MAINTENANCE

- 2.1 Since the last progress report to the Board in September 2021 all maintenance tasks supporting the registration process have continued.
- 2.2 Key processing volumes reflecting the period 28th April to 1st October inclusive are shown below.

	Edinburgh	Midlothian	West Lothian	East Lothian	Totals
Additions	27,245	2,799	5,117	3,475	38,636
Deletions	25,431	2,903	5,186	3,358	36,878
Amendments	598	85	171	85	939

3.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION – HOUSEHOLD CANVASS 2021

3.1 The annual household canvass continues. Phone canvass started on the 26th August and door to door canvass started on the 13th September. Door to door canvass will adhere to strict procedures to mitigate as far as possible any risk from Covid-19. The current canvass return rates for each ward within each constituent council is shown below.

City of Edinburgh Council

<u>WARD</u>	<u>Overall Percentage Return</u>
1. Almond	85.4
2. Pentland Hills	82.9
3. Drum Brae/ Gyle	88.7
4. Forth	77.0
5. Inverleith	82.9
6. Corstorphine/ Murrayfield	90.9
7. Sighthill/ Gorgie	76.1
8. Colinton/ Fairmilehead	87.6
9. Fountainbridge/ Craiglockhart	79.2
10. Morningside	80.9
11. City Centre	63.0
12. Leith Walk	74.3
13. Leith	75.6
14. Craigmillar/ Duddingston	77.9
15. Southside/ Newington	75.4
16. Liberton/ Gilmerton	82.2
17. Portobello/ Craigmillar	79.0

East Lothian Council

1. Musselburgh	85.2
2. Preston, Seton and Gosford	88.1
3. Tranent, Wallyford and Macmerry	86.1
4. North Berwick Coastal	86.2
5. Haddington and Lammermuir	87.3
6. Dunbar and East Linton	85.4

Midlothian Council

1. Penicuik	89.5
2. Bonnyrigg	90.6
3. Dalkeith	85.4
4. Midlothian West	88.3
5. Midlothian East	87.8
6. Midlothian South	87.3

West Lothian Council

1. Linlithgow	91.5
2. Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh	87.5
3. Livingston North	87.3
4. Livingston South	86.4
5. East Livingston and East Calder	86.8
6. Fauldhouse and the Breich Valley	85.0
7. Whitburn and Blackburn	82.7
8. Bathgate	86.1
9. Armadale and Blackridge	86.3

- 3.2 The changes in electors between the end of the 2020 Canvass and as of 19th October are shown below.

Addition and Deletion Figures

Additions from Publication of 2020 Register	82,119
Deletions from Publication of 2020 Register	60,029
Additions Since Start of Canvass	20,365
Deletions Since Start of Canvass	27,189

Electorate

Local Government Electors (inc. attainers)	713,014
Parliamentary Electors (inc. attainers)	648,569
Postal Voters	168,761
Registered Overseas Electors	1,954
Registered Service Personnel	163
Registered Crown Servants	9
Registered Declarants of Local Connection	10

4.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION – LEGISLATION

- 4.1 Currently a new Elections Bill is proceeding through parliament at Westminster. It now appears to be at the committee stage in the House of Commons. There is a great deal of content within the Bill and should anyone wish to read it a link is shown below.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-02/0138/210138.pdf>

There have been a considerable number of amendments proposed to the existing bill. Whether any of these proposed amendments will find their way into the final legislation is unknown. However, details of proposed amendments as of 18th October 2021 can be found using the link below.

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-02/0138/amend/elections_rm_pbc_1018.pdf

4.2 I will continue to provide further updates to the Board at subsequent meetings as the process moves forward.

5.0 ELECTORAL LEGISLATION – ELECTIONS

5.1 There are currently no by-elections scheduled at the current time.

6.0 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION ENGAGEMENT

6.1 I have continued to engage with unregistered electors in a number of ways. A detailed note of these engagement activities is contained within my reports of 14th June 2021 and 6th September 2021.

6.2 We will be contacting all non-registered school pupils in the coming weeks/months and issuing emails to all university students to inform them of their voter reg options/encourage registration.

6.3 We also have an article in the East Lothian Living newsletter which will be published at the end of this month as well as an ad in the Royal Highland Fusiliers Journal.

7.0 VALUATION ROLL – MAINTENANCE

7.1 For the period 1st April 2021 to 18th October 2021, 1,438 changes have been made to the valuation roll with respect to running roll activities. These changes comprised 306 amendments to existing entries, 394 deletions and 738 inserts with an additional c.1,750 name changes. This compares to 1,048 changes in the comparative period in 2020 and 1,650 in 2019.

	Edinburgh	Midlothian	W. Lothian	E. Lothian	Total
Inserts	634	32	43	29	738
Deletions	302	33	28	31	394
Amendments	203	26	40	37	306

7.2 This represents about 87% of pre-Covid levels looking at the same period in 2019/20. This figure is a further increase on that reported at the previous three board meetings. This further increase

is good to see and the positive upturn provides additional reassurance that we are slowly heading towards a more normal business position.

8.0 VALUATION ROLL – APPEALS

- 8.1 There are currently c. 200 outstanding 2017 Revaluation appeals, excluding appeals that have been referred to the Lands Tribunal. All of these have been cited for hearing before the end of the calendar year.
- 8.2 There are in total 16,500 outstanding running roll appeals of which 9,704 relate directly to Covid. The vast majority of the remainder, though not directly giving Covid as the ground of appeal, will also be Covid related. I reported at the last board meeting that it was anticipated that the Scottish Government were likely to legislate to remove Covid as a valid ground of appeal. To date the Scottish Government have put in place legislation that deals with Covid-19 appeals post 1st April 2021. I still await any further legislative change that would address the period prior to 1st April 2021. The SG policy note does clearly suggest that legislation will be forthcoming however until that actually transpires Covid appeals remain a risk in terms of a potential sizeable additional workload.
- 8.3 The resumption of physical Valuation Appeal Committee hearings has now begun. There have been a number of appeals that had proceeded to the committee stage and it is anticipated that more will proceed between now and the end of the year.

9.0 COUNCIL TAX – MAINTENANCE

- 9.1 Over the period 1st April 2021 to 17th October 2021, 2,962 new houses have been added to the list, this compares to 3,234 for the same period in 2019/20.

New Housing	Edinburgh	Midlothian	West Lothian	East Lothian	Total
01/04/21 to 17/10/21	1,508	463	401	590	2,962
01/04/20 to 17/10/20	1,077	171	299	247	1,788
01/04/19 to 17/10/19	1,645	332	668	589	3,234

The breakdown in bands for new housing is shown below for the period 01/04/21 to 21/10/21.

Band	Edinburgh	Midlothian	West Lothian	East Lothian	Total
A	81	1	1	2	85
B	145	20	16	23	204
C	229	69	14	48	360
D	331	35	63	59	488
E	301	115	66	133	615
F	145	149	176	143	613
G	241	72	62	167	542
H	35	2	3	15	55
Total	1,508	463	401	590	2962

- 9.2 The figures for 21/22 are running at about 92% of those of 19/20. It's good to see that the new housing volume is nearing pre Covid levels.
- 9.3 There are currently c.250 outstanding Council Tax appeals. Although, due to statutory disposal dates Revaluation 2017 appeals are taking precedence, I continue to engage with appellants to attempt to resolve their appeals. It is anticipated that a number of hearings at the Local Valuation Appeal Committee will be scheduled for early 2022 to begin to deal with the current backlog.

10.0 Governance Strategy Group

- 10.1 The most recent meeting of the Governance Strategy Group was held on the 13th October 2021. In attendance were myself, LVJB Head of Governance, Councillors Key, Aldridge, Russell, Goodfellow and Findlay. Topics discussed Transformation Moving Forward, Civil Penalties / Assessor's Information Notices and a new Lone Working Policy.
- 10.2 The discussion around Transformation I felt was of great benefit and provided the opportunity to discuss a number of key challenges that the organisation faces. The matter of transformation /decreasing financial landscape has been raised by the external auditor and is a matter that I am re-focussing on intently now that we are entering a more stable period. I am going to review the Nov 19 Business Strategy 2020/21-2022/23, to reflect on the impact of the pandemic, consider targeted as opposed to wholesale VERA options, with further evaluation on the service & procedural impact of the introduction of the new household canvass model, mobile survey and VST.

11.0 Period 6 Financial Statement

- 11.1 I note the content of the Treasurer's Period 6 Financial Statement.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 13.1 The Board is asked to note the content of this report.

Gary Elliott
ASSESSOR & ERO