

## Assessor's Report

This has been a very busy year for the Board. From a General Election during May 2005 through to starting the disposal of Revaluation appeals at the end of the year, my staff have shown a huge commitment to the many tasks put before them. In addition, there have been significant changes to the way we undertake some of our key processes. The vehicle for this change has been the integration of document imaging and workflow technologies into our existing IT network. Again, staff have risen to the challenge and

tackled head-on the necessary changes to the way they work. Performance has been one of the key outcomes which I have concentrated on during 2005 and I am delighted to report that across a spectrum of activities, performance has been improved and efficiencies created. Of course, this is just the start and exciting times lie ahead. Throughout the coming year we shall continue to strive to make improvements and deliver a quality service to Edinburgh and the Lothians.

## Information Technology

2005 has been a year of major successes in respect of the use and application of IT within the organisation. The strategy to introduce imaging and workflow technologies, which commenced with the tendering process in late 2003, reached a milestone target in September of 2005.

To assist with Electoral Registration canvass processing, all returned canvass forms were scanned using imaging technology then, through a system of workflow process maps and system integration techniques, staff were able to view images and update the electoral register without handling the original returned form. We immediately saw benefits of this approach. The reduced staffing level established following our Best Value review were more than able to deal with the workload. In addition the processing was fully completed in a shorter time and with a reduced need for overtime working. The ability to manage workloads and monitor

progress is greatly enhanced with this technology and the ability to retrieve forms electronically is vastly superior to filing and storing paper documents.

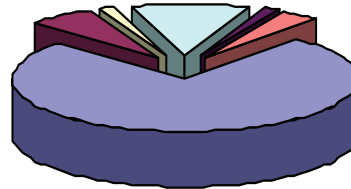


Towards the end of 2005 we moved towards reaching our next milestone of applying imaging and workflow to aspects of the Valuation Roll. This shall involve the removal of our last paper-based processes and full-scale integration of bespoke in-house applications with the new technology. This shall provide staff with an almost seamless transition through the different elements of the

## Budget

Lothian Valuation Joint Board provides services to its four constituent councils. These are City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, West Lothian and Midlothian Councils, and it is from these that the Board receives its funding each year. The budget setting process commences in September of each year, progresses to the Assessor who creates a detailed service and corporate plan linked to budget requirement, and culminates with formal approval of the

proposed budget by the Board members. The approved budget for 2005/6, after allowing for income, was £5.795 million. This is broken down into a number of service account headings and their proportions are displayed in the chart below. While the final accounts for 2005/6 remain to be audited, and approved by the Board, early indications are that expenditure was within the approved budget level.



- Employee Costs
- Premises Costs
- Transport Costs
- Supplies and Services
- Third Party Payments
- Support Services

## 25 Year Presentations

It is appropriate that recognition is given to members of staff who have over many years made major contributions to the work of the Board. Each year therefore those staff who have reached 25 years service are honoured with a presentation and a gift of Edinburgh crystal. This year sincere thanks go to Graeme Strachan, Brian Brown, Alex Wilson, Stewart Graham and John Renton. Well done!



Back row : Brian Brown,  
John Renton and Alex Wilson  
Front row : Stewart Graham and  
Graeme Strachan

## SAA Web Portal

Lothian Valuation Joint Board continues to play an active part in the further development of the Scottish Assessors Association Portal web site. On this site the public can access information on any domestic and commercial property in Scotland which currently appears on a Council Tax List or Valuation Roll. The web site has recently been enhanced so that on-line appeals can be made in respect of the Valuation Roll and soon this shall apply to the Council Tax List. This web site is proving very popular. Have a look at [www.saa.gov.uk](http://www.saa.gov.uk)



## Valuation Roll

There was considerable activity in the Valuation Roll during 2005/6, with some 3628 amendments being made during the year. This is the highest level in four years. A key performance indicator is the time taken to make these changes to the Valuation Roll as set against the effective date of change. As can be seen below, there has been a marked improvement in this area compared to the 2004/5 outcome.

YEAR	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR		
	< 3 MONTHS	3 - 6 MONTHS	> 6 MONTHS
2004/5	43%	23%	34%
2005/6	64%	19.5%	16.5%

Minimising the time delay helps not only the process of collecting rates but also assists businesses in avoiding lengthy back payment periods. In addition to this

improved performance, we have increased the frequency of passing this information to the constituent Councils. We had, for many years, been working to a monthly timetable, this changed to a fortnightly updating, and has recently changed to a weekly passing of information. This is a substantial enhancement in service delivery.

On 1 April 2005, the Revaluation Roll came into force with all 28,690 listed properties showing their newly assessed rateable values. Inherent within the rating process is the right to appeal, and by the closing date in September 2005 we had received 8,578 appeals. Disposal of these appeals is driven by a series of Valuation Appeal Committee timetables and at the end of March 2006, the Board's staff had dealt with 1,239 appeals. Throughout 2006/7 we aim to clear a further 4,000.

## Council Tax

House building continues to move at a pace across the Lothians and this is reflected in the Council Tax List. During 2005/6, 4,288 houses were added to the List and the following table provides information of the performance associated with this activity.

It can be seen that in all three time categories, there has been a real improvement in performance. Our target for next year is to have 87% of all new houses inserted on the List within 3 months.

YEAR	NUMBER OF AMENDMENTS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR		
		< 3 MONTHS	3 TO 6 MONTHS	> 6 MONTHS
2004/5	4408	73%	18%	9%
2005/6	4288	81%	12.5%	6.5%

Two other key activities are carried out in relation to Council Tax. Firstly, the banding of a property requires to be reviewed at the point it is sold, if there have been any physical alterations that would

## Absence

The Board maintains a policy for monitoring and reviewing sickness absence levels within the organisation. The table below shows the improvement we have made in reducing absence, and now compares favourably with national and Local Government levels. This has been achieved by revisiting the policy and its operation and, in particular, focusing on the day to day contact between line manager and member of staff, improving communication and providing support.

YEAR	DAYS LOST TO ABSENCE	DAYS LOST PER EMPLOYEE	DAYS LOST AS % OF TOTAL AVAILABLE
2003	1832	14.31	6.3%
2004	1575	12.30	5.6%
2005	1102	9.38	4.26%

affect the value. During 2005/6, the staff working on Council Tax investigated 24,135 house sales, matched these as appropriate to houses which had been altered, and as a result amended 329 bandings.



Secondly, all alterations to houses that require a building warrant are reported to the Board and on completion of any changes, the house information we hold is updated. In 2005, we received information on 9,629 changes to domestic property and updated our records for 6,966.

## Electoral Registration

Year on year, Electoral Registration represents a bigger workload for the Board. During 2005/6, an average of 2500 to 3000 rolling registration forms were processed each month by staff and, as a result of changes to the rules surrounding postal vote applications, the number requiring processing rose from 28,000 to 56,000.

Particular tasks involving a close working relationship with Returning Officers are required of the Electoral Registration Officer and staff during election times. At Elections, we are required to prepare registers for polling stations, update and prepare absent voter lists and create, and post, polling cards to the electorate. During 2005, there was a General Election,



one Parliamentary by-election and two local council by-elections.

Each year from September to December we are required to carry out a postal canvass in order to create the Electoral Register for the following year. Last year we issued 594,298 forms and achieved a return rate of 80%. All forms were successfully processed within a very tight timescale and the Register was printed and put on display on 1 December as required by law.

For a number of years we have been using an Information Stand to promote Electoral Registration to the electorate of the Lothians. This has proven to be

so successful that during 2005 we invested in a new stand which presents the Board in a modern and eye catching style.



Our locations for the stand range from major retail outlets and shopping centres to specific venues such as Disability and Equality Forums and Student Unions. If you have a suggestion for a venue, where you think our stand would be useful, please get in touch.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like to know more about the information contained in this report, the activities of Lothian Valuation Joint Board, or have a specific enquiry please contact us by writing to:-

**The Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer**

**Lothian Valuation Joint Board, Chesser House, 500 Gorgie Road, Edinburgh, EH11 3YJ**

or call us on (0131) 469 5986 or go to our website [www.lothian-vjb.gov.uk](http://www.lothian-vjb.gov.uk)



