

PERFORMANCE REPORT 2012/2013

1 INTRODUCTION

This report is provided to accompany the unaudited accounts to allow members of the Board to consider performance and budgetary achievements together. Key Performance Indicators for the work of Assessors in Scotland are in place for Valuation Roll and Council Tax and are submitted annually to the Scottish Government. Internal performance standards are also set for staff to ensure the organisation meets appropriate standards in all work undertaken. Performance standards for the work of EROs are submitted to the Electoral Commission in December each year following the Annual Canvass. Performance is monitored on an ongoing basis and formally assessed in line with the Performance Review and Development policy

2 ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

The Electoral year can broadly be identified in two parts. Major elections tend to occupy the first half of the year while the annual canvass consumes the latter half. This is an unusual year in that there have been no major elections in 2013. As you are aware electoral registration has commenced a period of considerable major change. Although the transition represents a challenging phase for Electoral Registrations Officers and their staff throughout the country the over-riding aim remains constant, that of creating and maintaining a register that is as accurate and complete as practically possible while at the same time ensuring that in all decisions, the voter is put first.

2.1 2012 Annual Household Canvass

During the 2012 canvass 393,295 forms were issued at the initial stage. Prior to the second stage we altered our procedures and data matched with Council Tax payers records and opted to issue a postal reminder to matched households and carried out a door to door canvass on all unmatched households. 87,824 postal reminders were issued and 67,230 properties visited by either temporary canvassers or permanent staff.

I am delighted to say that the final return rate for the canvass was 76.97%. This increase from 75.84% the previous year was the first increased return in over 10 years. From those returned, 72% represented no change to the existing registration details and 28% of returns required changes of which 45,655 included requests from electors for postal voting application forms and 258,411 electors indicated a preference to be omitted from the edited register.

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2.1/ Although the canvass return rate was 76.97%, when secondary checks were made to Council Taxpayers Lists it confirmed that 44,526 households where no return had been received were still in occupation. In compliance with legislation these electors were carried forward from the previous register.

The full return or retention of households can therefore be presented as 88.24%, this being compared with 85.61% from 2011.

2.2 Door to Door Canvass

During 2011 canvass 73 temporary canvassers were employed, to carry out a door to door canvass of a cross section of 39,536 properties, between the dates 26 August and 19 September.

For the 2012 canvass 231 temporary canvassers were employed and carried out a door to door canvass of 50,198 non-matched properties between the dates 12 October and 11 November. As I was unable to get sufficient temporary canvassers to complete the exercise prior to 1st December register publication a further doorstep canvass was carried out during February/March to conclude the door to door exercise.

While door to door can provide improved results the costs of this approach is in the region of three times as expensive as the postal approach, however, in order for us to more closely meet the performance standard set by the Commission it has become a requirement to carry out this form of canvass.

2.3 Alternative Methods of Return

During the 2011 canvass electors throughout Lothian were first given the opportunity of returning what is termed a "same" canvass form by means other than return post. This proved to be a popular means of responding to the annual canvass.

The facility was again offered for 2012. The following returns were made using these alternative methods, telephone 36,265, internet 35,906, text 18,627. This number shows an increase from the returns made the previous year of telephone 34,642, internet 30,078, and text 14,947.

The main for using this additional facility is to provide the elector with up to date means of engaging with the registration process and the level of use in its first two years has been very encouraging.

2.4 Introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

The move towards Individual Electoral Registration has progressed with greater speed with more detailed proposals emerging and under close monitoring by the Cabinet Office.

As a result of the continued consultation process and various evaluations of the data matching, a number of alterations have been made to the original proposals.

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2.4/ It is very important to note the importance of this years canvass. Those households who do not return the 2013/14 canvass form or who do not match to a national data source shall be subject to individual canvass and be required to provide personal identifying information from September 2014.

The other major improved change associated with IER is the intention to introduce electronic means of registration. This shall provide the elector with an easily accessed mechanism for registration and other related electoral activities. The development of this system is progressing steadily with areas, such as integration with office back office systems and security, under review and development internally.

A timetable in respect of IER has now been set in legislation. A number of the key phases and key dates within that timetable are indicated below,

- Absent Vote Identifier Refresh from 1st August 2013;
- Annual canvass 2013 will commence from 1st October;
- Last register published under the current legislation 10th March 2014;
- European Election 22nd May 2014;
- Scottish Independence Referendum 18th September 2014;
- Transition to IER commences from the Scottish Independence Referendum date;
- Electoral Register published under IER 1 March 2015
- Westminster Parliamentary Election 7 May 2015
- Annual canvass under IER autumn 2015

As ERO, both individually and as part of the Scottish Assessors Association, I am in regular consultation with the Cabinet Office. The level of consultation has been considerable and allowed input from various electoral practitioner groups which in turn formed an effective mechanism for implementing changes to the original draft schemes.

The Board will continue to be provided with regular reports in respect of the progress made towards the introduction of IER and of the implications and issues that arise as a result.

2.5 Scottish Independence Referendum 18th September 2014

Preparation for the Scottish Independence Referendum is well under way. I have participated in several working group meetings with Scottish government officials with a view to ensuring that the legislation, timetabling and documentation is fit for purpose. In addition I have given evidence to the Scottish Parliament Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee.

Legislation in the form of the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill, which allows for the registration of young persons, has been progressing through the Scottish Parliament with the final reading expected to take place on 27th June 2013. It is hoped that Royal Assent will be given within approximately 4 weeks of that date.

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2.5/ The enactment of the Franchise Bill is necessary to allow me to collect information from education establishments to allow me to pre-populate the young persons registration form thus hopefully encouraging a positive response to registration from this year's canvass. I have already contacted all independent schools and local authority education departments with a view to ensuring receipt of the young persons data at the earliest opportunity.

You should be aware that an additional form to register young persons, aged 15, will be included in this year's canvass mailing.

3 VALUATION ROLL

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

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

3.1 Supporting Business Promoting Growth Consultation

In the autumn of 2012 the UK Parliament announced their decision to postpone the next revaluation until 2017. As the Scottish Government had committed to matching the English rate poundage it was inevitable that they subsequently made the decision to likewise delay the Scottish revaluation until 2017.

At the same time as the announcement to delay the revaluation was made, the Scottish government launched a consultation on non-domestic rating 'Supporting Business – Promoting Growth'. I contributed to responses made by the Scottish Assessors Association (SAA), the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) and also the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

The Scottish Government appointed independent analysts to report on the consultation responses. That independent report is expected imminently with the Scottish government response and recommendations expected to follow.

In addition to the above consultation the Scottish government were lobbied by the RICS and some private practice rating surveyors to extend the deadline for disposal of rating appeal. After due consideration of all facts Mr Swinney announced that there would be no extension to the Valuation Timetable Order.

As a result of this decision all appeals lodge against the 2015 revaluation and all subsequent appeals lodged from April 2010 through to December 2012 must be cleared by 31st December 2013.

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3.2 Alterations to the Valuation Roll

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

In general terms, stakeholders prefer the Valuation Roll to be amended as quickly as possible after a change has taken place in order to facilitate stable financial planning and improving the cash flow to the rating pool. The KPIs show actual performance against estimated performance for 2006/7 to 2012/13 and targets we aim to achieve for 2013/14.

Valuation Roll	No changes	Rateable Value 1/4	Rateable Value 31/3	0 – 3 months %		3 – 6 months %		> 6 months %	
				Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
2006/7	3314	1,042,428,524	1,050,213,188	57	74.9	28	13.9	15	11.2
2007/8	4206	1,050,213,188	1,058,508,620	65	83.26	25	11.63	10	5.11
2008/9	4258	1,058,508,620	1,056,910,140	70	80.77	20	11.53	10	7.7
2009/10	3792	1,056,910,140	1,068,384,758	80	78.1	15	11.1	5	10.8
2010/11	3,476	1,259,913,732	1,274,347,293	82	78.02	14	13.55	4	8.43
2011/12	3,114	1,274,347,293	1,277,889,313	80	71.77	15	15.35	5	12.88
2012/13	3,188	1,277,889,313	1,275,905,939	75	74.09	13	12.30	12	13.61
2013/14		1,275,905,939		75		15		10	

I am very pleased to say that the organisation has almost met the target performance figures for 2012/13. It was a very difficult year dealing with an abundance of appeals with reduced staff numbers. The economic decline has continued to generate many more taxpayers' appeals and more proceeding to appeal hearing. Such appeals are very costly and also very time intensive for staff therefore having a knock on effect on all professional work. I have no doubt that staff have again had a very difficult year trying to carry out all work required.

I have maintained the performance target for 2013/14 and hope that through hard work and sound management that target can be met.

3.3.1 Appeal Settlements

For each of the relevant years the Assessor provides figures for the total amount of adjustment to net annual value arising from appeal settlements. This figure is expressed as a percentage of the total net annual value of the Valuation Roll as at 1 April in the relevant year. This indicator allows the Scottish Government to estimate the financial implications arising from the settlement of rating appeals.

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Valuation Year	No. of Appeals Dealt With	Target Percentage	Actual Percentage
2006/7	3,938	2%	0.365%
2007/8	3,641	1%	1.491%
2008/9	1,625	1%	1.66%
2009/10	1,224	0.5%	1.06%
2010/11	1,700	1%	0.09%
2011/12	6,655	2%	0.44%
2012/13	11,757	2%	0.86%
2013/14	(5,500)	(2%)	

The target number of revaluation and running roll appeals to be disposed of during 2012/13 was 10,000. As you can see from the table, the number of appeals previously dealt with at the last revaluation amounted to a maximum of less than 4,000. The clearance of such a magnitude of appeals, 11,757, is incredible. I applaud staff for their extreme hard work and dedication over a sustained period of time. I am also delighted to see the appeals loss being lower than expected which I believe demonstrates the level of accuracy at the revaluation.

The target disposal number set for the 2013/14 year has been set at 5,500 appeals to ensure that all appeal deadlines required by law are met.

4 COUNCIL TAX

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

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

4.1 Council Tax – New Dwellings

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

The table below shows that the number of new houses added in the year 2012/13 is again down from the previous year. Although the market is still very sluggish the number of dwellings on the list continues to rise year on year.

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Valuation List	No. of CT Entries@ 1/4	New houses added
2006/7	372,242	5,515
2007/8	377,051	5,323
2008/9	381,301	4,345
2009/10	384,837	3,984
2010/11	387,636	3,768
2011/12	390,642	3,410
2012/13	393,065	3,171
2013/14	395,666	

Although the number of new dwellings entering the List has dropped my technical staff have been involved with tasks outwith their normal day to day activities. I would like to express my thanks to them for their positive attitude towards multitasking through another very busy year.

4.2 Council Tax Performance

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

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

The KPIs show actual performance for 2006/7 to 2012/13 and the performance targets for 2013/14.

Valuation List	0-3 months	3-6 months	Over 6 months
2005/6	81.2	12.4	6.4
2006/7	84.8	11.3	3.9
2007/8	93.22	5.17	1.62
2008/9	94.13	4.53	1.33
2009/10	95.36	2.46	2.18
2010/11	94.98	4.06	0.96
2011/12	96.72	2.35	0.93
2012/13	95.52	3.09	1.39
2013/14	(95)	(3)	(2)

The time taken to add new dwellings to the Council Tax List continues to maintain a high level of 95.52% within 3 months and my aim is to continue to maintain that high standard.

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4.3 Council Tax – Altered Bands 2009/10

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

Valuation List	Point of Sale Band Changes	Sales Added
2005/6	329	29,903
2006/7	189	31,998
2007/8	240	31,264
2008/9	374	16,841
2009/10	105	14,402
2010/11	163	14,537
2011/12	180	15,492
2012/13	172	15,863

The above table shows that the number of Council Tax Bands altered as a result of dwellings having been altered and subsequently sold remains at a relatively low number compared to the high of 2007/08. The low numbers since 2008/9 are almost certainly reflective of the economic situation thus the lower number of house sales taking place during the financial years.

5 MANAGEMENT, STAFFING & BEST VALUE

5.1 Policies & Procedures

I consider that the organisation has continued to review practices, policies and procedures on an ongoing basis ensuring that we operate within a Best Value framework at all times.

An exercise was carried out to review all current LVJB policies by Kirsty Ward, an HR adviser seconded from City of Edinburgh Council, in conjunction with the senior staff of the Board. The nature of the changes range from very minor to those required due to legislative requirements. A full consultation process has been undertaken with the Trade Union and agreement has been reached on the changes made.

The following is a list of the policies and related documents where changes have been made following this review.

- Absence Management Policy
- Annual Leave Broken Periods of Service and Floating Days Policy
- Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy
- Career Development-Salary Progression Scheme for Trainee Valuer- Valuer
- Disciplinary Code
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- Disciplinary Procedure
- Fair Treatment at Work Policy
- Flexible Treatment at Work Policy
- Flexible Work Options Policy Framework
- Flexible Work Options request Form
- Flexible Working Hours Scheme
- Grievance Procedure
- LVJB Equality Policy
- Managing Sickness Absence Procedure
- Outside Working Policy
- Overtime Working Agreement Guide
- Redundancy Procedure
- Staff Car Allowance Scheme
- Time off for T.U. Duties and Activities Policy
- Time off Work for T.U. Learning Reps. Policy
- Time off Work for T.U. Safety Reps. Policy
- Violence to Employees at Work Policy

The Board is requested to note that this review has been undertaken and allow the Assessor on their behalf to approve the changes made.

5.2 Staff Reviews

During 2012/13 I have carried out and concluded reviews of three areas of staffing. The reason for targeting the three particular areas arose from resignations received from staff. The Trade Union has been fully involved in discussions throughout the reviews.

5.2.1 Human Resource Manager and Human Resource Officer

As a result of the resignation of the Human Resource Manager and the subsequent resignation of the Human Resource Officer a review of a distribution of their tasks and post requirements was carried out.

Due to new technology and altered work practices many of the tasks previously carried out by HR staff has been redistributed to the secretariat. To ensure that the organisation is supported by an experienced, knowledgeable and appropriately trained HR person the decision was taken to use the services of the City of Edinburgh Council who have agreed to provide a seconded member of staff to meet out requirements.

To ensure the approved budget is met additional duties have been absorbed by the secretariat and by management together with the use of a seconded HR administrator. The posts of HR manager and officer were not therefore filled.

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5.2.2 Administration Officer

As a result of the resignation of an Administration Officer a review of the tasks carried out by administration officers was investigated together with the consideration of changes in legislation and performance requirements that had been and continue to be introduced.

The decision was made to take two administration officers out of section management and give them specialist tasks to oversee. This enabled the remaining section management to concentrate on staff management while two officers concentrated on managing canvass staffing and evolving new duties. The intention is to ensure that all staff at this grade are provided the opportunity to learn all tasks required of this grade.

Again to ensure the approved budget is met the post of administration officer was not filled.

5.2.3 Senior Technician

As a result of the resignation of a Senior Technician a review of the post requirements and tasks was carried out. Due to the reduced workload resulting from the economic decline and the associated reduced building work for new and altered houses it was considered possible to reduce the number of senior technicians from six to three.

A short report was provided to the Convener and Treasurer of the Board requesting their approval of two resultant applications from staff to leave under the approved Voluntary Early Release Application scheme.

Consultation with staff and the Trade Union has been undertaken and I now seek formal Board approval for the reduction within the structure of three senior technician posts.

5.3 Freedom of Information - Model Publication Scheme

The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 imposed several duties on Scottish public authorities. One of these requires that authorities adopt and maintain a publication scheme that has approval of the Scottish Information Commissioner.

The aim of publication schemes is to describe what information an authority makes available so that people can readily access it for themselves without having to make specific request. To achieve this, the authority must publish the information in accordance with the scheme and tell people where to find it.

To assist with this requirement the Scottish Commissioner prepared a single Model Publication Scheme 2013 which is suitable for adoption by authorities. As from the 31st May 2013 this new scheme replaced the scheme previously in force.

Previously both the Board and the Assessor for the Board were required to create separate publication schemes. The Information Commissioner has acknowledged this caused confusion especially as the information contained within both schemes was of considerable similarity.

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5.3/ As a result as from 31st May 2013 the Commissioner has agreed that one publication scheme can exist that covers both the Lothian Valuation Joint Board and the Assessor and Elector Registration Officer for the Lothian Valuation Joint Board. The scheme now provides, through a single point of access, information on both the Board and the Assessor and ERO.

This scheme is available for viewing by going to **www.lothian-vjb.gov.uk**.

6.0 CONCLUSION

I am very pleased with the performance achieved during this very difficult year especially with no salary increases available to staff. The budgetary cuts over the last few years have resulted in a much reduced workforce.

Due to resignations and retirements I fortunately have some finance available within my staffing budget. I have decided to advertise for 2 trainee electoral and property administrators to ensure that I have sufficient, well trained staff in place to deal with additional workload arising from the Scottish Independence Referendum and the introduction of individual electoral registration.

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

My thanks go particularly to the senior management team and also to the staff and to the Joint Board for the support provided.

Joan Hewton
Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

28 June 2013