

# AYRSHIRE VALUATION JOINT BOARD

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 19th May 2015 at 10.30 a.m. within Burns Monument Centre, Kilmarnock.

## **Item 1 - Sederunt.**

### **Present:**

East Ayrshire Councillor: William Menzies.

North Ayrshire Councillors: Matthew Brown (Chair), John Ferguson, Catherine McMillan and Donald Reid.

South Ayrshire Councillors: Andy Campbell, Alec Oattes and Robin Reid.

In Attendance: Helen McPhee, Assessor and ERO; John McConville, Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO; Harry McCormick, Principal Administrative and IT Development Officer; Tim Baulk (Treasurer); Tom Simpson, Corporate Accounting Manager, South Ayrshire Council; Karen Briggs (for Clerk); Kirstin Muir, Finance, East Ayrshire Council; and Diane Knight, Co-ordinator (Democratic Support), South Ayrshire Council.

### **Also in**

**Attendance:** Alan Mackenzie, Auditor, Audit Scotland.

### **Apologies:**

Councillor George Mair, East Ayrshire Council;  
Councillor John McFadzean, East Ayrshire Council;  
Councillor Jim Roberts, East Ayrshire Council;  
Councillor Jim Todd, East Ayrshire Council;  
Councillor John Easedale, North Ayrshire Council;  
Councillor Ronnie McNicol, North Ayrshire Council;  
Councillor John Hampton, South Ayrshire Council; and  
Councillor Rita Miller, South Ayrshire Council.

## **Item 2 – Declarations of Interest.**

There were no declarations of interest by Members in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

## **Item 3 - Minutes of Previous Meeting.**

The Minutes of meeting of the Joint Board held on 31st March 2015 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

With regard to Item 10 – Maximising Electoral Registration on Page 6 of the Minutes, the Assessor and ERO advised the Board that South Ayrshire's population in the Census Figures for 2011 should be 94,490 and not 112,799 as had been outlined in the report.

**Item 4 – Unaudited Annual Accounts to 31st March 2015.**

There was submitted (circulated) a report dated 14th May 2015 by the Treasurer

- (1) presenting the unaudited Annual Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2015 for the Joint Board which had been prepared and would be submitted to the Board's Auditors, Audit Scotland, within the statutory timescale of 30th June 2015, with a copy of these accounts attached as Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) informing that Notice would be given under Regulation 5 (1) of the Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 1985 to allow public inspection of these accounts and that these accounts would shortly be subject to audit;
- (3) outlining that the Audit Services/Programme Review Manager of South Ayrshire Council had provided a statement on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system of Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board for the year ended 31st March 2015, attached as Appendix 2 of the report;
- (4) seeking approval for the capitalisation of a letter opener and envelope at a cost of £10,264 part of which had been funded the by the UK Cabinet Office; and
- (5) reporting
  - (a) that the accounts had shown a surplus for the year of £164,174 compared with a budgeted surplus of £51,135 which was the planned contribution to reserves for the year and leaving an 'unallocated' surplus of £113,039;
  - (b) that the Accumulated General Fund reserves of £365,470 were held by the Board as at 31st March 2015, which included the full £164,174 surplus for the year;
  - (c) that proposals for the use of the accumulated General Fund reserves were approved by the Board at its meeting on 13th January 2015 as part of the Revised Revenue Budget 2015/16 to 2017/18 report; and
  - (d) that the Board at its meeting on 31st March 2015, had approved the carry-forward to 2015/16 of any unutilised funding in respect of IER and other specific projects and following conclusion of the audit process, the overall surplus position would be reassessed and proposals would be developed for the Board's consideration on how these could be best applied which would include additional preparatory and survey work during 2015/16 in advance of NDR 2017 Revaluation.

Clarification was sought and provided that funding from the UK Cabinet Office was part of the unallocated surplus, and there were currently no liabilities to the Board in relation to any former employees receiving added years to their Pensions.

**Decided:**

- (i) to approve
  - (A) the accounting treatment of office equipment as capital expenditure as detailed in paragraph 4.4 of the report; and
  - (B) the unaudited Annual Accounts;
- (ii) to instruct the Treasurer to provide an updated report upon completion of the Audit; and
- (iii) to note that a report would be prepared for the next meeting of the Board with proposals to utilise in 2015/16 some of the 'unallocated surplus' on specific projects, including NDR 2017 Revaluation.

**Item 5 – Valuation and Performance.**

There was submitted (circulated) a report dated May 2015 by the Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO outlining the Valuation and Performance position to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2015 in relation to the following:-

- (1) Non-Domestic Subjects
  - Appeals referred to the Lands Tribunal for Scotland;
  - Outstanding Appeals not referred to Lands Tribunal for Scotland; and
  - the Revaluation 2017;
- (2) Council Tax Appeals;
- (3) VAC Hearing Dates;
- (4) Performance in Council Tax and Non-Domestic Valuation;
- (5) Draft Performance Levels for 2015/16; and
- (6) concluding
  - (a) that performance levels were still ahead of target and close monitoring and scrutiny of all performance targets and outputs would continue;
  - (b) that whilst the desire to show continuous improvement was the Board's aim, the 2015/16 performance targets have been set in light of current and future anticipated work commitments; and
  - (c) that litigation in connection with Non-Domestic Rating Appeals was likely to result in direct legal costs to the Board and that all financial implications would be monitored by the Board's Management Team.

Clarification was sought and provided that any company who had lodged a Revaluation Appeal to the Lands Tribunal for Scotland would continue to pay Business Rates based on the Rateable Valuation pending any decision from the Tribunal and that usually both sides would be responsible for paying their own costs in relation to an Appeal.

Concerns were raised by members of the Board regarding the length of time that was taken to resolve Revaluation Appeals.

**Decided:** having recorded their appreciation of the hard work that had been undertaken by the Assessor and ERO and her staff, to note the contents of the report.

**Item 6 – Public Performance Report.**

There was submitted (circulated) a report of May 2015 by the Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO seeking approval by the Board for the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board's Public Performance Report 2014/15 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

**Decided:** to approve the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board's Public Performance Report 2014/15 as detailed in the Appendix to the report.

**Item 7 – 2017 Non-Domestic Rating Revaluation Report.**

There was submitted (circulated) a report of May 2015 by the Assessor and ERO

- (1) informing of the work that required to be undertaken for the 2017 Non-Domestic Rating Revaluation;
- (2) advising that the table outlined in Appendix 1 of the report showed the number of subjects to be analysed and valued over a six year period; and
- (3) reporting that the Revaluation would involve a considerable amount of hard work by the Assessor's staff, not just in the mechanics of revaluation but also in the discussions and negotiations that required to be carried out under the auspices of the Scottish Assessors' Association to achieve the timeous completion of Practice Notes.

**Decided:** to note

- (a) the contents of the report; and
- (b) that progress reports would be submitted to each meeting of the Board.

### **Item 8 - Electoral Registration.**

There was submitted (circulated) a report dated May 2015 by the Principal Administrative and IT Development Officer outlining the current position with regard to the Board's functions concerning Electoral Registration including:-

- (1) Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and interim Canvass and that the register had been published on 27th February 2015;
- (2) UK Parliamentary General Election;
- (3) Voter Engagement and Advertising; and
- (4) Electoral Management System.

The Principal Administrative and IT Development Officer outlined the position with regard to the Individual Electoral Registration which had resulted in an increased volume of correspondence being issued by staff and that the position with regard to disenfranchised electors would continue to be reviewed.

Concerns were raised by Members of the Board in relation to a number of people who had gone to vote at Polling Stations and been told that their names were not on the Register despite previously having been registered, and that Elected Members or Polling Station staff had been unable to contact staff within the Valuation Board by telephone for assistance. The Assessor and ERO advised that she would look into this matter and report back to the next meeting of the Board

In relation to a matter that had been raised by an Elected Member, the Assessor and ERO gave an undertaking to investigate this issue and respond directly to the Elected Member concerned.

Elected Members also raised the difficulties that could arise with regard to members of families having the same name when voting, the numbers of rejected postal votes and the Electoral Management System currently in place and the Assessor and ERO gave an undertaking to examine these matters.

**Decided:** to note the contents of the report.

### **Item 9 – Staffing.**

There was submitted (circulated) a report dated May 2015 by the Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO Assistant Assessor, John McConville

- (1) outlining the current staffing matters of the Board; and
- (2) detailing short and long term absence from December 2014 to April 2015;

**Decided:** to note the contents of the report.

#### **10. Equality Duty – 2015 Progress Report.**

There was submitted (circulated) a report dated May 2015 by the Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO seeking approval of the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board's Equality Duty – 2015 Progress Report as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

**Decided:** to approve the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board's Equality Duty – 2015 Progress Report as detailed in the Appendix to the report.

Clarification was sought and provided in relation to reducing the average age of the workforce as young people were grossly under represented and that the Board was now receiving more applications for vacancies from younger job seekers.

#### **Item 11 – Annual Report for 2014/15.**

There was submitted (circulated) a report dated May 2015 by the Assessor and ERO

- (1) presenting the Annual Report for 2014/15 for consideration;
- (2) outlining current issues and service priorities;
- (3) providing an update on performance of the Joint Board; and
- (4) highlighting issues affecting the future direction of the Joint Board.

The Assessor and ERO advised that she was continuing to explore the possibility of purchasing an alternative software system and that she had been in touch with colleagues in other authorities to ascertain which systems were currently being used, succession planning, maintenance of 9 Wellington Square, Ayr and the possible relocation of the Valuation Board and following a concern from an Elected Member, she advised that she would review the Board's Website and would continue to review the progress being made with Individual Electoral Registration.

**Decided:** to note the Annual Report for 20/14/15.

#### **Item 12 - Any Other Competent Business.**

The Assessor and ERO advised the Board that Avril Gerrish, Committee Services Officer, was retiring from South Ayrshire Council on 30th June 2015 and the Board wished her a long and happy retirement.

#### **Item 13 – Date of Next Meeting.**

The Board noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 1st September 2015 at 10.30 a.m. within Cunninghame House, Irvine at 10.30 a.m.

The meeting ended at 12.05 p.m.