

## **AYRSHIRE VALUATION JOINT BOARD**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2021 at 10.30 am remotely.**

### **Item 1 - Sederunt**

Attended remotely

East Ayrshire: Councillors: McFadzean (Chair), Jenkins, McKay, McMahon and Todd.

Attended remotely

North Ayrshire: Councillors: Glover and Reid.

Attended remotely

South Ayrshire: Councillors: I Campbell, Cullen from Item 9, Dowey and Grant

In Attendance

remotely:

Helen McPhee, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer (ERO); John McConville, Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO (ERO); Harry McCormick, Principal IT and Admin Development Officer (ERO); Tom Simpson, Service Lead - Corporate Accounting (SAC); Wynne Carlaw, Service Lead – Democratic Governance (SAC) (Clerk); Alison Nelson, Co-ordinator, Democratic Support (SAC) and Courtney Buchanan, Committee Clerk (SAC).

Apologies:

Councillors: Easdale and McClung - North Ayrshire Council  
Councillor: A Campbell – South Ayrshire Council

### **Item 1 – Sederunt**

As detailed above.

### **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 the Previous Meeting**

It was noted that the Minutes intimated that Councillors McMahon and Todd had submitted their apologies, it was confirmed that both Councillors McMahon and Todd had joined the meeting remotely.

The Minutes of the meeting of the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board (the Board) held on 15 September 2020 was submitted.

### **Decided:**

1. to amend the Minutes to accurately reflect the attendance of Councillors McMahon and Todd; and
2. to approve the Minutes of the Board meeting held on 15 September 2020. Proposed by Councillor Grant and Seconded by Councillor Reid.

#### **Item 4 – Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2020.

#### **Item 5 – Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2020/1 – Position Statement at 30 November 2020**

There was submitted a report (circulated) of 23 December 2020 by the Treasurer to the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board (the Board) advising Members of the Board of income and expenditure for the period ended 30 November 2020 (monitoring period 8) as compared with the approved revenue budget.

Appendix 1 of the report compared the year-to-date budget for each main account heading however the Service Lead – Corporate Accounting took the Board through the report and highlighted the following areas;

In terms of employee costs Management had appointed trainee valuers from within the existing workforce, which had created consequential vacancies elsewhere in the Board's staffing structure. The recruitment process was ongoing but it was unlikely that many more posts would be filled before the end of the financial year. This, coupled with an expected underspend of £33,000 on canvassing costs due to Covid-19 restrictions, meant that a full year underspend of £333,000 was projected for employee costs.

With regard to supplies and services, there was a year-to-date overspend of £18,000 which was attributed to delayed software expenditure on the implementation of the new operating system, due to Covid-19 and the resolution of minor technical issues. This underspend was partly offset by unbudgeted expenditure incurred in relation to Covid-19, including additional hardware to enable home-working and protective equipment for office working, expected to total approximately £40,000. A full year overspend of £8,000 was projected for supplies and service costs.

In terms of administrative costs, a year-to-date underspend of £30,000 was largely attributed to postage plus smaller underspends against other budgets and was projected to increase to £65,000 at the year end.

With regard to 4.3 and 4.4 of the report the Service Lead – Corporate Accounting advised that the Scottish Government had agreed to provide additional funding of £211,698 to facilitate an expected increase in postal vote applications due to the impact of Covid-19 for the Scottish Parliament Election scheduled to be held on May 2021. Neither the funding or associated expenditure had been budgeted for by the Board but Management's plan to spend this funding was subsequently approved by the Scottish Government. The funding was expected to be received early in 2021. The Service Lead – Corporate Accounting advised that these expenditure and income budgets, as detailed in the table within 4.3 of the report, required to be created, not all of the expenditure would be incurred in the current financial year, the projected full year underspend for 2020/21 would further increase by an estimated £95,000 with the remaining spend to be incurred during 2021/22.

The overall full year projected underspend for the Board was £501,000 of which approximately £95,000 would be required to fund the remaining 2021 Scottish Parliament Election expenditure in financial year 2021/22. The impact of the projected full-year underspend would be to reduce the Board's contribution from reserves in the current financial year set at £168,707 in the approved budget, to a net contribution to reservices of approximately £332,000.

The Service Lead – Corporate Accounting advised that he was currently costing a new staffing structure and that the budget proposals for 21/22 would be presented to the March meeting after consultation with constituent authorities.

A Member enquired as to the cost of sending out postal vote application forms to registered electors that currently did not have one and the Principal Admin and IT Development Officer advised that it would be in the region of £170,000. He further advised that there would be a national advertising campaign, promoting this, launched in Feb/March and that he was working with the Communications Teams from each authority on a more Ayrshire focused campaign. The Scottish Government had also provided funding for a household notification letter to be issued to all households.

**Decided:**

1. to approve the temporary budget transfer request as outlined at paragraph 4.3 and 4.4 of the report; and
2. to approve the remainder of the report.

**Item 6 – Service Plan 2020-2023**

There was submitted a report (circulated) of 1 November 2020 by the Assessor and ERO presenting the Board with the new Service Plan for 2020-23.

The Assessor and ERO provided the Board with a verbal overview of the Service Plan for 2020-23.

**Decided:**

1. to note the move towards a blended method of working over the next three years for home/office working;
2. to note the delivery of the new CORE system and the necessary development for the implementation of the changes brought about by changes in legislation;
3. to note the planned development of the CORE system to facilitate greater use of mobile working;
4. to note the impact that the Covid-19 virus has had and would have over the next 12 to 36 months on service delivery;
5. to note the remainder of the report; and
6. to approve the Service Plan for 2020-23.

**Item 7 Strategic Risk Register**

There was submitted a report (circulated) of 23 November 2020 by the Assessor and ERO updating the Board on the risks currently faced by Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board and informing the Board of the strategic risks Covid-19 had brought. There had been a number of operational risks relating to Covid-19 which had been completed and did not form part of the Strategic Risk Register.

**Decided:** to note the content of the report and to agree the Strategic Risk Register.

## **Item 8 – Valuation and Performance**

There was submitted a report (circulated) of 21 December 2020 by the Head of Valuation Services and the Assistant ERO advising the Board on progress achieved in Valuation and Council Tax during the period 1 April 2020 to 30 November 2020.

A Member asked why the figures in the table at 4.2. of the report relating to Non-Domestic Valuations for East Ayrshire were substantially lower than South and North Ayrshire and the Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO advised that there had been a delay, due to Covid-19, in receiving information relating to building warrants and completion certificates. The situation had been resolved, staff would catch up with the backlog and advised that he did not envisage further problems going forward.

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

**Councillor Cullen joined the meeting at this point.**

## **Item 9 – Electoral Registration**

There was submitted a report (circulated) of 23 December 2020 by the Principal Admin. and IT Development Officer updating the Board on the position with regard to the Board's functions concerning Electoral Registration.

The Principal Admin. and IT Officer took the Board over the report highlighting the work that had been done to publish the registers in December 2020, that a letter would be sent to each household with advice on registration and postal voting, a media campaign would also commence early February/March using a variety of social platforms and that due to a change in legislation 600 foreign nationals had been added to the register.

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

## **Item 10 – Staffing**

There was submitted a report (circulated) of 21 December 2020 by the Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO advising Members of the current position relating to staffing issues.

The Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO provided a verbal overview of the report. He advised that considering the Covid-19 Pandemic there was no concerns relating to absence management and that members of staff were being provided with as much information as possible to aid in maintaining good mental health. He also advised that a new complaints process would be introduced in April and that he would present a report to the Board at the next meeting relating to this.

Re the introduction of home working and blended working a Member enquired if recruitment advertising would be widened, the Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO intimated that he had been in discussion with SAC's HR colleagues regarding the use of different platforms to advertise posts, he also advised that blended working including working from home was assisting the team in casting the net wider for staff.

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

### **Item 11 – Covid-19 and Related Matters**

There was submitted a report (circulated) of 11 November 2020 by the Assessor and ERO providing the Board with a position statement on the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic; providing a progress update on the organisations ongoing response to the Pandemic and how this, together with feedback from staff, had informed how the organisation would move forward in the delivery of services.

The Chair enquired if staff working hours were being monitored and what processes had been put in place to ensure that members of staff were encouraged to maintain a good work/life balance. The Assessor and ERO confirmed that working hours were monitored and agreed the Head of Valuation Services would liaise with SAC HR colleagues to ascertain what process the Council had in place relating to this issue.

#### **Decided:**

1. to note the most recent Covid-19 restrictions set out by the Scottish Government and how these had impacted on service delivery within the AVJB;
2. to note the progress made by the team in assisting service users with the multitude of enquiries that had been received;
3. to note the ongoing preparations in order to deliver registers for the May 2021 Scottish Parliament Election;
4. to agree that a new category of flexible working would be permitted, at the Assessor and ERO's discretion, that would ensure service delivery and going forward the blended model;
5. to agree that a revised plan for office accommodation would be presented to the Board May/June 2021; and
6. to note the remainder of the report.

### **Item 12 – Any Other Items of Business**

There were no further items of business.

### **Item 13 – Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board is scheduled to take place on 2 March 2021.