

AYRSHIRE VALUATION JOINT BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 at 10.30 am remotely.

Item 1 - Sederunt

Attended remotely
East Ayrshire:

Councillor: McKay

Attended remotely
North Ayrshire:

Councillors: Easdale, Glover, McClung and Reid

Attended remotely
South Ayrshire:

Councillors: A Campbell and D Campbell (Chair)

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);
Coenraad Balfourt, Deloitte LLP; Steven Hill, Senior Accountant, (EAC)
Alison Nelson, Co-ordinator, Democratic Support (SAC).

Apologies:

Councillors: I Campbell, Dowey and Grant, South Ayrshire Council
Councillor: George, North Ayrshire Council
Councillors: Jenkins, McFadzean, McMahon and Todd, East Ayrshire
Council

Item 1 – Sederunt

As detailed above. In the absence of Councillor McFadzean, Councillor D Campbell, Vice Chair chaired the meeting.

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

The Minutes of the meeting of the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board ([the Board](#)) held on 1 June 2021 (circulated) were submitted.

Decided: to approve the Minutes of the Board meeting held on 1 June 2021. Proposed by Councillor Easdale and Seconded by Councillor D Campbell.

Item 4 – Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2021.

Item 5 – Final Report on the 2020/21 Audit

There was submitted a report ([circulated](#)) of 15 September 2021 by the Treasurer to the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board (the Board) submitting the external auditor's final report on the 2020/21 audit.

C Balfourt, Auditor, Deloitte LLP provided the Board with an informative overview of the external auditor's final report highlighting the main findings in the report.

One Member raised concern that there was no reference to Covid 19 in the report and the impact that Covid 19 had on the organisation. The Auditor advised that no issues had been identified and that this would have been considered in terms of the Board's financial sustainability and how Covid 19 would have impacted on budget monitoring arrangements over the course of the year. The biggest impact identified was in relation to recruitment.

After considering the Final Report on the 2020/21 Audit, the Board

Decided: to accept the contents of Deloitte LLP's Final Audit Report.

Item 6 – Annual Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2021

There was submitted a report ([circulated](#)) of 15 September 2021 by the Treasurer to the Board submitting the Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021 together with the proposed independent auditor's report.

The Service Lead – Corporate Accounting (SAC) provided an overview of the Annual Accounts for year ended 31 March 2021. The Service Lead – Corporate Accounting (SAC) advised that the surplus of £956,329 included approximately £167,000 of Scottish Government funding that was received for the Scottish Government Election held in May 2021 and would be carried forward as part of the reserves to be spent in the current financial year.

It was also noted that the Chair may not be in a position to sign the Annual Accounts prior to 30 September 2021 and, after discussion, the Board

Decided:

- (1) to approve the Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021;
- (2) to authorise that the Chair, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer and Treasurer sign and issue the Annual Accounts by 30 September 2021;
- (3) to note that the accumulated General Fund surplus as at 31 March 2021 of £956,329 would be utilised to fund expenditure in future years, as previously approved by the Board; and
- (4) to agree that, in the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair would sign the Annual Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2021.

Item 7 – Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22 – Position Statement at 31 July 2021

There was submitted a report ([circulated](#)) of 16 September 2021 by the Treasurer to the Board advising Members of the income and expenditure for the period ended 31 August 2021 (monitoring period 5) as compared with the approved revenue budget.

The Service Lead – Corporate Accounting (SAC) provided an overview of the Revenue Budget Monitoring Reporting highlighting the following areas;

An underspend of £55,000 relating to Employee Costs attributed to vacancies, a full year underspend of £40,000 was projected based on the assumption that vacant posts would be filled by December 2021. This figure could increase if posts were not filled.

Transport Costs: a full year underspend of £2,000 was projected.

Administration Costs: there was a year-to-date underspend of £15,000, with a full year underspend of £20,000 being projected which was largely attributed to printing and postage costs.

Income: an over recovery of £10,000 which related to an Apprenticeship Employer Grant awarded. This funding was used to help fund two of the Board's trainee valuers' posts.

4.3 of the report related to the funding received for the Scottish Parliament Election. Total funding received was just under £212,000 of which £45,000 was spent in last financial year 2020/21. A balance of £167,000 formed part of last year's underspend and was currently held in reserves to be set against expenditure incurred during the current financial year 2021/22. At Period 5, £113,000 had been recorded with no further expenditure anticipated. In line with the Financial Regulations, Members were being asked to approve utilisation of the £167,000 within the Board's reserves to create budgets against which expenditure incurred in the current financial year could be charged. The Board's spend, across the two years, was approximately £158,000 against the £212,000 funding received. The Scottish Government had indicated that the Board could retain this funding but the funding must be ring fenced for future elections.

At monitoring period 5, the Board's net expenditure was underspent against budget by £76,000 with a full year underspend of £72,000 being projected. The impact of this underspend would be to reduce the planned contribution from reserves in the current financial year of £163,135 per the approved budget to approximately £91,000.

One Member enquired if the Scottish Government funding surplus could be used for the Local Government Elections in May 2022 and the Assessor and ERO confirmed that it could not be used to subsidise the Board's budget for planned elections but could be used for any unplanned election i.e. Referendum.

In terms of transport costs, it was noted that site visits had stopped and one member enquired if site visits had resumed and asked what impact this would have on the budget. The Assessor and ERO intimated that site visits were being introduced but did not envisage this having a detrimental impact on the budget.

As no Appeal Hearings had taken place over the last year one Member questioned payments to third parties and the costs, contained within the budget, of employing QCs etc for Appeal Hearings. The Assessor and ERO advised that a number of Hearings had been held recently and it was anticipated that expenditure, relating to Appeal Hearings, would rise until the end of the financial year. The Member asked if the budget would therefore be overspent due to the backlog of Appeal Hearings and the Assessor and ERO intimated that, although no Appeal Hearings had taken place over the last year, members of staff had worked with agents, rate payers and council tax payers in an attempt to resolve appeals prior to court hearings and did not anticipate the budget being overspent.

The Member intimated that, in his view, the budget did not detail the impact that Covid 19 had had on the organisation particularly in relation to the Appeal Hearings that were ongoing and still to commence. The Vice Chair suggested that an update was included in the next monitoring report regarding this and that a clear review was undertaken when next year's budget was being prepared regarding the likely costs of future Appeals Hearings.

Decided:

- (1) to approve the creation of budgets to set against expenditure incurred during the current financial year in relation to the Scottish Parliamentary Election (paragraph 4.4);
- (2) to request that a review be undertaken of the costs of Appeals Hearings in the next financial year; and
- (3) to approve the content of the report.

Item 8 – Public Performance Report 2020/21

There was submitted a report ([circulated](#)) of 7 September 2021 by the Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO seeking approval of the Board's Public Performance Report 2020/21.

The Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO highlighted the key findings of the Performance Report 2020/21 intimating that an additional section had been added this year which detailed the impact that Covid 19 had had on performance. The Board

Decided: to approve the Board's Public Performance Report 2020/21.

Item 9 – Valuation and Performance

There was submitted a report ([circulated](#)) of 8 September 2021 by the Head of Valuation Services and the Assistant ERO advising Members of the Board on progress achieved in Valuation and Council Tax during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2021.

The Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO provided a verbal overview of the report and the detail contained in Appendix 1 and intimated that it had been a challenging year however wished to commend the staff for their efforts. The Board

Decided: to note the contents of the report.

Item 10 – Electoral Registration

There was submitted a report ([circulated](#)) of 10 September 2021 by the Principal Admin. and IT Development Officer updating Members of the Board on the position with regard to the Board's functions concerning electoral registration.

With regard to the Annual Canvass, one Member asked if follow-up e-comms could be issued a few days prior to the start of issue of emails as members of the public would be more inclined to respond thus making the process more effective. The Principal Admin and IT Development Officer intimated that there had been a change in the software used this year and agreed to include better timed email reminders in future communication strategies for the Annual Canvass.

The Board

Decided: to note the contents of the report.

Item 11 – Staffing

There was submitted a report ([circulated](#)) of 8 September 2021 by the Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO advising Members of current staffing issues.

The Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO advised that recruitment continued to prove challenging however this was a national issue and not specific to Ayrshire.

One Member asked what options were being considered with regard to the additional public holiday in 2022, after discussion it was agreed that it would be helpful if proposals could be considered at the January meeting of the Board so that members of staff could be informed as soon as possible thereafter. The Board

Decided:

- 1) to note the Assessor and ERO's ongoing action to recruit additional staff;
- 2) to approve the closure of the office in the period between Christmas and New Year, subject to staff using their annual leave and or flexi leave;
- 3) to agreed that a report detailing the public holidays for 2022 should be presented to the Board in January 2022; and to note the remainder of the report.

Item 12 – Any Other Items of Business

The Assessor and ERO informed that she would submit her resignation formally in due course to the Board with a retiral date of the 31 March 2022. Members discussed the timing of the Assessor and ERO's retiral in relation to the Local Government Elections taking place in May 2022, the Assessor and ERO intimated that she would be flexible regarding this date. Members, after discussion, suggested that the Clerk have further discussions with the Assessor and ERO regarding her retiral date and HR (SAC) regarding the timescales for recruitment taking into consideration the Local Government Elections May 2022.

The Board

Decided: to instruct the Clerk to have further discussions with the Assessor and ERO regarding her retirement date and with HR (SAC) regarding the timescales for recruitment taking into consideration the Local Government Elections May 2022.

Item 13 – Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board would take place on 11 January 2022 at 10.30am.