

## **MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE GRAMPIAN VALUATION JOINT BOARD**

**7 JULY 2006**

**COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN**

### **PRESENT**

Councillors A. Wilson (Convenor), M. Burnett (Vice-Convenor), J.C. Davidson, G.G. Lumsden, J.A. McGregor, J. Porter, R. Sim (substituting for Councillor S D I Longmore), W P Watt and G. Urquhart.

### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors B Craig, B. Falconer, J Hunter, S.D.I Longmore, N Makin, P. McDonald and J.A. Mair.

### **IN ATTENDANCE**

A.A. McConochie, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer, M Wilson, Treasurer, the Principal Personnel Adviser, Moray Council and R Ritchie for the Clerk to the Board.

#### **1. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE BOARD DATED 27 JANUARY 2005**

The Minute of the meeting of the Board dated 27 January 2005 was submitted and approved as an accurate record.

#### **2. UNAUDITED ACCOUNTS FOR 2005/06**

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer seeking the Board's approval of the Unaudited Accounts for the year 2005/6, a copy of which was Appended to the report. The meeting noted that the Accounts had been duly prepared and presented for audit within the legal deadline of 30 June and that it was anticipated that the Audited Accounts together with the Auditors Report will be submitted to the meeting of the Board in October 2006.

There was also attached as Appendices 1 and 2 respectively a detailed statement comparing revised budget to actual spend for 2005/06 and a statement showing actual spend for the two years 2004/2005 and 2005/6

The Treasurer spoke to the report and the meeting noted that a surplus of £279,463 had been achieved during this period, which will be returned to the constituent authorities when the final accounts have been audited. The year-end surplus was attributed mainly to unfilled vacant posts during the year amounting to £189,000, which had been kept vacant in order to smooth the implementation of the Grading Review. The spend on equipment was less than anticipated due to a delay in moving office space within Woodhill House (£10,000) and income from the sale of electoral registers and reimbursement of "CORE" costs was higher than anticipated (£12,000). The meeting also noted interest of £28,000 earned on revenue balances a further £20,000 was not required for Valuation Appeals.

Following discussion, during which the Treasurer and the Assessor responded to questions, the meeting agreed to approve the Draft Accounts for the year to 31 March 2005.

#### **3. REVENUE MONITORING STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL TO 31 MAY 2006**

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer advising the Board of the current Revenue Budget Monitoring position for the period 1 April to 31 May 2006, as set out in the Appendix to the report.

The meeting noted that, in total, expenditure is 16% of the revenue budget resulting in an underspend of £70,000 which is mainly due to the savings generated by the posts kept vacant in order to smooth the implementation of the Grading Review.

Following consideration the Board agreed to note the report.

#### 4. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Under reference to Paragraph 7 of the Minute of the Board dated 27 January 2006 there was submitted a report by the Assessor inviting the Board to consider a revised draft "Overview of Corporate Governance Arrangements" taking into account comments received following the meeting on 27 January 2006. A copy of the revised draft was appended to the report.

The meeting noted that the revised arrangements set out the Board's position in relation to Corporate Governance and confirm its supervisory role over the management of the department. The meeting also noted that in relation to a number of areas the document is aspirational and will develop through time as will the policies against which standards of compliance will be judged.

Following consideration the Board agreed:-

- (i) to adopt the revised draft Overview of Corporate Governance Arrangements as a "Code of Corporate Governance for Grampian Valuation Joint Board";
- (ii) to recognise the aspirational nature of the document and that it is a working draft where there is a need to work towards full compliance; and
- (iii) that Code, the policies contained therein and the Risk Register be reviewed on an ongoing basis with reports submitted to the Board annually at the January meeting.

#### 5. ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

There was submitted a report by the Electoral Registration Officer advising the Board on the outcome of tendering process in relation to the 2006 Canvas, a new initiative as part of the 2006 canvas and the current position with regard to changes to Electoral Law.

The meeting noted that five tenders had been received and following evaluation the lowest tender from Adare Halcyan in the sum of £18,096.17 was accepted. In regard to returns where there has been no change in the household a new initiative will be undertaken. Electoral Reform Service will be providing a telephone response service, which allows householders where there are no changes on the form to use an automated telephone service to confirm their position. The service will also allow changes to opt-out choices and request a postal vote application form. The use of the telephone service will reduce the amount of incoming mail and allow the Electoral Register data base to be updated automatically allowing staff to concentrate on processing those forms with changed information, deal with queries and concentrate on non-returns.

In regard to changes to Electoral Law the Assessor advised the Board that updates on progress from the Department for Constitutional Affairs suggest that the legislation will be enacted prior to the 2006 Canvass but that there will be little practical effect on the form of this year's canvass. Regulations to be made under the Act will, however, impact considerably on absent voting arrangements with the introduction of personal identifiers (signature and date of birth) and a need to match these between applications received by the ERO and the Security Statement received by the Returning Officer at elections. The meeting also noted that there could be major cost implications relating to data matching between the ERO and Returning Officers. He also advised that the timing of secondary legislation will require each of the 50,000 absent voters in Grampian to make a fresh application after the coming into force of the December Register. New applications requested during the canvas will have to be dealt with in the new year. With this in mind the Assessor sought delegated authority, in consultation with the Treasurer, to review the revenue budget to identify savings of up to £20,000 to meet this additional cost.

Following discussion the Board agreed:-

- (i) to note the position in relation to the tenders to carry out the 2006 Household Canvass;
- (ii) to note the arrangements for telephone response to the canvass;
- (iii) that the cost of return postage, on this occasion, for Postal Vote applications be met by the Board; and

- (iv) that the Assessor and Treasurer be granted delegated authority to review the revenue budget to identify savings to meet the total estimated postal costs of £20,000

## **6. PUBLIC PERFORMANCE REPORT**

There was submitted a report by the Assessor advising the Board of performance levels achieved during 2005/06 and seeking approval for the publication of the Board's sixth Public Performance Report. There were attached as Appendices 1, 2 & 3 respectively details of Key Performance Indicators relating to the Valuation Roll, Council Tax and Staffing and separate figures provided by Division and Authority for Valuation Roll and Council Tax Performance.

The Assessor spoke to the report and the meeting noted that performance in relation to the Valuation Roll shows considerable improvement but work in this area is cyclical. Performance in 2004/05 was poorer due to Revaluation preparation and the assessor was of the view that current performance will drop in 2006/07 due to increased activity in dealing with Revaluation appeals and recommended a revision to the time frame targets. He also recommended that as existing Council Tax performance targets are being surpassed they be raised from 85% to 88%.

Following consideration the Board agreed to:-

- (i) note the content of the report and the accompanying performance information;
- (ii) approve the revised performance targets with effect from 1 April 2006; and
- (iii) approve the proposals for publication of the Public Performance Report.

## **7. IRRV SCOTTISH CONFERENCE 2006**

There was submitted a report by the Assessor inviting the Board to consider representation at the Annual Scottish Conference and Exhibition of the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation [IRRV] to be held in on 6 & 7 September 2006 in Crieff.

The meeting noted that in previous years the Board was represented at the conference by the Convener, Depute Convener and the Assessor or substitutes and for the past few years a free delegate place has been used to send a more junior member of staff for training and development.

Following consideration the Board agreed to be represented at the conference by the Convener, Vice-Convener, whom failing, the Assessor and a member of staff.

## **8. WOODHILL HOUSE**

Under reference to Paragraph 10 of the Minute of the Board dated 11 November 2006 there was submitted a report by the Assessor updating the Board in relation to the relocation of staff within Woodhill House, Aberdeen and advising on the out-turn in relation to approved expenditure.

The Assessor also recommended that as staff are still settling in to the new accommodation with various "teething" problems being experienced it would be prudent, at this stage, for a contingency fund of £6,000 be established from capital.

Following consideration the Board agreed to:-

- (i) note the content of the report in relation to the relocation of staff within Woodhill House;
- (ii) note the revenue expenditure incurred within the existing budget provision, subject to a refund from Aberdeenshire Council;
- (iii) approve the expenditure incurred amounting to £134,244 being funded from the Capital Fund; and

- (iv) the establishment of a further capital contingency of £6,000 in relation to the need to “settle in” to the new accommodation

### **9. GRADING REVIEW UPDATE [PARA 1]**

During discussion of this item Councillor Urquhart left the meeting.

Under reference to Paragraph 9 of the Minute of the Board dated 27 January 2005 there was submitted a report by the Head of Personnel Services, Moray Council, advising the Board of the outcome of the consultation with staff on the proposals for new pay and grading arrangements across all posts within the Board below Chief Officers.

The meeting noted that during May, all the employees affected received letters and a package of information explaining how their post would be affected by the new grading structure. A helpline operated during this period and staff were encouraged to submit a response to Personnel Services and to vote in the Unison ballot if they were a member of the trade union. 32 responses were received from employees and a summary of the issues raised were set out in Appendix A to the report. The first Unison ballot saw a marginal rejection of the proposals and following consideration of the feedback it was agreed to add a grade to the structure between Grade 1 and Grade 2 to give some demarcation between the clerical and secretarial posts, details of which were set out in Appendix B to the report. The report advised that the second Unison ballot produced an acceptance of the proposals and therefore the Board can now move to implement the new arrangements with effect from 1 October 2006.

The report also advised that there is a need to establish an appeals mechanism for those who wish to raise issues with regard to the evaluation of their post and a draft procedure was appended to the report as Appendix C. It was also proposed that an independent chairperson be appointed.

The Board also noted that under reference to Paragraph 10 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board dated 2 July 2004 there was an outstanding regrading request from Assistant Assessors, which had prompted the grading review so as to ensure that the Board has in place a grading structure which complies with Equal Pay legislation.

Following discussion the Board agreed:-

- (i) to note the outcome of the Unison ballot and that arrangements be made to progress with implementation of the new pay arrangements with effect from 1 October 2006;
- (ii) to approve the amendments to the original proposals as set out in Appendix B to the report;
- (iii) to approve the proposals as set out in Appendix C to the report for an appeals procedure based on the national model and agree that an independent Chair be sought through an external appointment;
- (iv) to commission training on the appeals process from the consultant who developed the national appeals training, subject to availability and cost;
- (v) that it be delegated to the Assessor, in consultation with the Head of Personnel Services and the Treasurer, to review the outstanding regrading request from the Assistant Assessors and take what action is considered appropriate in the circumstances; and
- (vi) that the Board's appreciation of the work involved in progressing the new pay and grading arrangements be conveyed to all those concerned.

### **10. BANFF OFFICE [PARAS 8 & 9]**

Under reference to Paragraph 6 of the Minute of the Board dated 28 January 2005 the Assessor reported orally on progress in regard to the temporary Banff Divisional Office accommodation. The meeting noted Aberdeenshire Council had agreed to transfer the land for the site of the proposed Banff Divisional Office at nil value subject to each authority meeting its own legal costs. The meeting noted that it would also be preferable that the removal of the portacabins be included in the construction contract.

Following consideration the Board agreed:-

- (i) that it be remitted to the Assessor and Moray Council Legal Services to conclude the transaction;
- (ii) that it be remitted to the Assessor, in consultation with the Treasurer and Moray Council Legal Services, to approach Aberdeenshire Council Architectural Services in relation to site investigation and thereafter to invite tenders in respect of the design, build and construction of the new offices.