

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE GRAMPIAN VALUATION JOINT BOARD

27 OCTOBER 2006

COMMITTEE ROOM 1, WOODHILL HOUSE, ABERDEEN

PRESENT

Councillors M. Burnett (Vice-Convener), J C Davidson, R Hossack (substituting for Councillor A R Wilson) J.A. McGregor, J A Mair, J. Porter, R Sim (substituting for Councillor Longmore) and G. Urquhart.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors A. Wilson (Convener), B Craig, B. Falconer, S.D.I Longmore, G.G. Lumsden, P MacDonald and W P Watt.

IN ATTENDANCE

A.A. McConochie, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer, M Wilson, Treasurer, G Ogg & I Milton, Depute Assessors and R Ritchie, Senior Committee Services Officer for the Clerk to the Board.

1. CHAIR

In the absence of the Convener the Vice-Convener, Councillor M. Burnett, took the Chair

2. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE BOARD DATED 7 JULY 2006

The Minute of the meeting of the Board dated 7 July 2006 was submitted and approved as an accurate record, subject to the minor typographical errors identified being corrected.

3. AUDITED ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2006

Under reference to Paragraph 2 of the Minute of the Board dated 7 July 2006 there was formally submitted by the Treasurer the Audited Final Accounts for the Grampian Valuation Joint Board for the year to 31 March 2006, a copy of which was included with the meeting papers.

The meeting noted there were no changes from the draft accounts presented to the Board at its meeting on 7 July 2006, which reported a surplus of £279,463. The meeting also noted that the Auditor's Report to Members on the Annual Accounts, which, at the time of issuing the papers for the meeting, had not been finalised would be submitted to the next meeting of the Audit Sub-Committee.

The report was augmented by an oral report by the Treasurer and the meeting that she had been advised, orally, that there were no recommendations stemming from the Auditor's Report. She also recommended that given the budget process for 2007/08 had already begun it would be appropriate to deduct the sum of £279,463 being the sum due to the constituents authorities as at the 31 March 2006, from the agreed requisitions of the constituent authorities for 2007/8.

Thereafter the Board agreed to:-

- (a) note the Final Accounts and the External Auditor's report for the year ending 31 March 2006; and
- (b) return the £279,463 due to constituent authorities by reducing the 2007/08 requisitions.

4. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING TO 30 SEPTEMBER 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 30 September 2006, as set out in the Appendix to the report.

The meeting noted there is an underspend of £132,000 to date, which is due mainly to savings in staff costs, amounting to £108,000 which have been generated by vacant posts being kept vacant to smooth the implementation of the Grading Review from 1 October 2006. Full details of costs will be submitted to the next Board meeting.

The Treasurer also advised the meeting that the underspend had reduced by £25,000 from the previous statement as a result of a negotiated settlement in regard to the outstanding regrading request from the Assistant Assessors. This had been dealt with under delegation to the Assessor, in consultation with the Head of Personnel Services and the Treasurer as agreed at the meeting of the Board on 7 July 2006 (para 9 (v) of the minute refers).

Following consideration the Board agreed to note the report.

5. REGISTER OF ELECTORS

There was submitted a report by the Electoral Registration Officer informing the Board of progress with the annual canvass, changes to Postal Voting arrangements and drawing to the Board's attention ongoing changes to canvass arrangements and the duties of the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO).

The meeting noted that the Enactment of the Electoral Administration Bill, which received Royal Assent on 11 July 2006, has introduced new duties for ERO's effective from this year's canvass. These include sending the canvass form more than once to any address, making one or more house to house inquiries, making contact by other means to persons not included in the Register, inspecting records held by others and providing staff training. The only additional duty not already undertaken in Grampian is direct house to house inquiry. The meeting also noted that in addition to these additional duties EROs, are now required, under Section 69 of the Act, to encourage electoral participation, which will be driven by guidance to be issued by the Electoral Commission and further detail on this is awaited.

In regard to these new duties the meeting noted that ERO's in Scotland were already well placed in relation to some parts of the new legislation since it has long been their position to issue both first and second reminders to the initial canvass form. Arrangements, however, for a door-to-door canvass are much more problematic raising issues of Health & Safety, rates of pay and training and recruitment among others.

The report was augmented by an oral report by the Electoral Registration Officer and the meeting noted that in regard to proposals for a door-to-door canvass the ERO proposed to carry out a pilot exercise, in Aberdeen Central, which historically has a poor rate of return. The pilot, using existing staff after hours, would be carried out possibly during December 2006/January 2007.

Following consideration during which the ERO responded to questions the Board agreed to note the report.

6. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Under reference to Paragraph 7 (v) of the Minute of the Board dated 11 November 2005 there was submitted a monitoring report by the Assessor in regard to non-financial key performance indicators in respect of the Valuation Roll and Council Tax for the period 1 April to 30 September 2006, details of which were set out in Appendices 1 & 2 to the report.

The meeting noted that there is no direct correlation between the numbers and net and rateable values shown in the Valuation Roll between 2004/05 and 2005/06 because of the intervention of the 2005 Revaluation, effective from 1 April 2005. The details of Amendments within Time Periods however did show improvement in performance.

In regard to Council Tax work the meeting noted that is not affected in the same way as Valuation Roll performance by the 2005 Revaluation and there is a point beyond which improvements in performance will be difficult to achieve. Whether that point has already been reached will not become clear until the end of the financial year.

Following discussion the Board agreed to note the report.

7. STAFFING POLICIES

Under reference to Paragraph 4 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board dated 7 July 2006 there was submitted a report by the Assessor seeking the Board's approval of draft staffing policies for the purpose of consultation with the Trade Unions. Copies of the draft policies in regard to a Code of Conduct for Employees, an Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy, a Confidential Reporting Policy and a Grievance Policy and Procedure were appended to the report as Appendices 1,2,3 & 4 respectively.

The meeting noted that these first drafts are the first of a number of policies, which the Code of Corporate Governance either refers to or requires being in place. The meeting also noted that they had been prepared from a range of sources including Moray Council policies and that given Moray provides Personnel advice and support to the Board it is considered important that they do align with those of Moray Council to ensure ease of administration and control. At the time of preparing the report comments on the first drafts were awaited from Moray Council Personnel Section.

Following consideration the Board agreed to:-

- (i) approve the Draft policies appended to the report for the purposes of consultation with Moray Personnel and UNISON, and;
- (ii) instruct the Assessor to report back at the next meeting of the Board to seek formal approval of the policies prior to immediate implementation.