

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE GRAMPIAN VALUATION JOINT BOARD

29 JUNE 2007

COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS, ELGIN

PRESENT

Councillors M Burnett, B Cormie, J Dick, J Dunbar, J Duncan, J Hamilton, I Ogilvie, R H Shepherd & M Watt.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors N Fletcher, J Hunter, A Milne & J Reynolds. Apologies were also intimated on behalf of A Keddie, Clerk to the Board and Maggie Bruce, Senior Audit Manager, Audit Scotland.

In regard to the apologies submitted of behalf of Members from Aberdeen City Council the Senior Committee Services Officer advised the meeting in regard to the terms of a letter on their behalf expressing their apologies and disappointment that they would be unable, due to other commitments, to attend the first meeting of the Board and in particular participate in the appointment of Convener and Depute Convener. Their concern in regard to the timing of the issue of notification of the meeting was also noted as was the explanation given in regard to this issue.

IN ATTENDANCE

A. A. McConochie, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer, I Milton, Depute Assessor, G Oag, Depute Assessor (Aberdeenshire) R D Burns, Chief Legal Officer (Moray Council) for the Clerk to the Board, M. Wilson, Treasurer and R. Ritchie, Senior Committee Services Officer, Moray Council.

1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOARD

The Senior Committee Services Officer (SCSO) read out the names of Members who had been nominated by The Moray, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils to serve on the Grampian Valuation Joint Board for the ensuing four years. The meeting also noted the substitute Members appointed to date and that Aberdeenshire Council still required to appoint substantive members to the Board and two substitute members.

2. APPOINTMENT OF CONVENER

The SCSO invited nominations for the office of Convener for the period to May 2011.

Councillor Hamilton, seconded by Councillor Duncan, moved that Councillor Shepherd be appointed Convener of the Board.

As an amendment Councillor Cormie, seconded Councillor Dick, moved that Councillor Ogilvie be appointed Convener of the Board.

On a division there voted:-

For the Motion four votes;

For the Amendment five votes

Thereafter the SCSO declared the Amendment carried and Councillor Ogilvie appointed Convener of the Board for the period to May 2011. Thereafter Councillor Ogilvie was invited to take the Chair.

3. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTE CONVENER

The Convener invited nominations for the office of Depute Convener for the period to May 2011.

Councillor Hamilton, seconded by Councillor Duncan, moved that the appointment of Depute Convener be deferred to the next meeting of the Board.

As an Amendment Councillor Burnett, seconded by Councillor Dick, moved that the Board proceed to appoint a Vice-Convener.

On a division there voted:-

For the Motion four votes;

For the Amendment five votes

The SCSO declared the Amendment carried and it was agreed to proceed with the appointment of Depute Convener.

Councillor Burnett, seconded by Councillor Cormie, moved that Councillor Dunbar be appointed Depute Convener.

There being no-one otherwise minded Councillor Dunbar was duly appointed Depute Convener of the board for the period to May 2011.

4. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Meeting resolved that in terms of Section 50A(4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, the public and media representatives be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Items of Business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 8 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

5. MINUTE OF MEETING OF 26 JANUARY 2007

The Minute of the meeting of the Board dated 26 January 2007 was submitted and approved as an accurate record.

6. PROVISIONAL DATES FOR MEETINGS OF THE BOARD DURING 2007 to 2011

There was submitted a report by the Clerk inviting the Board to consider setting dates for meetings of the Board to be held during 2007 to 2011. The SCSO advised the meeting of typographical error, which had omitted Friday 30 October 2009 from the report. He also recommended that Friday 24 June 2011 be added to the list of provisional dates.

Following consideration the Meeting agreed to set the following dates for meetings of the Board to May 2011:-

2007	Friday 26 October
2008	Friday 25 January Friday 20 June Friday 7 November
2009	Friday 23 January Friday 26 June Friday 30 October
2010	Friday 29 January Friday 25 June Friday 29 October
2011	Friday 28 January Friday 24 June

7. MEMBERSHIP & CHAIR OF GENERAL PURPOSES & AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE

There was submitted a report by the Clerk inviting the Board to consider appointing the membership and Chair of the General Purposes & Audit Sub-Committee of the Board for the period July 2007 to May 2011.

The meeting noted that the remit of the Sub-Committee is to review and monitor any Internal or External Audit Plans, reports and recommendations and to meet on an ad hoc basis to carry out these duties. Responsibility for review of the Annual Accounts and all performance information is referred to the full Board. The meeting also noted that membership previously comprised of the Convener, Depute Convener and two other members.

Following consideration it was agreed that the membership of General Purposes & Audit Sub-Committee comprise the Convener (Chair), the Depute Convener, Councillor Cormie and Councillor Burnett.

8. UNAUDITED ACCOUNTS FOR 2006/2007

There was submitted a Report by the Treasurer seeking the Board's approval of the draft unaudited accounts for the year 2006/07, a copy of which was appended to the Report as Appendix 1. There was also appended to the report as Appendix 2 a statement showing the actual spend for 2005/06 and 2006/07.

The Treasurer spoke to the Accounts and the meeting noted that for 2006/07 the statement set out in the draft accounts has changed substantially from last year. The new format is to comply with changes in accounting guidance and standards. The Income and Expenditure Account shows a summary of the day to day operational spend for the Board and unlike the old Revenue Account, the bottom line of this statement includes a number of "book entries" which are required by statute.

The meeting also noted that as the Board does not have powers to retain a General Revenue Reserve, the surplus of £284,937 for 2006/07 will be returned to the constituent authorities after the accounts have been audited. The meeting noted that the main reasons for the surplus related to staff costs which was attributed firstly to four posts being kept vacant to smooth the implementation of the pay review and secondly difficulty in recruiting professional staff resulting in delays in filling posts.

Following discussion, during which the Treasurer responded to questions, the meeting agreed to note the draft accounts for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.

9. REVENUE MONITORING STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL TO 31 MAY 2007

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 2007, as set out in the Appendix to the report.

The Treasurer spoke to the Accounts and the meeting noted that the transactions for the first two months of the year resulted in an underspend, to date, of £59,000. The main reason for the underspend to date is staff costs due to difficulty in recruiting to two professional posts, which are expected to be filled soon. The meeting also noted that the uneven pattern of spend for most items, except salaries, is likely to change by the end of the year.

Following discussion the meeting agreed to note the Revenue Monitoring Statement for the period 1 April to 31 May 2007.

10. EXTERNAL AUDIT : AUDIT PLANNING MEMORANDUM AND FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2006/07

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer inviting the Board to note the Audit Planning Memorandum and Financial Statements Strategy from the Board's External Auditor, Audit Scotland, for the financial year 2006/07, a copy of which was appended to the report as an Appendix.

In noting the apology for the meeting from the External Auditor, Maggie Bruce, the Treasurer presented the report, which represented External Audits plan of work for Board and drew Members attention to Section 2.3 of the report, which highlighted the main areas in the Appendix.

The meeting agreed to note the report.

11. IRRV SCOTTISH CONFERENCE 2003

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 on 5 & 6 September 2007 in Crieff. At the time of preparing the report details of the conference content was still awaited albeit the issues covered will be relevant to the valuation services provided by the Board, particularly in this election year.

The meeting noted that in previous years the Board was represented at the conference by the Convener, Depute Convener and the Assessor or substitutes. The meeting also noted that there was an opportunity to send a fourth delegate for only the cost of bed and breakfast accommodation that, in terms of value for money and staff development, it was recommended that the fourth place be taken by a member of staff.

Following consideration the Board agreed to be represented at the conference by the Convener, Depute Convener, Assessor or substitutes and a member of staff to be nominated by the Assessor.

12. PUBLIC PERFORMANCE REPORT

There was submitted a report by the Assessor advising the Board of performance levels achieved during 2006/07 and seeking approval of proposals for the publication of the report. There were attached as Appendices to the report details of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relating to the Valuation Roll and Council Tax Lists (Appendix 1) and separate figures provided by Division and Authority for Valuation Roll and Council Tax Performance (Appendices 2 & 3).

The report detailed the background to the Board's KPIs, which were the subject of agreement between the Scottish Assessors' Association and the Scottish Executive in relation to the introduction of Best Value to the valuation service. The KPIs, which have now been recorded for seven years in relation to work on the Valuation Roll and Council Tax Lists, are restricted essentially to new and altered entries in the case of the Valuation Roll and new entries in the case of the Council Tax List. They do not represent the Department's entire workload in maintaining these property-based registers. KPIs in regard to Electoral Registration are not recorded because of the change over from a single annual canvass to a system of rolling registration. The meeting noted however that discussions are ongoing at national level in relation to this matter but further changes in both canvass and absent voting procedures are likely to require additional work in this area. The Electoral Commission are currently working on the introduction of national performance targets and Grampian will participate in a pilot exercise in relation to this initiative.

The Assessor spoke to the report and the meeting noted, having regard to the overall position and noting that performance targets were reviewed only last year, he did not propose any change for 2007/08. In regard to the format of the Public Performance Report he proposed that the Board continue with the format for previous years by providing comparison with the two previous years and limited publication to its website, provision to the constituent councils and a press release. He also proposed a more "user friendly" format, a copy of which was appended to the report.

Following discussion, during which the Assessor responded to questions, the Board agreed to:-

- (i) note the content of the report and the accompanying performance information;
- (ii) maintain existing performance targets from 1 April 2007; and
- (iii) approve the proposals for publication of the Public Performance Report.

13. BANFF OFFICE

Under reference to Paragraph 10 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board dated 7 July 2006 there was submitted a report by the Assessor advising the Board of the current position in relation to the proposal to replace the Banff Office.

The meeting noted the background to the proposal and that discussions with the Treasurer and Aberdeenshire Council Property revealed that inviting Aberdeenshire's Architectural Service based in Banff offered a Best Value solution to the design element of the project. Accordingly instructions were given to lodge a formal application for planning permission and to subsequently invite tenders for the construction of the building. Application for planning permission was made on 22 June 2007.

Copies of the proposed plans were on display at the meeting and members were invited to consider these with a view to noting the proposed layout of the building, noting that the planning application has been made and confirming the subsequent building warrant application and tender invitation.

Following consideration, during which the Assessor responded to questions, the Board agreed:-

- (i) to note the position which has been reached in relation to the proposals for the replacement Banff office; and
- (ii) that the planning, building warrant and tender procedures be progressed.

14. FORMAL COMPLAINT 004

In terms of the Board's Formal Complaints Procedure adopted by the Board on 3 November 2000 (Para 7 of the Minute refers) there was submitted a report by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) bringing to the Board's attention details of a formal complaint received on 11 May 2007.

The meeting noted that the complaint related to the non-receipt of postal ballot papers and was formally acknowledged on the same day as receipt. On acknowledging receipt of the complaint the complainers were advised that the ERO's responsibility in such matters was limited to the provision of information to the Returning Officers in Grampian. The complaint was however referred to the Depute Assessor for investigation, a copy of which was appended to the report together with a copy of the ERO's detailed response.

The meeting noted that the investigation concluded that staff of the ERO had carried out all necessary steps to ensure that correct postal voting details were provided to the Returning Officer's contractors within the necessary timescales. The complainers were advised therefore that their complaint could not be upheld. They were also advised that if they wished to pursue the matter they would require to contact the Returning Officer.

The Board agreed to note the report.

15. FUNCTIONS OF THE ASSESSOR

There was tabled at the meeting a booklet setting out the functions of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer in regard to the Valuation Roll, the Council Tax List and the Electoral Register.

The Board agreed to note the contents of the booklet and that a copy would be forwarded to those members who had intimated their apologies and to substitute members.

16. ELECTORAL REGISTRATION [PARA 8]

There was submitted a report by the Electoral Registration Officer reporting on proposals for a partial door-to-door canvass and the proposed use of a telephone response service as used last year as well as a new internet initiative. The report also sought approval to depart from tendering arrangements as set down in the Financial Regulations in relation to the 2007 Annual Household Canvass and to report on the position in respect of personal identifiers for postal voters.

The meeting noted that, in terms of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the government sought to tackle four key areas considered to be at the core of a healthy democracy. These are Improving Access and Engagement; Improving Confidence; Extending Openness and Transparency in Party Financing and Maintaining Professional Delivery of Elections. A fact sheet issued by the Department for Constitutional Affairs (now the Ministry of Justice) was appended to the report.

The meeting also noted that budget provision of £111,000 had been made to meet the costs of the door-to-door canvass and the ingathering of personal identifiers (dates of birth and signatures) related to postal voting applications. Proposals for 2007 in respect of the door to door canvass, telephone and internet services and postal canvass arrangements were set out in Section 3 of the report. In regard to personal identifiers for postal voters the meeting noted that, in light of the various changes made in relation to the conduct of the May elections and count, the government has not, to date, promulgated the necessary commencement order to bring this arrangement into effect. When implemented fully this will involve the issue of fresh applications to some 56,000 postal voters throughout Grampian. The cost of such an exercise will amount to an estimated £31,000, which is included within the budget allocation of £111,000.

Following consideration the Board agreed to:-

- (i) the arrangements for a door-to-door canvass to be conducted during September 2007;
- (ii) note the arrangements for both telephone and internet response services in relation to the 2007 Household Canvass;
- (iii) the suspension of tendering arrangements in relation to the postal canvass and confirm Adare Halcyan as the contractor for 2007 and 2008; and
- (iv) note the position in relation to the ingathering of personal identifiers related to postal voting.

17. WOODHILL HOUSE [PARA 8]

Under reference to Paragraph 8 of the Minute of the Board dated 26 January 2007 there was submitted a report by the Assessor advising the Board of the background and current position in regard to the Board's lease of accommodation within Woodhill House, Aberdeen. The report advised that the Assessor had negotiated the terms for a new lease, as detailed in Section 2.3 of the report, within budget provision and with a commencement date of 1 April 2007.

Given the timescales the Assessor sought approval of the terms of the new lease from the Convener and Depute Convener, subject to homologation by the Board at this meeting.

Following consideration the Board agreed to homologate the Assessor's decision, taken in consultation with the Convener and Depute-Convener, to agree the terms of the new lease effective from 1 April 2007.