

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE GRAMPIAN VALUATION JOINT BOARD

8 JULY 2005

COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

Councillors, M. Burnett (Vice-Convenor), J.C. Davidson, R Hossack (substituting for Councillor Wilson), J Hunter, G Leslie (substituting for Councillor J Porter), G.G. Lumsden, P. McDonald, J.A. McGregor, J.A. Mair, R Sim (substituting for Councillor W P Watt) and G. Urquhart.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors A. Wilson (Convenor), B Craig, M. P. Cullen, B. Falconer, S.D.I Longmore, S. McDonald, J. Porter and W P Watt.

ALSO PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER

Councillor A E Coutts, Moray Council.

IN ATTENDANCE

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

1. CHAIR

In the absence of the Convenor the Chair was taken by the Vice-Convenor, Councillor M. Burnett

2. MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOARD

The meeting noted that subsequent to the last meeting of the Board Councillor S McDonald, Aberdeen City Council had resigned from the Board and had been replaced by Councillor J. Hunter. The Vice-Convenor welcomed Councillor Hunter to his first meeting of the Board following his appointment.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE BOARD DATED 28 JANUARY 2005

The Minute of the meeting of the Board dated 28 January 2005 was submitted and approved as an accurate record.

Banff Divisional Office

Under reference to Paragraph 6 of the Minute the Assessor advised the meeting that whilst there had been a delay regarding this matter it was now moving forward and Aberdeenshire Council had agreed to grant title to the site. It was agreed that in the event of approval being required, prior to the next meeting of the Board on 27 October 2005, it be delegated to the General Purposes Sub-Committee to act on the Board's behalf.

4. DRAFT ACCOUNTS FOR 2004/05

There was submitted a report by the Treasurer seeking the Board's approval of the Draft Accounts for the year 2004/05, 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 2005.

There was also attached as Appendices 1 and 2 respectively a detailed statement comparing revised budget to actual spend for 2004/05 and a statement showing actual spend for the two years 2003/2004 and 2004/05

The Treasurer spoke to the report and the meeting noted that a surplus of £207,536 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 an underspend in Staffing Costs of £133,000 which had arisen from the delay in

filling vacant Valuers posts until late in the financial year. There is also one senior admin officer's post, which has been held vacant pending the outcome of a review of the administration staff's duties. The meeting also noted that a further £27,000 was not required for Valuation Appeals.

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

5. IRRV SCOTTISH CONFERENCE 2005

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 7 & 8 September 2004 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.

6. PUBLIC PERFORMANCE REPORT

There was submitted a report by the Assessor advising the Board of performance levels achieved during 2004/05 and seeking approval for the publication of the Board's fifth 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 despite the additional workload of the 2005 Revaluation the level of activity has remained steady in relation to Valuation Roll Performance and although not at the much improved level of the previous year, has remained above target. The workload in relation to Council Tax has reduced slightly compared to the previous year and, as with the Valuation Roll, performance is down marginally although still above target. The meeting also noted that in regard to the Key Performance Indicators relating to work on the Valuation Roll and Council Tax Lists these 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 therefore represent the Department's entire workload in maintaining these property based registers. The Assessor also advised that Performance Indicators have not been recorded in relation to Electoral Registration during the period largely because of the changeover from a single annual canvass to a system of rolling registration which was in the course of being introduced when performance measurement for the Department's other activities began. 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.

Following consideration the Board agreed to:-

- (i) note the content of the report and the accompanying performance information;
- (ii) maintain performance targets for 2005/06; and
- (iii) approve the proposals for publication of the Public Performance Report.

7. SCANNING, IMAGING, DATA STORAGE & RETRIEVAL SYSTEM

Under reference to Paragraph 5 of the Minute of the Board dated 24 January 2003 there was submitted a report by the Assessor updating the Board on the acquisition of a scanning and Imaging System.

When originally reported to the Board, the possibility of extending the use of a document imaging system beyond electoral registration was raised. In light of the report on the Agenda in relation to Woodhill House, the issue is again to the fore. When originally raised, the estimated cost was of the order of £200,000 but with the passage of time and the natural replacement of other items of IT hardware, including PC's and improved servers, the currently estimated cost is of the order of £100,000. The meeting also noted that discussions have held with Aberdeenshire

Council and are ongoing with Moray Council to see if some form of joint working might also lead to cost savings. Although Aberdeenshire Council has concluded that a joint arrangement is unlikely, Moray Council has yet to respond in detail. Enquiries with other Valuation Boards or Assessors have regrettably drawn a blank.

The Assessor spoke to the report and the meeting noted that there are currently proposals before government to review the electoral registration and absent voting systems such that Electoral Registration Officers are likely to be required to ingather additional personal identifiers to improve voter security. Such proposals, which may even extend to individual registration, will be clarified in relation to the 2006 Canvass. The collection of additional personal identifiers whether on the basis of an amended household canvass form or individually, will bring major changes to the canvass procedure and the relationship between the ERO and local council Returning Officers. The Returning Officer may well be required to compare signatures and date of birth information in relation to receipt of Postal Ballots and the ERO may also be required to carry out similar checks on receipt of Absent Voting applications made apart from the annual canvass.

Following consideration the Board agreed to:-

- (i) to note the content of this report;
- (ii) authorise the Assessor to pursue the acquisition of a suitably identified system during the current financial year and instruct him to report the detailed arrangements including identified records storage cost savings to the General Purposes Sub-Committee; and
- (iii) authorise the General Purposes Sub-Committee to act with delegated powers in relation to this matter.

8. PRE-RETIREMENT WINDING DOWN

There was submitted a report by the Assessor inviting the Board to consider a request from UNISON for the introduction of a Pre-retirement Winding Down arrangement.

The meeting noted that Board has no specific policy in relation to staff who reach normal retirement age although "ad-hoc" arrangements have been made in the past in relation to attendance at pre-retirement courses organised by Aberdeenshire Council. It was also noted that both Aberdeen City and Moray Councils have adopted Winding-Down policies and that Aberdeenshire Council has such a policy in relation to teaching staff. In regard to the schemes operated within Aberdeen City and Moray Councils these are available to staff retiring between the ages of 60 and 65, in the normal course of employment and who have at least 10 years service with the authority. For the final 6 months of employment the employee may work one day less per week. In relation to Aberdeen City there is no change in salary payment or pension rights of the employee. In Moray Council salary is paid in relation to time worked and has effect on pension rights.

Following consideration the Board agreed:-

- (i) to give consideration to the introduction of a Wind-Down Policy as part of a formal Retirement Policy and in this regard it be remitted to the Head of Personnel, Moray Council, in consultation with the Assessor, to progress this matter and report thereon to a future meeting of the Board; and
- (ii) that it be delegated to the Assessor, in consultation with the Head of Personnel Services, Moray Council, to determine the current individual request, at no cost to the Board.

9. GRADING REVIEW UPDATE

Under reference to Paragraph 4 of the Minute of the Board dated 28 January 2005 there was submitted a report by the Head of Personnel Services, Moray Council, updating the Board on the Grading Review being carried out across all posts within the Board below Chief Officers.

A copy of the Project Plan was appended to the report as an Appendix. This advised that interviews will begin from 4 July, 2005, with the job evaluation process continuing through to September/October, 2005. Thereafter new pay structures will be developed with a view to reporting early outcomes to the Board in October, 2005. Allowing time for discussion of proposals with the Trade Unions and formal consultation it is anticipated that implementation could take place around April, 2006.

The report also advised that although various options will be considered there will be financial and staffing implications arising from the proposals. A typical model might expect 25% of staff to increase in pay, 50% to remain unchanged and the remaining 25% to reduce in pay. Based on this assumption, the impact in financial terms could be forecast to a possible increase of between 3 to 6 % but this very much depends upon the parameters set and could vary upwards or downwards.

Following consideration the Board agreed to note the progress on the Grading Review and that further reports will be submitted on a proposed grading structure, financial implications and staffing.

10. EARLY RETIREMENT - EFFICIENCY OF SERVICE: HOMOLOGATION OF REPORT [PARA 1]

There was submitted a report by the Head of Personnel Services, Moray Council, homologation of a decision taken, in consultation with the Convener, Vice-Convener and Councillor Porter, to approve an application for Early Retirement on the grounds of efficiency with effect from 28 March 2005, and that the Board meet the capital cost of any strain on fund associated with the request.

Following consideration the Board agreed to:-

- (i) homologate the decision taken to grant an early retirement application with effect from 28 March 2005 and the subsequent payment of the strain on funds associated with the request; and
- (ii) approve the recruitment of a replacement Assistant Assessor

11. VOLUNTARY EARLY RETIREMENT APPLICATION [PARA 1]

Under reference to Paragraph 7 of the Minute of the Board there was submitted a report by the Assessor inviting the Board to reconsider an application from a member of staff for voluntary early retirement in terms of Section 30 of the Pension Regulations (The 'Rule of 85') on the basis of changed circumstances. The meeting noted that whilst the post vacated by the retiral would require to be filled, a saving can be demonstrated, details of which were set out in the report.

Following consideration the Board agreed to approve the application from a member of staff for voluntary early retirement with effect from 31 July 2005, in terms of Section 30 of the Pension Regulations (The 'Rule of 85').

12. WOODHILL HOUSE [PARAS 8 & 9]

Under reference to Paragraph 7 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board dated 28 January 2005 there was submitted a report by the Assessor updating the Board on arrangements in relation to the refurbishment of Woodhill House, insofar as it will affect the Board's staffing accommodation. The report also invited the Board to consider expenditure related to the relocation of accommodation.

There was appended to the report a copy of the response from Aberdeenshire Council clarifying the various issues raised by the Assessor following the meeting of the Board on 28 January 2005.

The Assessor spoke to the report and the meeting noted that he would be investigating joint purchasing, with Aberdeenshire Council, of general office furniture and that the services of Moray Council's Health & Safety staff will be engaged so as to ensure the suitability of furniture for long term working.

Following consideration the Board agreed to:-

- (i) approve the proposals in respect of replacement of general office furniture, IT infrastructure arrangements and records storage furniture, as set out in sections 3, 4 & 5 of the report; and
- (ii) instruct the Assessor to report further on progress to the General Purposes Sub-Committee acting with delegated powers to approve actual expenditure.