

# Grampian Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer



## Equalities Mainstreaming and Outcomes 2013 - 2017

On behalf of Grampian Valuation Joint Board

**Contents**

1. Introduction..... 3

2 Grampian Assessor & ERO..... 4

3. Grampian Valuation Joint Board..... 4

4. The Legal Context..... 5

5. Mainstreaming..... 7

6. Evidence Review..... 10

7. Equality Outcomes..... 13

8. Conclusion..... 16

9. Appendix..... 17

## **1. Introduction**

The Grampian Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is an independent public official responsible for valuing non-domestic properties for rating, allocating dwellings to council tax bands and maintaining the Electoral Register.

The Assessor & ERO is appointed and funded by the Grampian Valuation Joint Board. The Board is a public body that exists to provide the local taxation assessment service to the three councils within the Grampian area (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray). By agreement with these councils, the Board is also responsible for the appointment and funding of the Electoral Registration Officer.

The Assessor & ERO has a small workforce distributed between offices in Aberdeen, Banff & Elgin. The Board and the Assessor & ERO are committed to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equal opportunity and foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.

## **2. Grampian Assessor & ERO**

The Grampian Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer is an independent statutory official appointed by the Grampian Valuation Joint Board to value non-domestic properties for rating purposes, allocate dwellings to council tax bands and provide an electoral registration service for the Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray council areas. These councils lie in the North East of Scotland and their collective area is known as Grampian. The local councils collect non-domestic rates and council tax and their Returning Officers are usually responsible for conducting any elections.

## **3. The Grampian Valuation Joint Board**

The Grampian Valuation Joint Board is the statutory valuation authority established by the Valuation Joint Boards (Scotland) Order 1995. The Board comprises 15 members; Aberdeen City Council appoints six Members, Aberdeenshire Council appoints six Members and The Moray Council appoints three Members. The three councils fund the Board on a pro-rata basis.

The role of the valuation authority is to appoint the Assessor and deposes as necessary for the purposes of the Valuation Acts. The Assessor and any deposes must be chartered surveyors and the Valuation Acts place the duty to assess properties on the Assessor rather than the Board thus ensuring that the assessments are arrived at in an independent manner. Through local arrangements, the Board appointed the Assessor as Electoral Registration Officer to the three councils.

## 4. The Legal Context

### The Equality Act 2010 and the General Equality Duty

The General Equality Duty replaces the previous race, disability and gender equality duties, which aimed to mainstream equality into public sector culture. These principles continue to apply to the public sector under the Equality Act 2010. This Act increased the number of equality groups from three to eight. These groups are called protected characteristics in the Equality Act:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex, and
- Sexual Orientation

The General Equality Duty also covers Marriage and Civil Partnerships, with regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination in employment.

The General Equality Duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other prohibited conduct
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

## The Specific Equality Duties

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 place particular legal requirements on specified public authorities to assist them meet the requirements of the General Equality Duty. Valuation Joint Boards are specified in the regulations. The legal duties for the Grampian Valuation Joint Board are to:

- Report on mainstreaming equality
- Publish equality outcomes and report on progress
- Assess and review policies and practices
- Gather and use employee information
- Consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement
- Publish in a manner that is accessible to the public

The Specific Duties require public authorities in Scotland to publish a Mainstreaming Report and a set of Equality Outcomes by 30 April 2013.

The Board must publish a fresh mainstreaming report every two years. The Board must also report on the progress made to achieve the equality outcomes by 30 April 2015 with fresh equality outcomes identified by 30 April 2017.

Given the respective roles of the Board and the Assessor & ERO, the Assessor & ERO reports on behalf of the Board.

## **5. Mainstreaming**

Mainstreaming simply means integrating equality into the day-to-day operations of the service – considering equality in everything that is done as an employer and when planning and providing services. Senior managers must provide clear and consistent messages with the equality duties embedded within all strategy. Co-workers should be able to recognise the relevance of the equality duties to their own role and should consider it in carrying out their work. Equality therefore becomes fully integrated within structures, behaviours and culture rather than an adjunct to these aspects of the service.

Evidence is an important aspect of mainstreaming and includes monitoring service users and service activity as regards all of the protected characteristics and then analysing outcomes. Monitoring and annual reporting on workforce composition, recruitment, development and retention of its employees with respect to protected characteristics will also assist the mainstreaming process.

### Progress to date

The Assessor & ERO has been represented or participated in person in the Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland workshops and Scottish Assessors Association Governance Committee sessions; and liaised with the personnel conducting mainstreaming and identifying equality outcomes for the three councils that operate with the Board's geographical area. Joint working with officers responsible for implementation of the new equality provisions in the other assessment and registration organisations has also been carried out.

At times of acute financial pressures on the public purse, the objective is to avoid duplication in terms of consultation and research where common base data is available, ensuring that Best Value<sup>1</sup>, a characteristic of public sector working that, like equalities, must be embedded in all operations, is delivered.

### Information sources

In advance of considering equalities outcomes, the Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council and The Moray Council mainstreaming research provides a resource in terms of statistical information for Grampian and also, through consultation with representative bodies, information on attitudes that prevail within the area. Most of the statistical information originated from the 2001 census outputs and through collaborative working with the relevant authorities, this information will be reviewed against the 2011 census data as it becomes available.

The Electoral Commission is an independent body established by Parliament. One of the Commission's objectives is to increase public participation in the democratic process and in this regard, it has carried out research on access and attitudes across group characteristics including gender, ethnicity and age. The research, that is quite extensive and spans the last ten years, provides a number of consistent themes:

- Voter registration is lower for Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME)
- The level of voter registration is inversely related to age
- Men are more engaged in the democratic processes than women

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<sup>1</sup> The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003



- Whilst UK Commonwealth, non-UK Commonwealth, Irish and EU citizens are entitled to be registered. EU nationals are least likely to be registered to vote.
- People in rented property tend to be less likely to participate in politics
- Deprivation has an association with non-participation in the electoral process
- Mobile populations tend to be under-registered. This is believed to include travellers

There are clear parallels that dictate that active consideration of these themes must be embedded in registration practice and procedure, essentially mainstreaming equalities considerations in the day-to-day operations of the service.

## **6. Evidence Review**

Neither the Board nor the Assessor & ERO operate in a vacuum albeit that the remit has a very narrow and statutory foundation. It is important to recognise that the functions are restricted but also that the impact of the functions is fundamental – providing access to the democratic process and an independent assessment service for local taxation.

Partnership working is however a key aspect of the service, with partnerships between the Scottish Assessors Association and the 13 other individual and independent lands valuation assessors, the Association of Electoral Administrators and the 14 other electoral registration officers in Scotland, the Electoral Commission, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation. Through these partnerships, the service is able to benefit from the synergies of joint working. The benefits of sharing resources, research and expertise enables the Board through the Assessor & ERO to deliver cost effective but specialist and comprehensive outcomes to the local area.

Operational partnerships with the three local councils responsible for the levy and collection of non-domestic rates and council tax, along with their electoral services offices that support the returning officers appointed for particular elections also prevail. Joint working at this local level ensures that the equalities themes flow across services and measures to advance the interests of those with protected characteristics are implemented in a coordinated manner.

Through their local and national joint working arrangements it is considered that Assessors & EROs provide one of the best examples of joint working

within the Scottish public sector, where the focus is on service delivery without disproportionate overheads of a structural or organisational nature.

Local and national partners also have an important role in providing feedback as to performance.

The service's strategic position is as follows:

- Electoral Registration is subject to a fundamental shift from household registration to individual registration brought about by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. For the next two years, the regime is subject to a series of initiatives that will have a substantial impact on the service and citizens. For example in 2014, 16 and 17 year olds who will be entitled to participate in the national referendum. There are some 430,000 electors currently registered to vote in Grampian, this amounts to approximately 10% of the Scottish electorate and 1% of the UK electorate. In recent years, Grampian has experienced high levels of employment and net migration from other parts of the UK. Since 2002 there has been a large increase in national insurance registrations to non-UK nationals. Through the necessity of contact with every elector, electoral registration is a priority area for equalities, particularly in view of the fundamental shift in focus from household to individual, and the drive to ensure all eligible 16 and 17 year olds can participate in the 2014 referendum.
- Rating – the rating revaluation of non-domestic properties that was due to be held in 2015 will now take place in 2017. This means that the bulk of the preparatory work will take place in 2014 – 2016 as the valuations will require to be finalised by the end of the summer in 2016. In Grampian, the Assessor is responsible for assessing the values of some 25,000 non-domestic properties that currently have a total rateable value of £700M.

- The Council Tax regime is currently a stable function, with a valuation list of some 250,000 dwellings allocated to council tax bands and around 2,000 new dwellings being added each year. The Scottish Government has indicated that they are reviewing its future and it is possible that it will be amended or replaced following the next Scottish Government election in 2016.
- The Appendix to this report provides the current characteristics of the employees. The Assessor & ERO service establishment comprises 76.5 full time posts. There are currently 75 full and part-time employees that represent 67.5 full time equivalents. Staff turnover is low, as detailed in the appendix, and the acute restraint in public expenditure dictates that recruitment will be minimal albeit subject to modest adjustments in order to cater for the move to individual electoral registration. The potential to effect change through workforce recruitment is therefore extremely limited.

Against this background and recognising that the rating and council tax functions are in the main extremely stable and not subject to the extent of citizen interaction that is encountered through the registration function, it seems clear that the main focus in the next two years requires to be in the electoral registration field.

Whilst the employment situation is also stable, the Board and Assessor & ERO must give the obligations of an employer sufficient prominence.

## **7. Equality Outcomes**

### Equality Outcome 1

Maximise the opportunities for young citizens to register to vote and therefore enable them to participate in the democratic process

The registration of young voters (under 18) for the referendum will mirror the demographic profile of Grampian. Registration statistics will demonstrate progress against census outputs and other sources of young person data. In turn, the early engagement with young citizens should prove beneficial in assisting to establish a culture of engagement in mid-late teens that may be maintained into adulthood.

### Activities

- Consult with partner authorities and education providers
- Canvass and publicity plan
- Integration of the equalities element with the Electoral Commission performance standards regime
- Engagement with individual equalities groups to ensure removal of barriers to registration

### Measurement

- Registration rates compared to census outputs
- Number of registration corrections and complaints

## Equality Outcome 2

Maximise registration amongst high mobility citizens such as occupiers of houses in multiple occupation and tenanted dwellings.

Research has shown that high mobility citizens and citizens in tenanted dwellings are under-represented in terms of electoral registration. Ethnicity and nationality may be influencing this under-registration.

### Activities

- Consult with partner authorities and housing providers
- Canvass and publicity plan
- Integration of the equalities element with the Electoral Commission performance standards regime
- Engagement with individual equalities groups to ensure removal of barriers to registration
- Focus on improved materials using straightforward language tested by relevant groups in partnership with other EROs and the Electoral Commission.

### Measurement

- Registration rates compared to census outputs
- Number of registration corrections and complaints

### Equalities Outcome 3

#### To maximise opportunities for young people to enter the workforce

Youth employment is a key national priority, with the low percentage of employees recruited directly from school identified as a key issue. Whilst the service relies on a significant number of individuals who are required to have tertiary education and be working towards professional qualifications, analysis confirms that under 25 year olds are under-represented in the service's workforce. Notwithstanding that recruitment is fairly minimal, the opportunity nevertheless exists to enhance opportunities for young citizens.

#### Activities

- Promote work experience opportunities for under 25 year olds
- Review recruitment advertising media
- Promote career progression schemes to encourage young people to make the service an employer of choice.

#### Measurement

- Annual workforce monitoring
- Annual work-experience monitoring

## **8. Conclusion**

The Board will support the Assessor & ERO in mainstreaming equalities throughout the service and monitor progress on an annual basis in relation to the protected characteristics and the specific equality outcomes identified above.

The Board will publish a fresh mainstreaming report in April 2015 and formally report on the progress made to achieve the equality outcomes by 30 April 2015.

Fresh equality outcomes will be identified and reported by 30 April 2017.



## 9. Appendix: Workforce Monitoring Statistics for year to 31.3.2013

	Work force Profile*	Employment Applicants	Appointment	Training	Promotion	Leavers
<b>Total number</b>	75	7	2	33	0	1
<b>Race</b>						
<b>White</b>						
British	52%	86%	100%	52%		100%
Other						
Irish						
Other white background	1%					
<b>Mixed</b>						
<b>Asian, Asian Scottish, Asian English, Asian Welsh or other British Asian</b>						
Indian						
Pakistani						
Bangladeshi						
Chinese	1%			6%		
Other Asian background						
<b>Black, Black Scottish, Black English, Black Welsh or other Black British</b>						
<b>Other ethnic background</b>						
<b>Unidentified</b>	46%	14%		42%		
<b>Disability</b>						
Yes	1%					
No	99%	100%	100%	100%		100%
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	52%	57%		45%		100%
Male	48%	43%	100%	55%		
<b>Age</b>						
16-25	1	3		0		
26-35	9	1		6		1
36-45	13			4		
46-55	29	1	1	20		
56-65	22	1	1	3		
>65	1			0		
Unknown		1				

\*As at 31 March 2013

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