



Grampian Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

Public Performance Report 2015/16

Introduction

The Grampian Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) 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.

General Information

The Grampian Valuation Joint Board is a public body that funds the Assessor & ERO by means of requisitions from Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray councils. Expenditure for 2015/16 was £3.822M against a budget of £4.011M and was net of additional grant funded expenditure of £0.375M provided under the UK government's Electoral Registration Transformation Programme for the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER). The Assessor & ERO has a full-time equivalent of 78 posts distributed between offices in Aberdeen, Banff and Elgin. As at 31 March 2016 there were 73 full-time equivalent staff in post. In the last year staff absence due to ill health amounted to 3.9%. This is a modest decrease on the figure of 4.0% in the previous year. Absence data for a small establishment is sensitive to the misfortune of a small number of employees. Only 5 employees recorded absence of greater than 14 days in the year, all of which was due to chronic conditions/surgery.

A review of our 2015/16 priorities

Complete and accurate registers of electors for the UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE) of 7 May 2015.

This election took place during the period of transition to IER which meant that absent voters had to be fully transitioned to IER if they were planning to vote by post or proxy. Electors who had not transitioned could however continue to vote in person at their polling station. We managed our publicity and engagement activities to assist citizens with this complex issue and the elections took place without any issues arising despite the fact that the customary autumn household canvass had not been carried out in 2014 due to the IER transitional arrangements. Reports on the election published by the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators highlighted a number of issues where ERO's had encountered logistical and software difficulties that had impacted on the election. These difficulties all arose in England or Wales, with no reports of problems in Scotland.

Conduct the first full canvass of properties in the area since 2013 and manage the end of the transitional arrangements for the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER).

Through the recruitment of full time electoral registration assistants, the first canvass of all residential properties in the area since 2013 was carried out. The end of transition was brought forward to 30 November 2015 and targeted canvassing ahead of this date minimised the number of entries removed from the registers to less than 1% of the

registers. The two stage nature of the canvass process now required under the IER framework means that canvass activity extends well beyond the 1 December and registration application activity has developed to an all year round process with special emphasis around electoral events. By 1 April 2016 the total electorate was 441,677.

The registration of under 18s in line with the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Act 2015.

The extension of the franchise was managed carefully and benefitted from partnership working with education authorities and individual schools. Apart from presentations and provision of information, specific activities included assisting authority-wide school elections and a design competition for engagement materials. By the end of the year just over 11,000 under 18s had registered to vote.

Prepare for the 2017 general revaluation of all non-domestic properties.

The revaluation of over 25,000 non-domestic properties takes a substantial amount of planning and preparation. Market evidence is of paramount importance and 1 April 2015 is the date that the market evidence should relate to. This is known as the tone date for the revaluation. We have issued rental questionnaires to more than 10,000 let properties and information forms requesting details of the occupation of the property to a further 3,500 properties. By the end of the year we had draft revaluation values for a third of the properties in the valuation roll.

Publish revised registers that marked the end of the IER transition period by 1 December 2015.

Throughout the last year we have provided information and statistical data on our registration activities to both the Cabinet Office that has been responsible for the implementation of IER and the Electoral Commission. The Commission reported on its assessment of the IER Transition progress in GB and the May 2015 registers in June 2015 and published its report on the December 2015 registers in February 2016. The Commission's reports assessed ERO performance. All EROs in Scotland met all the performance standards set by the Commission.

Maintain complete and accurate valuation lists and rolls

The Council Tax Valuation Lists for Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray contain the addresses and council tax bands of all **dwelling**s in each council area. The Valuation Rolls provide the address, owner, occupier and rateable value of **non-domestic properties** in the three council areas. Agricultural property is exempt from rating and is not included in the valuation rolls. The lists and rolls are published and can be inspected in the Grampian Assessor & ERO offices. The public can also look up any address in Scotland to check the council tax band or rateable value of a property by using the Scottish Assessors Association website www.saa.gov.uk.

We use quantitative target-based performance indicators rather than qualitative measures to monitor our performance in this area. In terms of overall numbers, the organisation increased the number of assessments of domestic and non-domestic properties being made within the 90 day performance timeframe when compared to the previous year with assessments for 4,296 properties made within the 90 day timeframe, whereas the corresponding total for 2014/15 was 3,935. However, in both domestic and non-domestic categories we did not achieve the targets of 94% of new dwellings being banded in the 90 day timeframe nor 77% of amendments to the valuation roll within the same 90 day timeframe. The corresponding percentages are 92.5% and 61.2%.

An examination of the reasons where the change to the list (domestic) or roll (non-domestic) was more than 90 days from the effective date of the change established that where the organisation relied on information required to make the change to come from third parties delays in implementation frequently lay with the third party rather than the

Assessor. Many changes or alterations to properties that did not require planning consents or building warrants were identified from rent questionnaires that had been issued as part of the Revaluation 2017 preparations. If the changes made in response to the late provision of information from third parties/rent questionnaires are excluded from the analysis, the resultant performance indicator is that 70% of changes to the valuation roll were made within the 90 day timeframe.

In overall terms the organisation met its priorities for 2015/16. The major commitment to Revaluation 2017 has impacted on our services and has in fact, given rise to a significant volume of updates to non-domestic assessments. The organisation has however responded and delivered in order to meet its priorities.

Data tables

Table 1 shows the number of new dwellings added to the lists in Grampian over the last 10 years and also the percentage that received notification within the 3 and 6 month performance windows. Table 1 also shows the performance thresholds that have been set.

Table 1 The time taken to add new dwellings to the list

Year	Number	Within 3 months		Within 6 months	
		Threshold	Actual	Threshold	Actual
2015/16	3,009	94%	93%	97%	98%
2014/15	2,650	92%	92%	97%	97%
2013/14	2,757	92%	95%	97%	99%
2012/13	2,568	92%	97%	97%	99%
2011/12	2,455	90%	95%	97%	98%
2010/11	2,715	90%	96%	97%	98%
2009/10	2,642	90%	92%	97%	98%
2008/09	2,803	88%	89%	96%	97%
2007/08	2,964	88%	92%	96%	98%
2006/07	3,078	88%	91%	96%	98%

Table 2 shows the number of alterations made to the roll each year along with the percentage of alterations that were made within the 3 and 6 month performance windows. The performance thresholds are also provided. Alterations include new entries to the valuation roll for newly constructed or converted buildings as well as alterations to existing buildings.

Table 2 The time taken to alter the Valuation Roll

Year	Number	Within 3 months		Within 6 months	
		Threshold	Actual	Threshold	Actual
2015/16	2,474	77%	61%	90%	78%
2014/15	2,200	77%	68%	90%	85%
2013/14	2,096	77%	75%	90%	88%
2012/13	2,284	70%	75%	85%	89%
2011/12	1,945	70%	69%	85%	86%
2010/11	2,502	70%	66%	85%	81%
2009/10	1,892	50%	57%	75%	73%
2008/09	2,248	50%	70%	75%	86%
2007/08	2,339	50%	65%	75%	85%
2006/07	2,187	50%	59%	75%	82%

Table 3 provides the electorate, the number of electors who have postal votes at the end of the canvass, and the number of electors who have opted out of the Edited Register. The former practice of removing electors who do not respond to two consecutive canvasses no longer applies to IER, and a full canvass was not conducted in 2014/15.

Table 3 Electorate details for Grampian

Register	Electorate	Canvass Return Rate	Postal Voters	Electors removed after 2 years	Opt-outs from Open/Edited Register
1 Dec 2015	436,748*	75%*	87,110	n/a	213,544
27 Feb 2015	444,256	n/a	85,618	n/a	196,359
10 March 2014	445,541	95.4%	70,626	1,336	179,326
1 Dec 2012	430,927	92.2%	78,886	1,556	150,766
1 Dec 2011	427,105	92.6%	71,502	1,667	138,020
1 Dec 2010	411,047	87.9%	66,645	2,315	96,140
1 Dec 2009	406,422	87.9%	54,709	2,718	92,172
1 Dec 2008	406,654	87.8%	49,626	1,579	77,420
1 Dec 2007	405,474	78.3%	49,157	1,930	73,249

*As stated above the canvass now extends beyond the 1 December, the number of registered electors rose to 441,667 by the end of 2015/16

Conclusion

The organisation has adapted to continue to deliver high quality registration and valuation services in a continuing cost efficiency driven environment. The organisation has tackled and delivered the first post-individual electoral registration transition canvass. It has also embraced the reduction in voting age to 16, and through its partnership working ensured that the young people were registered and engaged ahead of the Scottish Parliamentary elections that took place early in the following year.

The organisation is however only as good as the people that collectively represent it. In this regard the officers and employees of the Board have continued to demonstrate a commitment and agility that has ensured that service delivery reflects local concerns and conditions. I am extremely grateful to fellow officers and employees for their professionalism and dedication to ensure that the statutory duties of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer are delivered to the citizens of Grampian.

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