



Grampian Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

Public performance report for 2017/18

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. Net expenditure for 2017/18 was £4.095M against a budget of £4.039M that was net of additional grant funding of £0.177M 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 75 posts distributed between offices in Aberdeen, Banff and Elgin. As at 31 March 2017 there was 71 full-time equivalent staff in post. In the last year staff absence due to ill health was 1.7%. This compares to 1.3% for 2016/17 and 3.9% for 2015/16.

A review of our 2017/18 priorities

The following operational priorities were specifically identified in the management commentary for the year, they must however not be considered in isolation and the organisation has a wide range of on-going priorities that relate not only to operational aspects of the organisation but also to our duty to eliminate discrimination and mainstream equalities, manage our records to the satisfaction of the Keeper of Records, protect data and provide information on request and in line with current law.

Complete and accurate registers of electors for the Scottish local government elections of 4 May 2017 and the extraordinary UK Parliamentary General Election held on 8 June 2017.

The Scottish local government elections were the second elections where 16 and 17 year olds could vote as a matter of course. The 2016/17 management commentary observed that whilst there is greater certainty to the election calendar as a result of the establishment of fixed terms for parliaments, the experience of 2016 where the service encountered an unplanned extension to the registration application deadline for the EU referendum following a national system failure, stood the service in good stead for 2017 when on the 18 April the Prime Minister unexpectedly announced that an UKPGE would take place on 8 June. Our publicity and engagement activities resulted in a year on year increase in 16 and 17 yr olds being registered to vote with 10,007 registered to vote on 4

May 2017 compared to 9,186 registered for 5 May 2016 Scottish Parliamentary elections. The Electoral Commission's report on the 2017 Scottish local government elections was that they 'ran smoothly' and that this was 'a testament to the significant efforts of the electoral community'. The Commission's subsequent report into the UKPGE concluded that the election was 'well run' and identified areas where registration or returning officer errors had been made – none of which were in Scotland.

Conduct a full household canvass under the individual electoral registration (IER) regime.

The canvass of 279,165 households achieved a return rate of 83% by 1 December 2017. This was an improvement on the corresponding return rate of 79% as at 1 December 2016. We continued to chase up non-returns and by 31 March 2018 the return rate had risen to 86%. We have also managed to increase the number of households who respond using automated response channels such as online, text or automated telephone options from 79,606 in 2016 to 95,704 in 2017. Automated responses are more efficient as they cost less and do not require back-office processing. The two-stage nature of the canvass under the IER framework means that canvass related activity extends well beyond the 1 December and registration application activity is now an all year round process.

Publish revised registers 1 December 2017.

The Electoral Commission reported that all EROs in Scotland met their performance standards. The electorate on the revised local government registers published by 1 December 2017 was 438,674.

Respond to enquiries following the 2017 revaluation of all non-domestic properties.

The 2017 revaluation had a significant impact on ratepayers in the North East and the volume of enquiries and appeals was greater than had been the case in previous revaluation years. The sensitivity of the situation was principally due to the slowdown in the NE property market that became apparent after the valuation date of 1 April 2015 but before the revaluation values came into force on 1 April 2017. The service responded to the increased sensitivity with a high profile strategy of media engagement and presentations at public events to ensure that stakeholders could appreciate the rationale behind the revaluation including what issues were within scope for an appeal against a revaluation rateable value. A significant decision published by the Lands Valuation Appeal Court in March 2018 supported our interpretation of the law concerning changes in the economy.

Value all shooting rights and deer forests.

Since the exemption of shooting rights from non-domestic rates in 1995 there has been no definitive all-Scotland data source that would provide the location and owner/occupier information for shooting rights. Following the removal of this exemption by the Land Reform Act in 2016, Assessors have been working closely with national agencies, such as SNH, to obtain address data and local bodies, such as branches of the National Farmers Union and other stakeholders, to ensure that the sector is fully engaged in the process. A total of 2,359 new entries with a combined value of £2.47M were added to the valuation rolls in Grampian.

Maintain complete and accurate valuation lists and rolls

In terms of overall volumes, the number of assessments of domestic and non-domestic properties being made within the 90 day target period increased by 9% with 4,648 assessments in 2017/18 compared to 4,267 for 2016/17. The significant increase in

volume of our workload and the addition of a further 2,359 new entries for shooting rights however meant that we did not manage to maintain our target of 94% of new dwellings and 77% of amendments to the valuation roll within the 90 day target period. The corresponding percentages are 91% and 65% and essentially reflect the capacity of our organisation to handle such a large overall increase in workload without additional resourcing.

In overall terms the organisation met its priorities for 2017/18. It delivered registers and the related absent voting records for the Scottish local government elections and the snap UK parliamentary general election whilst adding over 2,000 entries for shootings to the valuation roll during 2017/18 and supporting ratepayers in understanding the rationale behind the 2017 revaluation against a sensitive and difficult economic background. Meantime it continued to deliver routine business as usual canvass, rolling registration, running roll and council tax update.

Data tables

Table 1 shows the number of new dwellings added to the lists in Grampian over the last 5 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
2017/18	3,231	94%	91%	97%	97%
2016/17	3,345	94%	92%	97%	98%
2015/16	3,009	94%	93%	97%	98%
2014/15	2,650	92%	92%	97%	97%
2013/14	2,757	92%	95%	97%	99%

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. The years 2009/10 and 2016/17 are shown in *italics* as these represent years when we are revaluing all non-domestic properties in addition to our routine maintenance of the roll. For this reason our resources have to be diverted to revaluation tasks and our routine maintenance performance threshold adjusted as appropriate.

Table 2 The time taken to alter the Valuation Roll

Year	Number	Within 3 months		Within 6 months	
		Threshold	Actual	Threshold	Actual
2017/18	2,576	77%	66%	90%	83%
<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2,129</i>	<i>60%</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>85%</i>	<i>75%</i>
2015/16	2,474	77%	61%	90%	78%
2014/15	2,200	77%	68%	90%	85%
2013/14	2,096	77%	75%	90%	88%

Table 3 provides the local government registers total electorate, the number of households we canvassed, the canvass response rate and the number of households that responded using our online/SMS text and phone response service rather than completing and posting the household enquiry form to us. The register published on 10 March 2014 was the last register revision based on the traditional household canvass prior to the introduction of individual electoral registration on 17 September 2014. A full canvass was not conducted in 2014/15 as this coincided with the national implementation of individual electoral registration (IER).

Table 3 Electorate and canvass details for Grampian

Register	Local Government Electorate	Number of households canvassed	Canvass Response Rate	Automated responses
1 Dec 2017	438,674	279,278	83%	95,704
1 Dec 2016	439,590	276,439	79%	79,606
1 Dec 2015	436,748	273,173	75%	64,040
27 Feb 2015	444,256	n/a	n/a	n/a
10 March 2014	445,541	269,163	95%	88,481

Conclusion

During 2017/18 the organisation was given plenty of opportunity to test its agility and capability to respond to external pressures. The significant response to the 2017 revaluation, the snap general election for 8 June and the difficult task of ensuring shooting rights for which there was no definitive data source were properly valued were three unique challenges for the organisation to rise to meet during 2017/18 whilst continuing the deliver our business as usual activities of maintaining the valuation roll, valuation list and electoral register. The Lands Valuation Appeal Court decision that supported our interpretation of the law has helped to crystallise rating law in relation to changes in the economic fortunes of an area and as such provided a degree of certainty to the assessment process that would otherwise be subject to significant challenge.

The performance recoded in this report is a product of the professionalism, dedication and commitment of the employees of the organisation. I am extremely grateful to my colleagues who work to ensure that the statutory duties of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer are delivered in a customer focussed and effective manner to the communities that make up the Grampian area.

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