

MORAY COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Grampian Valuation Joint Board

Friday, 26 January 2024

Council Chambers, Council Office, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX

PRESENT

Councillor Desmond Bouse, Councillor Isobel Davidson, Councillor Donald Gatt, Councillor Dell Henrickson, Councillor Seamus Logan, Councillor Neil MacGregor, Councillor Marc Macrae, Councillor Sam Payne, Councillor Stephen Smith, Councillor Iain Taylor, Councillor Lynn Thomson, Councillor Judy Whyte

SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Theresa Coull (for Councillor Sonya Warren)

APOLOGIES

Councillor Ciaran McRae, Councillor Sonya Warren

IN ATTENDANCE

The Assessor and ERO, Depute Assessor and ERO (Aberdeen and Moray), Principal Admin Officer, Lorraine Paisey - Treasurer to the Board, Audit and Risk Manager, Angela Pieri - External Auditor, and Lindsey Robinson - Committee Services Officer.

1. Chair

Councillor Donald Gatt, as Convenor of the Board, chaired the meeting.

2. Declaration of Member's Interests

In terms of Standing Order 25 and the Councillor's Code of Conduct, the Board noted that there were no declarations from Members who were present at the meeting where any item of business in which they have any financial or other interest is to be dealt with.

3. Minute of Meeting held 3 November 2023

The minute of the meeting of 3 November 2023 was submitted and approved by the Board.

Councillor MacGregor raised a point of accuracy. He stated that the declaration section should show him as a member of the North East Pension Fund Committee not the Board.

The Committee Services Officer advised that she would update the minute accordingly

4. Internal Audit Plan for 2024-25

The meeting had before it a report by the Internal Auditor advising the Board of the planned internal audit coverage of the Assessor's Service for the financial year ending 31 March 2024.

Following consideration, the Board unanimously agreed to note the proposed internal audit coverage.

5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Statement 1 April to 31 December 2023

The meeting had before it a report by the Treasurer to the Board asking the Board to consider the Revenue Budget Monitoring Statement for the period 1 April to 31 December 2023 and the Estimated Outturn position for the year 2023/24.

Following consideration, the Board unanimously agreed to:

- i. note the Revenue Budget Monitoring Statement for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023; and
- ii. note the estimated outturn forecast for the year 2023/24.

6. Financial Planning for 2024-25 and Future Years

The meeting had before it a report by the Treasurer to the Board asking the Board to consider the budgets that will form the three year Revenue Budget from 2024/25 onwards, and to discuss the operational issues facing the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer in the medium to long term.

Following consideration, the Board unanimously agreed to:

- i. approve the budget for 2024/25;
- ii. note the current indicative budget for 2025/26 onwards and that this will be further adjusted during the preparation of the Revenue Budget for 2025/26;
- iii. note various scenarios which could impact on the revenue budget and the range of potential assumptions and risks; and
- iv. note operational issues facing the service.

7. Electoral Registration

The meeting had before it a report by the Principal Admin Officer updating the Board on current developments in electoral registration.

During consideration Councillor Smith sought clarification on what else could be done to ensure that the public are aware of the need for voter ID at the general election.

In response, the Principal Admin Officer advised that the Electoral Commission would be doing a nationwide publicity campaign once the election had been called but that there were really useful resources on the Electoral Commission website but that the ERO would need help from all Council media teams to do this.

Councillor Logan sought clarification on whether all current UK Parliament members had been provided with updated copies of the register.

In response, the Principal Admin Officer advised that the registers are sent out on an "on request" basis.

Councillor Taylor sought clarification on whether online registration would be extended in the future.

In response, the Principal Admin Officer advised that the online application facility for an absent vote was brought in as part of the Elections Act 2022 and is only for reserved elections, meaning it is for UK Parliamentary General elections, UK By-elections and any recall petition. It would therefore be up to the Scottish Government if they wanted to implement it for any Scottish elections.

Following consideration, the Board unanimously agreed to note the contents of the report.

8. Valuation Roll and Council Tax Valuation List

The meeting had before it a report by the Depute Assessor and ERO (Aberdeen and Moray) providing the Board with an operational update on the valuation services provided by the Assessor including the performance levels achieved during the period 1 April 2023 to 16 January 2024 and making a recommendation on performance thresholds for the next three years.

During consideration Councillor Gatt sought clarification as to whether the 500 properties set to be returned to the Council Tax regime could be broken down into constituent authorities.

In response the Depute Assessor and ERO (Aberdeen and Moray) advised that the information was not available at present as some information was still being processed but it could be provided at a later date once it is available.

Following consideration, the Board unanimously agreed to:

- i. note the operational and performance information; and note the recommendations in respect of the Valuation Roll and Council Tax
- ii. Valuation List performance thresholds for the three year period 2024/25 to 2026/27

9. Staff Vacancies, Recruitment and Upskilling Existing Staff

The meeting had before it a report by the Assessor and ERO updating the Board on the current level of staff vacancies, recruitment and the upskilling of existing staff. During consideration, the Assessor and ERO advised that there is a meeting with Moray Council HR on 21 February and an update will be provided at the next meeting.

Cllr Gatt advised that he had sent an email to HR and received a response and this would be uploaded to CMIS after the meeting.

Councillor Thomson highlighted that NHS Grampian and NHS Highland have a website for recruitment in the Moray area and this may be something that could be replicated.

In response, the Assessor and ERO advised that he would raise it in his meeting with HR.

Following consideration the Board unanimously agreed to note the contents of the report.

10. Question Time

Future Meetings

Cllr Logan sought clarification as to whether the meetings were to continue in Elgin or to return to alternating between Elgin and Aberdeen.

Cllr Gatt advised that the Clerk would check the minute of the previous meetings.

The Assessor and ERO advised that prior to Covid the meetings were held in Elgin with the exception being the July/August meeting which was held in Aberdeen.

Following the meeting the Clerk advised the following:

At the meeting of the Board held 26 August 2022, the Board was asked to agree on the meetings going forward. The options were:

Online Meetings:

Holding on-line meetings saves members and officers time, in not having to travel to either Elgin or Aberdeen and in turn savings on travel and subsistence for each of the constituent Authorities.

Face to Face Meetings:

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, meetings of the Board were held face to face, twice a year in Elgin and twice a year in Aberdeen, this involved members and officers travelling to either location. If the Board decided to return to face to face meetings, the meetings could only be webcast when held in Elgin.

Hybrid Meetings:

Members may wish to consider hybrid meetings where there is a mixture of in person and on-line attendance. If this is the preferred option, to allow for the continuation of webcasting the meetings, the face to face location of the meetings would require to be Moray Council offices in Elgin to allow the use of their hybrid meeting and webcasting facilities.

Following consideration the Board agreed that future meetings of the Grampian Valuation Joint Board would be held as hybrid meetings with the physical location for the meetings for those wishing to attend in person, being Council Chamber, High Street, Elgin (Paragraph 8 of the minute refers).