



Orkney and Shetland Valuation Joint Board



Minute

Thursday, 25 March 2021, 14:00.

Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Orkney Islands Council:

Councillors Andrew Drever, Robin W Crichton, David Dawson, Barbara Foulkes and Harvey Johnston.

Shetland Islands Council:

Councillors Alastair Cooper, Allison Duncan, John Fraser, Emma MacDonald (substitute) and George Smith.

Clerk to the Board:

- Karen A Greaves, Head of Executive Support, Orkney Islands Council.

In Attendance:

- Colin Kemp, Treasurer to the Board.
- Dennis Stevenson, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer (for Items 1 and 2).
- Rosie Docherty, Rosie Docherty HR Consulting (for Item 3).

Orkney Islands Council:

- John W Mundell, Interim Chief Executive.
- Gareth Waterson, Head of Finance.
- Hazel Flett, Senior Committees Officer.

Shetland Islands Council:

- Jan Riise, Executive Manager – Governance and Law.
- Marie Gordon, Team Leader – HR Policy and Employment Support.

Apologies:

- Councillor Theo Smith, Shetland Islands Council.
- Maggie Sandison, Chief Executive, Shetland Islands Council.
- Gavin Mitchell, Head of Legal Services, Orkney Islands Council.

Declarations of Interest:

- No declarations of interest were intimated.

Chair:

- Councillor Andrew Drever, Orkney Islands Council, Convener of the Board.

1. Disclosure of Exempt Information

The Board noted the proposal that the public should be excluded from the meeting for Item 3, as consideration of the business may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information of the class described in the relevant paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 as amended.

Councillor Allison Duncan joined the meeting at this point.

2. Governance Review

The Clerk to the Board presented a joint report from the Chief Executive, Orkney Islands Council, and the Chief Executive, Shetland Islands Council, setting out the findings of a review of the governance arrangements for the Orkney and Shetland Valuation Joint Board.

The Clerk reminded members that, in November 2020, the Board agreed the scope of a review of governance arrangements and that the review be undertaken by the Improvement Service. Officers from the Improvement Services had subsequently held individual interviews with Board Members, with a facilitated session for both Board Members and officers held on 1 February 2021 to discuss the findings and consider areas for improvement.

The Improvement Service had now submitted its final report for consideration which found that, while the Deloitte Report highlighted governance as an area for the Board to focus improvement on, many of the issues raised were a reflection of staffing and recruitment issues facing the Board at that time. A number of new Members and officers had since joined the Board, which had a stabilising effect. An action plan had been developed to address the findings of the review and its recommendations and was attached for Members' consideration.

In response to a query from Councillor Robin W Crichton on what would happen with the review, the Clerk advised that the review arose from the findings of the annual audit report. The findings of the review would be useful in implementing improvements to the governance processes of the Board. The auditors would review actions arising from their previous annual audit report and either mark as complete or add further recommendations.

Councillor John Fraser referred to Action 5 on the Action Plan and suggested that it did not clarify whether support provided by officers to the Board would be formalised by inclusion in the relevant job description of that officer. The Interim Chief Executive, Orkney Islands Council, advised that this was work in progress, with a reporting target date of September 2021. He also urged caution on factoring additional duties into job descriptions and the potential for additional financial implications.

The Executive Manager – Governance and Law, Shetland Islands Council, concurred, particularly as each council had different structures and this may have unintended consequences for recruitment at a later date.

The Clerk advised that quarterly updates were provided in respect of the action plan arising from the annual audit report and asked the Board whether a similar reporting timescale was appropriate for the action plan arising from the governance review or, if not, what alternative reporting timescale was preferred. There was general agreement to align the reporting on a quarterly basis.

The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer offered general updates on actions for that post in the action plan, as follows:

- Action 8 – options to promote and make accessible the work of the Board – the most obvious route for this would be through the Board's website.
- Action 9 – succession planning would be a key focus over the next period. Two graduates were recruited in August 2019 and a mentor had recently been recruited to assist.
- Action 11 – benchmarking with other valuation boards – performance measures were being investigated to enable comparisons to be made.

The Board noted:

2.1. That, on 26 November 2020, the Board agreed the scope of the review of governance arrangements to be undertaken by the Improvement Service.

2.2. That the Improvement Service had undertaken the review and reported its findings, as detailed in the report attached as Appendix 1 to the joint report by the Chief Executive, Orkney Islands Council, and the Chief Executive, Shetland Islands Council.

2.3. That the review found that, while the majority of Members felt no major governance issues remained outstanding, a number of areas were highlighted where the Board should focus on improvement.

2.4. That an action plan, to address the recommendations arising from the independent review of governance, had been developed.

The Board resolved:

2.5. That the action plan, to address the recommendations of the independent review of governance arrangements for the Orkney and Shetland Valuation Joint Board, attached as Appendix 2 to the joint report by the Chief Executive, Orkney Islands Council, and the Chief Executive, Shetland Islands Council, be approved.

2.6. That the Clerk should submit a quarterly update to the Board on progress with the actions contained in the action plan addressing the recommendations of the independent review of governance arrangements for the Orkney and Shetland Valuation Joint Board.

Councillor Robin W Crichton asked that the Board's appreciation of the efforts put in by the Improvement Service to the review be acknowledged and the Improvement Service advised accordingly, which was unanimously agreed by the Board.

The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer left the meeting at this point.

3. Review of Pay and Grading Model – Progress

On the motion of Councillor Andrew Drever, seconded by Councillor Robin W Crichton, the Board resolved that the public be excluded from the meeting for this item on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 as amended.

The Team Leader – HR Policy and Employment Support, Shetland Islands Council, presented a report setting out the main issues for the Board to consider in respect of the review of the pay and grading model, together with decisions required, as well as next steps towards implementation, should the Board decide to proceed with an independent pay and grading model, copies of which had been circulated.

Councillor Barbara Foulkes left the meeting at this point.

Councillor Alastair Cooper left the meeting at this point.

The Board thereafter resolved what action should be taken with regard to a standalone pay and grading model.

The above constitutes the summary of the Minute in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 section 50C(2) as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

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4. Conclusion of Meeting

At 15:55 the Convener declared the meeting concluded.

Signed: