

SCOTTISH RATEPAYERS FORUM
Suite 108, Jurys Inn Hotel, Jamaica Street, Glasgow
Tuesday, 15 February 2005 at 10.30 am

Present:	Alistair Don	- Scottish Licensed Trade Association
	Roger Littlewood	- HBOS and IBRF
	Ken McCormack	- James Barr representing CBI/Scottish Business Rates Surveyors Association
	Bill Anderson	- FPB Scotland
	Nicola Plunkett	- Scottish Executive
	Carol Sibbald	- Scottish Executive
	Niall Stuart	- FSB
	William Sommerville	- Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board, SAA Vice President (Chair)
	James McEwan	- Glasgow City Assessor
	Michael Lithgow	- Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board (SAA Executive)

1 APOLOGIES

AA McConochie – Grampian Valuation Joint Board, SAA President
D Gillespie - Highland, SAA Secretary

2 MINUTE OF MEETING OF 9 NOVEMBER 2004

This minute was approved.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Mr Littlewood enquired about the explanatory leaflets to be issued with Revaluation Notices and appeal acknowledgements.

Ms Sibbald informed him that they had been approved and produced.

3.2 It was suggested that the approved minutes of this Forum could go onto the SAA Portal. A number of organisations could not always attend the meetings and it was felt that this would allow interested parties to be kept informed of relevant issues. It was agreed that the SAA would look into this.

3.3 Mr Anderson asked if the Chemical Industry should be represented at the Forum as they had specific problems. Mr Sommerville explained that all were welcome and that the initial invitations to join the Forum related to organisations that had been involved at meetings with the Finance Minister. In addition representatives of the SAA also met with various groups to discuss specific problems related to their own industry.

3.4 Mr Littlewood asked that various groups should be formed as Valuation Ratepayers Forums, eg Banks. In England this works very well. This was noted for further discussion.

4 REVALUATION GENERAL

4.1 Mr Sommerville reported the following: -

- (i) Progress on the SAA Portal (www.saa.gov.uk) had seen Revaluation values placed on the site and the early feedback suggested that this project had been well received. A link to the Scottish Executive Rates Calculator was also included, however a caveat had been put on the website regarding calculation of bills.
- (ii) Revaluation Notices will be issued during March 2005 with explanatory leaflets included. It was also noted that some Assessors will have assistance with additional languages on notices.

- (iii) It is intended that SAA representatives will have discussions with 'Cabal' Groups to progress schemes of valuation with the intention of improving the appeal process for ratepayers.
- (iv) Work had also commenced on the addition of Practice Notes for all subjects on the Portal with a view to having a number of them on the site shortly after the issue of Notices.

A general discussion followed on the Revaluation with ratepayer concerns, Private Practice Surveyors, the Scottish Executive web page on Small Business Rates Relief being noted. Generally it appeared that the Revaluation approach by the SAA had been well received.

5 RICS 'CABALS' Presentation by Mr McCormack

Mr McCormack's presentation was made on behalf of the Scottish Business Rates Surveyors Association. His presentation outlined the following: -

- 1 Brief History – formed 1978
- 2 Function - consultancy
- 3 Restructuring – now 1 Association not 3
- 4 Role at 2005

Following the presentation a brief discussion took place.

Mr Anderson enquired if there was consistency across the border. To which Mr McCormack responded positively.

Mr Anderson enquired about bogus surveying companies as one of his members, a small hotelier, had been caught 3 times, and asked about the course of action Private Practice Surveyors are taking. Mr McCormack informed him of the RICS campaign against such companies.

6 PORTAL UPDATE

Mr Sommerville reported on the following: -

- 1 75,000 hits per week
- 2 MGF3 funding approved for additional developments
- 3 Part of this will be improved search facilities

Mr Anderson wished to have it noted that Hotel descriptions could be improved to better illustrate licensed and unlicensed hotels.

Mr Anderson asked if High Street Shops could be shown as single or double fronted.

Mr McCormack welcomed MGF3 and asked if Category and Client could be used for searching.

Mr Sommerville thanked everyone for their views and advised that in addition to Non Domestic Rating, Council Tax Bands are also on the site and the next step was to consider the addition of the Edited Register if legislation allowed.

User groups had also been set up for feedback to the SAA and all comments would be considered. However it was stressed that there was still a limit on the resources available to meet all requests, especially over a short period of time and consideration had to be given to a "Best Value" approach.

7 SUMMARY VALUATIONS

As a follow up to his previous update Mr Sommerville reported the statistics in his pilot exercise for Ayrshire. Overall the return of questionnaires was 15%, however 85% of those returned thought it a good idea. He noted that few errors came back to him, which suggested that the records were good.

Mr Littlewood commented on the confidentiality of Bank Premises and wanted care to be taken as security issues could be created.

Mr Sommerville informed the meeting that another three Assessors may be in a position to issue Summary Valuations, one with the issue of Notices, one on request and another when appealed. He stated this was still a discussed possibility and further information would be provided later.

8 ASSESSOR/RATEPAYER CONTACT

Mr Littlewood gave a description of the way the scheme works in England.

- 1 Informs VO of rent changes
- 2 Informs VO of new rents
- 3 20 members in the scheme
- 4 Better communication
- 5 Cost saving
- 6 Eases pressure on appealing

Mr Sommerville informed the meeting he would discuss it at the Assessors Committee meeting although the initial thoughts of Assessors present thought it could be progressed in Scotland also.

The lack of information continues to cause problems for Assessors and Ms Sibbald was asked about the penalty approach as in England, where the matter had been de-criminalised. Within the Scottish Executive it had not been thought to be a good way although minimum £5,000 rising to the value of the heritable subject appealed to all three Assessors present!

9 ELECTRONIC APPEALS/STANDARD FORMAT

The receipt of appeals by email was raised and it was agreed that this matter would be put to all Assessors at their next meeting.

10 FIXED DATES FOR NEXT MEETINGS

The venue was agreed as excellent and Mr Sommerville advised members of the Forum that a suggestion had been made to fix dates for the next year for better planning. It was agreed that if possible the venue would remain the same and dates would be circulated to all members for the next four meetings.

11 AOCB

- 11.1** It was requested that an item under the heading of Freedom of information be put on the agenda for the next meeting. Mr Anderson and Mr Don made some brief points re confidentiality. Mr Anderson wished it to be a standing issue on the agenda.

J McEwan
16 February 2005