

# The Scottish Ratepayers' Forum

# Newsletter



R 2005 Issue 2 December 2007

## WELCOME BACK

to the SRF Newsletter which is slightly later than originally proposed but then we have had elections and a change in government. I had hoped to include contributions in this issue from the Scottish Government and a ratepayers representative but pressure of their other work has prevented this.

We are only at Issue 2 however and there is plenty time to canvas views before the next Revaluation gets underway, so watch this space!

If you have an issue you would like raised or discussed feel free to e-mail or snail mail me. The SRF Newsletter is proposed to be issued twice annually and contributions are welcomed. Matters which require to be discussed will be referred to the SRF secretary for inclusion on the agenda for the next suitable meeting.

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## SAA Web Portal

In the first edition of the Newsletter you will have read that Les Walker, the Borders Assessor and SAA Portal Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) was to give an update about the Portal at the next meeting. For those of you not at the meeting Clark Low, Vice President of the SAA has helpfully provided this summary of Les' presentation.

*L Walker provided background on the portal, which provides single point access to Assessors' information across Scotland. The overall aim of the project was to provide business benefits for Assessors and their stakeholders, including government departments. It was being used by citizens, property professionals, local authorities, Government Agencies and Assessors' staff. In total there were around 25,000-30,000 page requests per working day.*

*The site currently provides searches of all-Scotland Valuation Rolls and Council Tax Lists and valuation Practice Notes, and provides on-line forms for the submission of rating appeals, council tax proposals and rental information returns. Government users were using the facility to download data relevant to their areas of interest and to access data archives.*

*The intention was to increase the functionality by providing the facility for large property users to provide rental and other data in bulk, to further extend the transactional services available and to provide summary valuations for certain categories of properties. The overall design of the site may be reviewed.*

*Cash releasing, time releasing and customer satisfaction benefits were being realised by the above users, with one firm claiming to have made over £500,000 worth of savings for their clients through using the site. GROS have reported annual savings of £50,000. R Littlewood (HBOS Property and a member of the SRF) confirmed the usefulness of the site and advised that he looked forward to working with the SAA to assist with the development of the bulk rental return facility. He was glad to hear the Summary Valuations would be provided. P Kelly (representing Scottish Water) reported that Scottish Water found the site invaluable and advised that they could identify additional revenues that had been achieved by comparing the valuation roll entries at the portal against their chargeable properties database.*

More about the Portal on Page 3

## The Voluntary Sector

At the meeting of the SRF on 4 September 2007, members received a paper from the Scottish Voluntary Sector which outlined various concerns in relation to rating and valuation matters. Some of the issues raised are covered here. Answers in relation to Valuation matters are provided on behalf of the SAA and in respect of Rating questions by Alan Traynor Immediate Past President of the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV).

- *Concerns about the timing and basis of any rating revaluation, particularly if the Scottish Executive plan to abolish the council tax proceeds. Planning in a climate of uncertainty is very difficult, particularly when the Local Authorities (as contractors) can give out both the exemptions and the contracts.*

The date of the next General Revaluation is of course known. It will be effective from 1 April 2010 and early indication of its out-turn will be available on the SAA Portal at [www.saa.gov.uk](http://www.saa.gov.uk). What is less clear is how properties currently in the Council Tax regime will fare if the proposed replacement of local income tax is seen to be inappropriate for certain types of "dwelling". (SAA)

- *Need to standardise local authorities' variable powers of granting relief to charities, which impacts on national organisations, who do not always experience consistent decisions from the 32 Scottish rating authorities, producing uncertainty for financial planning and making it much more difficult for the sector to invest in certain local authorities' areas.*

I would imagine that Council procedures will be consistent in relation to the granting of mandatory relief (80%). There will, however, be variations in practice for discretionary relief because, quite simply, individual Councils will apply the discretion as they see fit and how it aligns with their corporate aims. It has to be appreciated that Councils, or more correctly council taxpayers, partly fund the cost of discretionary awards. (AT IRRV)

- *The lack of portability of exemption - because they are property specific, when a charity moves to new premises in the same local authority area, they do not take the exemption with them, but have to reapply. This inhibits moves designed to improve client services, improve access for those with disabilities, improve staff or client security/anonymity, increase administrative efficiency/effectiveness. There is a case for full portability based on the OSCR registration if the move is within the same local authority area.*

Decisions on rates relief, including charities, are based on the use of the property concerned ie it does not follow that all properties occupied by charities will necessary receive relief (there is case law on this). This is the reason why separate application is needed i.e. charities are required to confirm that the properties are being wholly or mainly occupied for charitable purposes. (AT)

## SAA Update

Since the previous edition of the SRF Newsletter there have been changes at the top of the SAA. Douglas Gillespie, Assessor to the Highland and Western Isles VJB was elected President at the AGM in May 2007 and has been joined on the Executive Committee by Clark Low as Vice-President (Tayside VJB Assessor) and David Thomson as Secretary (Dumbarton Argyll & Bute VJB Assessor. Billy Sommerville, Ayrshire VJB Assessor remains as a member of the Executive Committee as Immediate Past President.

## More about the Portal (from Page 1)

The Scottish Assessors' Association is justifiably proud of its all Scotland website which provides a one-stop-shop for information on Non Domestic Valuation and Council Tax. Launched in 2004 the Portal has recently won two awards. In September it was voted "Best in Scotland" at the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) Scottish Conference Performance Awards and in October, at the IRRV National Conference in Brighton it won the "Excellence in I.T." award, beating a joint bid by the RICS and VOA.

"The emphasis of the Portal's development has been, and will continue to be, Assessors' ability to deliver services that are customer-focused using IT (and web-based tools) to transform the way these services are delivered, with the overall objective of providing enhanced joined-up government services beneficial to central and local government organisations, and citizens alike." (© [IRRV](#))



*The Scottish Assessors Portal was announced as "Best in Scotland" at the IRRV annual performance awards in Crieff on 5th Sept 2007 and went on to win the "Excellence in IT" award at the National Conference in Brighton on 11 October where Allan Traynor, IRRV National President presented this trophy to Les Walker SAA Portal SRO.*

Portal development continues and in November this year the site was re-launched with a new look and dynamic resizing to fit variable desktops. As an added bonus the site shows a "real" map of Scotland with Orkney and Shetland no longer confined to a geographically remote "box".

Have a look for yourself on [www.saa.gov.uk](http://www.saa.gov.uk)

The screenshot shows the website's layout with a purple header and navigation menu. The main content area includes search boxes for rateable values and council tax bands, a map of Scotland for regional selection, and a news section titled 'Re-launch of SAA Portal'.

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**Scottish Assessors**

**To Search for a Rateable Value**  
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**To Search for a Council Tax Band**  
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**Feedback**  
 Feedback on this site is important. You can provide this by clicking on the following link.

**News**  
**Re-launch of SAA Portal**  
 The SAA Portal was originally launched on 16 August 2004 with funding from the 14 Scottish Assessors and the Modernising Government Fund. Since that time a range of on-line transactional services has been added as well as other improvements to the site. Today sees the re-launch of the Portal with an improved site design and new menu structure which it is intended will enhance the experience of all site users. (Posted 26 Nov 2007)

For information about your area, select a region from the map  
 For information about your area, select a region from the map or identify your Assessor from the local council area list below. Click to be taken to the home page for that region

Councils [ ]

**Scottish Assessors**

- Ayrshire
- Central Scotland
- Dumfries & Galloway
- Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute