



VALUATION JOINT BOARD FOR CENTRAL SCOTLAND

Subject: Assessor's Complaint Procedure Report
Meeting: Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board
Date: 25th January, 2006
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer is responsible for three main Statutory Functions. There are readily available statutory means of challenging the Assessor & ERO's decision in each of these three areas, as follows:

- Valuation for Rating
 - Application to the Assessor
 - Appeal to the local Valuation Appeal Committee or to the Lands Tribunal with further appeal to the Lands Valuation Appeal Court
- Compilation of the Council Tax Valuation List
 - Proposal to the Assessor followed by appeal to the local Valuation Appeal Committee with further appeal to the Court of Session
- Electoral Registration
 - Formal hearing by the Electoral Registration Officer with appeal to the Sheriff Court

It should be remembered that there is also a valuation complaint procedure where any interested person may use the statutory appeal system to complain that the Assessor has not adequately valued a property.

2.0 BENEFITS OF A FORMAL COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

A formal complaint procedure is in keeping with the Assessor and ERO's commitment to provide good quality services.

The complaint procedure should:

- Be easily accessible
- Be easy to understand and use
- Operate promptly and within a set timetable
- Operate fairly both to customers and staff
- Produce information to help managers improve service provision

For staff, a complaint procedure provides an avenue to resolve an issue with a customer where there is no alternative. It therefore removes a potential for tension and conflict in customer relations. Staff will have greater confidence in dealing with contentious issues. Support is available from senior managers in dealing with dissatisfied customers. The Assessor and ERO is not defensive about criticism from customers and there will be no "witch hunts" against staff arising from complaints.

For managers, the complaint procedure helps to highlight errors and service inadequacies at an early stage. Justified complaints will show a need to alter procedures and improve staff training.

For customers, there is a mechanism for listening to their views when things go wrong (or appear to the customer to have gone wrong). There is a clear procedure to register their dissatisfaction with an aspect of service provision and a way of informing the organisation that it is not operating efficiently.

Not dealing with a complaint effectively will obviously increase negative attitudes in the minds of customers. Conversely the prompt and appropriate reaction to a justified complaint can increase the standing of an organisation in the mind of the customer.

3.0 COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

a) What is a complaint?

Examples of complaints would be as follows:

- Failure to achieve the standard of quality expected
- Not dealing with enquiries or letters within a reasonable time
- Not correcting inaccurate information at the first request
- Not giving adequate explanation of appeal rights
- Providing inappropriate advice
- Biased, unfair or unhelpful attitude of a member of staff

An enquiry about a perceived failure or error in service provision is not a complaint unless the customer is dissatisfied with the explanation given or correction made at the outset.

Generally, however, a complaint is a statement of dissatisfaction from a customer or stakeholder after conducting business with the Assessor & ERO's office.

b) How to make a complaint

A complaint should be made directly to the Assessor in the first instance. Where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the initial response they may intimate that they wish to pursue the matter further.

c) Registering the complaint

Every attempt should be made to deal effectively with the matter complained of at the initial time of complaint, rather than advising the individual to lodge a written complaint. If this is not possible the customer should be given clear and positive advice as to the complaint procedure.

All complaints, whether verbal or in writing, should be brought to the attention of the Assessor or Depute, even if resolved and the following details must be added to the "Register of Complaints" by the Complaints Officer :

- Nature of the complaint
- Name of the person who has made the complaint
- Person appointed to deal with the complaint
- Resulting action taken
- Time taken to resolve the complaint

d) Dealing with the complaint

The form or letter of complaint will be acknowledged by the Complaints Officer within 5 working days, giving the name of the senior member of staff who will handle the complaint. The substance of the complaint will be addressed within ten working days. If this proves to be impossible an interim reply should be issued, explaining the reasons for the delay and giving a revised date for final reply. Where a formal complaint is specifically about an individual member of staff that person should not take part in the investigation or the response other than as a source of information.

If following investigation and response the customer is still dissatisfied he/she should be informed of the options open to pursue the matter. The Assessor will advise that the matter may be referred to the Joint Board. If the Board's response is still considered unsatisfactory the matter can be referred to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman.

e) **What happens to the complaint after it is resolved?**

The complaints register can be analysed for patterns of complaint to inform management of training and procedure issues that require to be addressed. The complaint procedure is a separate process, distinct from the Board's disciplinary procedure. In rare cases where it becomes apparent that a customer complaint should be dealt with by disciplinary procedures those procedures must be followed and the individual member of staff will be advised accordingly of his/her right to representation and of who has made the complaint.

f) **Suggestions and Compliments**

If customers or other stakeholders wish to make suggestions for improvement of the service they should be encouraged to do so. Similar to the complaint procedure they should be asked where necessary to put the suggestion in writing. Compliments to members of staff should also be recorded and the particular staff member should be informed of the compliment.

4.0 MAKING THE PROCEDURE AVAILABLE

A notice summarising the Complaint Procedure will be displayed at the reception area of the Assessor's office. Complaint and suggestion forms will be made available to the public on request. A summary of the Complaint Procedure is attached to this document as Appendix A and the Complaint Form as Appendix B.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Valuation Joint Board approve this Report.



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Brian Byrne
Assessor/Electoral Registration Officer
25th January, 2006

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1.0 Complaint Procedures
- 2.0 Complaint Form