



*Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute
Valuation Joint Board*

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2021-2024

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Communications Strategy			
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1.0 Introduction

Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board's (the "Joint Board") vision states that "we aim to provide high quality, transparent, effective and responsive services to all of our stakeholders". Our Commitment Statement includes the following, all of which directly relate to, or are dependent upon, good communications.

- Consulting our stakeholders and listening and responding to their views
- Valuing staff and providing them with opportunities to develop and contribute
- Encouraging innovation and recognising achievement within the organisation
- Treating all stakeholders, including staff, in a fair, consistent manner in accordance with our Equalities Requirements.
- Ensuring we are accessible and accountable to stakeholders
- Using language which is easy to understand
- Working with our partners in the Scottish Assessors' Association (SAA) to ensure transparency and Scotland-wide consistency of approach to service delivery

It is only through good communications that we will meet our commitments and achieve our aims.

2.0 The Strategy

This strategy aims to illustrate that the Joint Board will:-

- Ensure our communication methods are effective
- Collect and evaluate the views and experiences of citizens
- Engage with external organisations and institutions
- Develop formal and informal partnerships to use resources efficiently and drive improvement
- Use feedback obtained through the various communication channels to plan and deliver better services.
- Work with partners to ensure communications are efficient and effective

For the purposes of this Strategy, the term "Communications" will be considered in the wider sense of all forms of 'giving and receiving information'. Such a document cannot detail every form of communication that occurs in a multi-functional organisation such as the Joint Board, but it will identify the main methods by which the Joint Board will deliver its objectives. These will include direct mail (including email), Joint Board website, SAA website and advertising. Public Relations functions and social media will be provided by our partners (though direct use of social media is constantly under review).

3.0 General Approach

The majority of the Joint Board's communications are directly related to the three statutory functions of the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). These are production and maintenance of the:-

- Valuation Roll, for Non-domestic Rating purposes (NDR).
- Council Tax List (CT)
- Electoral Register

The format, content and frequency of these communications are, in many instances prescribed by law and may not be entirely under the control of the Joint Board. We will make our communications with the public as clear and easy to use as possible.

We will also provide information and assistance about our services to citizens in plain English and by the most appropriate method. Digital communications are increasingly important to the Joint Board. We will promote key achievements and initiatives and defend the Joint Board against any unfair criticism.

Internal communications will ensure a well-informed workforce which is equipped to deliver services and empowered to make improvements. We will ensure that our employees have an understanding of change affecting the organisation now and in the future.

Information gathered for statutory purposes, and through the Assessor and ERO's statutory powers, will be treated at all times with appropriate confidentiality and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act (2018).

4.0 Objectives

The objectives of our communications are shown in the table below.

Externally	Internally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deliver statutory functions in accordance with the law • To improve service delivery in line with stakeholder requirements • To inform the public of our functions • To provide openness and transparency in all operations of the Assessor, the ERO and the Joint Board • To work with partners to ensure consistency of service across Scotland • To give stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to decisions and actions of the Joint Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To communicate news and information to employees • To improve service delivery • To provide an understanding of change • Improve employee morale • To ensure member scrutiny of officers' actions and decisions. • To give employees the opportunity to contribute to decisions and actions of the Joint Board
<p>Underpinning all of the above is our commitment to eliminate discrimination, promote equal opportunities and promote good relations.</p>	

5.0 Partnerships

To ensure efficient use of public money and ensure nationwide consistency of message, the Joint Board will deliver many of its communications through, or in partnership with, the following:-

Partner	Partnership areas
Scottish Assessors Association	Design of forms, consultation responses, web portal (see below), stakeholder meetings, press enquiries and national advertising campaigns
Assessors web portal	Public: Council Tax List and Valuation Roll search facilities, public provision of Practice Notes and valuations, provision of general information and news, NDR and CT proposal and appeal submission facilities, various stakeholder form return facilities and consultation releases.

	<p>Institutions: Government statistical extraction, data to local councils, access to data for government agencies, including Scottish Water, emergency services and government projects.</p> <p>Between Assessors: Shared information repositories and internal guidance</p>
Electoral Commission	Design of form, guidance manuals, consultations/reports, media resources, events and national advertising campaigns.
Association of Electoral Administrators	Design of forms, guidance and advice, consultations/reports, national lobbying.
Council PR Departments	Social media releases, press releases and press enquiries

Of those listed, the following two areas are of particular importance:

5.1 Assessors Web Site (www.saa.gov.uk)

This web facility provides a single point of access to the Valuation Roll, Council Tax List and Electoral Registration information across Scotland. It is an exemplar of joint working which is the chosen way to provide consistent data to a range of stakeholders in an efficient manner. Assessors & EROs are committed to using the portal as a primary way of delivering modern services and it is seen as one of the main tools in delivering 3-yearly revaluations and several of the recommendations of the Barclay Review.

The Joint Board commits staff to the Management Committee and Project Team and provides a share of its funding.

The portal infrastructure also provides the platform for the hosting of the Joint Board's own web site (www.saa.gov.uk/dab-vjb/) and facilitates its ongoing development.

5.2 The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission (EC) provides guidance to EROs on the performance of their duties and issues a comprehensive set of on-line guidance notes. The Commission also sets ERO performance standards and monitors compliance with these.

The EC provides a regularly updated suite of media tools including leaflets and posters, national television and social media adverts and campaigns, role play tools and email banners which are developed through market research and targeted at particular populations of electors and potential electors. The joint aim is to maximise the use of these materials to increase the number of people who are registered for electoral purposes. This in turn will help to improve the completeness and accuracy of registers.

6.0 External Communications

The Joint Board's regular communications primarily relate to the three statutory functions. Summaries of these communications are provided at Appendices 1-3.

6.1 Non-Domestic Rating and Council Tax Valuation (See Appendices 1-2)

Most active communications with stakeholders take the form of statutory notices or requests made under statutory powers. These were previously issued by post but, increasingly, the Joint Board is looking to provide these by email or other electronic means. Various items of outgoing mail, including email, invitee feedback through our Customer Satisfaction process.

The Assessors portal (see above) provides the public with an invaluable source of the general information on the assessors' services and has an excellent search facility for service users wishing to find information on the Valuation Roll and/or Council Tax Valuation List. Appeals and proposals can be submitted on-line, with a 'bulk appeal' facility currently available to ratepayers (and their agents) with large property portfolios. Reform of the NDR appeal system will require the functionality and services available at the portal to be reviewed.

Communications with government and a number of ratepayer representative bodies, including the Scottish Ratepayers Forum, the Scottish Business Ratepayers Group and the Scottish Rating Surveyors Forum, are maintained through the Scottish Assessors Association.

On a day-to day basis, valuation staff members communicate with ratepayers, council tax payers, their agents and employees and the importance of these communications in customer satisfaction and influencing public perception of the service should not be underestimated.

6.2 Electoral Registration (See Appendix 3)

As with the Assessor's valuation functions, many of the ERO's public communications also take the form of statutory notices or requests made under statutory powers. Where legal provision has been made, an increasing number of these are issued and/or received by electronic means (web submission, email etc). Various items of outgoing mail, including email, invitee feedback through our Customer Satisfaction process.

Electoral Registration is the main area of proactive promotion with a campaign every year to promote the annual electoral canvass. The aims of the campaign are to increase public awareness of the annual canvass process, maximise the number of people who respond to the annual canvass where required and improve the completeness and accuracy of registers.

The campaign generally includes jointly funded television and/or radio adverts and social media campaigns. There are a number of other initiatives and these are contained in the annual "Electoral Participation Strategy". Specific efforts are made, and will continue to be made, to target population groups which, from research, are known to be under represented in the Electoral Register.

In many instances it is impossible to tie the outcomes with our engagement activities. It is therefore very difficult to evaluate the success of these campaigns with any accuracy. Where outcomes can be monitored these will be measured and assessed as detailed in the Participation Strategy.

6.3 Corporate Communications (See Appendix 4)

To enhance openness and ensure transparency in all that we do, the Joint Board makes a full suite of reports available to the public and other stakeholders through the publication of Annual, Board and Public Performance Reports on our website.

The Joint Board's Comments and Complaints Procedure is aligned with the Ombudsman's Model complaints procedure and provides a structured process for the Board to learn from public feedback. Complainants are advised of the outcomes of their complaints including any corporate learning which has been highlighted during the process.

Recent users of Joint Board services are invited to provide feedback using our Customer Satisfaction procedure. The results of this process, both quantitative and qualitative, are used by the Management Team to improve and refine services.

Social media platforms are not currently used directly by the Board but these will be considered for implementation during the currency of this Strategy.

7.0 Internal Communications (See Appendix 5)

Internal communications are directed towards supporting the Joint Board's aims, objectives and statutory functions and improving the services we deliver. We also communicate with employees to promote engagement, encourage development and provide an understanding of change (further details below). Staff are also continually encouraged to contribute to service design and improvement.

The Joint Board's shared network drives are the main platform for policies, procedures, guidance and advice. New or revised versions of policies are issued by email or at team briefings and through specific training/roll-out events.

Employees are encouraged to provide feedback to the Management Team through the electronic 'suggestions box', the annual staff survey and through face-to-face contact. Impropriety can be reported through the Joint Board's Public Interest Disclosure Policy.

Management Team meetings are followed by Team Briefings to deliver news, decisions and actions to employees. These briefings are supported by way of meeting 'Bullet Notes' which help ensure consistency of message. Minutes of all Management Team meetings and other internal working group meetings are made available to staff.

The employees' Trades Union is consulted on all relevant draft policies and policy changes and is given the opportunity to present to the Board where appropriate.

A Personal Performance, Training and Development Policy is in place which aims to:-









- Deliver on the Joint Board's commitment to manage and improve performance through the competence of our employees.
- Ensure that employee performance and development are directly aligned to service plans and targets.
- Encourage employees to continually develop their careers by offering learning opportunities.
- Help boost confidence, morale and performance ensuring everyone is empowered and has the skills and knowledge to help deliver organisational objectives to the appropriate standard.
- Build relationships, provide support, and keep individuals feeling valued, motivated and engaged.


This process gives staff a formal opportunity to communicate with their line managers to review performance and discuss training and development needs.

8.0 Review of Strategy








This Strategy will be reviewed at 3-yearly intervals or earlier where appropriate.

Non-Domestic Rating – Communications Plan












		Description	Purpose	Channel
CITIZEN		Valuation Notices	Statutory requirement	Paper/mail, but information also available at SAA web portal. Electronic provision may well be enabled moving forward.
		Valuation roll searches. Submission of proposals/ appeals and various particulars. Provision of general information.	As per description	Scottish Assessors web portal
		Rental and other questionnaires	To gather information to assist with making up and maintaining Valuation Roll	Issued:- Paper/mail Responses: SAA web site interactive forms are default position with paper/mail provided on request, DABVJB web site forms On-line submission will be expanded in advance of 2023 Revaluation
		Property visits	To gather physical attribute and tenure data	Physical site visits
		Ratepayer Representative Bodies (including SRF, SRSF and SBRG)	To support statutory functions To inform procedure To disseminate news To inform service planning and improvement	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephony, at meetings, consultations etc.
INSTITUTIONS		Council Billing Departments	Statutory Requirement	Secure weekly Data Exchange Quarterly reconciliations by paper/report
		Scottish Assessors Association (and colleague Assessors)	To support statutory functions To ensure Scotland-wide consistency. To design and inform procedure To disseminate news Consult with governments and others Exchange of best practice	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephony, meetings, consultations, remote conferencing etc. Assessors' portal – secure dtf, shared secure web site space plus the above.
		Liaison with Government(s), departments and their	Service planning Service improvement Provision of news /change information	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephony, meetings, consultations etc both directly and through SAA and IRRV.



		agencies, including Harmonisation Group and Scottish Water	Service/Performance Monitoring Legislative Consultations Exchange of best practice	
		Registers of Scotland	Provision of Sales Information (to support maintenance of CT List)	Secure File Transfer Data Sharing Agreement

Council Tax Valuation List – Communications Plan








		Description	Purpose	Channel
CITIZEN		Banding Notices	Statutory requirement	Paper/mail, but information also available at SAA web portal.
		Council Tax List searches Submission of proposals. Provision of general information	As per description	Scottish Assessors’ web portal
		Property visits	To gather physical attribute and occupation data	Physical site visits
INSTITUTIONS		Council Billing Departments	Statutory Requirement	Secure weekly Data Exchange Quarterly reconciliations by paper/report
		Scottish Assessors Association (and colleague Assessors)	To support statutory functions To ensure Scotland-wide consistency. To design and inform procedure To disseminate news Consult with governments and others Exchange of best practice	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, meetings, consultations etc. Assessors’ portal – secure dtf, shared secure web site space plus the above.
		Liaison with Government(s), departments and their agencies, including	Service planning Service improvement Provision of news /change information Service/Performance Monitoring Legislative Consultations Exchange of best practice	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, meetings, consultations etc both directly and through SAA and IRRV.
		Electoral Registration Officer	Maintenance of Council Tax Lists Maintenance of Electoral Register	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, meetings

Electoral Registration Function – Communications Plan









		Description	Purpose	Channel
CITIZEN		Annual Canvass forms (3 different forms)	Statutory requirement	Issued: Annually by paper/mail – email now an option Returns: Paper/mail, Internet, telephone, SMS services. Household visit
		Invitation to Register	Statutory requirement	Issued: Paper/mail/email/download from internet Returns: Paper/mail, Internet (GDS). Household visit
		Household canvass/ visits	Statutory requirement	Issued: Paper - personal visit/mail Return: Paper – personal visit/mail or encourage electronic return
		On-line application	Application to be registered	Government Digital Service (GDS)
		Various (absent voter and special category) application forms	Statutory requirement	Issued: Paper/mail/email/download from internet Returns: Paper/mail/email. AV applications may be provided by GDS in future
		Canvass Advertising	To improve canvass return rates. Improve the accuracy of the Electoral Register See separate Participation Strategy	Various Local Public Notices Television/Radio adverts (jointly procured with partner EROs) Housing Association and other newsletters Web site Notice Social Media – via Constituent Councils. Further use of social media channels to be considered. Campaigns to be reviewed annually
		Notices of Addition, Deletion & related	Statutory requirement General Enquiry	Issued: Paper/mail, email
INSTITUTIONS		Description	Purpose	Channel
		Provision of Registers to Returning Officers	Statutory requirement	Shared server and/or secure electronic exchange Managed and planned through liaison meetings
		Provision of Registers to Political Parties, Elected Members etc	Statutory requirement	Various channels (paper/mail, data, email, secure exchange) as requested by recipient
		News, information etc from Electoral Commission	Service improvement Provision of news/change information	Email – EC Bulletins, EC Alerts, EC Roll Call Meetings and Seminars
	Provision of information to Electoral Commission	Service/Performance Monitoring Compliance with Standards	Email with attachments Cloud reporting, Web submission	


				Ad hoc face –to –face meetings
		News, information etc from AEA	Service improvement Provision of news/change information	Email – Weekly Notifications Arena Magazine Branch meetings, Conferences, Training events
		Liaison with Government(s), departments and their agencies, including Electoral Management Board	Service planning Service improvement Provision of news/change information Service/Performance Monitoring Legislative Consultations	Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, at meetings, consultations etc both directly and through SAA, AEA, EC.

DABVJB CORPORATE EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

		Description	Purpose	Channel
CITIZEN		Public Performance, Annual and Board Reports	Openness and transparency Public scrutiny Performance reporting Accountability	DAB VJB Web site
		Customer Complaints Procedures	Learning from stakeholders Process improvements Accountability	Available on Web site or at Public Counters (paper) Submissions made by email, web submission, paper/mail Responses as per submission type
		Customer Satisfaction process	Learning from stakeholders Process improvements Accountability Equalities monitoring of service provision	Invitations included on a variety of items of correspondence issued via paper/mail, email and on web site. Sample of service users issued with questionnaires by paper/email. Submissions by web form. Response as appropriate
		General Service Provision	To ensure the public has access to our services	Face-to-face: Public Counter, wheelchair access, hearing loop, language translation service
INSTITUTIONS		Scottish Assessors Association	To support statutory functions To ensure Scotland-wide consistency. To design and inform procedure To disseminate news Consult with governments and others Exchange of best practice	See Electoral Registration, Non-Domestic Rating and Council Tax Communications Plans Assessors' portal
		West Dunbartonshire Council	Provision of Support Services	Service Level Agreement Multiple communication channels including messaging, telephone, meetings and remote conference facilities – both formal and informal
		Constituent Councils' Planning and Building Control	Identification of changes affecting Valuation Roll, Council Tax List and Electoral Register	Website download/access File transfer Paper transfer where required

DABVJB CORPORATE STAFF COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

		Description	Purpose	Channel
DAB MANAGEMENT		Policies and Procedures (inc HR, Health & Safety)	Procedural uniformity/operational consistency Compliance with statute and best practice	Intranet/Shared network drive, website, paper, team briefings, email circulation, presentations, training events, remote conferencing etc as appropriate. Note that although this is presented as a one directional flow, staff are involved in policy etc formulation
		Operational Guidance, Instruction and Assistance	Clarity of roles and responsibilities Procedural uniformity/operational consistency	Intranet/Shared network drive, website, paper, team briefings, email circulation, presentations, training events, remote conferencing etc as appropriate. Note that although this is presented as a one directional flow, staff are involved in formulation of process and procedure
		Grievance, Public Interest Disclosure and Suggestions Box	Opportunity for staff to raise issues or suggestions with the Management Team	Intranet, email, paper.
		Trades Unions	Representation of staff to Management Team	Formally and informally through meetings, exchanges of draft policies, proposed changes etc.
		Annual Staff Survey	To monitor staff morale, management procedures, equality of employment etc	Issued annually by email Responses by email and paper Option to complete anonymously
		Staff Equalities Survey	Quantification of representation of protected characteristics within workforce. Monitoring of equality of application of internal policies and procedures. Informing external/statutory reports.	Issued by email Responses by email and paper
		General Management Information	Procedural uniformity/operational consistency Provide information on change. Seek staff feedback on proposals	Team Briefings, Minutes, email, intranet, face-to-face, remote conferencing. Team briefings after each management team meeting provide staff with opportunity to feedback on decisions and proposals.
		Internal Working Groups	Innovation and suggestions Opportunity for staff input into process and procedural design	Face-to-face meetings, minutes, email, remote conferencing, etc

		Personal Performance and Development Reviews	Review performance Identify training needs	Face-to-face meetings, remote conferencing (if necessary)
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