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By Email

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Economy and Fair Work Committee
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Your Ref: N/A
Our Ref: MC-66-2022

Reply to: Edinburgh Office
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Date: 10 August 2022

Dear Ms Baker

REGISTERS OF SCOTLAND – EFW QUARTERLY PROGRESS UPDATE

I am writing to provide the Economy and Fair Work Committee with a quarterly update on the work of Registers of Scotland (RoS) as part of the agreed reporting. For ease of reading, I have outlined the latest updates against relevant headers below.

Performance

RoS is committed to being an effective and efficient delivery organisation and we are continuously looking for ways in which to improve our offering to customers. We have been working to update the performance information on our website so that it can be even more helpful and accessible for users, and as I reported in my monthly update to you in July, our new [performance webpage](#) is now live. The three areas of RoS work that are reported on a monthly basis within these pages are the status of open casework, casework turnaround times and our delivering the benefits of a complete land register figures.

These pages enable customers and stakeholders to see for themselves the progress we are making and provide transparency about the data that sits behind our Key Performance Indicators. Our KPI progress is updated quarterly on our external website and the end of June 2022 position is now available [on our website](#).

All our KPIs and performance data is on or ahead of target. In summary we have met or exceeded all the first quarter FY 22/23 targets we have set for: clearing our long-standing open casework, processing at least 60% of dealing with whole, first registrations and transfers of part within 35 days, and achieving at least 93% application quality. In particular I am pleased to report that the initial part of our strategy to clear our long-standing open casework has been delivered effectively, with the total stock of open-casework (of any age) now stable for the first time since March 2020, when the impact of COVID19 compromised the progress we had been making in reducing the volume of open casework.

We hope that the delivery of our performance targets will continue to ensure our customers remain highly satisfied with the services we provide. This is one of the reasons we became members of the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) and have been working with them to move across to their much more in-depth Business

Benchmarking Survey, which is used by public and private sector organisations across the UK. This not only allows us to directly compare ourselves to similar organisations but also build a huge resource of customer data on which to identify and base our priorities for improvements. This information is also going to provide customer insight that will really allow us to fully support our corporate value of customer focus and build a customer centric organisation that exemplifies an excellent customer experience.

We have now carried out two surveys and our score has increased from 77.3 which was the score for the pilot survey conducted in October 2021, to 78.5 in March 2022. The average for the national public sector bodies is 75.6 for satisfaction so our scores are already above the public sector averages, but we are setting ourselves the target of attaining a score of 80.0 by March 2024 and sustaining this.

We also offer the survey to our citizen customers via direct contact with the Customer Experience teams providing customer service support, property information and land and data sales. This survey is not part of the KPI calculation but is used to inform business improvements and add to decisions requiring customer insight of a growing customer base, and our path to accreditation by the Institute of Customer Services. The score returned by over 100 citizen customers was 89.5.

Legislation

The Coronavirus Recovery and Reform (S) Bill has completed its parliamentary passage and provision is now in place for RoS digital submission services to be made permanent. We are continuing to work with SGLD and the Scottish Civil Justice Council to make necessary amendments to the rules of court which will allow digital submission to some of my smaller registers.

Transparency of Land Ownership

We continue to make good progress in delivering the benefits of a complete land register. Our estimations are that around 87% of addresses that regularly transact are now on the land register, and our total land mass coverage (taking into account unlocking Sasines and land register work in progress) is around 80%. In the last period we have been working closely with SG officials on the land reform consultation and have continued engagement with the Scottish Land Commission.

The Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land (which went live on 01 April 2022) continues to see small numbers of applications. This is not unexpected as there is a 12-month transition period before criminal penalties for failure to supply information are applied. Work continues to publicise and raise awareness of this new register and to ensure that all customer queries about how to use the new register are addressed promptly, and our guidance is regularly updated.

RoS will have a role to play in supporting the new Register of Overseas entities, established by the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022, recently passed by the UK Parliament. Since the start of the year we have been working with Companies House (CH) and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIs) as a delivery partner for the Register of Overseas Entities. The new Register will be built by CH with the land registries of the UK required to include questions on overseas entity registration in the land registration application process and to include reference to overseas entity numbers on property title sheets

as well as a separate data provision to CH. On 22 July 2022 it was confirmed the land registration elements will come into effect on 5 September 2022.

Digital

Our new digital system, Register Land and Property (RLP), was launched in November 2021 providing customers with a digital channel to submit applications, and RoS with structured data used to streamline the registration process. Uptake has grown as ongoing development allows for more deed types to be accepted. RLP is now used by 490 firms submitting over 67,000 applications. 23.5% of all land register application now come through RLP up from 21% in June. Further development will soon allow us to accept the top three deed types, dispositions, securities, and discharges, that account for over 90% of all dealings, and will allow us to retire other digital channels that provide none of the benefits of receiving structured data.

Working in partnership with several legal firms we recently successfully completed a proof of concept (POC) using a qualified digital signature to validate a registration application. We are keen to continue to develop the use of digital signatures in parallel with RLP and will use the finding from the POC to continue the discussion with key stakeholders.

In addition, the self-service function for Sasine copy deeds and other deeds from the Register of Deeds went live in May. This has been an extremely well-received new service as it enables customers to directly access deeds at their convenience, rather than needing to contact RoS to obtain them.

As we move towards our vision of providing an end-to-end digital registration service we are currently reviewing and formulating technical response plans to reduce the impact of security events, including the threat of ransomware attacks. These activities are part of our continuous improvement work and informed by our internal audit of Cyber Resilience, and the findings from 'common threat scenario' exercises delivered by a third-party supplier on our behalf. The above activities form part of a programme of work this financial year to implement an effective Information Security Management System (ISMS) which meets the recognised ISO 27001 standard.

Geovation Scotland

Recruitment of Cohort 5 of the Geovation Scotland accelerator programme is now underway and the open call for applications will run between 25th July and 5th September 2022. Successful companies will be shortlisted and interviewed in September and the new cohort will be launched in October 2022.

Cohort 4 of the accelerator are currently in the 'Exploration' phase of the programme and will be shortly moving into the 'Traction' phase, during which they will join startup companies Student Bubble and EOLAS Insights Ltd from cohort 3 for joint Showcase activity in October 2022 (dates and format tbc).

Cohort 3 of the accelerator (Student Bubble and EOLAS Insights Ltd) will complete the programme in October and will move to being Geovation Alumni.

People

The Civil Service Commission has a statutory duty to ensure recruitment across the Civil Service is open, fair and based on merit and they use a comprehensive compliance regime to audit and assess the policies and practices in every department and agency. A Balanced Scorecard is provided annually for organisations and for the year 2021-22 we received a rating of 'Good-Static' which is the best rating achievable. Current labour market conditions are challenging, and this has had an adverse impact on our ability to attract and retain talent however we are actively recruiting and continue to look at ways to encourage applications from a wide range of communities.

We were first accredited with the Investors in People (IIP) standard in 2000, holding it continuously since then. We were last fully assessed in 2021, achieving the higher accreditation level of Gold. We recently completed the first part of our We Invest in People (WIIP) assessment for the 2024 renewal of our accreditation. Having carried out this assessment in accordance with the guidelines provided by Investors in People, the independent assessor is satisfied that we continue to fully meet the requirements of the Investors in People Standard at the higher level of Gold. Although this was an interim assessment, and so accreditation levels do not change, there have been further improvements against the framework, and noting current plans we have in place, the WIIP assessor expects to see further improvements next year. We will begin We Invest in Wellbeing later this year, and then start Investors in Young People next year to complement our current IIP accreditation.

We remain in discussions with trade unions about the 2022-23 pay offer.

Stakeholder Engagement

Our events and engagement activity over the last quarter has included an interactive session with the Keeper on our latest corporate plan, a second policy and practice workshop, providing insight and access to our RoS subject matter experts as well as the continuation of our programme of breakfast briefings for MSPs / MPs and their staff.

We exhibited at this year's Royal Highland Show to promote the new Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land. This is in addition to our well attended programme of practical webinars and speaking opportunities at a number of events including the Law Society Scotland Annual Conference.

The Scottish Government's Digital Assurance Office has separately requested we meet with Transport Scotland; Forestry and Land Scotland; and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to share our best practice in the design, development or procurement and delivery of new products and services.

We continue to proactively engage with the media to promote our award-winning digital services. Recently this has included press releases, media briefings and one to one meetings with newspaper editors and journalists. In the coming weeks a number of articles and features will be published in titles such as Holyrood Magazine, The Herald and Business Insider that showcase RoS' customer-focussed product development and digital services.

Finances

As mentioned previously, we are in the process of finalising our annual accounts for 2021-22, that are due to be published in September. In contrast to 2020-21, our income (just over £90 million) will have fully covered all our running costs. In addition, we have drawn down capital budget from the Scottish Government to cover the costs of developing the new registers on behalf of Ministers, and Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) budget to cover non-cash provisions. Our current projections are that we will continue to be broadly self-financing in future years, with income from fees matching the cost to serve customers, and housing market activity broadly running at our mid-point forecast.

Estate

You may be aware that the title to Meadowbank House (MBH) is in the name of Scottish Ministers. Prior to Covid, MBH was used just by Registers of Scotland. With the advent of hybrid working, we are now actively looking to share the building with other public bodies on a cost sharing basis to make sure we are making best use of our assets.

We are currently working with Consumer Scotland (who are on site already) and another SG Public Body to pilot sharing arrangements through a Memorandum of Terms of Understanding (MOTU) within MBH and with the Scottish Futures Trust and Revenue Scotland in St Vincent Plaza, RoS's Glasgow Office (rented). Several other public bodies are also indicating potential interest in sharing some space.

Over the coming year, we will review our longer-term estate strategy in the light of our continued experience with hybrid working and these initial sharing arrangements. In addition, we recently completed a survey of people's carbon use whilst working at home, and changes to commuting practices. Once analysed, the results will both feed into our carbon reduction KPI, replacing generic averages with more accurate data, and inform our hybrid working and estates strategy decisions in the future.

Other Matters

Register of Moveable Transactions: Early engagement and discovery work on the development of the two new Registers proposed under the Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Bill continues.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss the issues raised within this update at my forthcoming session with the Committee on 07 September 2022, however, please do not hesitate to contact me in the interim if you require anything further in relation to the information provided in this update, or if there are other aspects of RoS work that you would like to receive further updates on.

Yours sincerely



JENNIFER HENDERSON
Keeper of the Registers of Scotland