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By Email

Claire Baker, MSP
Convener
Economy and Fair Work Committee
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Your Ref: N/A
Our Ref: MC-32-2023

Reply to: Edinburgh Office
Department: Senior Management
Contact: Jennifer Henderson
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Date: 05 May 2023

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

Our Key Performance Indicator (KPI) progress is updated quarterly on our external website and the end of March position is now available.

At the end of the financial year FY22/23 our external KPIs were all on or ahead of target, except for the people survey engagement score which reduced from 66 to 65, where we had targeted an increase to 68.

In April, we shared with you a link to our published [Delivery Plan for 2023-24](#) that updates our overarching Corporate Plan 2022-2027. The plan reflects on what we have achieved in year one 2022-23, our focus for year two 2023-24, and what we plan to do to tackle our biggest challenges. In particular, we anticipate that customers will be pleased to see that we have increased all of our delivery targets for year two to ensure we build on and exceed what we achieved in year one.

Legislation

The transitional period (in respect of the offence provisions) for the Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land (RCI) has been extended by 12 months to 01 April 2024. My officials are now working with SG officials on an updated communications plan to ensure people who are in scope are aware of the requirement to register.

My officials continue to work with SG officials ahead of stage 3 of the Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Bill.

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 90%.

Our regular Overseas Ownership report - 'Land and Property Titles in Scotland by Location of Owner at Time of Purchase' was published in March 2023.

Digital Services

Register Land and Property (RLP) is our strategic channel for applications to the Land Register. In December 2022, a small team was formed with the aim of assessing the feasibility of automating registration of dealing-with-whole (DW) applications using an 'application-centric' approach. This approach will primarily complete applications using structured data entered into RLP by customers rather than information contained within the deed itself, with the information being validated against the deed using technology such as Optical Character Recognition and machine learning. It is anticipated that a significant proportion of RoS' standard DW work (which makes up the bulk of our applications) may be completed in this way, freeing up operational capacity to work on other products and accelerating the progress of clearing our long-standing open casework. We have recently approved two 'proposals in principle' to test the feasibility and viability of automating specific application types to deliver customer benefits and operational capacity and efficiency.

Our Chief Data Officer will be presenting at a Government Data Summit in London on 11 May and our Head of IT Services will be attending Holyrood's annual Digital Transformation conference where he will be a panel member sharing expertise on the topic of "Lessons on digitally transforming public sector".

Geovation Scotland

In order to position Geovation Scotland and RoS as the leading supporter of organisations and innovators in the geospatial/property sector and to help inform what support is needed for the growth of the Scottish market, Geovation Scotland has undertaken a review of the Scottish proptech landscape, which concluded in April 2023. Results are now being collated with a view to sharing results with contributors in the coming weeks.

Recruitment of cohort 5 of the accelerator programme is now underway, with final interviews and selections taking place in early May. Successful companies selected to join cohort 5 will begin the programme in late June when they will begin the 'Validation' phase of the programme.

Geovation Scotland founders across the accelerator and community continue to show growth. The current total amount raised by early-stage Geovation Scotland companies stands at over £1.6 million with the additional creation of 61 full-time jobs.

People

Investors in Young People

We are currently undergoing an Investors in Young People (IYYP) accreditation. IYYP is a good practice framework, designed to support employers to develop their youth employment practices around the attraction, recruitment, development, and retention of young people. As part of our assessment, the assessor will be holding interviews with a random selection of colleagues across a range of grades, job titles and functions. We already hold We Invest in People and We Invest in Wellbeing accreditations at “Gold” standard.

Supplementary Pay Offer

Scottish Ministers asked Scottish Government officials to lead dispute resolution discussions on behalf of those bodies in the Scottish devolved sector where PCS had a mandate for strike action with a view to reaching agreement on how the dispute may be resolved in the Scottish sector. PCS has confirmed that they are no longer in dispute with the Scottish Government and employers including RoS regarding pay and job security for 2022/23. PCS members have voted to accept the terms of the supplementary offer. Changes to pay for RoS staff, who qualify, will be processed in May salaries, backdated to 01 April 2022.

Industrial Action

We experienced another day of industrial action on 28 April and 45% of colleagues participated in the strike day. In anticipation of the day of action, activities were put in place to ensure RoS was open and providing services for its customers. We remain in contact with SG officials on how we will respond to the possibility of further strike action.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Spring customer satisfaction survey, conducted anonymously by the Institute of Customer Services, returned an improved score for our professional users (79.7) and Customer Effort (3.2). Our citizen customer score (87.8) was slightly reduced and work is underway to analyse results. As many similar government bodies and private sector organisations do the exact same survey, we are able to accurately benchmark, and the recent RoS scores are significantly ahead of other public sector scores.

We appreciated your sponsorship of our information drop-in session for MSPs and their staff on Wednesday 19 April 2023, the interactive session featuring demonstrations of our key services and functions provided MSPs with the opportunity to be updated on RoS work and to discuss any questions or concerns.

Over this quarter RoS has been meeting with the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) as part of its Project Meridian activity. A joint project between BIS and the Bank of England, Meridian is focused on synchronisation of real time gross settlements to reduce time, cost, and risk with housing transactions identified as a candidate use case. RoS/BIS engagement is focused on future land and property information services from RoS and RoS' involvement in proptech and fintech via Geovation.

Finances

Subject to final audited accounts we expect to return some funds to the Scottish Consolidated Fund for FY 22/23. Our current financial projections are that we will continue to be broadly self-financing in this new financial year and future years, with income from fees matching the cost to serve customers. We continue to monitor housing market activity, although we remained close to our projected volumes. We do not expect significant changes in fees this year (and no changes to statutory fees) though uplifts may be required in future years subject to our standard income review process.

Estate

We continue to promote opportunities to occupy available space in both of our buildings and are in active discussions with several other Agencies and NDPBs who may wish to share space in the future. To create further efficiencies, we are exploring using the Scottish Government's security and access control system to enable a wider range of public sector colleagues to use our buildings on a more ad-hoc basis.

Public Service Reform

RoS has submitted a return to the Finance and Public Audit Committee's recent call for views on Public Service Reform. The RoS input included examples of RoS work in each of the five PSR themes. Separately, RoS is working with colleagues in Scottish Government to share our experience of reforming our public service over the last few years, to support their work to shape the approach to PSR.

Other matters

RoS has been undertaking the triennial review of our Framework Document which is due for publication on 01 June 2023. The review is now complete, and will be published subject to Ministerial approval.

Please do not hesitate to contact me 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