

By Email

Claire Baker, MSP

Convener

Economy and Fair Work Committee
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Your Ref: N/A

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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 December position is now [available](#).

Operational performance remains strong this year, underpinned by technology enhancements and increased colleague productivity. In relation to our KPI for clearing open casework we have increased the target range for expected outputs mid-year to reflect stronger than anticipated performance in the first half of the financial year. Our KPI for new Transfers of Part (TP) cases has returned to the target level as anticipated. The KPI for new First Registration (FR) cases is below the indicator as a consequence of a focus on older casework and some increased complexity of that work owing to the maturity of the register. The balance of significantly greater progress on older cases is welcomed by customers and stakeholders and is helping to ensure that our key objective of clearing long standing open casework by the end of the Corporate Plan period is achieved.

We remain on track to be broadly self-financing in this financial year with income from fees matching the cost to serve customers, though we continue to monitor the housing market closely because of its significance to our income levels.

The property market (volumes) has held within expected range to this point in the year, though it has been towards the lower end of the range in most months. We are expecting the remainder of the financial year to be similar, with volumes in range but subdued.

Our collating of property market information is an essential part of our planning process, and we are currently seeing the majority of market reports predicting a fairly

stable market, with increased activity not expected until the end of 2024-25/start of 2025-26 financial years. These are in line with RoS' own forecasts. Our monthly publication of the House Price Index shows that compared with the market at the same point last year there has been an annual price increase of 2.2% and compares to a UK reduction of 2.1%.

Transparency of Land Ownership

We continue to make good progress in delivering the benefits of a complete land register. Our current total land mass coverage is 94.8%. The Unlocking Sasines data accounts for 35.5% of the land mass coverage (the remaining is Land Register and work in progress). The Unlocking Sasines dataset is now being used by 33 organisations as a pilot and work is scheduled to investigate how to make the information more accessible via a digital platform.

The media campaign to raise further awareness of the duties on certain persons under the Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land (RCI) is progressing well with the final campaign running over February and March. We are seeing a significant increase in enquiries and website traffic in response to the campaign. In the last month the application levels have started to increase considerably, and we expect this to continue until the end of the transitional period (01 April 2024).

Legislation

Good progress continues to be made on the build of the new registers required by the Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Act 2023. Work continues with SG and UKG officials on the regulations required to give effect to the scheme of registration. We anticipate consulting, on behalf of Ministers, on the fee structure for the new registers in the first half of FY 24/25 and will provide a relevant briefing in due course.

RoS are supporting a range of broader policy decisions across SG including the Land Commission, Land Reform and MSP requests around SG Land Reform consultation paper.

Customers

Our spring customer satisfaction survey across our business and citizen customers, conducted by the Institute of Customer Service, is currently live. To increase participation rates by citizens we are running the survey for an extra fortnight, and we are on track to exceed the target of 400 returned surveys which will give us a statistically significant result. Our autumn survey scores were 80.3 for professionals and 83.3 for citizen customers. These are in line with our target scores and well ahead of the public sector average of 74.3. Our customer effort scores of 3.1 for professionals and 3.5 for citizen users of our services, are well ahead of the public sector average of 5.7. For this measure, the lower the score, the easier it was for the customer to use our services.

Digital Services

Register Land & Property (RLP) enables customers to create a combined land and property transaction case which connects related advance notices, applications, and

submissions. Bringing these together removes the need for customers to move between services, minimises data entry, reduces the time spent registering deeds, allows customers to manage cases through a searchable dashboard; and enables Registers of Scotland to maximise the use of automation to further reduce application processing times. Whilst this capability has been live since June 2021, in the last quarter we extended the capability to support an increased number of transaction types leading to a growth in the new expanded service whereby 73% of all applications into RoS are now of the combined Land and Property type (up 2% on last quarter).

We continue to focus on driving further operational efficiency and capacity across the business through automating a significant proportion of our high-volume casework. Over the last quarter we have extended the coverage of streamlined tooling to cater for our Discharge deed types and the build of new automation capability to automate a subset of Discharge of Standard Security and Standard Security deeds. Progress is good and we anticipate rolling out automation across Q4 and into Q1 next financial year. This is the first phase (of three) to improve automation and drive further efficiency across the operational areas.

A new approach, using Embedded Title Sheets, to simplify our most complex registration processes (namely Transfers of Part), is progressing well. This will increase the overall capacity in RoS to process existing open casework, but also enable quicker processing of new applications. Core deliveries are planned over the next three quarters, and we are currently in the 'alpha' testing phase to refine the operating model and solution.

People

We have launched an Employee Value Proposition (EVP)/Employer Brand initiative, comprising of 3 stages: Research EVP, Design EVP, and Embed EVP. Stage 1 is underway, collating views on successful talent retention, with a focus on difficult to fill roles that have historically relied on contingent workers. Such roles are particularly prevalent in our digital functions.

We have participated in the Civil Service People Survey (CSPS) since it began in 2009, and the most recent survey concluded in late 2023. The CSPS results are not permitted to be publicly published until the Cabinet office releases the Civil Service results, at which point I will advise the Committee further on RoS results.

Our updated Diversity & Inclusion strategy launched in December 2023. The evolved strategy outlines how we will advance diversity and inclusion over the next five years. It includes: the pillars of our approach to diversity and inclusion; enablers that will support us to take this work forward and measure our impact; and the models we will use to track progress and make sure we are achieving the right level of change, at the right pace, over the next five years.

In December we updated our People Manager responsibilities to provide clarity on the role and expectations of managers, in line with hybrid changes, delivery goals, and futureproofing. With 200 colleagues designated as a manager, our implementation plan includes a range of comms and engagement sessions, with an 'all hands' people manager event in February being the main launch activity.

Our 2-year pay deal was accepted by PCS members and was implemented in October. Work is underway on additional commitments made in the pay deal, to move to a 35-hour work week in October 2024 and to progress benchmarking and option appraisals on Digital, Data and Technology pay frameworks to ensure our ability to compete within public and third sector to fill permanent roles and reduce reliance on contingent workers.

Having introduced a new performance management and development system in April 2023, we have now entered a period of close monitoring and reporting, aided by several assurance mechanisms including a mandatory pulse survey.

We continue to review what our Hybrid Working Policy means for the delivery of our services, our Employee Value Proposition (EVP), and the experience of our colleagues. Currently, all people managers are updating their Team Ways of Working (TWOW) agreements with their area.

Estate

We are continuing to make our buildings available to departments across the public sector and interest is increasing. We are also contributing to the work of the Single Scottish Public Sector Property Forum.

Other Matters

I am pleased to confirm that Chris Kerr has now been appointed as permanent Accountable Officer for RoS, following his interim positioning. We have also recently announced the retirement of our Director of People, Billy Harkness, who will be leaving the Civil Service in June after 41 years of service, and actions are underway to consider his back-fill.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Henderson', written in a cursive style.

JENNIFER HENDERSON
Keeper of the Registers of Scotland