

By Email

Claire Baker, MSP
Convener

Economy and Fair Work Committee
economyandfairwork.committee@parliament.scot

Your Ref: N/A
Our Ref: MC-023-2024

Reply to: Edinburgh Office
Department: Senior Management
Contact: Jennifer Henderson
Telephone: 0131 357 8199
Email: rossecretariat@ros.gov.uk
Date: 29 April 2024

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](#).

Operational performance has been strong this year, underpinned by technological enhancements and increased colleague productivity. We have reduced the volume of our open casework by around 20,000 applications. We have increased output of Transfer of Part applications by 45% without an increase in overall resource. First Registration output has been broadly the same as last year although we have significantly changed the mix of the casework being completed so that 20% more of the older and more complex applications have been completed than in previous years.

We ended the financial year with fewer open cases than we anticipated even in our best-case scenario, which provides a strong starting point for further reducing the open casework next year and eradicating it by the end of the corporate plan period (FY 26/27).

Transparency of Land Ownership

In our work to deliver the benefits of a completed land register, we have reached a significant milestone of 95.3% total land mass coverage at the end of March. The target set in year 2 of the corporate plan was to achieve between 90% and 95% by December 2024. The Unlocking Sasines data accounts for 35.4% of the land mass coverage - the remainder is Land Register and work in progress. The Unlocking Sasines dataset is now being used as a pilot by 36 organisations, with work scheduled later in 2024/5 to investigate how to make the information more widely accessible.

01 April marked the end of the transitional period for those currently in scope of Register of persons holding a controlled interest in land (RCI) regulations to make a submission. The total number of submissions received was 15,720. One submission is deemed as

one recorded person submitting over one piece of land and naming their associates. From January, engagement with the register rose steeply as did related customer enquiries. There were 2,500 RCI enquiries during the three-month period of which 58% (1,427) of these were in March. Work continues to support customers, encourage those who come into scope to make a submission, and to ensure that existing entries are maintained and updated where necessary as part of the ongoing duties of the recorded persons.

Legislation

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 papers.

Finance

While our 2023-24 full year financial position is being finalised ahead of the production of our year end accounts, draft figures (subject to audit) broadly indicate a net breakeven position with full year income and operating expenditure of £94.7m. We expect to see the impact of inflation and higher interest rates continuing to impact our volumes of applications in 2024-25. Our 2024-25 budget forecast shows a mid-income forecast of £98.6m and operating expenditure at the same level to deliver a breakeven position again next year.

Customers

Results have been received for the spring Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) customer satisfaction survey and we have increased both scores. Our professional score is 81.7 (+1.4), exceeding our KPI target to reach 80.5-81.0 by March 2024, and our citizen score is 84.4 (+1.1). The results have been shared internally and published externally in our year 3 delivery plan. Our continuing strong results see us perform well compared with other public sector bodies who also conduct the same survey.

The latest Country of Origin report, which presents statistics on land and property owners and tenants in Scotland by location of owner address at time of purchase, was published on 26 March. A related report providing information properties owned or leased in Scotland by companies outwith the UK was also made available free of charge for the first time alongside this publication. Given the limited number of purchases of the report, and agreement that charging for this report would not result in greater revenues, I concluded that providing the report for free was in the public interest due to significant public interest in the information.

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. RLP accounts for 95% of all residential transactions (discharges, standard securities and dispositions). In providing structured information to RoS, RLP is an enabler for automation.

The first phase of this work was delivered this quarter with automation of discharges: the removal of a standard security from a title sheet. This delivers operational efficiency and capacity release to more complex casework. Work now turns to the automation of standard securities which will be delivered in two increments across Q1 to maximise operational impact.

Embedded Title Sheets (ETS) continues to make progress in streamlining our registration processes with Transfers of Part (TPs). A revised approach has been designed which simplifies the generation of the Title Sheet by adopting the parent title and overlaying information specific to the new registration. This provides customers more information and makes it more efficient for colleagues to progress (driving up to three times improvement in productivity). Systems enhancements and colleague training have enabled these changes, and we are working through an alpha and beta phase to refine the approach ahead of a full launch, currently expected in summer 2024.

In response to customer feedback, RoS launched a RLP Application Programming Interface (API) and Land Register information API this quarter. Both provide customers the ability to initiate applications to the register or searches from the register via their case or matters management system. This provides considerable time saved for organisations that regularly seek property information from RoS, and firms submitting high volume casework, such as residential transactions.

People

On 21 February we delivered a successful RoS People Manager conference, bringing colleagues together, in-person, from every level of management. We have 200 people managers at RoS and have been embedding our new People Manager Responsibilities toolkit, emphasising the significance of each of their roles in creating a high performing organisation.

The Research stage of our Employee Value Proposition (EVP)/Employer Brand initiative is complete, and we are now in the process of designing our EVP for external launch. Our aim is to attract a wider talent pool, reduce our time and cost to hire, and reduce our reliance on contingent workers, particularly in support of our digital services.

We continue to implement improvements to our performance management and development system. In line with our corporate plan, we have begun work on a cascade of objectives which teams set through collaborative exercises.

We concluded a deep dive review of the evidence by which we can judge the effectiveness of RoS as a hybrid organisation. Internal and external assessments and benchmarking combined with the recent findings of a Scottish Government internal audit of our Hybrid Working and Culture provided a 'Reasonable' assurance rating, and recommendations for activities to support continuous improvement have been agreed. Social connectedness, performance, and culture in the hybrid environment are core themes for 2024/25.

Following the publication of our Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Strategy in December 2023, we have been further developing the structure within the organisation to take forward this strategy and achieve our mainstreaming outcomes. We have established our new D&I Delivery Group, which sits alongside a Steering Group, a Colleague Forum, and our colleague networks. In addition, we have developed our D&I Action Plan, and agreed a report format and reporting schedule to ensure that our progress against the plan is clearly and regularly communicated to our Steering Group, Executive Management Team, and our Board.

A draft refreshed People Strategy has been shared with the Executive Management Team and Board members. The timeline for this strategy is 2024-27, aligned to our Corporate Plan, with themes focused on: Delivering (performance), growing (leadership, management, and people capabilities), connecting (to each other, the work we do, RoS, our values and our culture), and evolving (our working practices, our skills, our behaviour, our attitudes as RoS and the work we do continues to change).

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.

FY 24/25 delivery planning

We have recently published our [delivery plan for FY 24/25](#), and a copy has been shared with the Committee convener under separate cover. As this plan represents the third year of delivery of our 2022-2027 corporate plan, and we are on track with the progress we anticipated making in year 2, we continue to focus on our current strategic objectives and have updated our key performance indicators to build on progress to date. Our key priority remains continuing to clear our long-standing open casework.

Public Service Reform

RoS continues to contribute information requested by SG in relation to progress with public service reform activities and planned reform milestones in FY 24/25.

Other Matters

Good progress continues to be made on the build of the new registers required by the Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Act 2023.

Recruitment is underway to appoint a new member to the RoS Audit and Risk Committee, and a new ARC chair (designate)/Non-Executive advisory board member as current role-holders approach their end of term.

Geovation Scotland presented its 2024 Showcase event in March, providing a platform for cohort 5 to pitch their tech companies to a collective of potential investors, partners and supporters. Working across a range of areas – travel, decarbonisation, land management, health and city navigation - each of these companies consider land and property or location data critical to their commercial success. To date, Geovation Scotland has supported 23 early stage tech startups working in land, property and location innovation to raise in excess of £3.98 million of additional funding and investment and create 72 new jobs. Recruitment for cohort 6 of the accelerator programme is now underway, with up to 8 early-stage geotech and proptech startups due to join the year-long programme in June 2024.

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