

## **Appointment of the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer**

**30 January 2019**

### **Report of the Chief Executive**

<b>PURPOSE OF REPORT</b>
To detach the role of Returning Officer from the post of Chief Executive in order to consider the appointment of the Director for Corporate Services, whose directorate includes Democratic Services/Elections, as the Council's Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer from 1 <sup>st</sup> March 2019.
<b>This report is public</b>

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

- (1) **That Members detach the role of Returning Officer from the post of Chief Executive.**
- (2) **That Council appoints Mr Dan Bates, who will take up the post of Director of Corporate Services on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019, to the role of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Lancaster City Council from the same date.**

#### **1.0 Background**

1.1 On 16 May 2016, Council resolved:

- (1) That Susan Parsonage be formally appointed to the role of Electoral Registration Officer effective from 1 July 2016.
- (2) That Council re-confirms that the role of Returning Officer be attached to the post of Chief Executive.

1.2 The role of a Returning Officer (RO) is enshrined in law. It can fall automatically upon the holder of specific job, as is currently the case at the City Council, or it can be applied to an individual appointed by Council. Similarly, every district council is required to appoint an Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) with personal responsibility to maintain the register of electors, conduct the annual canvass and encourage electors in the electoral process. Performance standards are set by the Electoral Commission. The ERO also discharges the responsibilities of the Acting Returning Officer at a UK Parliamentary election.

## **2.0 Reasons for the Appointment**

- 2.1 As Members are aware, the current Chief Executive will leave the authority in March. With preparations for local elections on 2<sup>nd</sup> May already underway, it will be necessary to appoint a RO for those elections – and any other unscheduled elections, by-elections or referenda which may arise - as swiftly as possible.
- 2.2 The City Council is required to have a RO in place and the role usually rests with a permanent member of staff. Council made a decision to attach that role to the Chief Executive's post and, now that there is to be period without a permanent Chief Executive, the role will need to be detached from that post. If and when a new Chief Executive is appointed, the Council can then re-consider where, or with whom, the roles of RO/ERO will sit.
- 2.3 The current RO, and the previous Chief Executive/RO, routinely appointed two Deputy Returning Officers with full powers (the Democratic Services Manager and the Elections Manager) to manage and oversee the work necessary to effect an efficient poll, postal voting and count process and it is not envisaged that this will change. The two Deputy Returning Officers, and the Council's two Elections Officers, have many years' experience of running elections and referenda and are fully qualified, each holding the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) Certificate. The team also carries out the day to day activities in promoting electoral registration and maintaining the register, as well as managing the annual canvass process, engagement activities and specific campaigns to encourage electors to register.
- 2.4 The new post of Director of Corporate Services is responsible for Democratic Services, which includes Electoral Services. As such, the post is the most appropriate to oversee and take responsibility for elections and electoral registration. The staff managing and directing the poll and the count will be staff from Democratic Services who work for Mr Bates. However, it should be noted that elections, by their nature and scale, are corporate events. Staff from all directorates take up roles in polling stations and at the count and the election could not run without their assistance and willingness to take part.

## **3.0 Conclusion**

- 3.1 Council is asked to appoint the Director of Corporate Services as RO and ERO from 1 March 2019.

<b>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>
(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)
None directly arising from this report.
<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>
As set out above in 2.1. The Council must have both a RO and an ERO in place.
<b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b>
The budget for the City Council elections is in place and fees for the RO for the Council's local elections on 2 May 2019 will be covered within that existing budget. RO fees for external elections are set, and paid for, by the party requesting the election (a fees and charges order is produced for Parliamentary elections, for example, which sets the fees for all ROs).

**OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

None.

**DEPUTY SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Deputy S151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring officer has been consulted and has no further comments

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**Contact Officer:** Debbie Chambers

**Telephone:** 01524 582057

**E-mail:** dchambers@lancaster.gov.uk

**Ref:**