

Appointment of the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer

25 September 2019

Report of the Democratic Services Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

For Council to consider appointing the City Council's Chief Executive, Mr Kieran Keane, as the Council's Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer with immediate effect.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) **That Council appoints Mr Kieran Keane, Chief Executive of Lancaster City Council, to the roles of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer with immediate effect.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Prior to 30 January 2019, the roles of Returning Officer (RO) and Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) were held by the Chief Executive and formed part of the duties in his/her job description.
- 1.2 On 30 January 2019, at a point where former Chief Executive Susan Parsonage had announced she would leave the Council in March 2019 and local elections were due to be held on 2 May 2019, Council resolved:
- (1) That the role of Returning Officer be detached from the post of Chief Executive.
- (2) That Mr Dan Bates, who will take up the post of Director of Corporate Services on 1 March 2019, also be appointed to the role of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration officer for Lancaster City Council from the same date.
- 1.3 The role of a RO is enshrined in law. It can fall automatically upon the holder of specific job, such as Chief Executive, as had been 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 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 The City Council is required to have a RO and ERO in place.
- 2.2 In January 2019, it was clear that, with the Chief Executive due to depart before the district and parish elections in May, appointments had to be made swiftly. Council had previously attached the role of Returning Officer to the Chief Executive's post and, because it appeared that there was to be a period without a Chief Executive, the role was detached from that post on 30 January 2019 in order to make a new appointment. The newly created post of Director of Corporate Services was the logical choice to take on the role of RO (and also ERO, which logically goes together with the RO role.) The Director of Corporate Services post includes responsibility for Democratic Services, which encompasses the elections team. As such, Mr Dan Bates was considered the most appropriate person to oversee and take responsibility for elections and electoral registration at that time.
- 2.3 On 26 June 2019 Council appointed Mr Kieran Keane to the post of Chief Executive on a fixed term basis until 31 October 2020.
- 2.4 It is usual for a local authority Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service to take on the roles of RO and ERO. Although it is not always the case, the three roles usually go together. Elections are major large scale events that require a local authority to draw on staff resources from all departments. The Chief Executive at Lancaster City Council is also the Head of the Paid Service and therefore in the best position to direct an operation that involves large numbers of his or her staff.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 Council is asked to appoint Chief Executive Mr Kieran Keane as RO and ERO with effect from this meeting.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT
(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)
None directly arising from this report.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS
As set out above in 2.1. The Council must have both a RO and an ERO in place.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
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.
SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS
The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments

DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Deputy Monitoring officer has prepared this report in her role as Democratic Services Manager.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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