

# WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## COUNCIL

13 DECEMBER 2022

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**Title:**

### APPOINTMENT OF RETURNING OFFICER AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

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**Head of Service:** Tom Horwood, Chief Executive

**Key decision:** No

**Access:** Public

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#### **1. Purpose and summary**

- 1.1 Following the creation of a Joint Chief Executive and Joint Management Team with Guildford Borough Council it is proposed to confirm the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer arrangements.

#### **2. Recommendation**

It is recommended that Robin Taylor be appointed as the Returning Officer for local elections, the Electoral Registration Officer for Waverley Borough Council and the Acting Returning Officer for UK Parliamentary Elections.

#### **3. Reason for the recommendation**

The Council is required to have in place appropriate statutory officers, including the appointment of a Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for the administration of elections. When the Council appointed me as Joint Chief Executive with Guildford Borough Council, that post was designated as Returning Officer for both Councils, having held that role in Waverley since 2017 and previously in a Hampshire council. May 2023 will see all-out elections for borough and parish councils in Guildford and Waverley. Both boroughs have boundary and polling district changes. Waverley will elect fewer borough councillors than in 2019. There are new accessibility regulations, voter ID requirements and the implications of the Coronation of HM King Charles III two days after polling day to plan for, all of which will introduce more risk than usual. While it is legally possible for a single individual to act as Returning Officer for two boroughs, I propose to make this change to mitigate the unusual level of risk and complexity facing elections in 2023.

Robin Taylor has increasingly taken on the full responsibilities of overseeing polls in recent years as Waverley's Deputy Returning Officer and therefore brings significant experience to the role. The Chief Executive shall continue as Guildford's Returning Officer, which will enable a focus on the respective boroughs with the two teams. The teams will work closely together on the

practical preparations whenever mutually beneficial. All operational arrangements for the Elections teams in both Councils remain with the Executive Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

## **5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan**

- 5.1 This proposal supports the Council's strategic priority of local, open and participative governance.

## **6. Implications of decision**

### **6.1 Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)**

The role of Returning Officer is appointed by the council but is personally accountable for the effective running of elections and is remunerated by an established schedule of fees that are discussed by Surrey councils and with the Government, and recouped in part from parish and county councils and the Government as appropriate. Separate Returning Officers would be paid their fees according to ordinary practice and so there will not be any additional financial burden to Waverley Borough Council as a consequence of this decision.

### **6.2 Risk management**

This proposal is itself a measure to reduce and mitigate the risks that are foreseen to be associated with the borough and parish elections in 2023.

### **6.3 Legal**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

### **6.4 Equality, diversity and inclusion**

There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications in this report. Equality impact assessments are carried out when necessary across the council to ensure service delivery meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

### **6.5 Climate emergency declaration**

There are no climate emergency declarations arising from this report.

## **7. Consultation and engagement**

- 7.1 Both Council Leaders are supportive. Group Leaders and Independent councillors were consulted and none objected.

## **8. Other options considered**

- 8.1 The alternative option would be to continue with one Returning Officer with a risk of reduced focus on the complexity of one borough's elections. No other options have been considered.

## **9. Governance journey**

- 9.1 This matter is being reported to Council on 13 December 2022 for a decision.

## **Annexes:**

None

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**Background Papers**

There are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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Agreed and signed off by:

Legal Services: S Rix 18.11.2022