

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

18TH DECEMBER 2014

Agenda Item	15
Report No	HC/40/14

UK Parliamentary General Election - Thursday 7 May 2015

Report by the Returning Officer

SUMMARY

The purpose of this Report is to advise the Council of the impact that Election Administration for the forthcoming UK Parliamentary General Election, scheduled to take place on Thursday 7 May 2015, will have on the work of the Council and explain the statutory framework that governs the conduct at this election.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Highland Council, at its Meeting on 15th March 1996, appointed the Chief Executive as Returning Officer for Highland Council Elections. Through that Office, I am the Returning Officer for the 3 Highland UK Parliamentary Constituencies, namely Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross; Ross, Skye and Lochaber and Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey.
- 1.2 The Primary Election Legislation governing the conduct of an Election is the Representation of the People Act 1983, which has been amended from time to time over the years, most recently by the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013
- 1.3 Section 25(2) of the 1983 Act states that “.....a Council shall place at the disposal of the Returning Officer for the purposes of assisting the Returning Officer in the discharge of any functions conferred on him in relation to a parliamentary election, the services of officers employed by the Council”
- 1.4 This Report aims to outline my staffing requirements to ensure the smooth administration of the forthcoming UK Parliamentary General Election.

2.0 ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

- 2.1 I propose to make the following arrangements for the administration and running of the Highland Council Election and would ask the Council to agree to the proposed staffing arrangements and use of accommodation set out below.
- 2.2 As Returning Officer, I have overall responsibility for the conduct of the Election. Michelle Morris, Depute Chief Executive will be appointed as my Depute.
- 2.3 I also intend to appoint John Bruce, Elections Manager and Cheryl MacIver, Elections Officer, as Depute Returning Officers with responsibility for ensuring the smooth administration of the Election. Carron McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform, will be appointed as a Depute Returning Officer to undertake Postal Vote Personal Identifier Administration using computerised checking.
- 2.4 I propose to establish a core team at Headquarters to process the nominations received and drafting of ballot papers. Election Administration training, advice, guidance and support will be provided by the HQ Election Team.
- 2.5 In order to minimise disruption to Council work, I propose to make the preparatory arrangements of updating documentation, checking the availability of polling stations, checking and replacing election equipment and checking the availability of polling and count staff using the Elections Manager, Election Officer and three support staff to carry out such duties pan Highland. This will minimise the disruption to other staffs' workload until closer to the election date.
- 2.6 A Postal Ballot Team will be established at Headquarters to process and check postal ballots received. It is estimated that some 35,000 postal ballots will be issued across the 3 constituencies. Approximately 25 staff from across all services of the Council will be required to carry out these tasks.
- 2.7 Council staff are the backbone of conducting the polls and the counts at an election and these experienced staff are used to manage the teams at the counts and to organise the logistics of filling and distributing ballot boxes, training poll and counting staff, transporting and handling ballot boxes at the counts. In the days immediately preceding the poll and counts these staff are deployed on election duties rather than their normal Council work. Without the co-operation of the Council and these staff, it would be impossible to conduct elections properly and efficiently.

3.0 ACCOMODATION

- 3.1 Accommodation will be required for the Election Team outlined above. For past elections Committee Room 3 in Headquarters has been used as the Election Office. I would request that the Council again makes this accommodation available for the forthcoming election from Monday 2 February until the end of May 2015. The early start will also help facilitate the administration of the Cairngorms National Park Authority Election being held on 19 March 2015.
- 3.2 Committee Rooms 1 and 2 in the Council Offices, Dingwall will be required by the Postal Vote Team, during the period 20 April until 8 May 2015.

4.0 TIMETABLE

- 4.1 The Electoral Commission has indicated that the earliest day on which the Notice of Election can be published for the UK Parliamentary General Election is Tuesday, 31 March 2015 and consequently it is intended to publish the Notice of Election on that day.
- 4.2 From that day onwards, nomination packs will be available and nomination papers may be lodged between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm on any working day, with the exception of Saturdays, Sundays, but can be lodged no later than 4 pm on Thursday, 9 April 2015. The Notice of Poll will be published as soon as practicable thereafter.
- 4.3 The last date on which a person may register to vote with the Electoral Registration Officer for this election is Monday, 20 April 2015.
- 4.4 The deadline for new postal vote and postal proxy applications and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes will be 5 pm on Tuesday, 21 April 2015. The deadline for new applications to vote by proxy, (not postal proxy or emergency proxies) is 5 pm on Tuesday 28th April 2015. The deadline for emergency proxy applications is 5 pm on Thursday, 7 May 2015.
- 4.5 As indicated above Polling day will be on Thursday, 7 May 2015 with the hours of poll being between 7 am to 10 pm.

5.0 POLLING AND COUNTING STAFF

- 5.1 A considerable proportion of the 600 Poll Staff employed by me at the Parliamentary Election are members of staff of the Council. Staff are generally free to volunteer for election duties, but do require the approval of their line manager to ensure that adequate cover is available to keep the Council functioning. This voluntary arrangement has worked

successfully in the past and again I would hope that the Council would agree to continue with these arrangements.

6.0 COUNT VENUE

6.1 Following consultation with political parties, the Count for the three Constituencies will take place at the Highland Football Academy, Dingwall on Thursday 7 May 2015, commencing at 10.00 pm.

7.0 ELECTION COSTS

7.1 The cost of the UK Parliamentary Election will be met by the UK Government and costs reasonably incurred will be recovered through the UK General Election Charges Order 2015

8. RECOMMENDATION

8.1 It is recommended that the Council notes and concurs with the content of this report.

Signature:

Designation: Returning Officer

Date: 08 December 2014

Author: John Bruce, Elections Manager

Background Papers:- This Report does not rely, to any material extent, on any particular document