

Agenda Item	23
Report No	RES/51/17

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Date: **30th August 2017**

Report title: **Staff Support for Election Duties**

Report by: **The Chief Executive**

Purpose/Executive Summary

At the Highland Council meeting held on 29th June 2017 members agreed that the principles surrounding staff support for Election duties would be presented to the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Committee.

This report outlines arrangements made for paying staff and providing time off following work carried out overnight during elections and provides a framework for the Returning Officer to operate within.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the current arrangements.
- Agree to allow the Returning Officer to make suitable arrangements for time off on an election by election basis based on the framework set out in paragraph 3.1.

1. Background

1.1 Since 2014 there have been 5 elections or referendums requiring overnight counts. The finish time of each count varied considerably due to type of count and turnout. The 5 most recent overnight counts are listed in 1.2 with finish times when count staff were allowed home.

1.2

Count	Year	Finish Time
Scottish Independence Referendum	2014	7:30am
UKGE	2015	5:30am
Scottish Parliament Election	2016	6:00am
EU Referendum	2016	4:30am
UKGE	2017	4:15am

2. Current arrangements

The current Council policy on supporting staff to undertake election duties states that.

“Election Day Duties

With the approval of the Service Director, employees who have been appointed to assist with polling or counting at Local, National or European Elections will be granted special leave with pay.”

The successful administration and delivery of elections not only involves significant planning but the co-operation and goodwill of staff and managers across services and all parts of the Council area. The support is called upon in the weeks leading up to the election as, for example, postal voting gets underway and in the days after conclusion of the count process. Current arrangements for overnight counts rely on the goodwill and flexibility of staff and Service Directors to release staff and also to make suitable arrangements for cover of duties the next day. Services work in a very cooperative manner to ensure their availability for election duties and arranging suitable cover for their Council work. All staff are given the opportunity of putting themselves forward for election duties.

2.1 Staff working through the night are paid a fixed fee for their work at the overnight count. It should be noted that not all staff engaged in the count are Council employees and the breakdown of Council/Non Council staff is given in paragraph 2.2 below. It remains vital that the Council can call upon an experienced cohort of staff to undertake and support the count process. The practice in Highland has been that Council staff are granted the morning after the count as special leave and if a member of staff wished to have the full day they would use annual leave or flexileave for the afternoon. In 2014 due to the late finish the Chief Executive granted Council staff working at the Scottish Independence Referendum the full day off.

2.2

UKGE-2107	Times Worked	Council Staff	External Staff	Payments made Counters /Supervisors	Current Notional Costs to Council	Full day notional cost to Council
Count Staff Overnight	9:30pm-4:15am	130	151	£125-£140	£9k (1/2 day)	£18k (full day)
Ancillary Staff for count set up		6			£0k (AL/FL taken)	£0k (AL/FL taken)
Totals		136	151		£9k	£18k

2.3 In the last two overnight election counts the Returning Officer has chosen to increase the number of count staff. The extra staff coupled with revised processes and new methods which have been adopted during the count have resulted in earlier than anticipated finishes to the counts. It is intended to use the current model for future elections.

2.4 Other Council staff are involved overnight including postal vote staff and drivers collecting and delivering ballot boxes from collection centres to the Count Centre. Staff also work after the count in dismantling the count centre to return it to its former use

2.5 Poll staff working from 7am until 10pm on the day of the election are currently allocated special leave to enable them to carry out polling duties. Again not all staff are Council employees The break down in numbers and payments made is given in paragraph 2.6. These staff are currently expected to report for work as normal on the day following the election.

2.6

UKGE-2107	Times Worked	Council Staff	External Staff	Payments made Poll Clerk/PO	Current Notional Costs to Council
Poll Staff	7:00am - 10:00pm	156	389	£165-£220	£20k

3.0 Proposed framework for special leave for election duties.

3.1 The current arrangements in place to recognise the support offered by staff involved in the election process are considered to be appropriate. Recent experience of overnight counts has seen earlier finishes allowing staff to be released much earlier than previously. It is important, however, that the Chief Executive be empowered to authorise a full day of special leave to Council employees in exceptional circumstances such as those that were encountered during the Scottish Independence Referendum count.

Role	Approx. numbers of council staff	Paid	Framework
Overnight Count Staff	130	Fixed fee	Morning after count off; may be extended by RO in exceptional circumstances. Directors may restrict the number of counts which staff are available to undertake in a fixed period.
Overnight Postal Vote Team	6	Fixed fee	Morning after count off; may be extended by RO in exceptional circumstances. Directors may restrict the number of counts which staff are available to undertake in a fixed period.
Team to disassemble count centre	6	Hourly rate	Full day off after count.
Transport Drivers	12	Hourly rate	Morning off after count.
Poll Staff	156	Fixed fee	Special leave on the day of the Poll.

4. Implications

4.1 Staff Implications.

Staff currently covering other duties may be impacted by staff not returning to work adding to their workload albeit for a limited period of no more than 1 working day. Service Directors and Heads of Service will need to assess each post and its impact on service delivery.

4.2 Financial Implications.

A notional cost to the Council of an additional £9k would be incurred if all staff were granted a full day off following working overnight at an election count. No additional cost would be incurred with the framework proposals in paragraph 3.

4.3 Legal Implications.

The recommendations in this report will ensure that the Council discharges its obligations under section 25(2) of the 1983 Representation of the People Act which state 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.

Date: 16 August 2017
Author: David Sutherland
Ref:
Background Papers: