



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Council

1 March 2023

Report of Karen Bradford
Electoral Registration Officer

Appointment of Deputy Electoral Registration Officers

Report Author

Julie Edwards, Electoral Services Manager

 julie.edwards@southkesteven.gov.uk

Purpose of Report

To consider the appointment of three Deputy Electoral Registration Officers

Recommendations

That the Council:

- 1. Approves the appointment of the Chief Finance Officer, the Assistant Director of Governance and the Electoral Services Manager as Deputy Electoral Registration Officers to act in place of the Electoral Registration Officer where they are unable to act personally and for the purposes of the authorisation of Voter Authority Certificates.**
- 2. Delegates authority to the Council's Electoral Registration Officer to appoint Deputies and to revoke or vary such appointments as necessary in the future.**

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	High performing Council
Which wards are impacted?	All

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 There are no financial implications relating to this report. No additional payments are made for deputy Electoral Registration Officer appointments.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Chief Finance Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 Legal and governance implications are set out in the body of the report.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 Section 8(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 requires the Council to designate an officer to the position of Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). This position is responsible for maintaining the Electoral Register for the area. The Chief Executive is the appointed Electoral Registration Officer. At the time of the appointment, no deputy appointments were made.
- 2.2 Section 52(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 allows the Council to appoint deputy Electoral Registration Officers, who will be able to perform and exercise any of the duties and powers of the ERO.
- 2.3 The Electoral Registration Officer may recommend who to appoint but no appointment can be made without formal approval of Council. Future decisions on

the appointment of deputy Electoral Registration Officers can be delegated by the Council.

- 2.4 Unlike Returning Officers, the ERO cannot appoint a deputy themselves, unless the power to do so has been delegated to them. No such delegation is currently in place.
- 2.5 The Elections Act 2022 has introduced the requirement for voters to show photographic identification at polling stations to verify their identity. Voters who do not have any acceptable form of photographic ID can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate.
- 2.6 The Voter Authority Certificates are issued centrally under a government contract once applications have been authorised by the ERO. However, those applying close to a specific election may need to be issued with a temporary Voter Authority Certificate which will need to be produced locally and contain a wet ink signature of the ERO or an appointed Deputy.
- 2.7 The Voter Authority Certificate application process opened on the 16 January 2023. The elections team are trained to process these applications with additional support from the Democratic Services and Land Charges teams.
- 2.8 In addition to the Electoral Commission voter awareness campaign, the Council has undertaken a number of initiatives to promote the new voter identification requirement to minimise the risks of late applications being received where voters do not have the required photographic identification. A total of 11 Tweets and 11 Facebook posts have been made with further posts scheduled, on average three messages per week. In addition a leaflet has been produced to be enclosed with the council tax bills being despatched on 13 March.
- 2.9 Another statutory function placed on the ERO that could be undertaken by an appointed deputy is conducting a registration hearing following a registration review or an objection to the removal of an elector from the electoral register.
- 2.10 It is recommended that three deputy Electoral Registration Officers be appointed, the Chief Finance Officer, the Assistant Director of Governance and the Electoral Services Manager, to provide resilience and to ensure that there is an officer available to discharge these functions.
- 2.11 If approved by Council, these appointments will be implemented with immediate effect.
- 2.12 It is also recommended that the decision to make future appointments of deputy Electoral Registration Officers is delegated by the Council to the appointed Electoral Registration Officer. This will ensure that future appointments can be made as and when necessary.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 The Council does not currently have appointments in place of Deputy Electoral Registration Officers. As a result of the additional requirements introduced by the Elections Act 2022 in relation to the issuing of temporary voter authority certificates, it is considered appropriate to appoint Deputies now to ensure that arrangements are in place ahead of the elections in May 2023.
- 3.2 This approach is also being taken by other Councils, including neighbouring Councils within Lincolnshire, with additional appointments of Deputy Electoral Registration Officers being made to meet the additional duties that have been placed on the ERO by the Elections Act 2022.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 Option 1 – That the Chief Finance Officer, the Assistant Director of Governance and the Electoral Services Manager be recommended for appointment as Deputy Electoral Registration Officers
- 4.2 Option 2 – That other officers are appointed as Deputy Electoral Registration Officers.
- 4.3 Option 3 – To not appoint any deputies.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 To provide sufficient resilience and to ensure that the Council has experienced officers appointed to the roles to discharge the statutory functions on behalf of the Electoral Registration Officer.