

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, 2004  
APPOINTMENT OF LOCAL RETURNING OFFICER  
(Report by the Executive Director of Central Services)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to acquaint Members with the commencement of planning for the European Parliamentary Elections in 2004 and a consequential issue relating to the appointment of the Local Returning Officer for the Huntingdon Parliamentary Constituency.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 On the last occasion that European Elections were held – in June 1999 – significant changes were made to the way in which they were organised and conducted. The variations included:-

- ◆ the reorganisation of UK European Parliamentary Constituencies into twelve regions, each returning a number of Members of the European Parliament, dependent on the size of the Regions' electorate;
- ◆ voting for political parties or individual candidates (if applicable); and
- ◆ a form of proportional representation to allocate seats.

- 2.2 In 1999 the District Council's Chief Executive was appointed Regional Returning Officer for the Eastern Region comprising the Counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. "Westminster" Parliamentary Constituencies were chosen as the "building blocks" for the elections in each of the regions. In the Eastern Region this involved some 56 Constituencies, the Acting Returning Officer for each assuming the role of Local Returning Officer and with it responsibility for the organisation and conduct of the election in his/her area.

- 2.3 Members will be aware of the role of the District Council's Chief Executive as Acting Returning Officer at Parliamentary Elections for the Huntingdon Constituency. This appointment "translates" into that of Local Returning Officer at European Elections. However, and in view of his responsibility for the Eastern Region as a whole in 1999 it was deemed necessary to review the situation locally.

- 2.4 In those circumstances and bearing in mind his experience as Deputy (Acting) Returning Officer at European, Parliamentary and other elections, Mr Peter Watkins, Executive Director of Central Services, was appointed as Local Returning Officer for the Huntingdon

Constituency for the conduct of the European Parliamentary Elections, in June 1999.

### **3. DEVELOPMENTS SUBSEQUENTLY**

3.1 While polling day for the next European Elections – 10th June 2004 – may appear some while away, planning for the event has already begun.

3.2 Furthermore, while the necessary secondary legislation has yet to be laid before Parliament, the District Council's Chief Executive has been reappointed Regional Returning Officer (designate) for the Eastern Region. Other developments are anticipated which will require primary legislation, including –

- ◆ a combination of European, District and Parish elections on 10th June 2004; and
- ◆ a suggestion by the Government that it wishes to consider “all postal” pilot schemes in three Regions and for one of those pilots also to include Internet and telephone voting.

### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

4.1 As in 1999 the responsibilities of the Council's Chief Executive as Regional Returning Officer for the Eastern Electoral Region are likely to be such as to require a separate appointment of a Local Returning Officer for the Huntingdon Constituency.

4.2 While under the Council's constitutional arrangements the Panel is responsible for the determination of a wide range of functions relating to elections, the appointment of a Returning Officer is reserved to full Council.

### **5. RECOMMENDATION**

5.1 For the reasons outlined in the preceding paragraphs, the Panel are invited to recommend to full Council —

**that Mr Peter Watkins, Executive Director of Central Services, be appointed Local Returning Officer for the Huntingdon Constituency in connection with the conduct of the elections for the European Parliament in June, 2004.**

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

European Elections Act 1999 and associated Regulations  
Home Officer RPA Circular 423

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