

| <b>ELECTORAL SERVICES – INCREASE TO ESTABLISHMENT</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Executive Summary</b>                              | Due to increasing workload arising from unplanned national and local by-elections, the requirements of the Elections Act, preparations for Local Government Reorganisation (“LGR”), additional support provided to parish councils, enhanced annual canvass activity and anticipated electoral reforms, the Electoral Services team is seeking an increase in its staffing budget to increase the Electoral Services Officer role from 30 to 37 hours per week. These pressures are ongoing and are expected to continue over the medium term. The increase is intended to provide sufficient baseline capacity and resilience within a statutory service to ensure the Council can continue to discharge its electoral registration and election administration functions effectively. The additional annual cost is estimated at £4,293. |
| <b>Options considered</b>                             | <p><b>Option 1:</b></p> <p>Continue with the current 30-hour arrangement. This would maintain the current establishment but would leave the service with limited capacity to respond to increasing statutory and operational demands, reducing resilience and increasing the risk of service pressures impacting delivery.</p> <p><b>Option 2 (Recommended):</b></p> <p>Approve an increase in the Electoral Services staffing budget to increase the Electoral Services Officer role from 30 to 37 hours per week. This would strengthen capacity within the team, improve resilience and support the delivery of existing statutory responsibilities and emerging workstreams arising from electoral reform and LGR</p>                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Consultation(s)</b>                                | CLT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Recommendations</b>                                | <p>It is recommended that Full Council:</p> <p><b>Approve an increase of 7 hours in the Electoral Services staffing establishment budget and the associated growth of £4,293 per annum.</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Reasons for recommendations</b>                    | The Electoral Services team delivers a statutory function. An increase in operational demand has arisen from electoral legislation, postal vote administration, annual canvass requirements and preparations for Local Government Reorganisation. The current establishment no longer fully reflects the volume and complexity of work now undertaken and the proposed increase in capacity will improve resilience, support business continuity and help ensure that electoral registration and administering elections is effectively delivered.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Background papers</b>                              | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

|                          |                                     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Wards affected</b>    | All                                 |
| <b>Cabinet member(s)</b> | Tim Adams                           |
| <b>Contact Officer</b>   | Rob Henry, Senior Elections Officer |

| <b>Links to key documents:</b>        |                            |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Corporate Plan:                       | Developing our Communities |
| Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) | N/A                        |
| Council Policies & Strategies         | N/A                        |

| <b>Corporate Governance:</b>                       |     |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Is this a key decision                             | No  |
| Has the public interest test been applied          | N/A |
| Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter | N/A |

## **1. Purpose of the report**

- 1.1 To seek approval for an increase in the Electoral Services staffing budget to facilitate an increase of 7 hours per week within the Electoral Services Officer role to provide additional capacity and resilience to meet current and anticipated service demands.

## **2. Introduction & Background**

- 2.1 The Electoral Services team has operated within a reduced establishment since 2021 and has delivered significant efficiencies whilst continuing to meet its statutory responsibilities. However, the volume and complexity of work undertaken by the service has increased substantially in recent years. Key drivers include implementation of the Elections Act, unplanned elections and by-elections, enhanced annual canvass activity, additional parish council support responsibilities, preparations for electoral reform including votes at 16, and LGR.

## **3. Proposals and Options**

- 3.1. The Electoral Services function is experiencing sustained growth in workload arising from legislative change, increasing regulatory requirements and preparations for wider local government reforms. A key service requirement is

to ensure that sufficient capacity is available to maintain statutory electoral functions, support service resilience and respond to emerging demands in a timely and effective manner.

3.2 Upcoming changes to electoral legislation, including the extension of voting rights to younger residents and the registration of attainers, are expected to increase the size of the eligible electorate significantly. These changes will require additional planning, data management, stakeholder engagement and public awareness activity to support participation and ensure that registration processes remain accessible and effective.

3.3 The service has also assumed additional responsibilities associated with the management and publication of registers of interests. Recent legislative requirements mean that information must be reviewed and redacted before publication, creating an ongoing administrative workload that will increase processing times and require continued resource support to maintain compliance.

A further service priority is the delivery of a comprehensive annual canvass. Experience from recent elections has highlighted the importance of following up registration activity to ensure that eligible residents complete the full registration process. A fuller canvass approach is intended to improve the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register but will require additional operational capacity to deliver effectively.

3.4 Changes introduced through the Elections Act have increased the burden connected to administering postal voting. The reduction in the renewal period for postal votes has created recurring programmes of large-scale renewal activity which are resource intensive and require significant officer time to process applications and maintain the integrity of electoral records.

3.4 Two options have been identified.

**Option 1:** To maintain existing staffing capacity, which would require the service to absorb the additional workload within current resources.

**Option 2 (Recommended) :** To increase available staffing capacity to support ongoing service delivery, strengthen resilience, improve responsiveness to unplanned electoral events and assist the authority in meeting future statutory and operational requirements.

## 4. Corporate Priorities

4.1. **Developing our Communities** - This request will allow us to better serve our communities in terms of supporting registration and a different demographic of residents to participate and engage in democracy.

## 5. Financial and Resource Implications

- 5.1. The proposal would result in an estimated additional annual staffing cost of £4,293. The service has delivered significant efficiencies over recent years through changes to working practices, reduced staffing structures and savings associated with changes to the annual canvass process. Despite these efficiencies, service demands continue to increase. Electoral Services remains one of the smallest teams in Norfolk relative to the electorate served and covering a large rural district. The proposal seeks to ensure sufficient capacity to continue delivering statutory functions effectively.

### Comments from the S151 Officer:

*New demands placed on the service support increasing the establishment by 0.2 FTE. Should sufficient savings not be met from the Corporate Directorate in 2026/27 then the £0.004m growth can be funded from the Earmarked Election Reserve.*

## 6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. The Council has statutory responsibilities relating to electoral registration and the conduct of elections. Adequate resources are required to ensure these functions are delivered lawfully, efficiently and in accordance with electoral legislation. Insufficient capacity could increase operational risk and reduce resilience in the delivery of these statutory functions.

### Comments from the Monitoring Officer

***The Monitoring Officer (or member of the Legal team on behalf of the MO) will complete this section. They will outline any legal advice provided.***

*The Council must ensure that sufficient resources are available to enable the lawful and effective delivery of its electoral functions. Subject to Members being satisfied that the increase is justified by service need and that the necessary budget provision is available, no specific legal or governance concerns arise from the recommendation.*

## 7. Risks

- 7.1. Failure to approve the proposal may result in continued pressure on a small statutory service (the smallest in the Norfolk Local Authorities) operating within an increasingly demanding regulatory and operational environment. This may reduce resilience, increase operational risk and limit the service's ability to respond effectively to unplanned electoral events, legislative change and Local Government Reorganisation requirements.
- 7.2. Approval of the proposal will result in a recurring budget obligation; however, the financial impact is relatively modest when balanced against the

operational and statutory risks associated with insufficient service capacity authority.

## **8. Net ZeroTarget**

8.1. No identified direct impact upon net zero has been identified.

## **9. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion**

9.1 The proposal supports continued access to democracy and registration for all eligible individuals and no adverse equality impacts have been identified.

## **10. Community Safety issues**

10.1 No impact upon community safety issues has been identified.

## **Conclusion**

The Electoral Services team delivers a statutory function. With the increase in operational demand connected to Changes to electoral legislation, postal vote administration, annual canvass requirements and preparations for Local Government Reorganisation has increased operational demand. Increase in capacity will improve resilience, support business continuity and help ensure that statutory electoral functions effectively delivered.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Full Council:

**Approve an increase of 7 hours in the Electoral Services staffing establishment budget and the associated growth of £4,293 per annum.**