

WMCA Board

Date	18 September 2020
Report title	Appointment of Combined Authority Returning Officer
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Report has been considered by	Programme Board August 2020

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The WMCA Board is recommended to:

- (1) Appoint Martin Reeves, Chief Executive of Coventry City Council as the West Midlands Combined Authority Returning Officer until further notice.
- (2) Note that the Returning Officer intends to appoint Helen Paterson, Chief Executive of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council as his Deputy.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to confirm the continuation of the appointment of the Combined Authority Returning Officer in respect of the Combined Authority Mayoral elections first made on 24 May 2019.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017 provides that each Combined Authority must appoint one of its officers or one of the officers of a constituent council to be the Combined Authority Returning Officer (CARO). If an officer of a constituent authority is chosen this will normally be the Returning Officer for that area.
- 2.2 The CARO will have overall responsibility for the election of the Mayor and may, for example, give to a Returning Officer of a constituent member authority, directions relating to the conduct of the election. In addition, the CARO will be responsible for accepting nominations and coordinating the regional result.
- 2.3 For the 2017 election a decision was taken to appoint the Returning Officer of Coventry City Council as the CARO. The WMCA does not maintain an elections team and is not responsible for any elections with the exception of the Mayoral election.
- 2.4 At its meeting on 24 May 2019 the WMCA appointed Martin Reeves, the Chief Executive of Coventry City Council as the West Midlands Combined Authority Returning Officer for the Mayoral Election 2020. That election was subsequently postponed as a result of the Covid19 pandemic and will now be held in May 2021. For the avoidance of doubt the Combined Authority is asked to confirm its appointment of Martin Reeves as CARO until further notice. The CARO will be supported by the electoral teams from Coventry City Council and Birmingham City Council. The CARO will appoint Helen Paterson, Chief Executive of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council as Deputy Returning Officer for continuity purposes.
- 2.5 Agreed protocols covering access to information and contact with all candidates in order to provide full transparency are being developed by the Combined Authority and will be jointly agreed by the Combined Authority Chief Executive and the CARO.

3. Wider WMCA Implications

- 3.1 The Mayoral election covers the whole of the constituent area of the WMCA but does not include the electorate of the non-constituent authority areas.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The CARO will have responsibility for the conduct of the poll and any directions made by the CARO may have implications on the cost of delivering the election. The cost of the election is approximately £3.6m and is borne by the Combined Authority. Additional costs may arise in the event that the election needs to accommodate Covid19 safety measures and we are currently in discussions with the Government regarding funding.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Combined Authority will be in breach of its statutory duty if a CARO is not appointed and it will not be possible for the election to be held.

6. Equalities Implications

- 6.1 A full range of measures are employed to ensure that all electors are able to cast their vote without difficulty.

7. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 7.1 There are no specific inclusive growth implications arising from this report.

8. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 8.1 This is dealt with in paragraph 3.1 above.

9. Other Implications

None

10. Schedule of Background Papers

Report to WMCA Board on the Appointment of CARO 24 May 2019.