

Report to:	Governance Committee
Date of meeting:	11 November 2025
By:	Deputy Chief Executive
Title:	Appointment of Returning Officer for Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) election
Purpose:	To appoint a returning officer for the MCCA election due to be held in May 2026.

RECOMMENDATION:

Governance Committee is recommended to recommend to County Council to appoint the Chief Executive of Brighton and Hove City Council as the Returning Officer for the Mayoral election for the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority.

1. Introduction

1.1 This paper recommends that the Chief Executive of Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) be formally appointed as the Combined County Authority Returning Officer (CCARO) for the Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) elections scheduled for May 2026. It sets out the legislative background, governance context, and rationale for the proposed appointment.

2. Background to the MCCA

2.1 The MCCA is being established as part of the Government's devolution agenda, with the Sussex region comprising East Sussex County Council (ESCC), West Sussex County Council (WSCC), and BHCC working collaboratively to form the new authority. The MCCA will assume strategic responsibilities across transport, housing, economic development, and public service reform.

2.2 Legislation to formally create the MCCA is expected to be passed in early 2026, with the first mayoral election scheduled for May 2026.

3. Legislative Framework for Returning Officer Appointment

3.1 The Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017 (the Order) require that an officer be appointed as the CCARO responsible for the effectual conduct of the election in the manner provided by the Order.

3.2 Under the Order all expenditure properly incurred by a Returning Officer prior to the formal establishment of the CCA must be paid by the constituent councils. Once the CCA is established, it must reimburse those councils.

3.3 The CCARO is personally responsible for a number of specific aspects of the combined county authority mayoral election including:

- giving notice of the election
- the nomination procedures
- encouraging participation
- ensuring that candidates and their agents comply with the requirements as to the content of candidate election addresses, and with the procedures for submitting them

- producing and distributing the booklet containing the candidates' election addresses to every voter
- the collation of local totals and calculation of the result
- the declaration of the result

3.4 Provisions in the 2017 order set out that the CCARO must be an officer of a constituent council or the CCA and that the appointment of the CCARO must be made by the constituent councils or the CCA.

3.5 The Election Regulations permit the appointment by the Constituent Councils of a CCARO for the mayoral election ahead of the establishment of a combined county authority. It is proposed that the Chief Executive of BHCC be appointed to this role.

3.6 As the MCCA will not yet be legally constituted at the time the Returning Officer must be appointed, the responsibility falls to the constituent authorities.

4. Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

4.1 There is a requirement for the Constituent Authorities to appoint a CCARO and it is recommended that this be the Chief Executive of BHCC. BHCC has already taken a lead role in coordinating the preparations for the mayoral election, including oversight of the Election Spend & Reimbursement Policy and logistical planning. The BHCC electoral services team has delivered the Area Returning Officer responsibilities at the last two Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner elections, has extensive experience managing large-scale elections and is therefore well-equipped to handle the complexities of a regional mayoral election.

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