



Combined Authority Board

24th July 2024

Title:	Appointment of Combined Authority Returning Officer
Report of:	Matthew Cumberbatch, Monitoring Officer
Lead Member:	Mayor Dr Nik Johnson
Public Report:	Yes
Key Decision:	Yes – KD2024/047
Voting Arrangements:	A simple majority of all Members present and voting

Recommendation:

A	To re-appoint John Hill, East Cambridgeshire District Council Chief Executive, as the Combined Area Returning Officer for the purposes of Article 6 of the Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017 for the Mayoral election to be held on 1 May 2025.
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Strategic Objective(s):

The proposals within this report fit under the following strategic objective(s):

X	Achieving ambitious skills and employment opportunities
X	Achieving good growth
X	Increased connectivity
X	Enabling resilient communities
X	Achieving Best Value and High Performance

1. Purpose

1.1	To appoint a Combined Area returning Officer (CARO) for the Mayoral election to be held on 1 May 2025.
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2. Background

2.1	<p>The Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017 at Article 6 (1) states:</p> <p><i>6. – Combined Authority Returning Officer</i></p> <p><i>(1) The Combined Authority must appoint one of its officers, or one of the officers of a constituent Council, to be the Combined Authority Returning Officer in relation to the election.</i></p> <p><i>Election in this context means an election for the return of a Combined Authority Mayor</i></p>
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2.2	John Hill, is currently the East Cambridgeshire District Council Chief Executive and was the CARO for the 2017 and the 2021 Mayoral elections. He was also appointed as the Police Area Returning Officer (PARO) for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections for 2021 and 2024 and has extensive experience in the wider area roles for elections for a number of years prior to this too.
2.3	The CARO is a significant and complex role responsible for the overall management of the Mayoral elections with specific responsibility for administering the nomination process, calculating and declaring the result and production of candidates addresses. Co-ordination of the process, particularly in relation to polling day and the count is particularly complex given that it covers the full Combined Authority area.
2.4	Advice has been sought from the Electoral Administration team within the Cabinet Office on such appointments. This has been clear that in making such appointments (this team make the formal appointments to the PAROs across the country) they select someone with UKPGE experience and with relevant RO experience of running a combined authority poll such as a PCC or combined Mayoral election. On this advice and the experience John Hill has, it would be correct and prudent to re-appoint John as the person with the most experience in the region.
2.5	However, to strengthen further resilience, the CARO will be asked to share their knowledge and processes with fellow Returning Officers in the region for any future elections.

3. Appendices

3.1	None
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4. Implications

Financial Implications

4.1	The cost of the 2021 Mayoral elections was £0.96m. The Combined Authority has allocated £1.04m for the 2025 elections based on an annual provision of £0.26m over four years. However, due to the Police and Crime Commissioner elections not being held at the same time as the Mayoral election (unlike 2021) the costs associated with the election will be shared across fewer organisations. Taken together with the impact of higher inflation since 2021, this has resulted in early forecasts of costs approximately 50% higher than originally set aside in the budget. Officers within the Combined Authority are working with relevant constituent councils to firm up the forecast position by September in order that it can be addressed through the Authority's Medium-Term Financial Plan.
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Legal Implications

4.2	The legal implications are summarised in the report.
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Public Health Implications

4.3	None
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Environmental & Climate Change Implications

4.4	None
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Other Significant Implications

4.5	None
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Background Papers

4.6	<p>Electoral Commission Guidance - Combined Authority and Combined County Authority Returning Officer guidance for Combined Authority Mayoral elections Electoral Commission</p> <p>Electoral Commission Guidance - Planning Guidance for Combined Authority Returning Officers</p> <p>Electoral Commission Guidance - Guidance for Returning Officers administering Local Government Elections in England Electoral Commission</p>
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