

Planning guidance for Combined Authority Returning Officers

Combined authority mayoral elections
in England

In this guidance we use 'must' when we refer to a specific legal requirement. We use 'should' for items we consider to be recommended practice, but which are not legal requirements.

Translations and other formats

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Updates to this document

Updated	Description of change
December 2016	Update to reflect that the conduct Order for combined authority mayoral elections has now been laid in the UK Parliament.
January 2017	Update to reflect the final legislation as made.
December 2017	Updated to reflect the Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (Amendment) Order 2017 which provide that in keeping with other elections, a subscriber must appear on the relevant register in force on the last day for the delivery of nominations rather than at the time the nomination is delivered; and to make non-date specific.
September 2018	Updated to take account of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018

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1 Introduction

Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this guidance is to support Combined Authority Returning Officers (CAROs) in carrying out their role at a combined authority mayoral election in England.

1.2 It has been developed in close consultation with the UK Electoral Coordination and Advisory Board (ECAB), the Elections, Registration and Referendums Working Group (ERRWG) and the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA). It reflects what we, the ECAB, the ERRWG and the AEA believe that CAROs should expect of their staff in preparing for and delivering combined authority mayoral elections.

1.3 This guidance has been produced taking account of, and should be read in accordance with, the requirements set out in the following legislation (as amended):

- Representation of the People Acts 1983, 1985 and 2000
- Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000
- Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001
- Electoral Administration Act 2006
- Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009
- Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (in relation to Greater Manchester only)
- Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013
- The Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017
- The Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Amendment Order 2017

1.4 Where the poll at a combined authority mayoral election has been combined with the poll at a local election, you will also need to have regard to the following (as amended):

- Local Government Acts of 1972 and 2000
- Representation of the People (Combination of Polls) (England and Wales) Regulations 2004
- Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
- Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
- Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007

1.5 The list above includes only the legislation that makes provision in areas that this guidance relates to and the legislation that is currently in force.

1.6 CAROs are also required to have regard to the public sector equality duty contained in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 when carrying out their duties.

How to use this guidance

1.7 This guidance is designed to highlight key considerations in planning for the election; the areas you should liaise with stakeholders, particularly local Returning Officers (ROs) across the combined authority area, to inform your planning to ensure consistency across the combined authority area and the tools you have available to help you achieve this in practice. This is the first of two parts of guidance to support CAROs with planning for and delivering the poll.

1.8 This part covers:

- the particular context and circumstances of combined authority mayoral elections
- roles and responsibilities
- planning and organisation
- aspects of the election process that CAROs are directly responsible for and where early preparations can be undertaken

1.9 We have published separate [CARO guidance on the delivery of key processes](#) which covers the detail of administering the nomination process and managing the collation of totals from local ROs and the declaration of the result.

1.10 Each part of the CARO guidance will cover:

- what you are required to do by law ('musts')
- what we expect you will need to have in place and what we would expect to see to be able to be satisfied that the key outcomes of the Commission's performance standards can be delivered
- recommended practice to assist you in understanding and discharging your duties



The boxes at the start of each chapter summarise the **key actions and decisions** you should take in relation to planning for a combined authority mayoral election with detailed guidance on those key actions and decisions set out in the main body of the chapter.

1.11 This guidance is supplemented by resources which can be accessed through links contained in the guidance.

1.12 This guidance does not cover your role and responsibilities as any other Returning Officer or Counting Officer. Separate guidance for Returning Officers administering [local elections in England and Wales is available from the Commission's website](#).

1.13 Should you have any questions about our guidance or any other matter relating to the administration of elections, our [local Commission teams](#) are available to provide on-going support. We also provide an out-of-hours advice service to deal with urgent electoral administration queries in the run up to and immediately following any scheduled elections. Further information on the provision of our out-of-hours service will be provided through our [Bulletin for electoral administrators](#).

Terminology

1.14 In this guidance we use the term 'local Returning Officer' or 'local RO' to refer to the local government Returning Officer for a constituent council of the combined authority area who will be responsible for administering the election at a local level.

1.15 A constituent council at a combined authority mayoral election is defined as either a county council that is wholly or partly within the combined authority area or a district council that is within the combined authority area¹.

1.16 In areas where there is both a county council and a district council, the election will be administered at district level and the local RO will be RO for the district².

2 Context of combined authority mayoral elections



Understand the context of these polls, the particular challenges in your area and prepare for effective co-operation between all ROs

To be able to effectively co-ordinate the administration of the poll, you will need to ensure you understand the challenges across the whole of the combined authority area and use this to inform your plans. For example:

- Will you have scheduled combined polls in your combined authority area? If so, what will the scale of the combination be? You will also need to ensure your plans cover the potential for any by-elections.
- What is the level of knowledge and experience among local ROs in your area of the SV voting system and the processes involved? You should ensure local ROs are familiar with the processes involved at SV elections.
- How will you ensure your plans consider the needs of postal voters when scheduling the dispatch of the election address booklet? As the booklet will contain candidates' campaign statements, the dispatch of the election address booklet should, as far as possible, be co-ordinated with the first issue of postal votes.
- How will you address the potential for a significant number of new or less experienced candidates and agents, particularly given that these polls are still relatively new? You will need to be prepared for a higher number of questions from candidates than you may have experienced at other elections.
- Have there been any changes to the political landscape across all or parts of the combined authority area that could have an impact? There may be significant scrutiny from voters, candidates and the media and you will need to manage the expectations of all those with an interest in the result.
- What will be the likely turnout? The potential for a high turnout should be reflected in all aspects of planning.

To help you meet any challenges, you will need to set up processes for effective co-operation and communication between the different ROs in your combined authority area.

You will also need to put in place detailed and robust plans for monitoring and maintaining integrity across the combined authority area.

2.1 These elections will bring their own particular challenges, and your work to deliver a well-run combined authority mayoral election may come under considerable scrutiny – from voters, candidates and the media.

2.2 While there are lessons which can and should be learnt from the experience of the first set of scheduled combined authority mayoral elections in 2017, these polls are still relatively new and so experience of managing this type of poll is limited, even for those who have worked as CARO before. You should continue to consider and learn lessons from experiences at all other recent polls in your area.

2.3 This chapter seeks to highlight some of the particular aspects of context relevant to combined authority mayoral elections which you should ensure underpin all aspects of your planning.

Combination

2.4 CAROs across England will each have their own specific challenges, and a key factor impacting on the delivery of the election in each case will be whether the poll at the combined authority mayoral election is combined with the poll at another election.

2.5 For example, local government elections and possibly neighbourhood planning referendums and council tax referendums could be taking place on the same day as the combined authority mayoral election in some or all parts of the combined authority area. Effective co-operation between the different Returning Officers across the combined authority area will be vital. In particular, combination presents particular challenges in respect of voter information and the complexity of the verification and count.

Nature of the contests

2.6 If there are more than two candidates, the election is held under the supplementary vote system (SV). This system is also used at the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections and local authority mayoral elections. At an SV election, voters can vote for a first and second choice candidate they want to elect. If a candidate obtains more than 50% of the first choice votes, they will be declared elected. If no candidate obtains more than 50% of the first choice votes, all candidates except for those in first and second place are eliminated. The ballot papers showing a first preference for one of the eliminated candidates are checked for their second preference. Any second preference votes for the remaining two candidates are then added to their first preference votes and the candidate with the most votes is elected.

2.7 The elections will involve co-ordination across a number of local authority areas and there will be challenges around making sure that voters understand what they need to do in order to be able to cast their vote – or votes where the poll is combined - in the way they intended.

2.8 There may be a number of new or less experienced candidates and agents who are unfamiliar with the practices and processes of an election and who will need your support to be able to participate effectively. Even those who are more experienced will have limited experience of standing in this type of election, given that these polls are still relatively new, and therefore may need additional support.

2.9 The evolving political landscape could also mean that even in places where there have traditionally been large majorities in other contests, this may no longer be the case, meaning the focus and circumstances could be different from anything experienced in your area before.

2.10 Given the possibility of close and hard-fought contests, you should be prepared for the integrity of the election to be scrutinised. Allegations and cases of electoral fraud will not only have a negative impact on the confidence of electors and campaigners, but they may also have a significant impact on your capacity to manage the election process effectively. It is therefore crucial that you put in place detailed and robust plans for monitoring and maintaining the integrity of the elections in your area. You should work closely with the local police, ensuring you have in place good lines of communication for referring any allegations.

Scale

2.11 Many aspects of planning for the elections will need to reflect assumptions as to the likely turnout. Establishing such assumptions at an early stage in planning is of key importance as the scope for adjusting plans is limited at a later stage in the process. There are always challenges with developing such planning assumptions, with it often being difficult to predict in advance of the election period what the levels of engagement in a particular election are likely to be. Given the potential for high levels of interest and engagement in the elections, some of which may not emerge until close to the polls, the potential for a high turnout should be reflected in all aspects of planning for the polls.

2.12 As the polls become closer, the context will continue to evolve as the campaigns pick up pace. You will need to be prepared to react to events which could have an impact on the effective delivery of the election, and this will include having robust contingency plans in place that you can turn to where required.

2.13 At any election, there is the potential for a high number of applications for registration being made close to the deadline for the elections. This should be anticipated and built into planning, reflecting lessons learnt from the experience of recent electoral events.

2.14 The media focus on the verification, count and declaration of results could be significant. It will be important to manage expectations, not only of the media but of all with an interest in the results, by consulting on your proposed approach and subsequently communicating clearly what you expect

to deliver and by when, particularly where combination will impact on your expected result declaration times.

2.15 There are a range of factors which will impact on how the verification and counting of votes will be managed – the size, population, geography and demographics of the combined authority area, and the scale of combination (if any), will all have an impact on the available options for managing this part of the process. This re-enforces the need for early engagement and consultation on how this will be managed.

2.16 In particular, turnout will impact planning for the verification and count, with it being vital that appropriate provision is made to ensure that verification and count processes are as accurate and efficient as possible. The potential need for two rounds of counting at a supplementary vote election means there are additional factors you need to take into consideration in planning the result collation process overall to co-ordinate the timing and organisation of verification and counting to ensure that they are carried out in a timely and effective way across the combined authority area.

3 Roles and responsibilities



Understand the management structure in place for administering the polls across your combined authority area

- Decide on your approach for ensuring the polls are administered consistently across the combined authority area (see also Chapter 4 for further information).
- Decide, in consultation with local ROs across the combined authority area, whether you will direct that you will print the ballot papers to be used at the election.
- Decide on whether you will direct that the counting of the votes is to take place at a central location.

Combined Area Returning Officer

3.1 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) in relation to the election³.

3.2 CAROs are responsible for the overall conduct of the combined authority mayoral election, and for liaising with and co-ordinating the work of local ROs within the combined authority area.

3.3 As CARO you are personally responsible for the following specific aspects of the combined authority mayoral election:

- giving notice of the election⁴
- the nomination procedures⁵
- encouraging participation⁶
- ensuring that candidates and their agents comply with the requirements as to the content of candidate election addresses, and with the procedures for submitting them⁷
- producing and distributing the booklet containing the candidates' election addresses to every voter⁸
- the collation of local totals and calculation of the result⁹
- the declaration of the result¹⁰

3.4 You may also take on responsibility for the printing of the combined authority mayoral election ballot papers by giving a direction to the relevant local RO(s)¹¹. You may also direct that the count be held at a central location¹².

3.5 Any decision to issue such a direction should be made at an early stage in the process, following consultation with the relevant local ROs, in

order to provide clarity for all involved and to enable these activities to be planned for and taken forward as appropriate.

3.6 You can give general or specific directions to local ROs about the discharge of their functions in relation to combined authority mayoral elections, including directions requiring local ROs to take specified steps in preparing for a combined authority mayoral election and directions requiring them to provide you with information that they have or are entitled to have¹³. Local ROs are required to comply with any direction you have given to them¹⁴. You can give directions that apply to all local ROs, or only to one or some.

3.7 Where the poll at the combined authority mayoral election is combined with another poll, the local RO will not have responsibility for the combined functions, which will limit your power to give directions. You are only able to exercise your power of direction over local ROs in respect of those aspects of the combined authority mayoral election for which they, as local ROs, are. Your power of direction does not apply to those combined functions that are taken on by other Returning Officers. In any case, you should ensure that you have an effective mechanism in place to promote good working relationships with all ROs to enable you to co-ordinate the ROs' work, as it relates to the combined authority mayoral election, across the whole of the combined authority area.

3.8 Further information on your role and responsibilities as CARO, including guidance on the issuing of directions, can be found in **Chapter 4**.

Returning Officers in the combined authority area

3.9 Local ROs are responsible for running the combined authority mayoral election at a local level. Each constituent council must appoint an officer of the council to be the local RO for the combined authority mayoral election. Where both a district council and a county council are constituent councils for the same area of the combined authority, the requirement to appoint an officer of the council to be the local RO only applies to the district council¹⁵.

3.10 Where the combined authority mayoral election is not combined with any other poll, the local RO will be personally responsible for the conduct of the poll, including the provision of polling stations¹⁶, the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers¹⁷ and the verification and counting of the votes in their area¹⁸.

3.11 Where the combined authority mayoral election is combined with the poll at another election, the relevant RO will take on the combined functions. For example, where the combined authority election is combined with a district election, it will be the RO for the district election who will take on the combined functions. In practice, this will be the same person as the local RO.

3.12 The relevant RO will be personally responsible for the following combined functions in their area:

- the provision of polling stations¹⁹
- the appointment and training of Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks²⁰
- conducting the poll
- the notice of situation of polling stations²¹
- the equipment of polling stations²²
- the notification of the secrecy requirements at polling stations²³
- signing certificates of employment for polling station staff allowing them to vote at the polling station they are working at, as opposed to the one allocated to them²⁴
- authorisation to order the removal of persons from polling stations²⁵
- verification of all ballot papers²⁶
- where it has been decided to combine the issue of postal votes:
 - the corresponding number list
 - the issue of postal votes including creating a copy of the postal voters list and proxy postal voters list and marking it on issue
 - the opening of postal votes including the marking the returned postal vote statements on the lists and the verification of the personal identifiers on the returned postal voting statements²⁷

Electoral Registration Officer

3.13 The Electoral Registration Officer is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and lists of absent voters for their local authority area²⁸ and is normally a senior officer in the local authority and may also be the Returning Officer.

4 Your role and responsibilities as CARO



Understand your role and responsibilities as CARO

- Consider how you will ensure consistency across the combined authority area and how you will monitor the delivery of the election across the whole of the combined authority area.
- Ensure that any guidance and directions you issue are compatible with our guidance and performance standards framework. If in doubt, contact us at the earliest opportunity to discuss.
- Put in place a communications plan for communicating any directions and guidance.
- Decide, in consultation with local ROs, whether you will issue a direction to reserve for yourself the printing of the combined authority mayoral ballot paper.
- Consider your approach to appointing deputies, including the number required and for what purposes you will be appointing them.
- Put in place a procedure for the correction of procedural errors, including those made by local ROs
- Ensure you have appropriate insurance cover in place.
- Ensure you have a clear understanding of your statutory functions and a working knowledge of the legislation.
- Understand the challenges across your combined authority area (see also **Chapter 2**).
- Put in place protocols for the two-way communication of verification and count information between you and local ROs, including the communication of local count totals and second count.

4.1 As CARO you are responsible for the overall conduct of the election of a combined authority mayor for the combined authority area for which you have been appointed.

4.2 In addition to your legal duties as outlined in the previous chapter, you are also responsible for providing leadership and co-ordinating the work of

local Returning Officers to ensure that the election is well-run and that voters and those standing for election receive a consistently high-quality service across the whole of the combined authority area.

Personal responsibility

4.3 You are personally liable for the conduct of the combined authority mayoral election relating to your role and duties. Where polls are combined you are personally liable for the functions that fall to you as CARO.

4.4 You may appoint one or more deputies to assist you in delivering the election²⁹, and you should take steps to put any arrangements you consider as appropriate in place at an early stage in the process. As a minimum you should ensure that you appoint one or more deputies to assume your role in case you are unable to act personally as CARO. You should ensure that any deputies appointed have the skills and knowledge required to carry out the functions that they have been assigned. You must make any appointment of a deputy in writing³⁰ and should include details of the functions that the deputy is authorised to exercise on your behalf. The deputy's acceptance should also be given in writing.

4.5 While you can appoint one or more deputies to discharge any or all of your functions, you cannot delegate your personal responsibility for the conduct of the election or any aspects of it that you are responsible for delivering.

4.6 You are also subject to breach of official duty provisions. This means that if you or your appointed deputies are, without reasonable cause, guilty of any act or omission in breach of official duty you (and/or they) are liable on summary conviction to an unlimited fine

4.7 You have the power to take such steps as you think appropriate to remedy acts or omissions that arise in connection with any function of the elections and that are not in accordance with the rules³¹.

4.8 This power allows you to correct procedural errors that you, as CARO, or a local RO, an Electoral Registration Officer, a Presiding Officer or a person providing goods or services to you (or any deputies of any of these) make. Local ROs have the same power to correct procedural errors³² and you should ensure that they consult you before exercising this power.

4.9 Where you or a local RO use the power to correct procedural errors for the combined authority mayoral election, you should ensure that the error and corrective action taken is explained to those affected including, where applicable, voters and candidates and agents. You should ensure that you keep a record of:

- any errors identified including what the error was and how it occurred
- the impact of the error
- any advice you or the local RO received (including legal advice)

- what measures were taken to correct the error, and how these were communicated

4.10 Where you remedy an act or omission in full by using this power, you will not be guilty of an offence of breach of official duty. You should remember that the power to correct procedural errors does not enable the votes to be recounted once the result has been declared³³.

Insurance and indemnity

4.11 You should ensure that you have appropriate insurance cover and be prepared to demonstrate robust planning and decision-making processes in the event of any challenge to the election and a claim against this cover.

Your skills and knowledge

4.12 You should have a working knowledge of the relevant legislation governing the conduct of the election. This means that, in addition to having a clear understanding of your statutory functions, you should have an overview of what the legislation contains and an understanding of how it affects the administration of the election, so that you can review, question where necessary, and quality-assure the whole process in the combined authority area.

4.13 There are management responsibilities attached to your role. For example, you should:

- provide leadership to local ROs within your combined authority area, which should be supplemented with advice, guidance and training as required, to ensure that the election can be well-run and that voters receive a high-quality service wherever they are voting
- co-ordinate and administer the planning of the election at the combined authority area level, in line with the legislation and Electoral Commission guidance and performance standards
- take all necessary steps to ensure that the local authority provides you with the resources you need to fulfil your role, oversee the planning, project management and risk management of the election at combined authority area level
- provide guidance and support to local ROs in preparing and maintaining a proper project plan and risk management approach for the election
- ensure that local ROs have the necessary plans and arrangements in place for the conduct of the election in their area
- provide guidance and support to your staff, monitor progress and receive regular feedback on activities
- support local ROs in administering the election and provide appropriate oversight of their work
- monitor the performance of local ROs and identify and oversee any actions necessary to mitigate any issues arising

- ensure that your staff, and local ROs and their staff, are appropriately trained to deliver the roles required of them
- ensure that election accounts are completed in a timely manner
- maintain an effective working relationship with your police Single Point of Contact (SPOC)

Performance standards

4.14 The Electoral Commission sets standards and monitors and reports on the performance of Returning Officers.³⁴ The performance standards for ROs can be found at [Appendix A](#) – Performance standards for Returning Officers.

4.15 The framework was developed around the key outcomes from the perspective of voters and those who want to stand for election, and in particular whether Returning Officers are taking the necessary steps to deliver the following outcomes:

- Voters are able to vote easily and know that their vote will be counted in the way they intended.
- It is easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with these rules, and they can have confidence in the management of the process and the result.

4.16 The framework includes a standard which specifically covers the role of statutory office holders with a power of direction, such as CAROs, and focuses on the co-ordination and management of the poll. Elements of performance standards 1 and 2 – which focus on ensuring that planning for and delivery of the poll enables voters to vote easily and know that their vote will be counted in the way they intended and enables people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved and comply with the rules – are also applicable to CAROs. Throughout this guidance we have highlighted what we expect CAROs will need to have in place and what we would expect to see to be able to be satisfied that the key outcomes of the standards can be delivered.

4.17 The Commission’s guidance for other Returning Officers includes what we expect ROs will need to have in place, and what we would expect to be able to see to be satisfied that the key outcomes of the standards relating to their functions can be delivered. The performance standards framework and guidance should give CAROs a good indication of what they should be expecting of local ROs within their combined authority area, and should be used to inform their work to monitor and support local ROs in their area. The Commission’s team will be available to support you in this task.

Managing and co-ordinating the poll

4.18 We recognise the importance of local knowledge and experience and that there is no 'one size fits all approach' which can be applied to, or even within, each combined authority area. Every area has its own set of circumstances which will influence your decisions on how best to ensure a consistent, high-quality experience for those voting and standing for election across the combined authority area.

4.19 In deciding on how you will manage the combined authority mayoral election in your area, you will first need to establish and understand the context and challenges across the whole of your combined authority area. It will be important to agree planning assumptions at an early stage, recognising that these will need to be kept under review to respond appropriately should circumstances change.

4.20 The combined authority mayoral election is one election delivered across a number of local authority areas. You should therefore consider at an early stage how you will ensure that the election is administered to a consistent standard across the whole of the combined authority area, so that voters receive a consistently high quality of service regardless of where they live and that the election produces a result that is accepted. This should be reflected in the objectives and success measures set out in your project plan.

4.21 There will be aspects of the election process where you will particularly want to ensure that there is consistency, most notably in the areas that impact on the voters' experience – for example, the issue of poll cards and postal votes, and the staffing of polling stations – as well as in respect of the verification and counting of votes.

4.22 There are various tools available to you to ensure consistency. It is for you to decide, based on factors such as your knowledge, experience and relationships with the local ROs in your area, and taking into consideration issues of scope and scale, how to best achieve the objectives set out in your election plan. Your power to give directions is one tool available for you to use, but whether to give directions, on what matters, and to whom is at your discretion.

4.23 Where the combined authority mayoral election is combined with the poll at another election the power of direction will not be capable of being used for some aspects of the process depending on which RO is responsible for them in practice. Therefore other tools to ensure consistency – such as cooperation and consultation – will be crucial.

4.24 Your project plan should reflect how and when you will reach a decision on your approach to managing and co-ordinating the poll in your area and how you will implement this approach in practice. It should also include a communications strategy to support this work.

4.25 As a minimum, you should have in place processes for monitoring the delivery of the combined authority mayoral election across the whole of the combined authority area, including compliance with any directions and/or guidance you have given and the Commission's performance standards. You should think about how you will support other local ROs and electoral administrators in the area in managing the polls and in dealing with any emerging issues.

4.26 The Commission's teams across England will be available to support you throughout the election. Further detail on our plans for support and monitoring at any scheduled elections will be included in a future bulletin.

4.27 You may choose to issue written guidance to local ROs on particular aspects of the election. In order to effectively manage the result collation process, you should put in place a protocol for the transmission and receipt of local verification and count totals.

4.28 In addition, you should arrange training and/or briefing sessions for local ROs and their staff.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 3](#), you will need to have arrangements in place to ensure the consistent delivery of the poll.

To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to set out how you intend to ensure consistency of delivery, including whether you have issued (or intend to issue) guidance, and whether and how you have used (or intend to use) your power to give directions.

4.29 As part of your planning process you should identify what directions you are planning to issue to local ROs, although there may of course be issues that arise at a later stage on which it becomes desirable or necessary for you to give directions at short notice. Should you decide that the use of directions is appropriate, your project plan should include specific plans for developing and issuing directions and a communications strategy to support this process.

4.30 If you are considering giving directions or guidance to local ROs you should take into account any relevant criteria in the performance standards framework and/or Electoral Commission guidance. The performance standards framework and Commission guidance reflect what we and the UK Electoral Coordination and Advisory Board (ECAB) and the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) agree that Returning Officers need to do to prepare for and deliver well-run elections. This shared agreement, along with the flexibility in how the standards are achieved, should reduce the potential risk of conflict between the criteria of the standards and any guidance or directions issued by CAROs.

4.31 However, in order that local ROs can be clear as to precisely what is expected of them, if you do intend to give any guidance or directions that are different or contrary to the criteria of the standards, please contact [our](#)

[Commission teams](#) in the first instance to discuss the implications so that we can avoid as far as possible there being any unresolved conflicting requirements placed on local ROs.

4.32 In deciding whether to give a direction on a particular aspect of the election, and what that direction should be, you should aim, wherever possible, to consult your local ROs, so that you can take into account any relevant local factors in making your decisions. This consultation should help to reduce the risk of any directions having unintended consequences and potentially maximise the ability of local ROs to comply with them.

4.33 In particular, you should ensure that when you are deciding on any potential directions you intend to give, you have considered and consulted with other local ROs on whether and how the direction applies in areas where polls are combined.

4.34 Any consultation on possible directions should be planned for and completed in good time to enable the prompt and timely communication of your decision and any associated directions to local ROs, to enable them to plan and prepare for the election accordingly.

4.35 If you decide to exercise your power of direction, you should do so with regard to the following principles and aims:

- trust: people should be able to trust the way our elections work
- participation: it should be straightforward for people to participate in our elections (whether as campaigners, candidates or voters) and people should be confident that their vote counts
- consistency across the combined authority area
- transparency
- professionalism
- accurate results in which people can have confidence

4.36 You should communicate any directions to local ROs at the earliest opportunity, and in particular any requiring them to take specified preparatory steps. You should keep a record of what directions have been given, when, and to whom.

4.37 Local ROs are legally required to comply with any directions you issue. However, your plans for giving directions should take account of the fact that there may be circumstances where local ROs are unable to comply with a direction, for whatever reason. You should therefore ensure that you develop plans to deal with these situations, which may include establishing a process for considering requests for exceptions to your directions. You should keep a record of any instances where you have agreed that a local RO can deviate from a direction.

5 Planning and organisation



Prepare a project plan and risk register, treating each as a 'living document' and use them to monitor progress and manage risks

- Set out what you want to achieve and what success would look like.
- Evaluate the planning and delivery of previous polls, if not already done so, and use your findings to feed into your planning.
- Ensure your plan covers contingency planning and business continuity arrangements.
- Liaise and seek input from local ROs in your area in developing your risk register and ensure they are aware of any risks you identify, as well as any mitigating action. Ensure any mitigating actions are taken forward.
- Set up a project team.
- Set up a communications plan to support consistency in the delivery of the election across the combined authority area.
- Establish a schedule of regular meetings with local ROs.
- Ensure plans cover how you will coordinate any public awareness activity across the combined authority area. Establish a communications network involving a representative of each local RO to help share information and coordinate activity.
- Ensure the Commission's registration campaign feeds into your plans and seek to co-ordinate activity in your area with national activity where possible.
- Ensure stakeholder communication is embedded throughout your planning, with particular arrangements in place for work with the media.

5.1 The key objective of implementing project and risk management processes is to ensure that adequate preparations are made in advance of the poll, with risks identified and properly managed, so that the poll can be delivered effectively. You should set out at an early stage what you want to achieve and what success would look like for you, and this should be reflected in the objectives and success measures set out in your project plan. You should work with local ROs in developing these objectives and success measures and ensure that they also reflect these in their own plans.

Project plan

5.2 You should prepare a project plan in relation to your functions as CARO, treat it as a 'living document', keep it under regular review and use it to monitor progress. If you are also a local RO, you may choose to integrate some or all of this into your wider election planning documentation. You should ensure that your planning supports the delivery of the following outcomes:

- Voters are able to vote easily and know that their vote will be counted in the way they intended.
- It is easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with these rules, and they can have confidence in the management of the process and the result.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 3](#), you will need to develop and implement robust project management processes. This should include evaluating the planning for and delivery of previous polls and identifying lessons learnt, updating plans as required. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place project planning documentation which is kept under regular review. This part of the guidance sets out what this project planning documentation should cover.

The Commission has produced [a template project plan](#) that you may wish to use and adapt to fit your local circumstances. The template includes a number of example deliverables and tasks including all of those that should be included to be able to demonstrate that the outcomes set out in the performance standards can be delivered. In addition to those identified in the template you should also add in any other deliverables and tasks you identify as necessary, including ones specific to the circumstances in your combined authority area.

5.3 If you have not already done so, you should evaluate the planning for, and delivery of, previous polls and identify what worked well and what did not, and use these findings to inform your planning. In particular you should identify any lessons learnt from previous similar electoral events, particularly those with a regional management aspect which should assist with informing your planning. If you have not delivered a poll with an element of regional co-ordination previously, you should consider how you can learn from the experiences of others who have carried out such a role.

5.4 The Commission has provided some sample aims and suggested tools [within the template project plan](#) that will allow you to measure the extent to which the conduct of the election has been successful as part of the template project plan. Your [project plan](#) for the election should also include a plan to evaluate procedures post-election and identify lessons learnt.

5.5 Your project plan should cover contingency planning and business continuity arrangements. The continuity arrangements should include provisions to cover loss of staff and loss of venues during the election period.

5.6 You should also ensure that your plan covers the potential for the combined authority mayoral election to be combined with unscheduled elections in parts or all of the combined authority area.

5.7 Additionally, your project plan should identify the resources and staffing required. You should take all necessary steps to ensure that the local authority makes the necessary resources available to you to enable you to discharge your functions.

5.8 The Commission has published a [non-date specific timetable](#) containing the statutory deadlines as set out in the election rules which can be used to assist you in your planning. A date-specific timetable will be available on our website ahead of any scheduled elections, and we will notify you through a Bulletin once this has been published.

Risk register

5.9 You should prepare a risk register, treat it as a 'living document' and keep it under regular review, using it to monitor the risks and document any changes in risk, as well as ensuring that mitigating actions are identified and are being taken forward, including by local ROs where appropriate. Your risk register should consider risk and risk management in relation to your functions as CARO, plus any key risks relevant to the administration of the poll across the combined authority area. It should identify the seriousness of any risk by indicating both the likelihood of the risk occurring and the impact of the risk if it did occur.

5.10 In developing your risk register you should ensure that you liaise with and seek input from local ROs as necessary, and that they are aware of any risks you identify that may directly affect the election in their local area, as well as any mitigating actions for which they are responsible.

5.11 The Commission has developed a [template risk register](#) that you may wish to use. The template provides some example risks and suggestions for mitigating those risks. In addition to the risks identified in the template you should also identify any other risks, including ones specific to your combined authority area, and how you would mitigate those.

Staffing

5.12 You should establish a project team to support you in carrying out your functions as CARO. The project team should include the relevant key staff to support you in each specific function, including encouraging and co-ordinating electoral participation across the combined authority area and ensuring that candidates' election addresses are compliant with legislation.

5.13 In addition to yourself your project team should include:

- other local ROs in the combined authority area
- where a local ROs is not also the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), the ERO
- any appointed deputies
- other election staff members
- any other key personnel you consider appropriate (such as, for example, colleagues from your council's communications team or your local SPOC).

5.14 The project team should have a clear remit and understanding of the tasks to be carried out. At the planning stage a schedule of meetings should be prepared, and a record of each meeting should be kept as an audit trail of what was discussed and of any decisions made. Where possible, you should chair any formal meetings of the project team.

Communications

5.15 As CARO you will need to put in place communication plans to support the delivery of the election. These plans should support you in effectively liaising with and coordinating the work of local ROs to ensure the consistent delivery of the poll across the combined authority area, and with managing stakeholder coordination and communication, including media liaison.

5.16 When developing your communication plans you should identify and document how you will communicate in relation to key aspects of your approach to managing and co-ordinating the poll, including:

- consulting on and giving guidance and, where appropriate, directions
- disseminating information
- monitoring local RO planning and performance
- communicating your plans for the processes for which you are responsible, particularly nominations and result collation
- coordinating public awareness activity
- providing advice and support to, and dealing with enquiries from, local ROs and their staff

5.17 You should establish a schedule of regular meetings with local ROs from across the combined authority area to discuss options and issues, with a view to, where possible, reaching consensus on the decisions you need to make to deliver the election and meet the identified objectives and success measures. A record of each meeting should be kept as an audit trail of what was discussed and of any decisions made.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 3](#), you will need to develop and implement plans for communicating with local ROs. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place plans for communicating with local ROs.

Raising awareness

5.18 You must take such steps as you think appropriate to encourage the participation of electors in the election³⁵, and in carrying out such activity you must have regard to any guidance issued by the Electoral Commission. As CARO you should actively take the lead in promoting and sharing good practice and in coordinating awareness activity across the combined authority area.

5.19 Your planning should take into account the need to work with local ROs in your combined authority area to ensure that local area-wide awareness activity is coordinated and that clear, consistent messages are communicated effectively to electors.

5.20 When preparing the public awareness strategy for your combined authority area, you should document:

- the identification of your target audiences
- the objectives and success measures of the activity
- risks – identification and mitigation
- resources – financial and staffing

5.21 Implementation of your strategy should be included within your overall project plan.

5.22 You should establish a communications network involving a representative of each local RO in your combined authority area to share information and coordinate public awareness activity across the combined authority area. This network can also be used to ensure that any communication relating to specific aspects of the election, such as the verification and counting of votes or the declaration of result, or issues that arise, for example allegations of electoral fraud, are dealt with effectively and consistently across the combined authority area.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 3](#), you will need to develop and implement a strategy for coordinating and delivering public awareness and engaging with electors across the combined authority area.

Information to electors

5.23 You have a legal responsibility to produce and distribute a booklet containing the candidates' election addresses to every voter in the combined authority area³⁶.

5.24 In order to effectively communicate information to electors you should consider who you want to reach through your awareness activity and the method of communication to be used. You should take advice and seek input from relevant staff at the combined authority or other local authorities in the

combined authority area, in particular communications and marketing staff. You should also take into account the registration campaign being carried out by the Electoral Commission and seek to co-ordinate activity in your area with the national activity as appropriate.

5.25 'Information' covers any information required by the elector in order to successfully participate. This may include information on:

- the election(s)
- the date and hours of poll
- the location of polling stations
- any key deadlines (e.g. deadlines for applying to register to vote and for postal or proxy votes)
- how to mark the ballot paper(s)
- what assistance is available to electors (e.g. information for disabled voters)
- how and when votes are counted
- how the result will be made known

5.26 You should ensure that all outgoing communications provide appropriate contact details to allow anyone to respond and obtain further information. You should consider what contact details are most appropriate in each case, working with local ROs and their staff as required.

5.27 The public may also proactively make enquiries and you need to consider how a consistent approach to addressing such enquires can be achieved. You could, for example, consider developing agreed responses to FAQs for front line staff. We have developed [FAQs for local elections](#), which also includes Q&A's in relation to combined authority mayoral elections.

5.28 'Where is my polling station?' is a common question in the run-up to polling day and on polling day itself. So voters can easily access information on the location of their polling station, we are working with Democracy Club to display polling station locations on our Your vote matters website.

5.29 If you are also the local RO, you can help us by making polling station location data available in an open format, either by publishing the data on your website (through an API or at a particular web address), or by giving the data to Democracy Club. The data you send to the printers in order for poll cards to be printed will likely be enough. The data you provide will help to create a central place where voters can find their polling station, making it easier to inform the public of where their polling station is located. You can find out more about how to publish polling station data in an open format on [Democracy Club's website](#).



The Commission will also provide templates and tools on [our website](#) to support you with providing information on elections. There, you can also [sign up to Roll Call](#), the Commission's voter registration newsletter, to receive updates about our national campaign and what resources we will be making available.

There is also a frequently asked questions page on [Your Vote Matters](#), which people should be directed to, for example by providing a link from your own web pages to the Your Vote Matters website.

Media liaison

5.30 You should ensure that stakeholder coordination and communication is embedded throughout your planning, with particular arrangements in place for working with the media, including:

- plans for coordinating media liaison within the combined authority area, and strategies for dealing with both proactive communication and media liaison in relation to specific events such as the verification and counting of votes and the result declaration
- dealing with general media enquiries
- reactive handling of any issues that arise in relation to the election, for example allegations of electoral fraud

5.31 It is important that media communication is managed in a coordinated and consistent way across the combined authority area in order to maintain public confidence that the election is being well-run. To achieve this effectively there should be a clear process in place for the combined authority area to be followed by you, local ROs and your respective communications teams to respond to any issues that arise.

6 Specific aspects of the election process



This guidance is designed to provide CAROs with an overview of those aspects of the election process they are directly responsible for and aims to highlight where early preparations can be undertaken.

Separate guidance for CAROs on managing the nomination process, the production and dispatch of the booklet of candidate addresses and the collation of local totals will be available.

Candidates and agents

- Work with local ROs to coordinate engagement with candidates and agents across the combined authority area. Put in place communication plans to ensure candidates and agents are provided with relevant information in a timely way. Consider with local ROs how local information will be provided to candidates.
- Plan for candidate briefings.
- Estimate how many candidates might stand for election and feed this into your plans.
- Start discussions with EROs to determine how best to supply copies of the electoral register to candidates and your approach for the required candidate subscriber checks.
- Ensure that the requirements as to the content of candidate election addresses, and the procedures for submitting those addresses, are complied with
- Plan how you are going to manage the process of producing and distributing the mayoral booklet

Production of ballot papers

- Decide, in consultation with local ROs, whether you will print the ballot papers centrally or whether they will need to be printed locally by the local ROs.
- Agree, in consultation with local ROs, the colour of the ballot papers to be used across the combined authority area.
- Agree a print specification for ballot papers as early as possible.

Absent voting

- Consult local ROs on plans for issuing postal votes to ensure the timing for the receipt of postal votes by electors is consistent across the combined authority area and maximises the amount of time that voters will have to receive, complete and return their postal votes.
- Liaise with local ROs to ensure that the dispatch of the election address booklet can, as far as possible, be co-ordinated with the first issue of postal votes.
- Where polls are combined, agree with the relevant RO whether the issue of postal votes will be combined.

Assessing and managing the risk of electoral fraud

- Put in place a single integrity plan for the whole of the combined authority area that covers the specific steps you will take to identify and deal with any potential electoral fraud and how you will communicate your approach to provide public confidence.
- Liaise with your SPOC and ensure all local ROs across the combined authority area are communicating regularly with their SPOC.
- Ensure local ROs' integrity plans fit into your combined area integrity plan.

Verification, counting and collation of results

- Work closely with local ROs in your area to inform any decisions about how the verification, counting and result collation will be organised and managed across the combined authority area. You may choose to hold the count at a central location or allow for the counts to be held locally in some or parts of the constituent authorities. However the verification and count are organised, you should ensure that local ROs' plans will deliver a consistent standard of administration. Engage local ROs at an early stage to inform the development of your approach. Also engage others with an interest, such as candidates, political parties, voters and the media.
- In developing your plans, have regard to the Commission's principles for a well-run verification and count and consider other practical factors that may affect the organisation and timing of the verification and count.
- Record all decisions regarding the verification and count and communicate these to those affected, bearing in mind that there may be different arrangements in place in different parts of the combined authority area.
- Put in place protocols for the two-way communication of verification and count information between you and local ROs, including the

communication of local count totals and any direction to conduct a second count if no candidate obtains more than 50% of the valid first preference votes.

Candidates and agents

6.1 It should be straightforward for those campaigning to participate in elections. As CARO you are responsible for putting in place effective communication plans to ensure that candidates and agents are provided with clear and timely information – including information about local arrangements – to enable them to engage effectively in the election process. You will need to work with local ROs in your area to coordinate engagement with candidates and agents both locally and at the combined authority area level.

6.2 As CARO you are responsible for all aspects of the nomination process at the combined authority mayoral election. You should take steps at an early stage to estimate how many candidates might stand for election as this can have a significant impact on various elements of the electoral process, including the printing of ballot papers, nominations, the management of candidate election addresses and production of the booklet, as well as the verification and count. In order to develop this estimate, and to keep it under review, you should make early contact with political parties, monitor any expressions of interest and, in due course, monitor requests for nomination packs.

The register of electors

6.3 Each Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) in the combined authority area is required to supply you with such copies of the electoral register as are required for the different aspects of the election.

6.4 You need to have access to the registers for all local authority areas within the combined authority area for:

- Calculating the number of local government electors across all local authority areas on the last day for publication of notice of election.
- Checking whether the subscribers to a candidate's nomination are valid.
- Delivering the booklet containing the candidates' addresses to all registered electors in the combined authority area.

6.5 You will need to ensure your plans outline the processes and safeguards you will have in place regarding the transfer and security of the data included on the electoral registers.

6.6 You should start discussions with the EROs in the combined authority area at an early stage about how this can best be achieved in practice. You will need to take into account any practical issues related to managing registers if they have been produced by different software suppliers.

6.7 You will need to ensure there is an agreement in place between you and each ERO in the combined authority area for secure data transfer and destruction of data.

6.8 Although GDPR does not require a written agreement when sharing data between data controllers, it is strongly recommended that you agree a data sharing protocol with any other EROs in the combined authority area.

6.9 Our [resource](#) on the EU General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Bill contains more detailed advice on storing personal data securely and maintaining your document retention policy, including what it should contain.

Calculating the total number of local government electors on the last day for publishing notice of election

6.10 Candidates need to know the total number of local government electors on the last day for publishing notice of election in order to calculate their spending limit, alongside the number of constituent councils. You are required to provide them with this information as soon as practicable after they have made a written request³⁷. However, you should ensure that you have a mechanism in place to provide this information to all candidates in a timely manner, whether or not a written request is made, so that they can meet their statutory obligations.



Further details on calculating the total number of local government electors on the last day for publishing notice of election are available in our [guidance for CAROs on delivering key electoral processes](#).

Subscriber checks

6.11 At these elections, a candidates' nomination form must be subscribed by 100 electors, with at least 10 from each of the constituent council areas.

6.12 You must reject a nomination if the nomination form is not subscribed as required³⁸. It is essential that the correct version of the register is used for checking that the subscribers are valid. Subscribers must appear on the local government register for a constituent council within the combined authority area that is in force on the last day for publication of notice of election.

6.13 You will need to liaise with the local ROs/EROs across the combined authority area to ensure that you base your determination of the validity of subscribers on the relevant register update. You may want to use the copies of the register from all the EROs in your area to enable you to carry out the checks yourself, in which case you would need to decide whether you will receive the registers in hard copy or in data form. Alternatively you may wish to delegate the checking to individual local ROs, requiring them to confirm to you whether the subscribers are entitled to subscribe the nomination form.

6.14 In deciding how to manage this process, you should consider how you will ensure that your proposed approach will enable the checks to be carried

out in a timely way to support you in determining a nomination. You will also need to take into account any practical issues related to managing registers if they have been produced by different software suppliers.

Delivery of candidates' address booklet

6.15 You (or your chosen delivery contractor) will need access to the addresses of electors across the combined authority area for the purposes of sending the booklet containing candidates' addresses. You should liaise with EROs to confirm the process and timescales for sharing the necessary data.



Guidance on the production of the booklet is available in our [guidance for CAROs on delivering key electoral processes](#).

Access to the register by candidates

6.16 Once a person becomes a candidate at the combined authority mayoral election as defined in the paragraphs below, they can request a copy of the full registers and lists of absent voters covering the combined authority area they are standing in³⁹. Registers can only be supplied if the candidate has made a written request.

6.17 The earliest a person can officially become a candidate is on the last day for the publication of notice of election (i.e. on the 25th working day before the poll). They will officially become a candidate on this day if on or before this date they have already declared that they are a candidate at the election (or another person has declared that they are a candidate).

6.18 If after this date they or others declare that they will be a candidate at the election, they will become a candidate on the date such a declaration is made, or on the date that they submit their nomination papers, whichever is the earlier.

6.19 While the legal responsibility for receiving requests and supplying registers to candidates rests with the ERO for each local authority area⁴⁰, you should start discussions with EROs at an early stage to determine how best to ensure that all candidates can be supplied with registers in such a way that they have timely and easy access to them, that the information contained in them is used in accordance with electoral and data protection legislation, and decide how this will be communicated.

6.20 For example, you could decide to supply the registers centrally on behalf of the EROs as part of the nomination pack. The benefit of this approach is that it could operate so that candidates would only need to complete one request form covering all areas within the combined authority and receive their registers from a single place, instead of having to approach each ERO separately with individual requests. If you are considering supplying the registers centrally, you will have to discuss and agree with the EROs how the various registers could be brought together for subsequent supply and consider how this would work for both printed and data copies.

The registers must be supplied in data form unless a printed copy has been specifically requested. You will need to ensure that whatever arrangements you put in place are clearly communicated to the candidates and their agents to enable them to use the registers to campaign and obtain the necessary subscribers.

Information for candidates and agents

6.21 As set out in paragraph **6.10** above, candidates need to know the total number of local government electors on the last day for publishing notice of election in order to calculate their spending limit, alongside the number of constituent councils, and you are required to provide them with this information as soon as practicable on written request.

6.22 Candidates will also need to have access to guidance on the election process and election spending. Our guidance for candidates and agents at combined authority mayoral elections is available on [our website](#). There are two types of combined authority mayoral elections – one where the mayor takes on the functions of a Police and Crime Commissioner, and one where they do not. We have produced separate guidance on the qualifications and disqualifications for these two types of combined authority mayoral elections.

6.23 As part of your plans for engaging with candidates and agents and supporting their participation in the election, you should consider with local ROs how information about local arrangements will be provided to candidates. Local arrangements will include details from local ROs including their contact details and information on the dates, times and venues for the key election processes, including:

- postal vote issue and openings
- polling
- the verification and count

6.24 You could decide to collate and disseminate local information centrally, or to advise candidates and agents to contact the relevant local RO directly. Whatever method you choose you should ensure that candidates can easily access all the information they need in a timely way in order to be able to participate in the election.



To be able to meet the outcome set out in [performance standard 2](#) you will need to ensure that information on the election process and spending is easily available for candidates and agents, including through ensuring they are issued with written guidance. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place written guidance to be issued to candidates.

6.25 Briefing sessions should highlight the importance of following the election rules to ensure that those who want to stand for election have the necessary information to enable them to understand what they need to do. In particular, the briefing should cover access to the register of electors,

nomination deadlines, the subscriber requirements, nomination submission rules, the use of commonly used names, the use of party names, descriptions and emblems and what can and cannot be included in the booklet of candidates' addresses. At your briefings, you should emphasise the importance of candidates understanding the qualifications and disqualifications.

6.26 You should also share the approach to tackling electoral fraud with candidates and agents at briefing sessions and/or within the information provided to them and consider, where appropriate, inviting the police to attend any such briefing sessions.

6.27 Given these elections are happening for the first time, there are likely to be a significant number of candidates and agents who will need your support to be able to participate effectively.



To be able to meet the outcome set out in [performance standard 2](#) you will need to ensure information on the election process and spending is easily available for candidates and agents, including through providing briefing sessions. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to arrange briefing sessions and produce briefing resources. The Commission has prepared a [template briefing session](#) for candidates and agents which CAROs can adapt to fit their local circumstances.

Booklet containing candidates' addresses

6.28 Each candidate at a combined authority mayoral election may provide an election address to the CARO for publication in a booklet to be sent to every eligible elector in the combined local authority area⁴¹. A candidate's election address must be prepared by their election agent and include the information set out in law by the last time for delivery of nomination papers⁴². As part of your planning, you will need to consider how you are going to manage this process in practice. The CARO has a legal duty to ensure the text included complies with legislative requirements⁴³ and guidance on the production of the mayoral booklet will be included in our other [guidance document for CAROs: Delivery of key processes](#).

6.29 You will need to ensure that the booklet containing the election addresses of candidates who have contributed to the production of the booklet is issued in sufficient time to help voters make an informed choice. In particular, you should liaise closely with local ROs on a dispatch date so that the first issue of postal votes can be co-ordinated, as far as possible, with the dispatch of the booklet.

Production of ballot papers

6.30 Local ROs are responsible for the production of ballot papers for their area. You may take on responsibility for printing ballot papers in any or all areas by giving a direction to the relevant local RO⁴⁴.

6.31 If you intend to take on this responsibility you should notify the relevant local ROs at the outset of the election planning process, and provide them with information as soon as possible about when and how ballot papers will be delivered to them for issue in postal ballot packs and use in polling stations. If you do decide to issue a direction to print the ballot papers yourself, then data protection considerations and effective management of contractors and suppliers will be critical.

6.32 You will need to ensure your plans outline the processes and safeguards you will have in place regarding the transfer and security of the data between yourself and local ROs.

6.33 You will need to ensure there is an agreement in place between you and each local RO in the combined authority area for secure data transfer and destruction of data. Our [resource](#) on the EU General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Bill contains more detailed advice on storing personal data securely and maintaining your document retention policy, including what it should contain.

6.34 Although GDPR does not require a written agreement when sharing data between data controllers, it is strongly recommended that you agree a data sharing protocol with other local ROs in the combined authority area.

6.35 General guidance on the management of contractors and suppliers, which would also be relevant for any CAROs taking on responsibility for the printing of ballot papers, can be found in [Part B of our guidance for Returning Officers](#) at local government elections and our [checklist on managing contractors and suppliers](#).

6.36 If you are taking on the responsibility for printing ballot papers and intend to send data to a contractor to produce ballot papers for the election, you are using a data processor.

6.37 As a data controller, data protection legislation imposes a legal obligation when using a processor to formalise the working relationship in a contract which sets out:

- the subject matter, nature and purpose of the processing;
- the obligations and rights of the data controller;
- duration of the processing; and
- the types of personal data and categories of data subjects.

6.38 In addition, the contract must set out specific obligations on the processor, including that they:

- comply with your instructions
- are subject to a duty of confidentiality
- keep personal data secure and notify you of any breach
- maintain written records of the processing activities they carry out for you
- only use a sub-processor with your consent

- submit to audits and inspections and provide you with whatever information you need to ensure compliance with data protection requirements
- delete or return all personal data to you as requested at the end of the contract

6.39 Our [resource](#) on the EU General Data Protection Bill contains more detailed advice on your legal obligations when using a data processor.

6.40 The form and content of the ballot paper is prescribed in legislation. However, if you are not printing the ballot papers yourself, you should liaise with the local ROs regarding ballot paper production and take such steps as you consider necessary, including giving specific guidance or directions to local ROs as you think appropriate, to ensure that the form and content of the ballot papers meet the legislative requirements and are consistent across the whole of the combined authority area.

6.41 You should also have processes in place to check that local ROs have printed the ballot papers to the required specification, including that the candidate details on the ballot paper are reproduced accurately, and that the correct emblems and font type and size have been used. For example, you should consider putting in place a process to double-check the ballot papers of local ROs yourself before printing commences in order to satisfy yourself that all the ballot papers across the combined authority area will be printed correctly. We have produced a [proof-checking factsheet](#) you can refer to.

Ballot paper colour

6.42 The colour of the ballot paper is not prescribed, nor is the colour to be used for tendered ballot papers, although tendered ballot papers must be a different colour from the ordinary ballot papers. As CARO you should decide early on what colour the ballot papers will be in your combined authority area and work closely with all the ROs to agree the colour to be used. At combined polls, different-coloured ballot papers must be used for each poll⁴⁵. You should also consider consulting print suppliers about the colour to ensure that your choice does not give rise to supply or production difficulties.

6.43 In deciding on the ballot paper colour you should take into account accessibility issues relating to colour and contrast. [Section 6 of the Commission's 'Making your mark' good practice design guidance](#) contains advice on choosing colours.

Printing specifications

6.44 You should consult with local ROs in the combined authority area early on in the planning process about the production of ballot papers to enable them to confirm their requirements and printing arrangements with their suppliers at an early stage in the process.

6.45 Although the final content of the ballot paper cannot be confirmed until nominations have closed, in addition to confirming the colour, you will need to make decisions about the following elements of the ballot paper at an early stage:

- ballot paper numbers
- unique identifying mark
- the 'official mark'

6.46 You may use a different official mark for different purposes at the election. That means that you could choose one official mark for all ballot papers for the whole of the combined authority area, or you could choose to have different official marks, e.g. for polling station ballot papers and ballot papers issued to postal voters.

6.47 In particular, you will need to consider how to ensure that no two ballot papers in the combined authority area are duplicates. The unique identifying mark will need to be unique to each ballot paper across the combined authority area. If you reach a decision that the unique identifying marks to be used across the combined authority area are to be formed of a repeat of the ballot paper number with a prefix, you should consider developing unique prefixes for each local authority area which would then give local ROs flexibility as to how they number the ballot papers within their area.

Absent voting

6.48 You should consider how you are going to work with local ROs across the combined authority area to ensure that all absent voters receive a consistently high quality of service, irrespective of where they are registered.

6.49 In particular you should consult with local ROs about their plans for issuing postal votes in their area with a view to ensuring that the timing for the receipt of postal votes by electors is consistent across the whole of the combined authority area and maximises the amount of time that voters will have to receive, complete and return their postal vote.

6.50 Your consultation with local ROs should also include consideration of the timing of the dispatch of the election address booklet and how it links into the timing of the first issue of postal votes. As far as possible, the first issue of postal votes should be co-ordinated with the dispatch of the booklet so postal voters are able to make an informed choice before completing and returning their postal vote.

6.51 If there are combined polls in your area, the relevant Returning Officer will need to decide whether to do a combined or separate issue of postal votes, and you will need to liaise with the relevant officer to ensure their decision is reflected in your overall plans.

Assessing and managing the risk of electoral fraud

6.52 Voters and campaigners should be confident that elections are free from fraud, and that the results you declare are a true and accurate reflection of the will of the electorate. Trust and confidence in the integrity of elections is essential but can be fragile – it will be difficult for you to rebuild trust or confidence which has been lost as a result of allegations or proven cases of fraud.

Planning for the prevention of electoral fraud

6.53 While you will need to be able to work with the police and prosecutors to investigate any allegations which might be made, you should also put in place effective strategies for preventing electoral fraud from the outset.

6.54 In order to ensure that voters and candidates can have confidence that their votes will be counted in the way that voters intended, you will need to have in place plans and processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential electoral fraud.

6.55 You should take the lead on integrity issues to produce a single combined authority integrity plan in discussion with the police and all local ROs to add to your overall project plan.

6.56 Your plan should be developed in consultation with the police force single point of contact (SPOC) and include specific steps to identify and deal with any potential electoral fraud, and should also identify how you will communicate your approach to maintaining electoral integrity in order to support public confidence in the election.

6.57 You should discuss your plans for maintaining the integrity of the election with your SPOC at the earliest opportunity. A [checklist of topics that should be considered](#) at any pre-election planning meeting between you and your SPOC is available. You should, as part of this meeting, consider the possibility of any joint publicity work that can be carried out with the police, for example, jointly running public awareness campaigns within the electoral area to highlight what can be done to help detect and prevent electoral fraud.

6.58 As part of your early liaison with your SPOC you should establish a clear agreement about the division of responsibilities between you and your SPOC, so that there is early clarity about each other's roles. In particular, you should agree with your SPOC an approach for referring allegations of fraud you may receive for further investigation where appropriate. For example, will you or the local ROs be the initial point of contact and refer allegations to the SPOC, or will the SPOC be the initial point of contact and advise you of allegations? In addition, you should agree a mechanism for handling evidence, so that the police can carry out any forensic analysis, where necessary.



The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice have provided [guidance to local authorities for handling evidence](#).



A [template memorandum of understanding](#) between local ROs and the police on joint planning for elections and the reporting and investigating of electoral fraud is available on the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice [website](#). Elements of this document can also be adapted for any memorandum of understanding between you and the police.

6.59 Integrity plans prepared by local ROs should fit within the combined authority area plan and include any issues they have identified locally. Guidance for local ROs on integrity plans can be found in [Part B of our guidance for Returning Officers](#) at local government elections in England and Wales. You should ensure that you have considered the specific risks relating to each of the areas within the combined authority area as a whole, including taking into account previous allegations of electoral fraud and the risk of electoral fraud allegations relating to other polls taking place on the same day as the combined authority election. There are a number of electoral offences specified in electoral law and we have produced a [factsheet](#) which provides information on these offences.

6.60 You should share the approach to tackling electoral fraud with parties, candidates and agents at briefing sessions and/or within the information provided to them. You should also consider inviting the police to attend any such briefing sessions and invite them to supply you with any relevant documentation to include in your information pack.

6.61 In some cases, where there is a significant risk of electoral fraud allegations, you should also consider communicating your approach to tackling fraud more widely in advance of polling day to provide reassurance to voters and campaigners.



Following consultation with Returning Officers, police forces and political parties, the Commission has issued a [Code of Conduct for campaigners at elections and referendums](#). The Code applies to all campaigners, and sets out agreed standards of appropriate behaviour before and during an election or referendum. The Code also makes it clear that if a Returning Officer considers it appropriate to address further specific local risks, and has consulted with relevant national and local parties, we will support them in introducing additional local provisions which go beyond the terms of the nationally agreed Code.

The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice have developed a [template letter seeking agreement from candidates to abide by the Code of Conduct](#) and this should be provided to all candidates standing at the election

6.62 You should establish and maintain contact with the police at an appropriate level. The police Single Point of Contact (SPOC) officer will be able to provide you with contact details for the relevant force command or

lead unit, and will also be able to explain any divisional structure within the force if appropriate. You should ensure that you are provided with the contact details of any divisional SPOCs, and ensure that the local ROs within the combined authority area schedule regular contact with them.

Assessing and managing the risk of electoral fraud

6.63 You are uniquely placed to identify incidents and patterns of activity that might indicate electoral fraud in your area. Effective early action to address possible fraud could help to avoid costly police investigations or legal challenges to the results of elections.

6.64 You should ensure that you have mechanisms in place to assess the risk of electoral fraud in your area, including considering:

- whether there has been a history of allegations of electoral fraud in parts of the combined authority area, including in specific wards
- whether the election is likely to be particularly close and hard fought
- whether the contest which is based on strong personal disagreements as well as political arguments
- where there is a highly mobile population with a frequent turnover of electors
- where there are electors who may be more vulnerable because of low levels of literacy and/or English language ability

6.65 Your plans for managing the risk of electoral fraud across the combined authority area will need to reflect any specific risks you or local ROs have identified in addition to any general fraud detection plans.

6.66 For example, you should consider the risks associated with houses of multiple occupation, student halls of residence or care homes where other people may have access to personal mail or where care givers may assist residents in care homes with completing postal vote applications or postal votes.

6.67 Your plans should also set out mechanisms for monitoring indicators of possible electoral fraud and setting thresholds for action in response. Although there are no definitive signs of possible electoral fraud, you should be aware of and consider with local ROs the following:

- whether there have been unusual patterns in registration or absent vote applications at other elections in the combined authority area
- whether there have been unusual patterns of rejected ballot papers, including rejected postal ballot packs, at other elections in the combined authority area
- whether there is any unusual pattern of registration or absent vote applications in the period leading up to the election

Dealing with allegations of electoral fraud

6.68 Allegations and cases of electoral fraud will not only have a negative impact on the confidence of electors and campaigners, but they may also have a significant impact on your capacity to manage the election process effectively.

6.69 It is therefore crucial that you put in place detailed and robust plans for monitoring and maintaining the integrity of the election across the combined authority area. This should include ensuring that local ROs work closely with the local police, ensuring they have in place good lines of communication and have agreed an approach for referring allegations of electoral fraud.

6.70 Every UK police force has a named single point of contact officer (SPOC) for election-related crime. Your local police force SPOC will be a key partner to help you to ensure that any possible instances of fraud are quickly identified and dealt with. You should make sure that you and local ROs are clear who your SPOC is and how you can contact them.

6.71 You should establish and maintain contact with your SPOC from the outset of your pre-election planning process, with regular contact scheduled into your project plan. Early discussions with your SPOC should cover your mechanisms for identifying possible fraud and what actions should be taken where any suspicions arise. If you have any problems establishing contact with your SPOC, please contact your [local Commission team](#).

6.72 You should ensure that all candidates and agents understand how to raise specific concerns about electoral fraud relating to the election, including what type and level of evidence will be necessary to enable allegations to be investigated by the police. You should also ensure that they understand how allegations will be dealt with, and what information and feedback they should be able to expect about the progress of any investigations.

6.73 The police will investigate any allegations of fraud until, following consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), they are either satisfied that no further action is necessary or appropriate, or they forward the case file to the CPS for prosecution. The police should keep you and, where appropriate, the local RO and ERO informed of the progress of the case.

6.74 You should also be aware that, particularly where the mayor would take on the functions of the Police and Crime Commissioner, there may be instances when the police force decides that it would be appropriate to ask another force to investigate allegations of electoral fraud relating to these elections. In such an instance, you should ensure that you make contact with the relevant lead officer from the force leading the investigation as quickly as possible.



The Commission and the National Police Chiefs' Council (formerly the Association of Chief Police Officers) have supported the College of Policing to produce a [manual of guidance for policing elections](#), which is available to download from our [website](#).

Dealing with allegations of financial offences

6.75 Candidates and their agents must follow rules set out in legislation about how much they can spend at an election. We produce guidance for candidates and agents, parties and non-party campaigners outlining rules on spending. This can be found on our [website](#).

6.76 In England, any queries on election spending should be referred to the Electoral Commission's Party Election Finance team via email: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk or telephone: 0333 103 1928.

Security

6.77 Your project plan should include a review of security arrangements with the local police. You should also consider any security risks as part of your contingency planning exercise and include these in your risk register.

6.78 If you are printing the ballot papers yourself, your security arrangements should prevent unauthorised access to or use of the ballot papers during all stages of the production process and storage between printing and delivery to local ROs.

Verification, counting and collation of result

6.79 One of the aspects of the election process where you will particularly want to ensure that there is consistency is the verification and counting of votes and collation of the result. You will therefore need to consider when, where and how the votes are verified and counted by local ROs.

6.80 You should work closely with the local ROs in your area to inform any decisions early on about how the verification, counting and result collation is to be organised and managed across the combined authority area, including the processes to be followed in collating the result, in order for them to develop their own plans for verification and counting accordingly.

6.81 Where the election is combined with another election, effective co-operation between the different Returning Officers across the combined authority area will be vital due to the increased complexity.

Principles for effective verification, count and result collation processes

6.82 In developing your plans, processes and protocols you should have regard to the following key principles:

- All processes are transparent, with a clear and unambiguous audit trail.
- The verification produces an accurate result. This means that the number of ballot papers in each box either matches the number of ballot papers issued as stated on the ballot paper account or, if it does not:
 - the source of the variance has been identified and can be explained and/or
 - the box has been recounted at least twice, until the same number of papers is counted on two consecutive occasions.
- The count produces an accurate result, where:
 - at the first count, the total number of first preference votes cast for each candidate and rejected votes matches the total number of ballot papers given on the verification statement for the election.
 - at the second count, where required, the ballot papers on which a first preference vote was given to those candidates who did not remain in the contest equals: the total number of ballot papers containing a valid second preference vote for a continuing candidate, plus the total number of ballot papers containing a second preference vote for a candidate not remaining in the contest, plus the rejected ballot papers at the second count.
- The verification, count and result collation are timely.
- The secrecy of the vote is maintained at all times.
- The security of ballot papers and other stationery is maintained at all times.

6.83 In developing a result collation process, you will need to consider each key stage that contributes to the overall result, including verifying the ballot papers and counting the votes in each of the areas within the combined authority area, collating the local totals and calculating the result, and ensure that these are organised, managed and delivered in such a way as to ensure these principles can be met.

The verification and count

6.84 The potential need for two rounds of counting at a supplementary vote election means there are additional factors you need to take into consideration in planning the result collation process overall and in

coordinating the work of local ROs in organising and managing the verification and counting of votes for their areas.

6.85 Under the supplementary vote system all of the first preference votes in the combined authority area must be counted, the local count totals must be provided to and approved by you as the CARO, and the result of that count must be declared, before you can declare a candidate elected⁴⁶.

6.86 If no candidate is elected with more than 50% of the first preference votes, you must identify which of the candidates remain in the contest following the first count, after which the second preference votes can be counted⁴⁷. If a second count does take place this is likely to take less time than the first count due to the reduced number of candidates remaining in the contest and the need to only count the second preference votes of voters whose first preference votes were cast for an eliminated candidate⁴⁸. These factors demonstrate the need for you as CARO to have in place a robust two-way communication protocol with local ROs and to co-ordinate the timing and organisation of verification and counting to ensure that they are carried out in a timely and effective way across the combined authority area.

6.87 In addition to considering how to meet the key principles, you should consider other relevant practical factors that will affect organisation and timing, such as:

- other polls taking place in the combined authority area
- the number of local authorities within the combined authority area
- turnout
- the geography of the combined authority area
- size and capacity of venues
- transparency for candidates
- cost

The decision-making process

6.88 You should engage with local ROs at an early stage to inform the development of your approach to co-ordinating the verification and counting of votes. You should consult with local ROs on your proposals for when, where and how to verify and count the votes, identifying any planning assumptions you have used to inform your proposals. You should also engage in dialogue involving others with an interest before making your decision, including prospective candidates, political parties, voters and the media. You should explain what factors are relevant to your decision and make clear the implications of your proposals for when the result may be declared. While you should seek input from those affected or interested to inform your decision-making, ultimately the responsibility for making decisions remains with you as CARO.

6.89 Your consultation, dialogue and decision-making should be planned for and completed in good time, before the formal election campaign period begins, to enable your decisions to be communicated to local ROs so that they can reflect them in their planning for the verification and count.

6.90 Once made, you should record your decisions about when, where and how to verify and count, and the information you took into account in making them, and be able to explain the reasons for your decisions if asked. You should communicate your decisions to those who may be affected or interested, including candidates and agents, voters, and the media and others whose views you sought or received before making your decisions.

6.91 If different arrangements will be in place in different parts of the combined authority area, you should ensure that you communicate clearly to candidates and agents, and others who may be attending or observing verification or count processes, which aspects of those processes may differ, and why.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 2](#), you will need to ensure verification and count processes are designed and managed to secure an accurate result. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place information on how the verification and counting is to be organised and managed, including the process you followed to arrive at your decision.

When to verify and count the votes

6.92 At a combined authority mayoral election that is not combined with another poll, local ROs must begin verifying the ballot paper accounts and counting the votes as soon as practicable after the close of poll.

6.93 Where the polls are combined, the verification will be carried out by the relevant RO as soon as practicable after the close of poll and the local RO must start the first preference count as soon as practicable after the delivery of the ballot papers to them.

6.94 As CARO, you will need to consider the timing of the verification, count and result calculation across the whole of the combined authority area, and how you will ensure local ROs are able to deliver to these timings.

6.95 At a combined authority mayoral election that is not combined with another poll, you should agree a time when local ROs should start the verification process.

6.96 The overarching principle that should underpin any Returning Officers' decision-making in relation to the timing of election counts is the need to ensure an accurate result in which voters and candidates have confidence.

6.97 As CARO you should consider this principle carefully in deciding when, where and how the votes in each area will be verified and counted. You need to ensure that you are confident that both your and local ROs' processes are managed and resourced in a way that enables counting to produce a timely outcome, whether there are one or two counts. Your decision as to the timing of the verification and count should reflect the following:

- Each combined authority mayoral election is a single poll producing one result for the combined authority area as a whole. Each local authority area's total counts towards a result for the combined authority area as a whole and therefore it will be important to identify a defined period of time during which all the votes will be counted and totals announced for each area.
- The result of the election must be accurate. Underpinning the approach to the timing of the verification and count is the need to ensure an accurate result in which voters and candidates can have confidence. This means that the period of time specified for the verification and count to take place must be such that local ROs can resource and conduct a well-run verification and count process within it.
- The potential for and extent of combined polls in the combined authority area. Where polls are combined, whether in some or all local authority areas, you will need to take this into account in identifying the options for timing of the verification and counting of the votes for the combined authority mayoral election. You should:
 - Obtain information from local ROs about the other polls taking place and plans for verification and counting at the other polls, and use this information to inform your planning assumptions.
 - Make clear when you communicate the plans for when to verify and count the votes what factors related to combination you have taken into account in making them, and any particular implications of your decisions for areas with combined polls.
 - Ensure that you provide candidates and agents at the combined authority election with information for all areas, highlighting where combination exists and has had an impact on the decision, including where this has resulted in different arrangements being in place.
 - Keep your plans under review to deal with any emerging situations, such as by-elections being called for the same day as the combined authority mayoral election poll.
 -
- Other practical considerations. There are also a number of other practical factors that you may want to take into account in developing your proposals and making your decision about when the votes will be verified and counted, such as: the fact that the election will be held under the supplementary vote system wherever there are three or more candidates; the number of local authority areas in the combined authority area; turnout; the geography of the combined authority area; resources, including availability of staff and venues.

Timing of the count

6.98 As CARO, you and the project team will agree the approach to be taken in respect of the timing of the verification and the count. Where polls are

combined you will need to liaise with the local relevant in the area and make decisions as early as possible in the process.

6.99 The Commission recommended in its report 2012 report, [Timing of election counts](#) that 'In order to allow political parties and candidates to campaign and voters to make their choices on the substantive issues at the heart of the election, decisions on the timing of the count should be taken outside of the campaign period proper. That is, before notice of election is issued'. For fixed term elections, the Commission recommends that decisions should be made 'not later than the end of January preceding an election taking place in early May'

Organisation of the verification and counting

6.100 There are a variety of ways in which verification and counting can be organised across the combined authority area, and you will need to decide which is the best option for your area, based on your local circumstances and those of the local ROs and, where relevant, other Returning Officers in your combined authority area.

6.101 At a standalone combined authority mayoral election, local ROs are responsible for the verification of the ballot paper accounts and the counting of the votes for their area⁴⁹.

6.102 On completion of the verification procedure at a standalone combined authority mayoral election, local ROs must inform you of the contents of the verification statement i.e. the total number of ballot papers counted.

6.103 If the votes are counted at a different venue to where verification takes place, local ROs must seal the verified ballot papers in packets with contents lists and send them, along with the ballot paper accounts and the verification statement, to the count venue⁵⁰.

6.104 Where the poll at a combined authority mayoral election has been combined with the poll at another election, the relevant Returning Officer will be responsible for verifying the ballot papers at all polls⁵¹. The local RO will, however, remain responsible for the counting of the votes for their area. Therefore, where polls have been combined, you should liaise with the relevant Returning Officer to ensure consistency in the verification across the combined authority area.

6.105 Where polls have been combined, you will need to obtain the verification statement from the relevant Returning Officer to enable you to check the local count totals against the verification statement and identify any potential variances. Local ROs must also inform you of the contents of the statement of local count totals, once it has been prepared⁵².

6.106 Where polls are combined, you will need to liaise as early in the planning process as possible with your project team and decide the way the verification and count will be organised in your area to achieve the more effective and transparent process.



The Commission has produced guidance on the verification and count process.

Guidance on the principles of an effective verification and count process is contained in our guidance for Returning Officers, [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#). For practical guidance on the verification and count process, see our verification and count resource '[Planning for an effective verification and count: a toolkit for Returning Officers](#)'.

6.107 There are two broad options for organising the count processes for the election in the combined authority area:

- **Individual local counts and the central collation by the CARO:** This option would see the verification and counting of the votes take place in local count venues, with the local totals being forwarded to you at a central hub, similar to the approach normally followed at a European Parliamentary or PCC election. In this case, you would need to ensure that the process in place for the transmission and receipt of totals from each local RO to the central hub is capable of establishing a clear audit trail, is timely, and supports the development of an accurate result.
- **Central combined authority area count:** There are two main variations of a centralised count: a count where votes are verified locally before being transferred to a central counting venue, where all of the votes for the combined authority area would then be counted; or a count where votes for all areas are both verified and counted in one central counting venue.

6.108 There are, however, variations within these two options and the potential for other ways of organising counts within a combined authority area. For example, across a combined authority area some local authority areas could count locally, while others come together and hold counts on a more centralised basis.

6.109 You should liaise closely with the local ROs in your area when deciding on the approach. In areas where the poll at the combined authority mayoral election is combined with the poll at another election, you should work closely with the relevant Returning Officers to agree an approach. Whichever option is chosen, there will be risks and benefits associated with it. You will need to identify these when you develop your proposals for consultation and, once a decision has been made, work with local ROs (or the relevant Returning Officers in case of combined polls) to plan how you will manage and mitigate the risks.

6.110 We have set out here some of the key factors you will need to consider in deciding how to organise and manage the verification and counting of the votes in your combined authority area:

- **Consistency of approach:** local ROs and their staff will have past experience of running election counts in their area and will have their own processes and workflows that they are used to following. While this

knowledge and experience will be useful in helping to decide how best to organise and manage the verification and counting, you should consider how you will ensure consistency in the approach to verification and counting across the combined authority area, regardless of where the processes are to be carried out.

- **Staff resources and availability:** The identification, recruitment and training of sufficient, capable staff to conduct the count will also be a key consideration. For example, depending on the geography of the combined authority area it may be more difficult to recruit the necessary numbers of suitable staff to work in a central location than it would be to recruit people to work at a venue closer to their home, who are also more likely to be experienced staff who have worked on election counts in the past.
- **Deployment of staff:** You should also consider how to make the most efficient use of staff. If there are more than two candidates, there is the potential that a second round of counting will be required. The first round of counting will need to be completed by all local ROs and the totals collated before any second round can commence. This could mean that, unless counts are completed within a similar time, count staff for some areas may have completed the process while others are still counting. If count staff are in one (or several) central locations they can be deployed flexibly to maximise productivity in the interests of a timely outcome to the count. If staff are at separate local count centres it is likely that count staff in some areas may have completed the process while others are still counting. You will need to consider how to ensure that the count arrangements enable all constituent authority areas to complete their counting within a reasonable time of each other.
- **Venues:** Any venues used will need to be of a sufficient size and capacity to accommodate the necessary processes and staff, and enable processes to be carried out effectively and in clear view of those entitled to attend, taking into account potential media attendance at the declaration of the result. Local ROs will already have venues (and reserve venues) that they have used in the past and are familiar with, along with the verification and count workflows and layouts that work for these venues. If you are using a central venue, the scale of the space needed will depend on the size of the combined authority area and number of electors. You will also need to identify and put in place contingency arrangements, which may include identifying suitable venues of an equivalent size and capacity in case of the loss of a venue.
- **Transmission of local totals:** Local ROs need to transmit their local totals to the CARO to enable the combined authority area result to be calculated⁵³. You will need to ensure that you provide instructions on the method to be used for transmitting the information accurately and securely, and carry out a test of the process in advance. There are greater risks with this process if counting is carried out locally, for example, as a result of technical issues. You would need to develop

contingency arrangements to be deployed in the event of technical problems occurring.

- **Security and logistics:** You should ensure that ballot papers are stored securely at all times. This will be an important consideration in any proposals that would require ballot boxes to be transported to a central venue, or between venues after being verified. You should consider carefully the potential security risks associated with the transportation of ballot boxes and the associated logistical challenges, including how to ensure that where polls are combined the correct ballot papers for each poll are in the right place so that all ballot papers can be included in the appropriate count.

6.111 Your decisions as to when, where and how the votes are to be verified and counted should be taken in accordance with the principles and considerations set out in this chapter. Once you have made your decisions you should consider how best to ensure that local ROs' plans for managing and resourcing their verification and counting processes will achieve these principles in practice.

How to verify and count the votes

6.112 However the verification and count are organised and managed, you should ensure that local ROs' plans will deliver a consistent standard of administration of these aspects of the election, so that the election as a whole delivers an accurate result in which everyone can have confidence.

6.113 There are a variety of methods for verifying the ballot papers and counting the votes. You can decide whether to require local ROs to use particular methods, or to leave it to each local RO to choose their preferred method based on what is most appropriate for their local circumstances and explain it to you. It is for you to decide in conjunction and consultation with local ROs in your area which approach to take.

6.114 Whatever counting method is used it should be transparent and lead to an accurate outcome. Calculating an accurate result relies on accurate verification and count figures, and you will need to consider specifically how you will ensure that the local totals you receive from local ROs to collate the result are accurate before you accept them. You should produce templates of all documents which local ROs will be required to complete during the verification and count process to provide a clear audit trail.

6.115 Breaking down the verification and counting of votes into areas smaller than the whole of the local authority area is one counting method that is particularly effective in achieving an accurate result. Breaking down the verification and count into parts smaller than the whole area is particularly effective in achieving an accurate, timely result with clear audit trails. The results from those 'parts' are then aggregated to achieve an overall local total for the area. Any counting issues that may arise will be limited to a more

manageable area and any re-counts that may happen as a result, may be limited.

6.116 Whatever your decision, you should be able to satisfy yourself that ROs' plans for verifying and counting can meet the principles for an effective verification and count and will deliver a result that is accurate and in which everyone can have confidence.

The result collation

6.117 You should ensure that a result collation process for the combined authority area is in place to enable you to calculate the result of the election.

6.118 You should ensure that there is consistent and transparent communication about the result collation process both at the result collation venue and at any other count venues, depending on how the verification and counting is organised in your combined authority area, to candidates and agents, the media and other relevant stakeholders. If verification and/or counting is being carried out at a central venue(s) you will need to provide information to attendees about those processes.

6.119 As CARO you must collate the contents of the local verification statements and count totals for each local authority area, and calculate and declare the overall result for the combined authority area⁵⁴. It is for you as CARO to determine how best to manage this process in your area. Your project plan should include plans to deliver the calculation of the result.

Collating the result

6.120 You should decide on the process and mechanism you will use to collate local verification and count totals from local ROs in order to calculate the result of the election. You should also consider what you may need to put in place to support these processes, including protocols, mechanisms and systems, and ensure that they are followed consistently and build contingencies into your plans in case any facility, building or technology that you intend to use becomes unavailable.

6.121 You should consider how best to organise and manage the two-way transfer of information between you and local ROs. This includes the checking, recording and collating of information from local ROs and the calculation of the result. You should determine whether you need to put in place IT systems or programmes to facilitate this. As a minimum you should develop and implement protocols as necessary for the communication of information between you, local ROs and the staff working on the result collation process. You should include how local count totals will be communicated, the process for checking local totals and authorising them to be shared publicly. Whatever processes and systems you use for collating the result, you need to ensure that they meet the principles set out in paragraph **6.82** above.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 3](#), you will need to develop a process for receiving and submitting local totals. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place arrangements for managing the process of collating local totals, including any protocols and guidance issued to local ROs.

Accredited observers and Commission representatives

6.122 Observers accredited by the Commission are entitled to observe:

- the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers
- the poll
- the verification and counting of the votes
- the collation of the result⁵⁵

6.123 Your project plan should include processes to manage potential enquiries from observers and to support their attendance at the electoral processes they are entitled to attend. This should include providing observers with information on the location and timing of the above processes.

6.124 Commission representatives are also entitled to observe these processes and, in addition, are entitled to observe your working practices.

6.125 Accredited observers and Commission representatives do not need to give advance notification of where they intend to observe, but will carry with them a photographic identification card issued by the Commission.

6.126 If you are in doubt about the status of a particular individual seeking to gain access to election processes, you can check the registers of observers on the [Commission's website](#).

6.127 You have a legal duty to have regard to the [Commission's Code of practice for observers](#) when managing the attendance of observers⁵⁶. Observers will have agreed to comply with the standards of behaviour set out in the Commission's Code of practice. If you think there has been a breach of the Code of practice, please inform [your local Commission team](#).

Appendix A – Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

Performance standard 1: Voters

Ensuring that planning for and delivery of the poll enables voters to vote easily and know that their vote will be counted in the way they intended

Outcome	What does the RO need to do to achieve the outcome	What will demonstrate how the outcome has been met
<p>Voters receive the information they need, in an accessible format and within time for them to cast their vote</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement robust project management processes • Evaluate planning for and delivery of previous polls and identify lessons learnt, updating plans as required • Put in place arrangements to manage contractors and suppliers to ensure that the work is delivered as required by the specification • Ensure robust processes are in place for ensuring that there are no errors on voter materials, notice of poll and notice of election • Ensure poll cards are received by voters as soon as possible so that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project planning documentation which is kept under regular review • Planning documentation reflecting lessons learnt • Arrangements in place for the management of contractors and suppliers • Processes for the proof-checking of voter materials, notice of poll and notice of election • Information on the method for delivery of poll cards, including an estimation of when poll cards will be delivered • Information on the poll easily

	<p>voters have the maximum amount of time to act on the information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure information on the poll, including the notice of election and notice of poll, is easily accessible to voters, such as through the local authority website 	<p>accessed through the local authority website</p>
<p>Voters receive a high-quality service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that access needs are taken into account when planning for and setting up polling stations • Decide on the allocation of electors and staff to polling stations to ensure polling stations are properly staffed so that voters receive a high-quality service, giving consideration to the factors set out in Commission guidance • Ensure polling station staff are trained to set-up polling stations in such a way that takes account of voter needs • Ensure postal ballot packs are received by voters as soon as possible so that voters have the maximum amount of time to act on the information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment regarding access needs, identifying any problems and actions taken to remedy these • Approach taken to allocating electors and staff to polling stations • Guidance/training provided to polling station staff • Information on the method for delivery of postal ballot packs, including an estimation of when postal ballot packs will be delivered

<p>Voters have confidence that their vote will be counted in the way they intended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a clear audit trail of the issue, receipt and opening of postal ballot packs • Have in place processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity problems, including what steps are to be taken to deal with any such problems • Maintain the secure storage of ballot papers and postal ballot packs at all times • Put in place appropriate resources to ensure the verification and count is timely • Ensure the results are communicated to voters in a clear and timely way • Ensure count processes are designed and managed to secure an accurate result, with a clear audit trail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements to maintain a clear audit trail of the issue, receipt and opening of postal ballot packs • Processes for dealing with integrity problems • Arrangements for securely storing ballot papers and postal ballot packs • Information on how the verification and counting is to be organised and managed, including the process you followed to arrive at your decision • Arrangements for communicating results to voters • Arrangements in place to maintain a clear audit trail of the count processes
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Performance standard 2: Those who want to stand for election

Ensuring that planning for and delivery of the poll enables people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with these rules, and enables them to have confidence in the management of the process and the result

Outcome	What does the RO need to do to achieve the outcome	What will demonstrate how the outcome has been met
People who want to stand for election receive all the information they need to take part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure information on the election process and spending is easily available for candidates and agents, including through providing briefing sessions and ensuring they are issued with written guidance • Ensure that candidates have the opportunity to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to their formal submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written guidance issued to candidates • Date(s) of briefing sessions and briefing resources • Arrangements in place for candidates to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to formal submission
Candidates have confidence that the process is well-managed, and have confidence in the results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that those entitled to attend postal vote opening sessions are able to follow what 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Layout plan of postal vote opening sessions • Information provided to attendees

	<p>is happening, where and when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure count processes are transparent, with everything at the verification and count carried out in clear view of all those entitled to attend, with information provided to attendees on the processes to be followed • Ensure count processes are designed and managed to secure an accurate result, with a clear audit trail • Have in place processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity problems, including what steps are to be taken to deal with any such problems 	<p>at postal vote opening sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Layout plan of the count • Information provided to attendees at the count • Arrangements in place to communicate progress at the count • Arrangements in place to maintain a clear audit trail of the count processes • Processes for dealing with integrity problems
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Performance standard for statutory office holders with a power of direction

Performance standard 3: Co-ordination and management of the poll

Co-ordinating the planning for and delivery of the poll to ensure a consistent high-quality experience for voters and those wanting to stand for election

Outcome	What does the statutory office holder need to do to achieve the outcome	What will demonstrate how the outcome has been met
To ensure that local ROs have the necessary arrangements in place to deliver well-run elections in their area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement robust project management processes • Develop guidance and issue directions where necessary to ensure the effective administration of the polls in each local RO area • Develop and implement plans for communicating with local ROs • Develop and implement a strategy for co-ordinating and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project planning documentation which is kept under regular review • Arrangements for ensuring the consistent delivery of the poll, including guidance issued and whether and how you have used your power to give directions • Plans for communicating with local ROs • A strategy for co-ordinating and

	<p>delivering public awareness and engaging with electors across the area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where appropriate, develop a process for receiving and submitting local results 	<p>delivering public awareness activity and engaging with electors across the area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements on how you intend to manage the process of collating local results, including any protocols and guidance issued to local ROs
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- ¹ Article 2, Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017 (2017 Order).
- ² Section 35(2D) and (2E), Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) (as inserted by paragraph 1(5), Schedule 2, 2017 Order).
- ³ Article 6(1), 2017 Order.
- ⁴ Rule 5, Schedule 1, 2017 Order (Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017).
- ⁵ Rules 6 to 15, Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ⁶ Section 69, Electoral Administration Act 2006 (as amended by paragraph 6(4), Schedule 2, 2017 Order).
- ⁷ Paragraph 5(2), Schedule 5, 2017 Order.
- ⁸ Article 8 and paragraph 7, Schedule 5, 2017 Order.
- ⁹ Rule 59(1) to (10), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ¹⁰ Rule 59(11) and (13), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ¹¹ Article 6(2), 2017 Order.
- ¹² Article 6(2), 2017 Order.
- ¹³ Article 6(2), 2017 Order.
- ¹⁴ Article 6(3), 2017 Order.
- ¹⁵ Article 5(1), 2017 Order.
- ¹⁶ Rule 25, Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ¹⁷ Part 5, Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 (RPR 2001) (as applied and modified by articles 3(2), (3)(e) and (4)(c) and 2, Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017).
- ¹⁸ Rules 46 to 59, Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ¹⁹ Regulation 5(1)(g) and (2)(c), (2004 Regulations (as applied to combined authorities mayoral elections by paragraph 2(4)(a), Schedule 4, 2017 Order).
- ²⁰ Regulation 5(1)(g) and (2)(d), 2004 Regulations.
- ²¹ Regulation 5(1)(g) and (2)(a), 2004 Regulations.
- ²² Regulation 5(1)(g) and (2)(e), 2004 Regulations.
- ²³ Regulation 5(1)(g) and (2)(f), 2004 Regulations.
- ²⁴ Regulation 5(1)(g) and (2)(g), 2004 Regulations.
- ²⁵ Regulation 5(1)(g) and (2)(h), 2004 Regulations.
- ²⁶ Regulation 5(1)(g) and (2)(i), 2004 Regulations.
- ²⁷ Regulation 5(1)(g) and (2)(za), (zb), (b), (fa) and (j), 2004 Regulations.
- ²⁸ Section 9, Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) and paragraph 5, Schedule 4, Representation of the People Act 2000.
- ²⁹ Section 35(4), RPA 1983 (as applied and modified by article 3(2), (3)(a) and (4)(c), 2017 Order).
- ³⁰ Section 35(4), RPA 1983 (as applied and modified by article 3(2), (3)(a) and (4)(c), 2017 Order).
- ³¹ Section 46, Electoral Administration Act 2006 (as applied and modified by article 3(2), (3)(f) and (4)(c), 2017 Order).
- ³² Section 46, Electoral Administration Act 2006 (as applied and modified by article 3(2), (3)(f) and (4)(c), 2017 Order).
- ³³ Section 46(2), Electoral Administration Act 2006 (as applied and modified by article 3(2), (3)(f) and (4)(c), 2017 Order).
- ³⁴ Sections 9A and 9B, Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA 2000).
- ³⁵ Section 69, Electoral Administration Act 2006 (as applied and modified by article 3(2) and (3)(f) and Schedule 2, 2017 Order).
- ³⁶ Article 8 and paragraphs 5 and 7, Schedule 5, 2017 Order.
- ³⁷ Rule 5(4) to (6), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ³⁸ Rule 12(2)(b), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.

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- ³⁹ Regulations 102, 108 and 117, RPR 2001 (as applied by articles 2, 3(2) and (3)(e), 2017 Order).
- ⁴⁰ Regulations 102 and 117, RPR 2001.
- ⁴¹ Article 8, 2017 Order.
- ⁴² Paragraphs 2 to 5, Schedule 5, 2017 Order.
- ⁴³ Paragraph 5(2), Schedule 5, 2017 Order.
- ⁴⁴ Article 6(2), 2017 Order.
- ⁴⁵ Rule 16(2)(d), Schedule 3, Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 and rule 18(3)(d), Schedule 3, Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007.
- ⁴⁶ Rule 59, Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ⁴⁷ Rule 58, Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ⁴⁸ Rule 55, Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ⁴⁹ Rules 47 to 58, Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ⁵⁰ Rule 48(2), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ⁵¹ Regulations 4 and 5(1)(g) and (2)(i), 2004 Regulations.
- ⁵² Rules 54(2)(b), 56(2)(b) and 59(2)(a), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ⁵³ Rules 54(2)(b), 56(2)(b) and 59(2)(a), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ⁵⁴ Rule 59, Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2017.
- ⁵⁵ Sections 6C(1), 6A(5)(e) and 160(1), PPERA 2000.
- ⁵⁶ Section 6F(7)(c) and 6E(4)(b), PPERA 2000.