

Combined authority mayoral elections in England

Guidance for candidates and agents

Overview document

September 2018 (updated February 2021)

This document applies to combined authority mayoral elections in England. It does not apply to any other mayoral election or to district, borough, county, county borough or unitary authority elections, parish and community council elections or elections to the Greater London Authority. Our guidance and resources for other elections in the UK can be accessed from our website at: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/local-elections-england>

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Purpose of our guidance for candidates and agents

1.1 Our guidance aims to provide practical advice for anyone who wants to stand as a candidate or be an agent at a combined authority mayoral election in England. It does not apply to any other type of mayoral election. It covers what you need to do to stand as a candidate, the campaign and election periods, the declaration of the result and election spending. It includes relevant factual material as well as a guide to sources of further information. Standing for election can be complicated, but we hope that our guidance will make it as straightforward as possible.

This document does not cover [local authority mayoral elections](#) or elections for the [Mayor of London](#).

You can access guidance for those elections through our website.

How to use our guidance

1.2 Our guidance is made up of six parts, setting out the different stages that candidates and agents need to go through when standing at a combined authority mayoral election.

1.3 Each part is accompanied by a number of forms and resources, which can be directly accessed via links in the individual parts. Alternatively, relevant guidance, forms and resources will be available on our [dedicated webpage for candidates and agents](#) at a combined authority mayoral election.

Data protection legislation applies to the processing of all personal data.

Please contact the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) for further information about how the current data protection legislation affects you.

1.4 The following parts make up our full guidance for a combined authority mayoral election:

- [Part 1a – Can you stand for election?](#) (this document does not cover Greater Manchester or West Yorkshire)
- [Part 1b – Can you stand for election in Greater Manchester or West Yorkshire?](#)
- [Part 2a – Standing as an independent candidate](#)
- [Part 2b – Standing as a party candidate](#)
- [Part 3 – Spending and donations](#)
- [Part 4 – The campaign](#)
- [Part 5 – Your right to attend key electoral events](#)
- [Part 6 – After the declaration of result](#)

1.5 Before starting the process of standing for election potential candidates need to be confident that they meet all of the requirements. You should therefore first read [Part 1](#) of our guidance, which covers the qualifications and disqualifications. We have a separate document for candidates standing in Greater Manchester or West Yorkshire (Part 1b), where the combined authority mayor will also take on the functions of a Police and Crime Commissioner, and the disqualifications that apply to candidates at that election are different to the disqualifications at other combined authority mayoral elections in England.

1.6 Once satisfied that you can stand, you should read [Part 2a](#) of our guidance (if you are standing as an independent candidate) or [Part 2b](#) (if you are standing as a party candidate), which deal with the nominations process and guide you through which forms you need to submit and by when.

1.7 Candidates and agents at a combined authority mayoral election must follow rules about how much they can spend, who they can accept donations from, and what they must report after the election. Failure to follow the rules could lead to you committing an offence and losing your seat, if elected. [Part 3](#) of our guidance explains the rules.

1.8 [Part 4](#) covers the rules on publication and display of campaign literature and what you need to bear in mind when campaigning. Each candidate at a combined authority mayoral election may provide an election address to the Combined Authority Returning Officer (CARO) for inclusion in a booklet which will be delivered to each person entitled to vote in the election, and this part explains what you need to do.

1.9 Candidates and agents also have a right to attend key electoral events. These are: the opening of postal votes; the poll; and the count. Others can also be appointed to attend these electoral events. Details on your rights and what to expect at these events are provided in [Part 5](#).

1.10 Finally, there are a number of things candidates and agents will need to do once the result has been declared, including submitting their spending returns to the CARO. This is covered in [Part 6](#).

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1.11 To keep the guidance as relevant to the reader as possible, we have split most guidance parts into an 'Essential information' section, which all candidates and agents should read as it contains information that is relevant to all, and a 'Supplementary information' section, that will be relevant only to some. You will be directed to the 'Supplementary information' section at relevant points throughout the 'Essential information' section.

The electoral system

1.12 If there are only two candidates standing at the election, the combined authority mayor is elected under the first-past-the-post electoral system, whereby the candidate with the most votes is elected.

1.13 If there are more than two candidates, the combined authority mayor is elected under the supplementary vote system. Voters can vote for a first and second choice candidate they want to elect. The ballot paper will list all the candidates and voters will vote for their first choice candidate by marking an 'X' in the first choice column and for their second choice candidate by marking an 'X' in the second choice column. 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.

Who does what at a combined authority mayoral election and how to contact them?

The Combined Authority Returning Officer (CARO)

1.14 Each combined authority area has a Combined Authority Returning Officer (CARO) who has overall responsibility for the election of the combined authority mayor in that area. The CARO is likely to be a senior officer of the combined authority or of one of the constituent councils and is independent of their authority in respect of their electoral functions.

1.15 The CARO is responsible for the nomination process and for calculating and declaring the result of the election. The CARO will liaise with and coordinate the work of local Returning Officers in their combined authority area, and they also have the power to give directions to local Returning Officers relating to the discharge of their functions at the election.

1.16 The CARO will offer briefings ahead of the election and we strongly encourage you or your agent to attend, even if you have been an agent or stood for election before.

The local Returning Officer

1.17 Local Returning Officers are responsible for running the combined authority mayoral election at a local level. They are responsible for administering the conduct of the poll, the issue and opening of postal ballot papers and the counting of votes for their voting area.

1.18 The local Returning Officer for the combined authority mayoral election is the person who acts as Returning Officer for local elections in that area and is normally a senior officer of the local authority and is independent of the authority in respect of their electoral functions.

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1.19 Local Returning Officers may also offer briefings on local arrangements for the poll.

1.20 You will be able to contact the local Returning Officer for any local authority area by contacting the relevant local authority elections office. You can find the contact details at <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter>.

The Electoral Registration Officer

1.21 The Electoral Registration Officer is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and absent voters' lists for their local authority area. In England, the Electoral Registration Officer is normally a senior officer in the local authority and may also be the Local Returning Officer. Contact details for all Electoral Registration Officers can be found at <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter>.

The Electoral Commission

1.22 We are an independent statutory body established in November 2000 by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. We are currently headed by ten Commissioners, including a Chair. We report directly to the UK Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

1.23 We are responsible for registering political parties and non-party campaigners, the monitoring and publication of significant donations to registered political parties and the regulation of party and non-party campaigner spending at certain elections. We also have a role in promoting voter awareness. We are required to report on the administration of certain electoral events, to keep electoral matters under review and, if requested, must review and report on any electoral matter. We also accredit observers to be present at election proceedings.

1.24 We do not run elections but have responsibility for providing advice and assistance on electoral matters to all those involved in elections, including CAROs, local Returning

Officers, Electoral Registration Officers, political parties and candidates.

1.25 We are here to help, so please get in touch if you have any questions.

Contacting us

1.26 If your question is about **spending or donations**, please contact us at:

Email: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk
Tel: 0333 103 1928

1.27 For **any other queries**, please contact us at:

Email: infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk
Tel: 0333 103 1928