

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 45

Subject: Appointment of an Honorary Recorder

Date of meeting: 1 October 2026

Report of: Elizabeth Culbert – Director of Governance & Law

Contact Officer: Name: Victoria Simpson
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Wards affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 It is proposed that the new resident Judge at Lewes Crown Court, Her Honour Judge Henson, be appointed by the Council to the role of Honorary Recorder following the resignation of HHJ Christine Laing from the role at Lewes.

2. Recommendations

That Council:

- 2.1 Agrees to appoint Her Honour Judge Henson as Honorary Recorder of Brighton & Hove Council for the period of her tenure as Resident Judge at Lewes Crown Court.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The role of Honorary Recorder is an unpaid ceremonial office created by the Local Government Act 1972. It offers a means of facilitating close links between local authorities and the judiciary, including by enhancing understanding of the judicial system among the community. The functions of Honorary Recorder may include attending ceremonial and civic functions.
- 3.2 The role is to be distinguished from that of a Recorder, who may be appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of the Lord Chancellor after a competition administered by the Judicial Appointments Commission. While Recorders hold paid judicial posts, which entail sitting as judge in the crown or county court, Honorary Recorders are unpaid and appointed by local authorities.

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- 3.3 The role of Honorary Recorder is normally reserved to a specific Senior Circuit Judge or Resident Judge and continues as long as they remain the Senior Circuit or Resident Judge for the area, at which point the tenure ceases. The role of 'Resident Judge' is considered to be best placed to continue and develop the role of Honorary Recorder, as it brings with it leadership and management duties, including providing support and guidance to the judiciary in the relevant judicial centre. The holder of the Resident Judge post is considered to be best placed to continue and develop the role of Honorary Recorder.
- 3.4 The appointment of an Honorary Recorder role is intended to support building relationships between the Council and the Court system, for example in relation to community safety, environmental protection, animal welfare, trading standards, benefit fraud, community care and child protection. With the above in mind, the Honorary Recorder may attend meetings and events to enhance their awareness of the political, financial and constitutional framework in which the local authority operates. The Council could also assist the Honorary Recorder develop links with other public bodies in Brighton & Hove with whom we have well established connections, such as health trusts and the police.
- 3.5 Any Honorary Recorder must maintain his/her judicial independence and neutrality. In view of this, any involvement in the activities referred to above would be on a strictly non-political basis.
- 3.6 On behalf of the Council, the Monitoring Officer approached HH Judge Henson KC to assess her interest in the role, following her appointment as the Resident Judge at Lewes Crown Court on 30th May 2026. HH Judge Henson KC is authorised as a Judge in the Family Court, including the High Court, pursuant to section 9 of the Senior Courts Act 1981 and as a result may sit in cases involving children, both in public and private law.
- 3.7 HH Judge Henson has expressed enthusiasm for undertaking the role of Honorary Recorder should she be so appointed. Council is asked to note the following extract from HH Judge Henson's email, which is considered to provide an indication of her expertise as well as her suitability for the role:

'I have been a full time Judge in Sussex since 2015 and have during that time attended numerous civic and ceremonial events, supporting the administration of justice in Brighton and Hove and beyond.

I have enjoyed leading the Sponsored Legal Walk for charities providing much needed funding for legal services in Sussex over the last few years.

Having children myself in Sussex I am passionate about participating in a scheme that may reduce knife crime in our county which is sadly on the increase with the increase of drug crime and glorification of knives and gangs.

My background is as a barrister (call 1994) practicing in Legal Aid criminal representation, then taking silk and now a Judge. I was the first in my family to go to university and have been proactive in Sussex in school engagement

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as well as acting for a local school as a Governor for several years. I am an active member of my Inns of court in promoting diversity within the judiciary.

I am a keen advocate of open communication and close links between the courts and civic administration in our county where I have also lived for 20 years. It has never been more important for public confidence to be improved with the work of the courts, and I have worked to that end including running events for young travellers at the courts and local students. I also have been the Judge at the University mock trial competition.

Many of those within the CJS are those impacted by housing issues, drugs and health service users and by forming close links it is my hope the cycle of crime and crisis can be dramatically reduced in Sussex.'

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 There is no legal requirement to appoint an Honorary Recorder when (as now) the post becomes vacant. However the appointment aligns with relevant Judicial Guidelines and, for the reasons outlined above, it is recommended that this appointment be made.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 No consultation has taken place.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Name of finance officer consulted: Haley Woollard

Date consulted: 09/09/2026

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The legal implications are explored in the body of the Report.

Name of lawyer consulted: Victoria Simpson Date consulted 08.07.2026

8. Risk implications

- 8.1 No risks have been identified.

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 No equalities implications have been identified other than the potential for this appointment to assist the Council in its aim to promote and support good relations and cohesion between all communities in the city, as well as to reduce crime & disorder, improve community safety and reduce offending.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 No sustainability implications have been identified.

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11. Other Implications

11.1 Crime & disorder implications:

All councils are subject to a statutory duty (s17 Crime and Disorder Act 1998) to do all they can to reasonably prevent crime and disorder in their area across the range of services delivered within their communities. The proposal described here is considered to offer an additional means of performing that statutory duty, this by actions which may have potential to impact on community safety and otherwise prevent crime and disorder, including the misuse of substances and re-offending.

12. Conclusion

12.1 The recommendations are made for the reasons given above.