

How to propose a pattern of wards

Helping you make the strongest possible case to the Commission

Getting started

If you have a view on a new pattern of wards or electoral divisions for your area, there are three important things to remember before you get in touch:

1. Give your reasoning

The Commission takes its decisions on the basis of the evidence and argument put to us. It's important that you tell us **why** you are putting forward your view. Just giving your opinion without explanation and reasoning is unlikely to persuade the Commission.

2. Make it relevant

The Commission has three main criteria - set out in law - which it must follow when it produces a new pattern of wards or electoral divisions. They are:

- The new pattern of wards should mean that each councillor represents roughly the same number of voters as elected members elsewhere in the authority.
- Ward patterns should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities and boundaries should be identifiable.
- The electoral arrangements should promote effective and convenient local government and reflect the electoral cycle of the council.

Our decisions on new wards and boundaries will always be based on the criteria above. As such, the Commission is much more likely to accept your proposals if they are based on one or more of the criteria above. This guide sets out, in more detail, what the three criteria might mean in practice.

3. Get in touch

The Commission gives equal weight to all responses to consultation regardless of whom they are from but we need to record them all and consider them together. We also publish all consultation responses so you can see the basis on which we took our decisions. You don't need to write a lot, but if you follow the advice above and elsewhere in this guide, you should be able to make a good case.

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Consultation process

One of the most important parts of the electoral review process is to propose a new pattern of wards or electoral divisions for the whole local authority area.

We will carry out two phases of public consultation on new boundaries during an electoral review.

We judge all proposals on their merits regardless of whom they are from and we commit, in every electoral review, to carry out two phases of public consultation on boundaries before we finalise the electoral arrangements for your area.

This guide aims to help you contribute to an electoral review by proposing a pattern of wards for your area, commenting on our draft proposals or having your say about the community identities and interests of your area.

When will we ask for your view?

We will ask local people for views on new warding arrangements on two occasions during an electoral review.

1. Information gathering stage – once the Commission has taken a view on the total number of councillors that should represent the authority, we will begin work on drawing up new boundaries for wards across the area to accommodate those councillors. We will ask local people for their help in drawing up draft recommendations for new electoral arrangements.
2. Consultation on draft recommendations – once we have published our draft recommendations for new electoral arrangements (number of wards, number of councillors representing each ward, ward names and ward boundaries) for your area, you will have the chance to comment on them. We will invite you to tell us where you think we've got it right and, where you don't think our boundaries meet our criteria, you can propose alternatives.

At all stages of consultation, you can give us your views on the whole local authority area just a small part of it.

You can find out which stage we are at with your review by logging on to our website at www.lgbce.org.uk or go direct to our consultation portal at consultation.lgbce.org.uk.

Making your case

The Commission must abide by certain rules – set out in law¹ - when drawing up our proposals for new ward or electoral division boundaries. We will consider your evidence in light of these criteria before coming to conclusions so it's important that you bear them in mind when submitting your views to us.

The main rules are:

- **Delivering electoral equality for local voters** – this means ensuring that each local councillor represents roughly the same number of people so that the value of your vote is the same regardless of where you live in the local authority area.
- **Reflecting the interests and identities of local communities** – this means establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, maintain local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable.
- **Promoting effective and convenient local government** – this means ensuring that the new wards or electoral divisions can be represented effectively by their elected representative(s) and that the new electoral arrangements as a whole allow the local authority to conduct its business effectively. In addition, we must also ensure that the pattern of wards reflects the electoral cycle of the council as shown below.

Occasionally, it will not be possible for us to put forward a boundary proposal that clearly meets all these principles. In fact, the statutory criteria can sometimes contradict each other, for example where a proposed ward might reflect the shape of local communities but delivers poor levels of electoral equality. In these cases, the Commission will use its discretion – and the quality of the evidence presented to it - to come to a conclusion.

The next three sections of this guide tell you more about how we interpret the three criteria and how they might make a difference to your submission to us.

¹ Schedule 2, Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

1. Delivering electoral equality for local voters

An electoral review must, so far as is practicable, deliver electoral equality where all councillors in a local authority area represent a similar number of electors.

Electoral equality is the only criterion which we can measure with precision. We will therefore be able to take a firm view on the extent to which your proposal meets our ambition to deliver electoral fairness.

We publish details of electorate numbers at polling district level on our website along with maps which give you a good idea of the number of electors affected by your proposal. We will also take into consideration any developments that might affect the number of electors in an area within five years of the end of the review.

We base our decisions on the number of electors in a ward and **not** the total population.

For example, if the overall number of electors in your local authority area is 100,000 and we have said we are minded to recommend a council size of 40 councillors, it means that electoral equality will be achieved if each councillor represents 2,500 electors.

In this scenario, if you are proposing a single-member ward during the next phase of consultation, it will need to contain approximately 2,500 electors. Similarly, if you are proposing a three-member ward, it would need to have around 7,500 voters.

Although we strive for perfect electoral equality for all wards or divisions, we recognise that this is unlikely to be exactly achieved. If you propose a boundary that has many more, or fewer, voters in it than the target we set in the paragraph above, we will need to see evidence that such a variance is justified on the grounds of our other statutory criteria set out below. The more your proposal causes councillors to represent many more, or fewer, voters than the average, the more persuasive your evidence will need to be. You will need to explain to us why your proposal reflects the interests and identities of local communities and/or the arrangement would provide for effective and convenient local government.

The example below shows how we calculate electoral variances for new wards or divisions.

Figure one: electoral variances

Local authority A has an electorate of 100,000 in 2012. In 2018 (five years after the planned completion of the review), the electorate of Local authority A is expected to be 103,000.

The Commission has decided that it is minded to recommend a council size of 40 councillors for Local authority A.

In these circumstances, the Commission will base its new ward patterns on each councillor representing around 2,500 electors.

	2012	2018
10% fewer electors	2,250	2,318
Perfect electoral equality	2,500	2,575
10% more electors	2,750	2,833

2. Reflecting the interests and identities of local communities

If you are making a submission to the Commission, you should ensure that the wards and boundaries you propose reflect, as far as possible, the interests and identities of your area's communities. We will try to balance this consideration with our other statutory criteria before finalising our conclusions.

Unlike electoral equality, it isn't possible to measure levels of community identity so we will be looking for evidence on a range of issues to support your reasoning. The best evidence for community identity is normally a combination of factual information such as the existence of communication links, facilities and organisations along with an explanation of how local people use those facilities. Put simply, we want to know **why** a particular proposal reflects local communities. For example, why does a road unite the surrounding communities when roads can often divide areas?

Below are some issues that we often use to assess community interests and identity. You may wish to use some of these examples to tell us why you are putting forward your view:

Transport links – Are there good communication links within the proposed ward or division? Is there any form of public transport? If you are proposing that two areas (e.g. villages, estates or parishes) should be included in the same ward or division together, how easily can you travel between them?

Community groups – Is there a residents group or any other local organisation that represents the area? What area does that group cover? What kind of activities do they undertake and are there any joint-working relationships between organisations that could indicate shared community interests between different geographical areas?

Facilities – Where do local people in your area go for shopping, medical services, leisure facilities etc? The location of public facilities can represent the centre or focal point of a community. We would like to hear evidence from local people about how they interact with those facilities so that we can understand the shape of local communities and the movement and behaviours of their residents.

Identifiable boundaries – Natural features such as rivers, valleys and woodland can often provide strong and recognisable boundaries. Similarly, constructions such as major roads and railway lines can also form well known barriers between communities.

Parishes - In areas where parishes exist, the parish boundaries often represent the extent of a community. In fact, the Commission often uses parishes as the building blocks of wards and electoral divisions.

Shared interests – Are there particular issues that affect your community which aren't necessarily relevant to neighbouring areas that might help us determine where a ward or division boundary should be drawn? For example, many local authorities contain areas which have urban, suburban and rural

characteristics. Each of those areas may have different needs and interests though they could be located next to each other. One area might be more affected by urban issues such as the local economy while an adjacent area might be more concerned with local transport matters. We would like to hear evidence about what those issues are and how they mean ward boundaries should combine or separate the areas in question.

3. Promoting effective and convenient local government and reflecting electoral cycles

The third factor the Commission must consider, by law, in making recommendations for new electoral arrangements is the need to secure effective and convenient local government and ensure that the council has a ward pattern that reflects its electoral cycle.

We will therefore consider the following issues before we recommend a pattern of wards or divisions for your area:

Number of councillors in each ward or division - there is no limit to the number of councillors that can be elected to represent a ward or division. However, we would not normally accept a proposal for more than three councillors to represent a ward.

The Commission has to abide by certain rules when deciding how many councillors should represent a ward and, in particular, we have a responsibility to ensure that patterns of wards reflect the electoral cycle of the local authority. The law² states that where a council hold elections in three years out of every four where a third of councillors are elected at each election ('by thirds'), we should seek to deliver a pattern of three-member wards across a district. This means that every voter will have an equal opportunity to influence the make up of the council at each election. Similarly, if a district council elects half its councillors every other year ('by halves'), we should seek to deliver a pattern of two-member wards across the district.

If you live in a district which elects by thirds, you should bear in mind that the Commission will seek to propose three-member wards in your area. We will only move away from such a pattern where a three-member ward would significantly undermine our other obligations under the law, namely: to deliver electoral equality, reflect community interests and identities and promote effective and convenient local government. The rules we must follow are summarised in Figure Two below.

Where a council holds whole-council elections every four years (this includes all county councils and London boroughs), the Commission is able to propose any pattern of wards or divisions that it believes best meets its statutory criteria. This is usually a mixture of single-, two- and three-member wards or divisions.

² Section 2, Schedule 2, Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

Figure Two: councillors per ward depending on electoral cycle

Electoral cycle of council	Pattern of wards sought by Commission	Types of authority affected
By thirds	Three-member	Some district and metropolitan borough councils
By halves	Two-member	Some district councils
Whole-council elections	Any pattern of single-, two- and three-member wards or divisions	All county councils, London borough and some district councils

Size of ward or division – we will look at the geographic size of the ward or division and try to ensure that it is not so large that it would be difficult for a councillor to represent. Similarly, in urban areas, a ward might be so small in area that its councillor might not be able to contribute effectively to the wider business of the council.

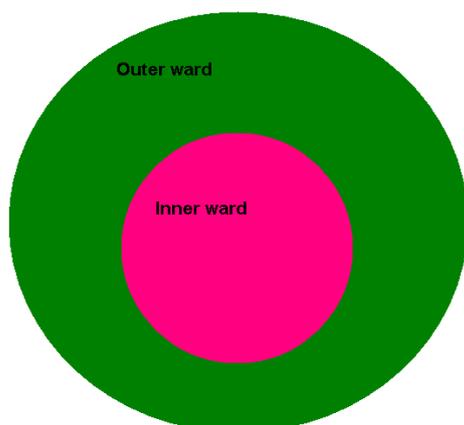
District council boundaries – if we are carrying out a review of a county council, electoral divisions will never cross the existing district council boundary. This is a rule which is set out in law³ so that all electoral divisions will be wholly contained within a district.

Coterminosity – if we are carrying out a review of a county council, we will try to match the boundary of the new electoral divisions – as far as possible – with the existing district ward boundaries. Where existing district ward boundaries match the boundaries of electoral divisions, we call it ‘coterminosity’ where coordination between the two councils in question can help to deliver effective and convenient local government.

‘Doughnut’ wards – we occasionally receive proposals for a pattern of wards which propose an ‘inner’ ward and an ‘outer’ ward for a town or village (see Figure Three below). We will not normally recommend this kind of pattern because the communication links between the north and south of the outer ward are usually poor and we also often find that people in the northern part of the outer ward share higher levels of community identity with residents in the north of the inner ward than with residents in the south of the outer ward. Where we need to split a town or village to achieve electoral equality, we will usually seek an alternative to this pattern.

³ Schedule 2, Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

Figure Three: 'Doughnut' ward



Detached ward – we are sometimes presented with proposals to include two geographically separate areas in the same ward or division. We will not usually accept a proposal of this kind as it is unlikely to meet our criteria for promoting community identity and interests or delivering effective and convenient local government.

Ward and electoral division names - the names of wards and divisions are often important to local people. The Commission rarely has strong views on this aspect of a review and will usually use names which have been put to us by local people. Where there is no consensus, we will make our decision based on which name best reflects the communities contained within the ward. We will also seek to ensure that ward names are distinct from others in the area to avoid confusion for voters. For example, we will consider whether the proposed name of a ward is too long to be easily recognised by local people and that there is some consistency in the way wards have been named across the local authority area.

A district or county council can also opt to change the name of a ward or division outside the review process.

4. Other things to consider

The Commission will base its decisions primarily on its three main statutory criteria set out in the sections above. However, there are a few other things you should remember if you're putting together a proposal.

Single-member ward review - councils whose electoral cycle means that they elect the whole council every four years can ask the Commission to carry out a single-member ward or division review. This means that the Commission will seek to deliver a pattern of wards or divisions across the district or county which are represented by one councillor.

Changing electoral cycles - the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 allows councils to change their cycle of elections under certain circumstances. The provision means that some councils who currently elect by thirds can move to whole-council elections every four years (or vice versa). As a result, the Commission would not need to try and deliver a uniform pattern of three-member wards across the district.

Other things we don't usually consider - there are a number of things the Commission does not consider to be strong evidence when it takes decisions. For example, an area's history and tradition may be the basis of a sense of community identity. However, communities change over time and perceptions can vary between individuals as to the nature of those ties. The Commission would need to hear how and why those traditional arrangements reflect communities **now**.

In addition, whilst social and economic data (e.g. from the census or other statistical sources) can tell you a lot about individuals living in an area, it doesn't necessarily explain the nature of communities and is often a poor guide their interests and identities. The Commission considers that this kind of evidence can provide useful background information but we will treat it with caution when proposing new wards or divisions and their boundaries.

Previous examples

You might also find it useful to have a look at previous reviews where the Commission received persuasive evidence on ward and division arrangements which it subsequently recommended as part of its draft or final proposals.

Case study: Northampton Borough Council

In October 2009, the Commission invited proposals for a new ward pattern for Northampton Borough Council as part of its electoral review. In preparing its submission to the Commission, the Borough Council formed a cross-party working group of councillors to draw up its proposals which were subsequently submitted to the Commission.

The council's working group considered the need to secure electoral equality as part of its evidence as well as assessing the various identities and interests of communities across the borough before proposing a pattern of wards. In its final submission to the Commission, the working group was able to describe each ward and why it met the Commission's statutory criteria. The council had also carried out a public consultation on its proposals to assess local people's views.

The Commission found the evidence provided by the council's working group to be persuasive in most areas and based its draft recommendations on their work.

The relevant submission can be found on the Commission's website at:

http://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/16325/northampton-stage-one-submission-northampton-borough-council-2010-21-01.pdf

Case study: Prestbury Parish Council

In May 2011, the Commission published its draft recommendations for a new pattern of electoral divisions for Gloucestershire County Council. In its initial recommendations, the Commission proposed that the parish of Prestbury should be linked with the parish of Swindon in the same electoral division.

The Commission received evidence from Prestbury Parish Council which included evidence that the parish shared community interests and identity with Pittsville parish rather than Swindon. They cited shared transport routes, the location and usage of schools and a library as well as shared issues around a major new development in the area which affected its own area as well as Pittsville's residents.

The Commission found that the parish council's evidence made a persuasive case that Prestbury and Pittsville shared common community interests and identity and, as such, proposed that they formed part of the same electoral division as part of its final recommendations.

You can read Prestbury Parish Council's submission on our website:

http://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/16081/all-parish-and-town-councils-glouc-stage3-sub-2011-08-05_redacted.pdf

Case study: Goffs Oak Community Association

In May 2011, the Commission published draft recommendations for a new pattern of wards for Broxbourne. It proposed that the area of Goffs Oak should form part of a ward with the adjacent Bury Green part of the Borough.

The Goffs Oak Community Association supplied evidence to the Commission proposing that their area shared greater community identity and interests with the Hammond Street area rather than the Bury Green Area.

The Association provided evidence of community facilities, transport links and local organisations which were used by people in the Goffs Oak and Hammond Street areas which suggested that the two areas shared a community identity to a greater extent than the proposals made by the Commission. The Association was able to point out that an alternative proposal, put forward by the council, would provide for good levels of electoral equality as well as meeting the Commission's obligations on community interests and identity.

The Commission accepted the evidence presented to it and proposed the change in its final recommendations. The Goffs Oak Community Association submission can be accessed on the Commission's website:

http://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/15450/goffs-oak-community-association-broxbourne-stage-three-submission-2011-07-25.pdf

What happens next?

If you are responding to the information gathering stage of the review, the Commission will consider your views before producing a set of draft recommendations for new wards and ward boundaries across your local authority area. You will get another chance to have your say when we publish draft recommendations. Once we've gathered all the views expressed to us during the draft recommendations consultation stage, we will then publish final recommendations.

You will find all the advice you need to take part in any other stages of the electoral review, as well as the timetable, on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk and through our consultation portal at consultation.lgbce.org.uk.

How you can have your say

Website: you can keep track of the electoral review for your area through our website at www.lgbce.org.uk. We set up a dedicated web page for each review where you will find details of its timetable, our reports, maps, proposals and guidance.

Email: You can make a submission to us directly through our website or by emailing: reviews@lgbce.org.uk.

Write: to us at:

Local Government Boundary Commission for England
3rd Floor, Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG

Interactive consultation portal: we have built a dedicated consultation portal as part of our website which allows you to have your say during any part of our consultation.

The portal includes interactive maps where you can search for your area, zoom into any part of it and compare the existing arrangements with our proposals. You can also have your say directly through the portal.

Just log on to our website at www.lgbce.org.uk or go directly to consultation.lgbce.org.uk to have your say.

Hard copies: we always make hard copies of our maps and reports available to local authorities and asked that they are placed on display in libraries and other council buildings.

Quick briefing: How to propose a pattern of wards or divisions

The Commission aims to propose electoral arrangements for a local authority which:

- Mean that each local councillor represents a similar number of voters.
- Reflect the identity and interests of local communities
- Promote effective and convenient local government and ensure that the pattern of wards reflects the council's electoral cycle.

The checklist below lists some of the factors you should consider if you are putting together your own boundary proposals.

You can find out more information about this electoral review and the Commission on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

A good pattern of wards or divisions should:

- Provide **good electoral equality**, with each councillor representing a similar number of voters.
- Reflect **community interests and identities** and include evidence of community links.
- Be based on strong, **easily identifiable boundaries**.
- Help the council deliver **effective and convenient local government**.

Useful tips:

- Our website has all the information you will need about electorate figures, maps of the area and other useful information.
- Changing the boundary of one ward can cause knock-on effects elsewhere in the area.
- We publish all submissions we receive on our website so you can follow what other people and organisations are telling us.
- Our consultation portal allows you to interact with maps of your area and to look in more detail at current and proposed boundaries. Access it through consultation.lgbce.org.uk.

Have your say:

By post: The Review Officer
LGBCE

Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG

By email: reviews@lgbce.org.uk

Electoral equality:

- Does your proposal mean that councillors would represent roughly the same number of voters as elsewhere in the council area?

Community identity:

- **Transport links:** are there good links across your proposed ward? Is there any form of public transport?
- **Community groups:** is there a parish council, residents association or another group that represents the area?
- **Facilities:** does your pattern of wards reflect where local people go for shopping, medical services, leisure facilities etc?
- **Interests:** what issues bind the community together or separate it from other parts of your area?
- **Identifiable boundaries:** are there natural or constructed features which make strong boundaries for your proposals?

Effective local government:

- Are any of the proposed wards too large or small to be represented effectively?
- Are the proposed names of the wards appropriate?

Councillors per ward:

- If your council elects 'by thirds' we will look to create a pattern of three-member wards across your council area. If not, we can propose a mixed pattern of wards