

The
Local Government
Boundary Commission
for England



Corporate plan

2011-12 to 2015-16

Electoral equality

Effective and convenient local government

HC XXX

Corporate plan

2011-12 to 2015-16

Presented to the House of Commons pursuant to Paragraph 12 of Schedule 1 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

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Foreword

This is the second Corporate Plan and five year strategy of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). The plan sets out how we intend to achieve our two principal aims:

- To provide boundary arrangements for English local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters.
 - To keep the map of English local government in good repair and work with local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens.
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As a Commission, we have unique powers not only to deliver fair electoral arrangements for voters across England but also to assist local authorities in meeting the considerable challenges they face in the current economic climate.

This Corporate Plan provides details of how we intend to increase outputs, widen the scope of our activities and work more closely with the local government community to strengthen English local government.

Section One explains how we aim to deliver a programme of electoral reviews to reduce the number of English local authorities with significant electoral imbalances from 18% (in 2010) to 10% in the lifetime of the plan.

Section Two sets out how we will introduce a new programme of principal area boundary reviews (PABRs) that will re-draw the external boundaries of local authorities where such changes would facilitate convenient and effective local government. The review programme will address minor anomalies that impede the effective delivery of frontline local government services as well as dealing with more substantial boundary changes, such as whole-council mergers.

Section Three explains how we intend to increase our review activity against a funding profile that will deliver accumulated efficiency savings of approximately 28% over the course of the plan.

Section Four describes our corporate capacity to deliver our aims. As a new organisation, we will continue to develop our corporate policies and staff as well as building stronger relationships with Parliamentarians and the local government community.

Section Five details how we intend to measure performance across our activities. The plan strengthens our Key Performance Indicators and sets ambitious targets on achieving electoral equality, responding to requests made by local authorities and delivering excellent customer service to our key partners within local government and beyond.

We have demonstrably delivered the aims set out in our first Corporate Plan. We are in the process of completing the review programme left to us by our predecessor body, the Boundary Committee for England¹, and have subsequently increased review activity in 2010/11.

Over the past 12 months, the Commission has also adapted to the new legislative framework within which it operates. Under the terms of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, all Orders for the implementation of LGBCE recommendations require scrutiny in both Houses of Parliament – a new process for implementing new electoral

arrangements. The LGBCE successfully made twelve Orders in 2010/11 which implement new electoral arrangements for local authorities representing over 2.5 million people.

When the LGBCE was established in April 2010, we gave an undertaking to review our policies and procedures on both electoral reviews and PABRs. Over the past year, and in line with our 2010/11 Corporate Plan, we have carried out that review and have consulted widely within the local government community and elsewhere on proposals to introduce new ways of delivering both types of review.

On the basis of that major consultation, we will

publish updated technical guidance in the first quarter of 2011/12 to advise and inform on our approach to the conduct of every future review. The guidance, and our new approach, will allow us to carry out a wider range of work, speed up individual reviews by up to 50% and ensure that our programme is flexible enough to respond effectively to the wide-ranging needs of local authorities.

Our strategy for the next five years aims to deliver a flexible programme of reviews that balances our responsibility to deliver electoral fairness for voters with our objective to help local authorities across England achieve their ambitions.

¹ The Boundary Committee for England was a statutory committee of the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission's boundary-related functions were transferred to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on 1 April 2010

Our work: an overview

Our objectives:

1. To provide boundary arrangements for English local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters.
2. To keep the map of English local government in good repair and work with local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens.

Our core activities:

We are responsible for conducting three types of review of local government:

- **Electoral Reviews** – Reviews of the internal electoral arrangements of local authorities: the number of councillors, names, number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions. Electoral reviews are initiated primarily to improve electoral equality but can also be carried out by request, for example, to address council size (the total number of councillors elected to a local authority) or provide for single-member wards or divisions.
- **Principal Area Boundary Reviews (PABRs)** – Reviews of the external boundaries of local authorities, intended to reflect community identities and to promote effective and convenient and effective local government. Reviews of this nature range from addressing minor boundary anomalies that hinder effective service delivery but affect only a few electors to whole-council mergers. A PABR may also give rise to the need for a consequential electoral review of the local authority(ies) involved where the scale and/or nature of the boundary change requires it.
- **Structural Reviews** - Advising the Secretary of State, on request, on the structure of local government in an area following proposals from local authorities to change from two-tier to unitary local government. The Government has indicated that it has no current plans to seek our advice on structural reviews and, as such, they do not form part of this five year strategy.

Our values:

- **Independent** – We are not part of Government and our decisions are not influenced by party political considerations.
- **Impartial** – Our decisions are based on evidence and reason.
- **Professional** – We strive for the highest standards in how we operate and how we work with the public, local authorities and other key partners.

Section One: electoral equality

Objective One: To provide boundary arrangements for English local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters.

Electoral equality, namely each elector having a vote of equal weight in his or her local authority's elections, is a fundamental democratic principle. Over the period covered by this Corporate Plan, we aim to carry out a programme of electoral reviews so that, by the end of 2015/16, significant levels of electoral inequality² affect 10% of local authorities compared to the current figure of 18%.

As well as identifying and addressing electoral inequality across English local authorities, we will include in our programme electoral reviews in response to formal requests from councils. Where councils wish to move to a pattern of single-member wards or divisions, for example, or where local authorities wish to alter the size of the council (i.e. the

number of councillors), we will seek to respond positively to those requests.

In the forthcoming year, we will also introduce greater flexibility and efficiency into the way we conduct reviews. By allocating reviews into three different streams according to their complexity (Types 'A', 'B' and 'C'), we will be able to undertake reviews in which the work involved, both for us and for interested parties, is proportionate to the scale of the issues to be addressed. Our aim is that for a 'Type A' review, where the changes are likely to be discrete and affect only a few wards, will aim to publish final recommendations within six months, halving the current review timescale³.

Our new procedures for electoral reviews and

their associated efficiencies will introduce greater flexibility into the overall work programme of the Commission. In turn, this head room will allow the Commission to introduce a new programme of PABRs and electoral reviews in 2011/12 which will respond directly to requests made by local authorities.

Table One illustrates progress made on the aims set out in our previous Corporate plan as well as giving details of the proposed programme of electoral reviews for 2011/12.

Table Two sets out our intentions for electoral reviews over the five year period of this Plan and its effect on overall levels of electoral inequality.

² Significant levels of electoral inequality in a local authority are defined as: more than 30% of its wards/divisions have an electoral imbalance (ratio of electors to members) of more than 10% from the average for the authority; and/or it has one ward/division with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%; and the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by population change within a reasonable period.

³ For planning purposes, the Commission will assume that the average length of a review will be 12 months as the new procedures become embedded in the first years of this plan so as not to risk the deliverability of the programme. Following publication of final recommendations, the Commission is then obliged to lay draft orders in both Houses of Parliament for 40 days under the negative resolution procedure.

Table One: Electoral Reviews

	Objectives set for 2010/11	Outcomes 2010/11	Objectives for 2011/12
1. Electoral reviews of areas with significant electoral imbalances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will complete reviews in Northampton, South Derbyshire, West Somerset and Sedgemoor. ■ We will commence reviews of 16 local authorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reviews completed for Northampton, South Derbyshire, West Somerset and Sedgemoor. ■ Reviews commenced in 14 local authority areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will complete reviews of Rugby, West Lindsey, Swindon, Daventry, Hartlepool, Staffordshire, Rushmoor, Broxbourne, Surrey, Buckinghamshire, Cumbria, Hart and Oxfordshire. ■ We will commence reviews in 14 local authority areas.
2. Electoral reviews of new unitary authorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will complete reviews of Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester, Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and County Durham⁴. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reviews completed for Cornwall, Northumberland, Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester, Bedford and Central Bedfordshire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will complete the electoral review of County Durham. ■ Reviews of new unitary authorities will all have been completed in 2011/12.
3. Electoral reviews in response to requests by the Secretary of State and/or local authorities to deliver effective and convenient local government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will complete reviews of Mansfield and Stoke-on-Trent. ■ We will commence an electoral review of Gloucestershire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reviews completed for Mansfield and Stoke-on-Trent. ■ Review commenced in Gloucestershire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will commence reviews in seven local authority areas in direct response to requests from authorities⁵. ■ We will complete the review of Gloucestershire.
4. Liaising with the local government community on electoral review procedure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will consult the Local Government Association and other interested parties in developing our review related policies and procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consultation carried out with all local authorities, LGA, local councils and other interested parties on new procedures for all future electoral reviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will publish new technical guidance to introduce faster, proportionate and more flexible electoral review processes.

⁴ As a result of major fluctuations in voter registration in County Durham during the general Election period in 2010, the LGBCE postponed publication of final recommendations until the Commission has confidence in the electorate data and associated electoral variances. New electoral arrangements for County Durham are still scheduled to come into effect, as planned, at the county council elections in 2013.

⁵ Figure includes requested electoral reviews and PABRs.

Table Two: Planning assumptions for electoral review programme

Planning Assumptions	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
No. of local authorities	352	352	352	352	352	352
No. with electoral inequality at 1 April	64	64	61	51	46	41
Add new cases of inequality (projected from the average of last 5 years) ⁶	8	10	10	10	10	10
Reviews planned for completion to address electoral imbalances	8	13	20 ⁷	15	15	15
Authorities with imbalance at end of year	64	61	51	46	41	36
Proportion of local authorities with electoral imbalance at end of year	18%	17%	14%	13%	12%	10%
Reviews planned for completion for other reasons ⁸	4	2	-	-	-	-

⁶ Several external factors can influence the number of local authorities that meet the Commission's intervention criteria such as the natural movement of populations, housing development, and changes in how voter registration is undertaken. The Commission will refine its programme in the light of any fluctuations of this kind.

⁷ The Commission's publication of new technical guidance will allow it to deliver some 'fast track' reviews from 2011/12, reflected in its planning assumptions. In later years, the programme allows headroom for the Commission to deliver a larger number of PABRs and electoral reviews on request by local authorities whilst still tackling electoral inequality.

⁸ The Commission has re-classified electoral reviews which were conducted - or are being conducted - for reasons other than to address significant electoral imbalances such as its reviews relating to new unitary authorities (e.g. for Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester) or under its policy to deliver effective and convenient local government (e.g. Stoke-on-Trent).

Section Two: effective and convenient local government

Objective Two: To keep the map of English local government in good repair and work with local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens.

Few principal area boundary reviews (PABRs) - reviews of the external boundaries of local authorities - have been conducted since 1992. Between 1992 and 2007, legislation dictated that only the Secretary of State could initiate such reviews.

From discussions with partners in the local government community and elsewhere, it is clear that there is now an appetite amongst a number of local authorities who believe that there would be benefits in a PABR of their area.

In our consultations with local authorities and others, there is currently demand for approximately 30 PABRs across England. These range from correcting minor boundary anomalies which affect only a small number of electors, but which may have a disproportionate

impact on service delivery, to proposals for whole-council mergers. Our intention is to make the potential for a PABR available to local authorities in England from 2011/12 onwards.

Not all PABR requests by authorities will proceed to the review stage. By definition, PABRs will involve at least two local authorities and we believe that the views of the local community should be considered before a review is initiated. In commencing our programme we are not minded to sanction or recommend 'hostile' takeovers, and will focus initially on delivering PABRs where they are supported locally and, in the case of major changes, where sound business cases have been developed.

Our Corporate Plan for 2010/11 expressed an aim to develop new procedures to govern the

PABR process. We have now conducted our policy review and consulted the local government community and others on our proposed approach. The results of that consultation will inform the technical guidance we will publish at the start of 2011/12.

In addition to demand generated by local authorities, we are also aware of a considerable number of extremely minor boundary anomalies, many of which do not affect electors, which were been identified by Ordnance Survey, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Boundary Committee for England. With the publication of technical guidance on the conduct of PABRs, we aim to add these anomalies to our programme but without setting a specific target for completion, since that might adversely affect our

work in assisting local authorities that have requested reviews.

At a time when local authorities are considering innovative and radical approaches to address financial challenges, such as sharing services and re-assessing governance arrangements, PABRs

present them with an option that could deliver more effective and convenient local government and associated financial savings.

Table Three shows the LGBCE's planning assumptions on PABRs over the course of the five year strategy.

Table Four illustrates progress we have made against the aims set out in our previous Corporate Plan in relation to PABRs as well as giving details of our proposals for 2011/12.

Table Three: Planning assumptions for PABR programme

Planning Assumptions	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
No. of requests received	c.32	7	8	8	9	10
Of which identified as likely to proceed to review	5	2	2	2	2	2
PABRs planned for completion	0	0	1	3	3	3
No. of PABRs identified as likely to proceed to review but uncompleted	5	7	8	7	6	5

Table Four: Principal Area Boundary Reviews (PABRs)

	Objectives set for 2010/11	Outcomes 2010/11	Objectives for 2011/12
1. Liaising with the local government community on procedures for PABRs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>We will consult with the Local Government Association and other interested bodies over our approach to principal area boundary reviews.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consultation carried out with all local authorities, LGA, local councils and other interested parties on new procedures for a programme of PABRs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will publish new technical guidance to explain PABR process to local authorities and other interested parties.
2. A programme of PABRs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>We will consult local authorities over the need for boundary reviews and develop a programme of work.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All English local authorities have been contacted by the LGBC to alert them to the opportunities available as a result of the emerging PABR programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will publish a programme of PABRs in response to requests made to us⁹.

⁹ In 2011/12, the Commission aims to add seven reviews (either PABR or electoral review) to its work programme in direct response to requests from local authorities.

Section Three: resources

The LGBCE will deliver its programme of reviews on a funding profile that will accumulate efficiency savings of approximately 28% over the course of the five year Plan.

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Table Five summarises our five year resource plan. It includes efficiency savings of 2.5% a year. If inflationary pressures are taken into account, we are effectively delivering efficiency savings of 5% each year - an accumulated efficiency saving of 27.6%.

The forecast outturn for 2010/11 is £2,463k which represents an underspend of approximately £400k against the budget set before our separation from the Electoral Commission. In our first year as a stand-alone body, the Commission

has taken the opportunity to re-base its budget to reflect the efficiencies it has achieved through the outsourcing of some services and our reduced overheads overall. Table Five shows how we intend to embed those savings in the five year strategy.

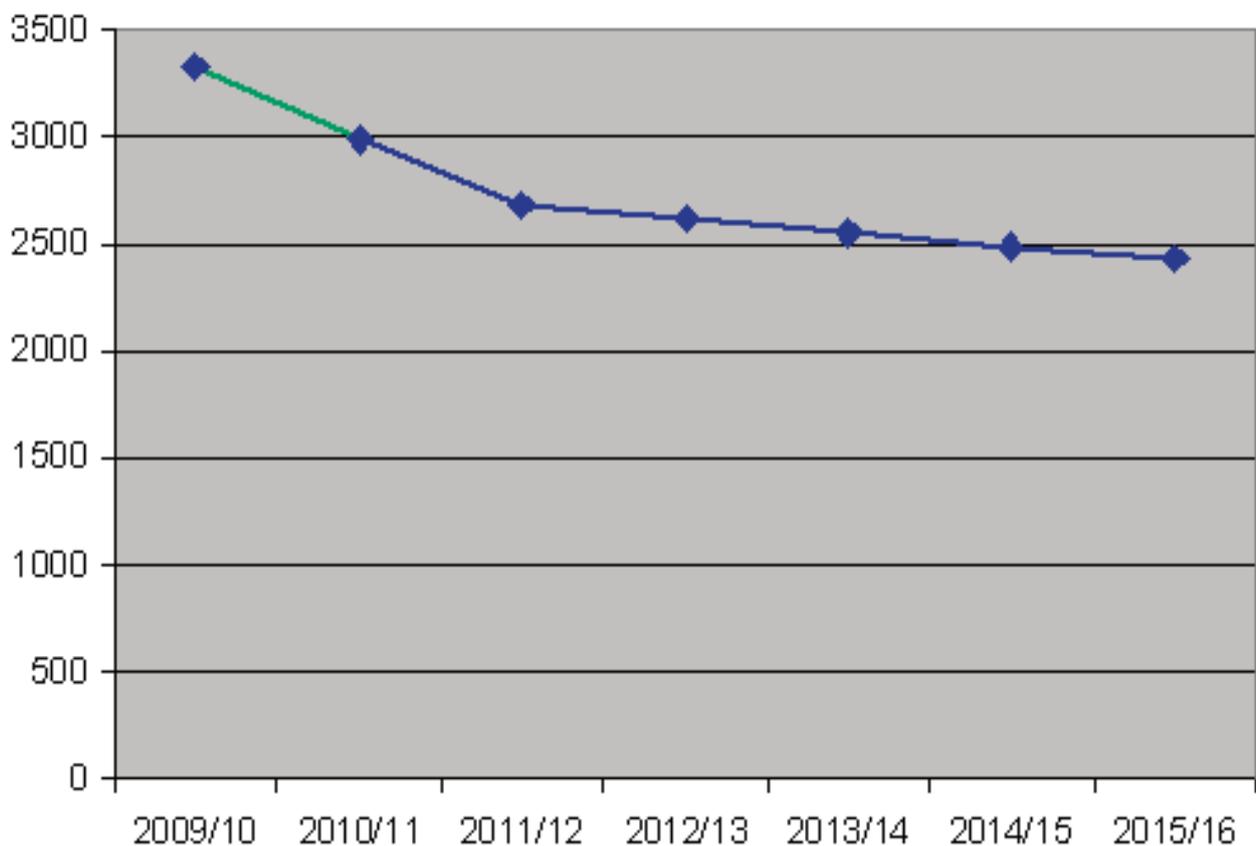
Savings have been achieved through not filling less business critical posts and by scrutinising external costs such as mapping and printing. Ongoing savings will be achieved through closer working with our provider of joint services and through the delivery of a more efficient review process as set out in our proposals for new technical guidance on both electoral reviews and PABRs.

We have assumed a capital budget of £50k in each year of the strategy (reduced from £100k in 2010/11) to meet requirements for new or replacement systems and equipment, as the needs of the organisation will now be met more efficiently through its outsourced service provider.

This Corporate Plan and associated strategy allows us to deliver an increased level of review activity within a funding regime that is considerably less than that incurred by the Electoral Commission carrying out its boundary activities - £3.3m in 2009/10.

Table Five: Planned funding profile - five year budget breakdown

	2010/11 (£000)	2011/12 (£000)	2012/13 (£000)	2013/14 (£000)	2014/15 (£000)	2015/16 (£000)
Staff (including Commissioners)	1,350	1,360	1,295	1,295	1,260	1,225
Rents, rates and service charges	519	620 ¹⁰	620	600	600	600
Mapping and printing	423	350	350	325	315	300
Other costs (travel, professional costs etc)	553	303	302	283	265	254
Revenue Total	2,845	2,633	2,567	2,503	2,440	2,379
Capital	100	50	50	50	50	50
Total	2,945	2,683	2,617	2,553	2,490	2,429

Figure One: Boundary Committee (2009/10) and LGBCE funding profile (2010/11 - 2015/16)

¹⁰ Increase from 2010/11 due to VAT on Service Charges transferring from 'Other Costs'.

Section Four: corporate capacity

We are a small organisation with significant powers to effect positive change across English local government. As a newly independent body, we have focused on increasing our capacity over the past 12 months so that we are now in a position to deliver an expanded programme of reviews from 2011/12 onwards within a reducing a funding profile.

Review capacity

Over the course of 2010/11, we carried out a fundamental review of our policies and procedures for both electoral reviews and PABRs. In 2011/12, we will publish new technical guidance and time-lines for each type of review that will allow us to increase the capacity of our programme compared to historic and current levels.

On electoral reviews, for example, the proposal to have a differential approach by adopting three types of review, will allow for the timescale of some to be reduced by up to 50%

thereby increasing our capacity to carry out more reviews whilst continuing to guarantee high professional standards. This will also release capacity for us to embark on our proposed programme of new PABRs (see Section Two).

Resource capacity

Our outsourcing of several back office services in an agreement with the Local Government Association (LGA) has already achieved savings and will allow us to focus our resources on front line review activity in 2011/12 and beyond.

Over the coming year, we will also continue to work to establish the unit cost of each type of review to support business planning over the duration of the five year plan. From this analysis, we will gain a better idea of how we could further reduce costs and increase the capacity of the programme if demand for reviews from local authorities continues to rise.

Commissioners

We will start 2011/12 with seven Commissioners, an increase of two from the beginning of the previous year. This will complement the planned increase in the volume of decision-making over the coming 12 months.

Staff

Recruitment over 2010/11 has been limited to the most business-critical posts, with two posts deleted from the original structure chart submitted as part of the last Corporate Plan. Our current structure is set out in **Figure Two**.

Governance

At our first meeting on 15 April 2010, the Commission agreed a corporate governance framework which sets out the full responsibilities of Commissioners, committees and officers. During the course of the year, we have also updated the corporate policies left to us by the Electoral Commission. During 2011/12, we will finalise the entire range of internal

corporate policies on matters such as information security, equalities and data protection.

Risk

We will refine our corporate risk register, covering strategic and operational risks for 2011/12. Responsibility for monitoring, updating and taking action on risks will be shared across the senior management team.

Reputation and relationships

As a new organisation, we will continue to strengthen our relationships with key partners in local government and in Parliament. We are committed to ensuring that our final recommendations on electoral reviews have the confidence of Parliamentarians – who ultimately decide whether new electoral and boundary arrangements should be implemented – as well as local authorities themselves and voters.

In 2010/11, the Chair of Commission met 23 Parliamentarians to brief them on reviews relating to their constituency or on the work of the Commission generally. In the coming year, we aim to increase contact with MPs and Peers to inform them about the work of the Commission and/or individual reviews. We will also engage with the relevant Select Committee in the House of Commons to brief members on our strategic aims and hear the views of that forum on the direction of the Commission.

We are answerable to the Speaker's Committee and will provide members with our proposed five year plan and estimated resource requirements for 2011/12 as well as providing our estimate for income and expenditure for 2012/13 for their approval.

We will also maintain our constructive relationships with the Leadership Board and staff at the Local

Government Association (LGA) and will continue to consult them on policy development and practice. We will continue to engage actively with the local government community through the LGA Annual Conference and other local government events. Similarly, we will keep Ministers and senior staff at the Department for Communities and Local Government briefed on our strategy.

A new communications strategy to be agreed for 2011/12 will also seek to strengthen our relationship and communications with each of our key audience groups. This will cover activities such as direct contact with local authorities who are undergoing a review as well as engaging more members of the public in consultation on reviews.

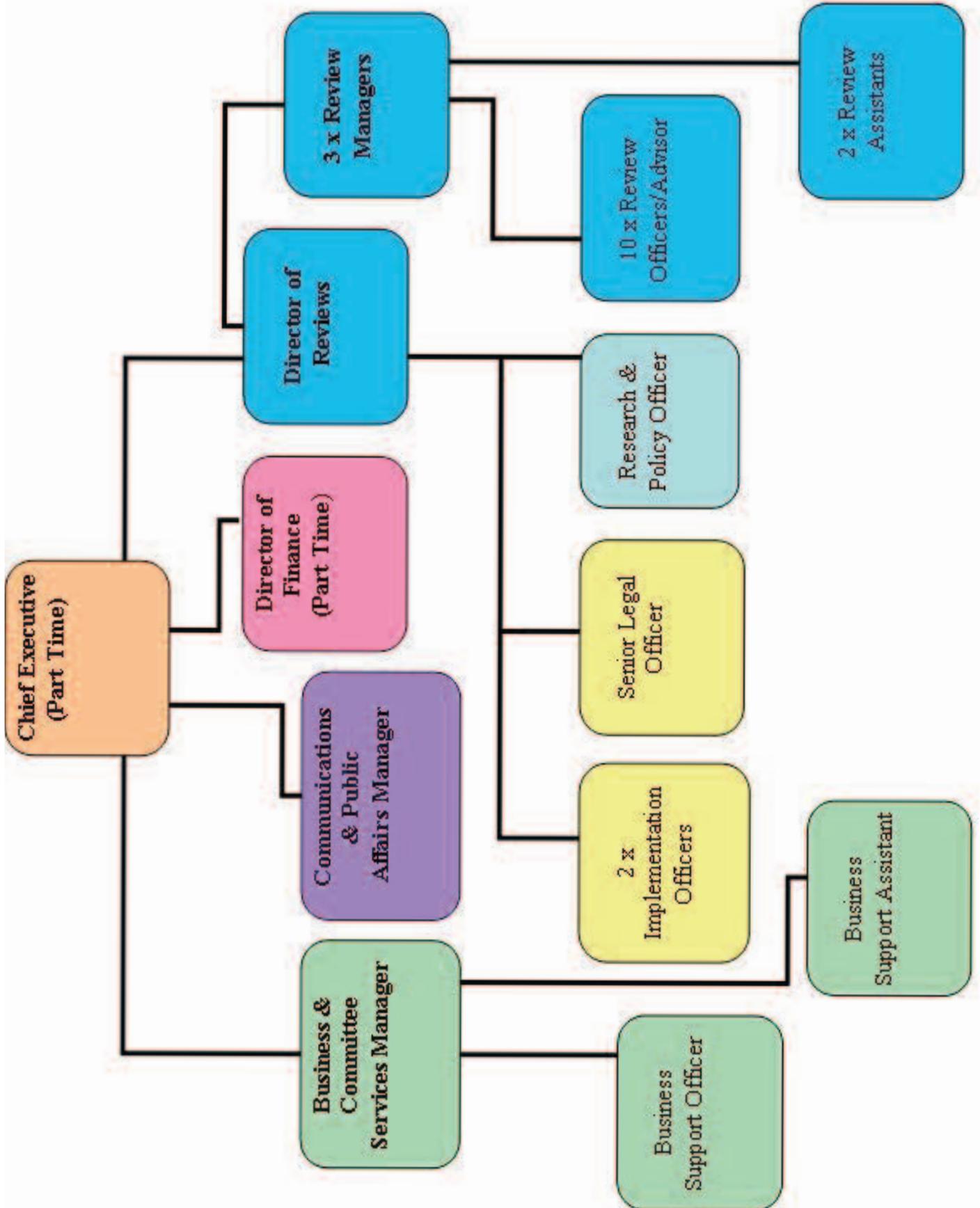


Figure Two: LGBCE structure chart 2011/12

Section Five: performance

In 2011/12, we will embark on the most ambitious programme of activity in the recent history of local government boundary reviews. Our performance management framework has been designed to challenge the effectiveness of the programme and whether it both delivers the objectives of the organisation and reflects the values of the Commission.

We have devised a series of measures to assess the outputs and the outcomes of the review programme for 2011/12. Our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) reflect our two core objectives set out in the plan: to deliver electoral equality in English local government; and to facilitate boundary changes intended to reflect community identities and to promote effective and convenient local government.

The KPIs set out in **Table Six** below will also test the extent to which our

values are reflected by the perception of the public and our partner organisations. The indicator relating to customer satisfaction, for example, will assess whether those involved in reviews see the organisation as independent, impartial and professional.

In 2011/12, we will demonstrate our commitment to working more closely with the local government community by including a KPI which reflects our responsiveness to requests for reviews. Our Corporate Plan and five year strategy emphasises our intent not only to intervene where electoral inequality exists, but also an ambition to respond positively and in a timely manner to local authorities who believe we can use our unique powers to facilitate the delivery of more effective and convenient local government.

The indicators listed below are supported by a series of management indicators that we will use

to assess the status of the review programme. Responsibility for monitoring and KPIs and Management Indicators will be shared across the senior management team.

We also wish to develop during the course of 2011/12 a methodology that enables us to capture and evaluate the extent to which there is local satisfaction, both among councillors and residents, with new electoral arrangements we have put in place. This could then be developed into a new KPI for future years.

Additionally, we plan to carry out an analysis during 2011/12 to test the reliability of the electoral forecasts provided by local authorities during reviews completed over recent years. This will provide us with an assessment of the longevity of our recommendations in delivering electoral equality as well as suggesting improvements in the methodology used for predicting electorates in future reviews.

Table Six: Key Performance Indicators 2011/12

	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Target 2011/12
1.	Percentage of local authorities with significant ¹¹ electoral imbalances ¹² .	17%
2.	Number of local authorities' requested reviews that are programmed - at 1 April - for review (electoral review or PABR).	7
3.	Aggregate percentage customer satisfaction with review processes ¹³ .	>70%
4.	Percentage of electoral change orders which, following reviews by the Commission, come into effect at the election expected when the review was first programmed.	95%
5.	Average unit cost of reviews ¹⁴ .	NEW
6.	Percentage variance from total budget.	<3%

¹¹ Significant levels of electoral inequality in a local authority are defined as: more than 30% of its wards/divisions have an electoral imbalance (ratio of electors to members) of more than 10% from the average for the authority; and/or it has one ward/division with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%; and the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by population change within a reasonable period.

¹² See Table Two (page 8).

¹³ Based on the LGBCE opinion survey despatched to everyone who took part in a review and available to all visitors to the Commission's website. 'Satisfaction' is defined as the description of the Commission's conduct, products or publications as "very good" or "quite good". The indicator is the number of respondents answering in that way as a percentage of the total number of respondents (including those answering in neutral terms). This replicates standard practice as represented in the OGC's best practice guidance.

¹⁴ Baseline to be established in 2011/12.

Section Six: The Commission

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) comprises a Chair who is supported by six Commissioners.

Max Caller CBE - Chair
Professor Colin Mellors - Deputy Chair
Jane Earl
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL
Professor Colin Mellors CBE
Sir Tony Redmond*
Dr Colin Sinclair
Professor Paul Wiles

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill

* Expected to be appointed to the Commission from 1 April 2011.

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for England (LGBCE)**

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