

Local Government Boundary Committee for England

Corporate Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25

Presented to the House of Commons pursuant to Paragraph
11(5) of Schedule 1 to the Local Democracy, Economic
Development and Construction Act 2009

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 22/04/2020



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This publication is available at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at 1st Floor, Windsor House, 50, Victoria Street, London SW1H 0TL

Tel: 0330 500 1263

ISBN 978-1-5286-1871-7

CCS0420433430 04/20

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by the APS Group on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Corporate Plan

2020/21 to 2024/25



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1. Foreword

I am pleased to present the Commission's Corporate Plan and five-year strategy for the period 2020/21 to 2024/25.

The plan outlines how the Commission intends to deliver electoral fairness for local government voters across England, alongside supporting related changes in local governance and structures.

Since being established as a stand-alone body, the Commission's electoral reviews have addressed electoral inequality affecting citizens in all parts of England. We have also responded positively to requests from local authorities, and from Government, when it was felt that an electoral review could assist in the delivery of effective and convenient local government. In so doing, the Commission believes that it is fulfilling the role entrusted to it by Parliament. Our new plan will continue to pursue those fundamental objectives.

Despite a positive record of delivery, the Commission is mindful of future demand. Electoral registers change continuously, and this almost invariably impacts on levels of electoral equality within local authorities; our plan commits to delivering fair electoral arrangements whenever imbalances arise. Also, the

Commission has a duty to review every council in England 'from time to time', with many now becoming due for such a review. Our plan will see the completion of electoral reviews of London boroughs and the start of a major programme of reviews of metropolitan authorities in order to ensure that they meet statutory requirements. Both these factors will maintain pressure on our programme for the duration of the plan and beyond.

We are also committed to supporting any broader changes in English local government. In recent times, we have agreed electoral arrangements for new unitary authorities in Dorset (where reorganisation was implemented in 2019) and worked with councils in Suffolk and Somerset in the creation of three new, merged, local authorities. It is pleasing that all of these went smoothly.

We are aware of further proposed changes towards unitary structures in two counties that will, in due course, require electoral reviews and other new authorities may be created during the lifetime of the plan. The Commission is keen to support such developments and is working closely with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and local authorities to build new democratic arrangements wherever they are desired and deemed

appropriate. At the same time, our programme will remain receptive to individual local authorities seeking an electoral review to help them deliver effective and convenient local government.

Despite these increasing, and sometimes unpredictable, pressures on our programme, we have maintained a focus on the quality of our reviews alongside working productively and efficiently. Since we presented our first Corporate Plan to Parliament, we have reduced our budget requirement by 39%¹ in real terms. The new plan maintains that focus. Our new People Strategy will set out how we recruit, retain and build skills across the Commission and ensure that we are equipped to face the challenges that will inevitably occur. We will further develop our IT infrastructure to improve the efficiency and accuracy of our processes and we will continue to exploit digital technology in the way we conduct and present reviews.

Not least, the Commission will continue to work in ways that engage with, and support, the local government community.

¹ £1 in 2010 is worth £1.2907 in 2020 (CPI inflation calculator) so a real terms reduction of £1.436m or 39%.

In short, the Commission is committed to finding an appropriate balance between the competing demands of providing fair and meaningful electoral arrangements for voters, helping councils deliver better local government, and responding positively to the changing local government landscape. We believe that this plan strikes the right balance between these various objectives.

Professor Colin Mellors

**Chair, Local Government Boundary
Commission for England**

2. Setting the scene

This is the ninth Corporate Plan and five-year strategy of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. It highlights both our performance since we became independent in 2010 and our plans for 2020/21 and beyond.

Who we are?

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England ('the Commission') is an independent body, established by the United Kingdom Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. Our main activities are:

- Reviewing the electoral boundaries of local authorities in England and implementing any changes.
- Reviewing the administrative (external) boundaries of local authorities in England and making recommendations for changes to the Secretary of State.
- Advising the Secretary of State, at their request, on proposals they receive from two-tier local authorities for changes to unitary status.
- Reviewing the constituencies of the London Assembly and implementing any changes.

Our mission

- To sustain fair electoral arrangements and keep the map of English local government in good order.

Our vision

- We are an independent body that consults and decides on the most appropriate electoral arrangements for local government.
- We promote openness, integrity and rigour in all our dealings.
- We use our resources responsibly and always strive to do things better.

Our values

- Openness
- Rigour
- Integrity

3. Our work

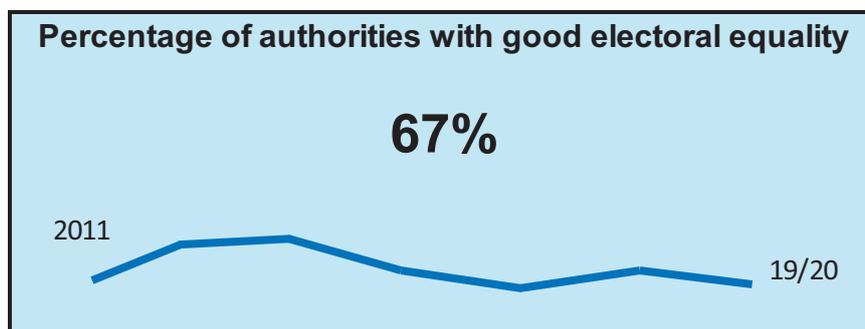
Since our establishment in 2010, the number of electoral reviews we have undertaken each year has risen considerably² alongside efficiencies and budget reductions. Over the last four years, we have aimed to start around 25 reviews annually – each lasting approximately 15 months – and our funding has supported this level of activity. We have conducted a mixture of reviews, reflecting our statutory duty to review each of the 343 local authorities in England ‘from time to time’, whilst being a professional, impartial, transparent and efficient organisation.

Electoral review programme

Over the next five years, we plan to undertake the following forms of electoral reviews:

(i) Intervention electoral reviews – We will identify authorities with high levels of electoral imbalance³ and conduct reviews to address these anomalies. These are known as intervention reviews.

Figure 1

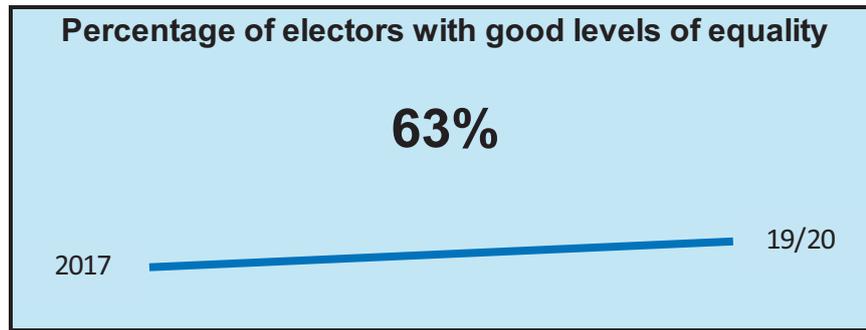


Inevitably electorates and, therefore, the ratio between councillors and electors are continually changing as housing development takes place. Accordingly, therefore, as we remove electoral imbalance in one set of authorities, new imbalances occur in others. This means that our task of addressing electoral imbalance is one that continues every year. We measure this in two ways. In Fig 1 (above) we show the *percentage of authorities* with ‘good levels of electoral equality’. In Fig 2 (below) we show the *percentage of electors* with ‘good levels of electoral equality’.

² 2010/11 (8), 2011/12 (13), 2012/13 (16), 2013/14 (13), 2014/15 (22), 2015/16 (16).

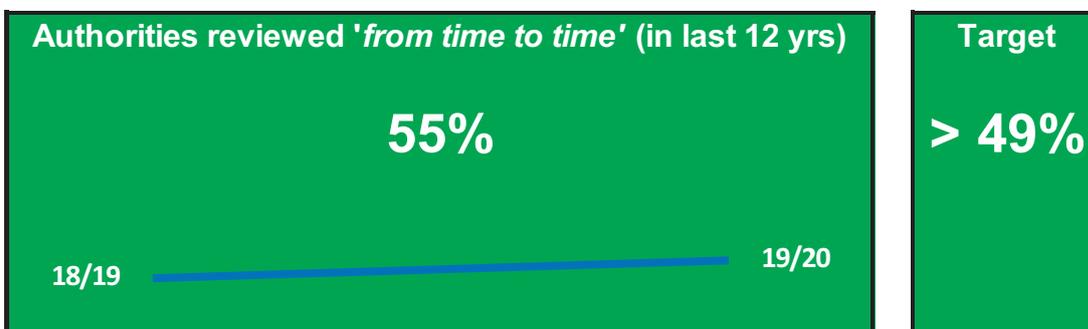
³ We consider a high level of imbalance to be when any ward or division in an authority has a variance greater than (+/-) 30% from the average for that authority or 30% of wards or divisions have a variance greater than (+/-) 10% (i.e. where councillors represent considerably different numbers of electors compared with other councillors within their local authority).

Figure 2



(ii) Periodic electoral reviews – As already noted, the Commission has a duty to review every local authority ‘from time to time’. Whilst intervention reviews are undertaken as and when individual authorities breach what we consider to be acceptable levels of electoral equality, periodic reviews represent more of a rolling element of our review programme. Whilst the Act does not provide a definition of ‘time to time’, we believe that, on grounds of good governance, such reviews should take place around every three-four full electoral cycles, i.e. approximately 12-16 years. We will soon complete our periodic review of London boroughs, most of which had not been reviewed for around 20 years. These will be finished during 2020/21. We will then turn to other local authorities that have not been reviewed for some time. In 2020/21 we will start our programme of reviewing metropolitan boroughs and districts that have not been reviewed for 12 or more years. There are 27 metropolitan boroughs and districts in this category, and we intend to have completed all these reviews by 2024/25. In Fig 3 (below) we show the KPI for periodic electoral reviews.

Figure 3

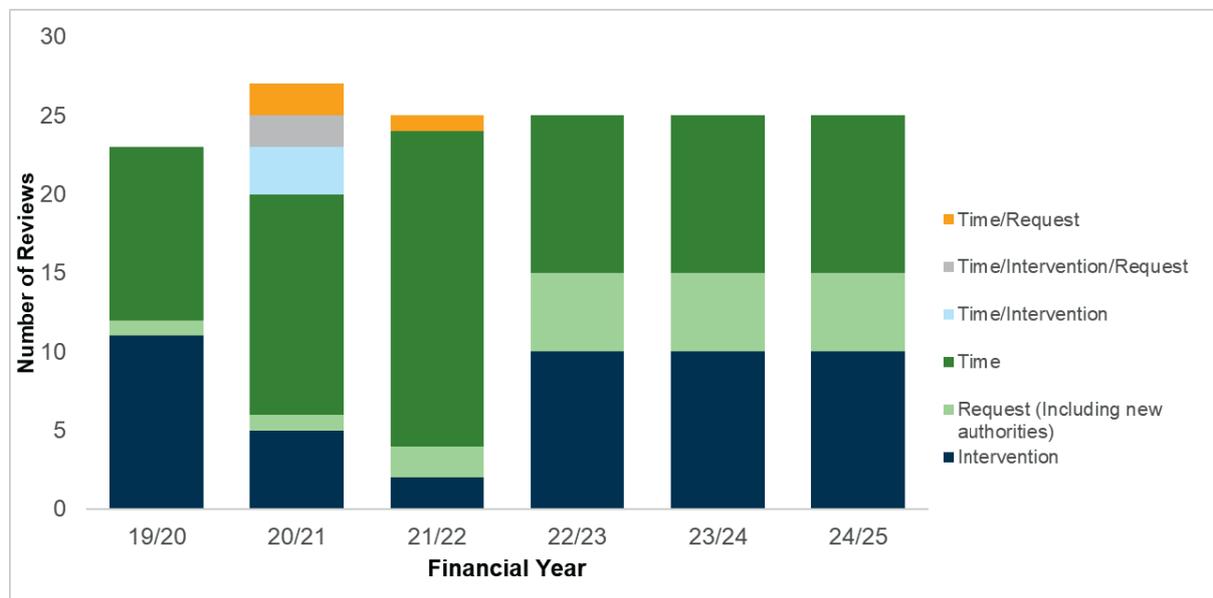


(iii) Requested reviews – Alongside these two types of review, we are keen to retain enough capacity to meet the requests of any council that believes a review will assist them in improving local government and governance. Clearly, it is impossible to predict how many such requests we will receive each year, and we adjust our other reviews to accommodate these requests. In 2020/21, we expect to start five such reviews and will prioritise any requests within our overall programme.

(iv) Mergers and new authorities – Finally, we are also prepared to help councils merge and reorganise where this has been agreed by Parliament. We have previously completed electoral reviews of five newly formed authorities and, again, will prioritise this work, if requested, to support government plans. We already have space identified in our future review programme for reviews of new unitary authorities – in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire – that are due to be created in May 2021 and May 2020 respectively.

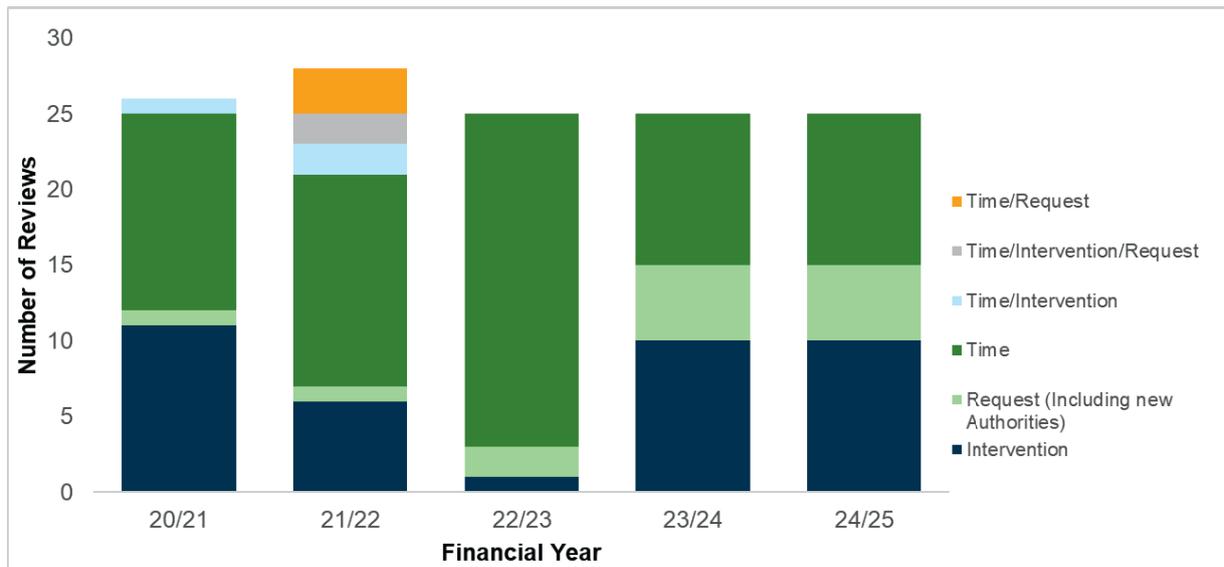
Fig 4 (below) depicts the types of review that we anticipate starting over the next five years.

Figure 4: Planned review programme (review starts)⁴



⁴ Electoral reviews of new and merged authorities are included as 'request' reviews.

Figure 5: Planned publications (completions)



Our programme has inevitably been affected by the two unanticipated elections in 2019 – the European Parliamentary elections in May and the UK General Election in December – meaning that, whilst review starts have remained on target, some completions have been unavoidably delayed. However, none of these delays will affect the date of implementation. Pre-election protocols meant that we were required to pause much of our external review work during these elections so that the completion of reviews will be re-profiled. Accordingly, there will be additional completions over the next two years so that the overall output will remain as planned. We have used this time to undertake other activities that will enhance and improve our future work.

Other activities

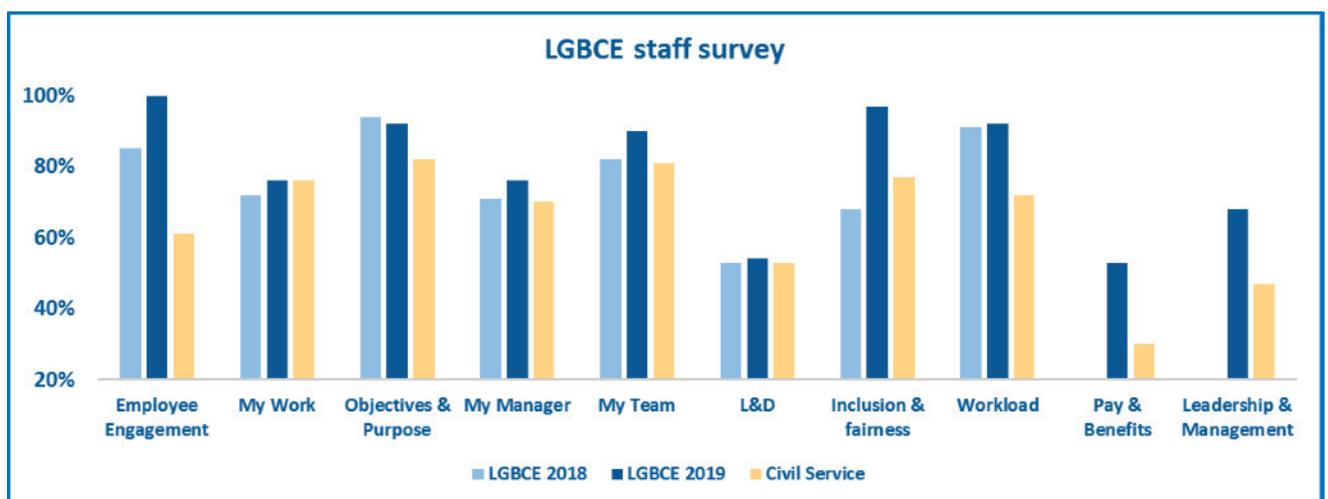
Since we were established in 2010, and as part of our plans to reduce costs and increase efficiency, we have continually reviewed our processes and ways of working methods through several major projects. In broad terms, during the period 2010/11 to 2014/15 we undertook an average 15 reviews annually at an average cost of £156k per review. During the period 2016/17 to 2018/19, the equivalent figures were 80 reviews at an average cost of £75k per review (the current figures for

2019/20 are £68k per average review)⁵. At the same time, we believe that our reviews have improved in both quality and presentation.

We have developed and implemented an IT strategy that enables us to be flexible and digital. We are continuously developing our website, internal systems and processes, and current plans include improving access, charting a customer journey through our processes and garnering input from local government, community organisations and political parties to understand what works best.

At our meeting with the Speaker’s Committee in 2017, members suggested we should conduct staff surveys. We have followed this advice, and have now conducted two such surveys, modelled on the annual Civil Service Survey. The results have been encouraging and we are pleased that staff views compare favourably with our colleagues across the Civil Service.

Figure 6: LGBCE staff survey v Civil Service



We are not complacent, however, and will focus on both maintaining what we do well and improving on areas where we want to do better. Informed by survey findings, and wanting to be an employer of choice, we have developed our ‘culture and behaviours’ work and have introduced a new People Strategy. This sets the aim for

⁵ Numbers of reviews undertaken are from LGBCE’s Annual Reports and Accounts. Unit costing information is based on expenditure and review numbers until 2014/15 and from then on detailed unit costing work which considers length of reviews, size of review, hours allocated to reviews and a more sophisticated method of allocating overheads to reviews.

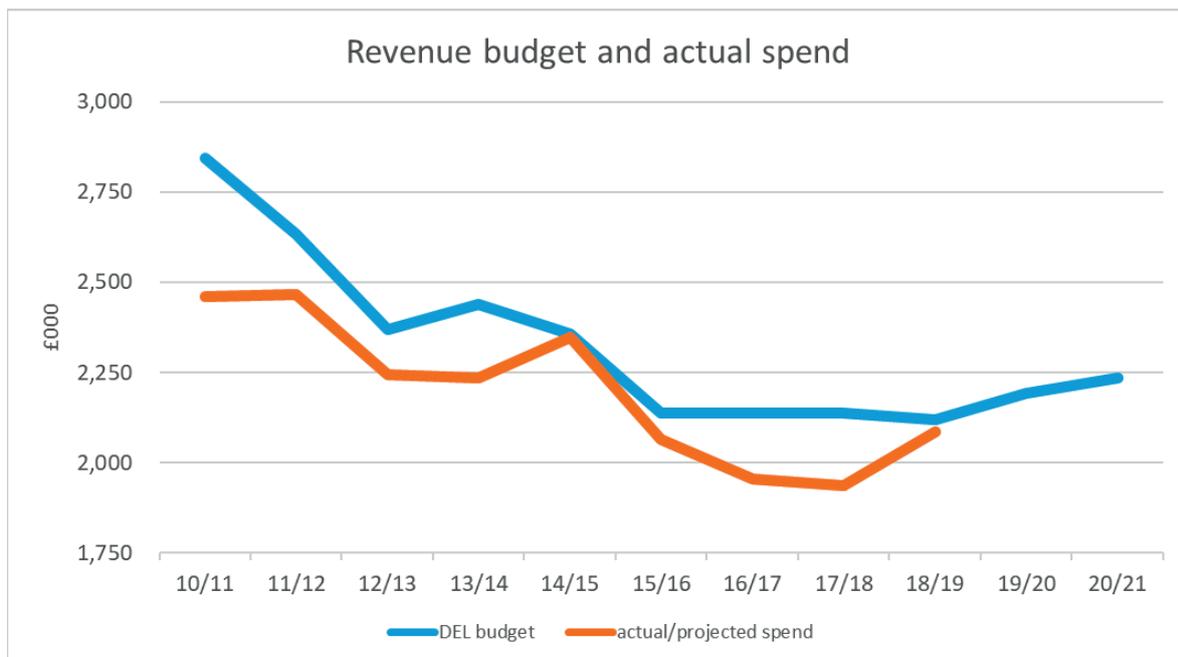
the LGBCE to be a 'well-led, high-performing, diverse and inclusive' organisation. It identifies nine work strands that we will progress over the next three years.

Our work in this area will mean that we are an even better place to work and are responsive to what our staff tell us.

4. Running costs and funding

Since 2010, we have significantly reduced both overall expenditure and budget and the cost of individual reviews, whilst increasing the quantity and quality of reviews delivered.

Figure 7: Spending profile⁶



Our budget has remained the same, or reduced, each year since 2010 and now offers little opportunity for further significant efficiencies without reducing staff numbers, the quality of our reviews, or the number of reviews we can deliver.

Following Treasury guidance, we are, therefore, asking for a 2% inflationary increase from 2020/21 and throughout the life of this plan purely to meet the costs of pay inflation, contract inflation and other anticipated increases (such as a rent review).

We have a small annual capital budget of £50k which we use for investment in our IT and software solutions (website, consultation portal, SharePoint, intranet) and to replace our map printer every five years or so.

⁶ Our reduced revenue expenditure in 2016/17 and 2017/18 was balanced by increased capital spend on office fit-out and relocation costs and funded by higher staff turnover and delays in the appointment of new Commissioners.

Figure 7: Funding profile 2019/20 to 2024/25⁷

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
staff and commissioners	1,386	1,414	1,442	1,471	1,500	1,530
mapping and printing	124	126	129	132	134	137
stakeholder engagement	94	96	98	100	102	104
business costs	482	492	370	375	381	456
legal and professional	53	54	55	56	57	59
depreciation	53	48	177	178	179	112
DEL revenue	2,192	2,230	2,271	2,312	2,353	2,398
AME	60					
revenue total	2,252	2,230	2,271	2,312	2,353	2,398
capital	50	50	50	50	50	50
total	2,302	2,280	2,321	2,362	2,403	2,448

⁷ In 2020/21 the budget was amended before approval by the Speakers Committee to reflect changes arising for COVID-19. Two items previously requested were removed and budget changes due to be implemented for IFRS16 (leases) were removed under direction of HM Treasury. This plan reflects the post COVID-19 budget for 2020/21 (15/04/20).

CCS0420433430

978-1-5286-1871-7