



**An introduction to the Local Government  
Boundary Commission for England and  
electoral reviews**

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# About us

## The Commission

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. We are not part of government or any political party. We are accountable to Parliament through a committee of MPs chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Our organisation is made up of a Chair and five Commissioners who are supported by 25 members of staff.

## Our role

Our main role is to carry out electoral reviews of local authorities in England. The aim of an electoral review is to:

- Deliver electoral equality for voters;
- Establish electoral areas (wards or divisions) for local authorities that reflect, as far as possible, community identities in that area;
- Promote effective and convenient local government.

We also provide independent advice to the government about boundaries between local authorities (from correcting minor boundary anomalies to whole-council mergers) and we have responsibility for advising government on proposed structural change for local authorities.

## How to find us online

You can find out more about the Commission and our work at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk) .

Our website also includes an interactive consultation portal where you can look at our proposals in detail and have your say in one of our consultations at [consultation.lgbce.org.uk](http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk).

Our website also provides details of all current reviews, completed reviews and other information on past changes from 1974 for local authorities and parishes across England.

# Electoral reviews

The Commission's main role is to carry out electoral reviews of district, borough and county councils in England.

## What is an electoral review?

An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for a local authority. These include:

- The total number of councillors to be elected to the council.
- The names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions.
- The number of councillors to be elected from each ward or division.

We must, by law<sup>1</sup>, take into account several key factors when taking decisions on an electoral review.

- The need to secure equality of representation across the local authority area.
- The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities.
- The need to secure effective and convenient local government.
- The need to ensure that the electoral arrangements of a local authority reflect its electoral cycle.

These are known as our statutory criteria. As we take decisions on the most appropriate electoral arrangements, we will seek to achieve a balance between these criteria.

## Why do we conduct electoral reviews?

### **a) Electoral equality:**

The Commission will often carry out electoral reviews in local authority areas which have high levels of electoral inequality.

The population of any local authority changes constantly with people moving into, and out of, an area as well as movements of people within it. For example, a major housing development in a council ward can increase the number of electors living there in comparison to neighbouring wards. Where the number of electors in a ward becomes significantly larger or smaller, compared to other wards in that local authority, it results in an electoral imbalance where some councillors represent many more voters than others in the same area. Put simply, electoral imbalances mean that the value of your vote in elections varies depending on where you live in the local authority area.

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<sup>1</sup> Schedule 2, Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

As part of an electoral review, we aim to ensure that the ward or division boundaries of a local authority are such that each councillor represents roughly the same number of electors.

Every year, we examine data which give details of levels of electoral inequality for every local authority in England. We use this information to determine which local authorities have significant levels of electoral inequality and – as such - could be subject to an electoral review<sup>2</sup>.

**b) Reviews on request:**

We also carry out reviews on request. For example, councils may wish to make changes to their electoral arrangements in order to improve the way they represent and serve people in their area. Examples of requests to the Commission for reviews include:

- Some councils believe that they have too many or too few councillors for them to work most effectively and will ask us to conduct a review with a view to increasing or decreasing the number of elected members representing the authority.
- Some councils which have wards represented by more than one councillor wish to change to wards which cover a smaller area and are represented by a single councillor. These are known as ‘single member ward reviews’ or ‘single member division reviews’ for county councils.
- Councils are also able to change their cycle of elections. For example, councils that hold elections in three out of every four years could decide to move to a single election for all councillors every four years.

Councils can approach us at any time to request an electoral review. We will consider each request and will seek to accommodate a review whilst balancing our other priorities.

**c) Boundary changes, mergers and structural changes:**

Where a local authority’s external boundary has changed or where a new local authority has been formed (e.g. a new unitary authority) we may also carry out an electoral review to ensure that the council has the most appropriate electoral arrangements for the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Significant levels of electoral inequality in a local authority are defined by the Commission 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.

## How might an electoral review affect you?

Our reviews will usually propose new electoral arrangements for a local authority. This means proposing potential changes to:

- The total number of councillors on the council (known as 'council size');
- The number, names and boundaries of wards or electoral divisions; and
- The number of councillors to be elected for each ward.

Every electoral review will be different and the extent of the changes will vary. An electoral review in your area may propose no change to the size of the council. It may also mean no changes to the boundaries of the ward or division in which you live. In most cases, though, an electoral review is likely to lead to extensive changes to the ward boundaries of the council, especially where a change in council size has been proposed.

### Parishes:

We cannot make recommendations for changes to parish boundaries or create new parishes. However, we can change the electoral arrangements within parishes including creating parish wards but **only** where they are affected by our changes to district wards or county electoral divisions.

### Polling districts:

We do not determine the size and shape of polling districts or the location of polling stations. These are the responsibility of your local council. The results of an electoral review may lead the council to consider reviewing polling districts.

### District/County boundaries:

If we are carrying out a review of a district council within a county, the review will not affect the county council's electoral division boundaries or the external boundaries of the district. Similarly, a review of county council electoral divisions will not alter district council ward boundaries. However, an electoral division will never cross the external boundary of a district.

### Parliamentary constituency boundaries:

We cannot change, or take account of, the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies. Those boundaries are reviewed by a separate body, the Boundary Commission for England, under different rules and legislation, (<http://consultation.boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/>). In practice, the Boundary Commission for England use the wards that we put in place as a result of an electoral review.

### Other issues:

Our recommendations do not affect local taxes or result in changes to your address or postcode. Nor is there any evidence that our recommendations have an impact on house prices or insurance premiums. In addition, the Commission has no powers to determine issues such as school catchment areas or the organisation of local services.

## **The electoral review process**

Around six months before the formal start of a review, we will aim to meet councillors and senior officers of the local authority. We will also try to meet the parish councils in the area. In a series of meetings, we explain the review process and gather the information we will need to conduct the review.

Thereafter, an electoral review will broadly follow the following timetable:

**Figure One:** typical review timetable

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Preliminary Stage	Desk research by the Commission, information gathering (e.g. local statistics) and meetings with the council and partner organisations.	6-8 weeks	This stage allows the Commission to gather information about the local authority (e.g. electorate figures) and brief the local authority about the review process.
Council size	Public consultation on the number of councillors who should represent the council in the future.	6 week consultation + 6 weeks to consider consultation responses	Your chance to have your say on how many councillors should represent your council area. We will not ask you about ward boundaries at this stage of the review as we aim to come to a conclusion on the number of councillors to represent the local authority.
Information gathering	Public consultation on new ward or division boundaries.	8-12 week consultation + 10-12 weeks to consider responses	Your first chance to have your say on new ward boundaries in your area. Before the Commission devises new boundaries in your area, we will ask local people and organisations to put forward suggestions for a new pattern of wards so that we can ensure that, as far as possible, our recommendations are community driven and based on local knowledge.
Publication of draft recommendations	The Commission publishes its draft recommendations for new electoral arrangements for the local authority: the number of councillors representing the authority and the number, names and boundaries of all wards and divisions	6-10 week consultation + 6-12 weeks to consider responses	Your chance to have your say on our draft recommendations for new electoral arrangements. We ask local people and organisations if they agree with our proposals and, if not, what alternative boundaries they would like to suggest
Publication of final recommendations	The Commission publishes its final recommendations for new electoral arrangements based on the evidence it has received throughout the review	End of review	The Commission will now put its final recommendations to both Houses of Parliament for approval. If accepted by Parliament, the new arrangements will come into to force at the next local elections.

You can keep track of the timetable for your review by logging on to the dedicated web page which we create for each electoral review at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk).

## Useful links

You can find out more about the Commission, Commissioners and their work on our website at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk).

Our website includes the following information which you might find useful:

- Technical guidance on electoral reviews and advice about getting involved in the consultation stages of a review.  
[www.lgbce.org.uk/\\_documents/lgbce/guidance-policy-and-publications/guidance/electoral-review-guidance-august-2012.pdf](http://www.lgbce.org.uk/_documents/lgbce/guidance-policy-and-publications/guidance/electoral-review-guidance-august-2012.pdf)
- A dedicated web page for each review which includes its timetable, the Commission's recommendations and feedback we have received from local groups and people.  
[www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk)
- Our interactive consultation portal allows you to follow the progress of your review and look in detail at our proposals and compare them to the existing arrangements.  
[consultation.lgbce.org.uk](http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk)

## Contact us

Website: [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk).

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