



# Corporate plan 2010–11 to 2014–15

Effective and convenient local government

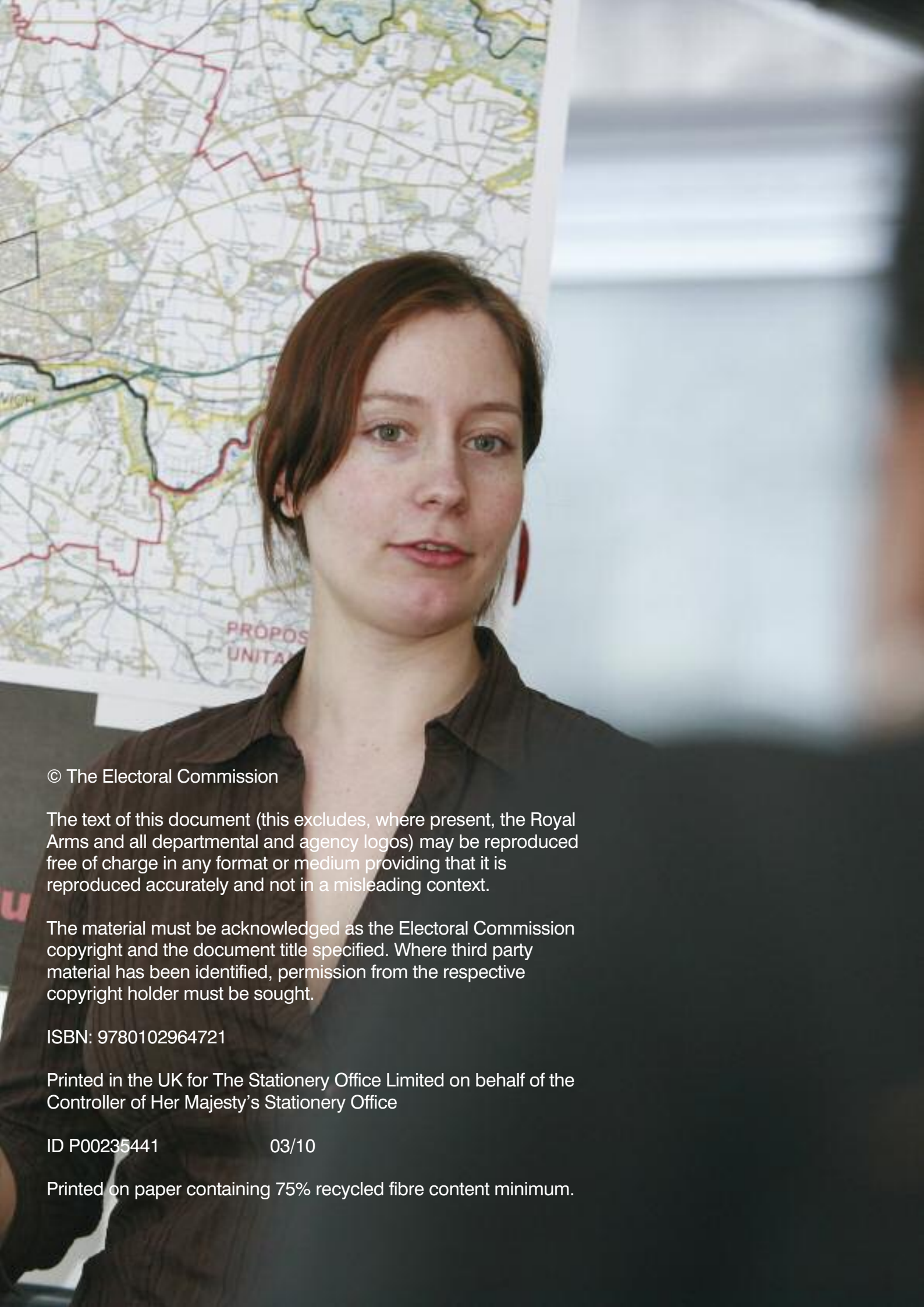
HC 485



# Corporate plan 2010–11 to 2014–15

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

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 30 March 2010.



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ISBN: 9780102964721

Printed in the UK for The Stationery Office Limited on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

ID P00235441

03/10

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum.

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# Foreword

This is the first five-year plan of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.<sup>1</sup> It sets out our priorities and the activities we plan to undertake to achieve the foundations for effective and convenient local government in England.

We want local people and communities, local government and Parliamentarians – who ultimately will decide whether our electoral review recommendations should be implemented – to have confidence in our review processes and the impartiality of our judgements.

## Enhancing reputation

In the eight years that it existed, the Boundary Committee for England built on the reputation of its predecessors and achieved a justifiable reputation for being an expert and independent body. As the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, we wish to enhance that reputation, particularly within the local government community. We believe the Commission, as it moves forward, should engage with local government in the development of review-related policies and processes, while ensuring that its independence is retained.

This, we believe, will have two main benefits. First, it will provide us with a fuller insight into the way local government works,

both in the political and officer spheres, and into the challenges local government faces.

Second, we want local government, and interested parties locally, to have confidence in our review processes and the impartiality of our judgements in striking the right balance of community, identity and the other criteria to which we are required to have regard. This can only be achieved through a process of engagement. We will wish to build on some of the engagement techniques trialled by the Boundary Committee for England as a means of involving more people in the review process.

Such involvement is key to enabling local residents to influence the drawing of boundaries that reflect their communities and the election of councillors that can represent their interests effectively.

## Our responsibilities

We are responsible for conducting three different types of reviews of local government:

- ① Our main role is to conduct ‘electoral reviews’ – reviews of the internal electoral arrangements (the number of councillors and the names, number and boundaries of wards) of local authorities.
- ② We can also conduct ‘boundary reviews’ – looking at the external boundaries of local authorities.
- ③ Finally, we have a role in advising the Secretary of State on the structure of local government (‘structural reviews’), following proposals from local authorities to change from two-tier to unitary local government.

## Looking forward

While we will have a potentially large future workload of electoral reviews to address electoral imbalances, we believe we should build some flexibility into our programmes to respond to requests for reviews from local authorities or the Secretary of State. Accordingly, we will

<sup>1</sup> The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 provides for the establishment of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and the transfer to it of the Electoral Commission’s boundary-related functions.

provide opportunities for local authorities, in particular, to advise us of their needs in terms of reviews, and we will seek to reflect them in our work programmes.

Such is the nature of our work it is possible for us to be responsive in our review programming. We are able, within reason, to substitute one type or area of review for another should the need arise, with minimal effect on resources.

Nevertheless, it is important that we are in a position to advise local authorities as far in advance as possible of any intentions we may have of undertaking reviews in their areas, enabling them to plan ahead effectively and with some certainty. To this end, we will seek to advise local authorities a year in advance of our planned review activities and, wherever possible, to keep the commitments we have made to them.

We will also work with the Secretary of State and with local government in developing policy and procedural guidance for the

conduct of administrative boundary reviews.

We also have a role in advising the Secretary of State, at his request, on proposals he receives for changes from two-tier to unitary local government. The Government has stated that it currently has no plans for any further programme of invitations to councils to submit unitary proposals. However, the Government has recognised that in some specific cases in the future there may be areas where circumstances warrant a focused and targeted invitation to the councils concerned. This is provided for by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Accordingly, for the purposes of this corporate plan, we do not anticipate receiving a request for advice from the Secretary of State. Nevertheless, we are committed to assisting the Government, in whatever manner is felt appropriate, in seeking to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of local government in England.

We recognise that as a new, and relatively small, single-purpose

organisation, the first years of the new Commission's life are likely to be challenging, particularly as we have inherited a significant programme of electoral review work from the Boundary Committee for England. We believe it is important that, in addressing this programme of work, we make the best use of the resources available to us, particularly staff resources. To this end, over the first few years of the period of this corporate plan we intend to seek operational efficiencies by increasing year on year the number of reviews undertaken and completed.



# Our mission

To create the foundations for effective and convenient local government in England





# Our aims



Providing equity and fairness in local electoral arrangements



Ensuring local government structures reflect communities and support efficient service delivery

# 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 citizens, local authorities and other key partners

# Our objectives



## Objective 1

To provide fair boundary arrangements for local authority elections in England



## Objective 2

To keep the map of English local government in good repair



# Objective 1

## To provide fair boundary arrangements for local authority elections in England

People need to be confident that the processes involved in the drawing of electoral boundaries are open, transparent and free from political bias or influence.

Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector having a vote of equal weight in elections, is a fundamental democratic principle. The setting of electoral area boundaries that provide for electoral equality, as far as possible, while reflecting local communities and providing for effective and convenient local government, is therefore an important objective.

In carrying out reviews, we will be able to make recommendations on the number of:

- councillors to be elected to the local authority as a whole
- councillors to be elected from each electoral area<sup>2</sup>
- boundaries and names of electoral areas

Our recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements will be implemented by an Order laid in draft in both Houses of Parliament.

In the main, our electoral review work over the period of this corporate plan 2010–11 to 2014–15 will be aimed at addressing significant electoral imbalances that have arisen in local authorities since their last review. However, local authorities may also request us to undertake electoral reviews. We will respond positively to requested reviews, and will seek to integrate them into our programme of work.

More generally, we will respond to Government policy initiatives relating to local government and will seek to work with it in their delivery.

<sup>2</sup> District and London borough wards and county council divisions

## Key activities for the next five years >

- ① Monitor electoral imbalances arising in local authorities and conduct electoral reviews of those in which significant imbalances have arisen.

### In 2010–11

- we will complete reviews in Northampton, South Derbyshire, West Somerset and Sedgemoor.
- we will commence reviews of 16 local authority areas.

- ② Consider the need for and, where appropriate, undertake reviews of new unitary authorities established by the Secretary of State.

### In 2010–11

- we will complete reviews of Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester, Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and County Durham.

- ③ Consider the need for and, where appropriate, undertake reviews of local authorities for reasons other than to address significant imbalances, for example, to reflect changes to the electoral cycle or requests for single-member electoral areas.

### In 2010–11

- we will complete reviews of Mansfield and Stoke-on-Trent.
- we will commence an electoral review of Gloucestershire.

- ④ Liaise with the local government community in developing our review-related policies and procedures.

### In 2010–11

- we will consult the Local Government Association and other interested parties over our approach to council size.

## Key performance indicators >

We have set out a range of activities, and the outcomes we expect to achieve from these. In order to understand how we are progressing against these activities we will monitor and report against a range of output/outcome measures and progress indicators.

Chart 1: Output and outcome measures		
Measures	Current	Target 2010–11
Percentage of local authorities with electoral imbalances meeting the review criteria <sup>3</sup> that will be subject to a review starting in 2010–11	7% <sup>4</sup>	25%
The level of stakeholder satisfaction where the review process is improved or maintained	56% (good or excellent)	To maintain or increase overall satisfaction rates
Percentage of wards/divisions in each local authority area reviewed that have an electoral variance of 10% or less <sup>5</sup>	85%	85%
Percentage of reviews that are completed within planned timeframes at the start of each review	Ongoing monitoring <sup>6</sup>	90%
Accuracy of electoral change Orders in reflecting the Commission's final recommendations	Not applicable <sup>7</sup>	100%



<sup>3</sup>A local authority is subject to review if: more than 10% of its wards/divisions have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average for that 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.

<sup>4</sup>Reviews completed in 2009–10. Primarily these reviews were of new unitary authorities established by the Secretary of State in 2008–9, to ensure that their electoral arrangements reflect their new functions and intended approach to engagement with communities.

<sup>5</sup>On the basis of forecast electorates. In making recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England is required to have regard to a five-year forecast of the number of registered electors.

<sup>6</sup>No reviews commenced in 2009–10 were scheduled to be completed within the 2009–10 financial year.

<sup>7</sup>The Electoral Commission had power to modify Boundary Committee for England recommendations. There is therefore no comparable indicator.



# Objective 2

## To keep the map of English local government in good repair

The need to keep the map of local government in England in good repair through a review process has been recognised since the introduction of the first modern pattern of local authorities in 1888.

The task was described in 1992 by one of our predecessor organisations, also named the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, as ‘an essential piece of estate management and a keystone of effective democratic local government’. We agree with that view. However, boundary reviews are also important in maintaining local government structures that reflect their communities, and can deliver services in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

Few reviews of the external, administrative boundaries of local authority areas in England have been carried out since 1992. The Local Government Act 1992 reserved to the Secretary of State the power to initiate such reviews. That power has been

exercised only twice. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 returned the power to initiate administrative boundary reviews to the Boundary Committee for England but, because of other work pressures, it was not exercised by that body. As a consequence, there has been a significant build up of boundary anomalies, both large and small, over the years.

We will be able to undertake principal area administrative boundary reviews at the request of the Secretary of State, a local authority or on our own initiative. We will report our recommendations to the Secretary of State, who will decide whether or not to implement them by Order, with or without modifications, subject to the approval of both Houses of Parliament. In conducting reviews, we will be required to have regard to any guidance provided to us by the Secretary of State.

We see our first task in developing policies and processes in relation to this type of review, engaging with the Secretary of State and the local

government community over the factors that should be taken into account in reaching conclusions on recommendations.

In our first year we believe priority should be given to the Boundary Committee for England’s planned and published programme of electoral review work. However, we should have some flexibility in our 2010–11 work programme to undertake a very limited number of boundary reviews, where a good case is made for them to be conducted as a matter of priority. Thereafter, we will wish to develop and maintain an ongoing programme of boundary reviews, integrated with electoral review work.

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## Key activities for the next five years >

- ① Liaise with the local government community and the Secretary of State in developing our review-related policies and procedures.

### In 2010–11

- we will consult the Local Government Association and other interested bodies over our approach to principal area boundary reviews.

- ② Develop and publish a two-to-three-year programme of boundary reviews.

### In 2010–11

- we will consult local authorities over the need for boundary reviews and develop a programme of work.



# Corporate capacity

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is established from 1 April 2010 as an independent corporate body.

It is accountable to a committee of Parliament chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons (the Speaker's Committee). The Commission is required to submit to the Speaker's Committee for each coming financial year (other than its first) an estimate of its income and expenditure, and its five-year plan including estimated resource requirements over the longer period. The Speaker's Committee is charged with examining both documents to decide whether they are satisfied that the estimate and plan are consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge by the Commission of its functions. In making its decisions the Speaker's

Committee has regard to advice from the National Audit Office and the Treasury.

In practice, the Boundary Committee for England and the Electoral

Commission have prepared and submitted to the Speaker's Committee an estimate of the Local Government Boundary Commission's income and expenditure for its first financial year.

The Commission has also prepared a corporate governance framework setting out the responsibilities of the full Commission, committees, and officers. This framework is to be formally adopted at its first meeting. The Commission's Chief Executive is appointed by the Speaker's Committee as Accounting Officer, and carries personal accountability for planning and monitoring, advising the Commission, managing risks and resources, and accounting for the Commission's activities. The Accounting Officer signs the accounts, including the statements of responsibilities and of internal control. In particular, they have personal responsibilities for the propriety and regularity of the Commission's finances, and for the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which the Commission's resources are used.

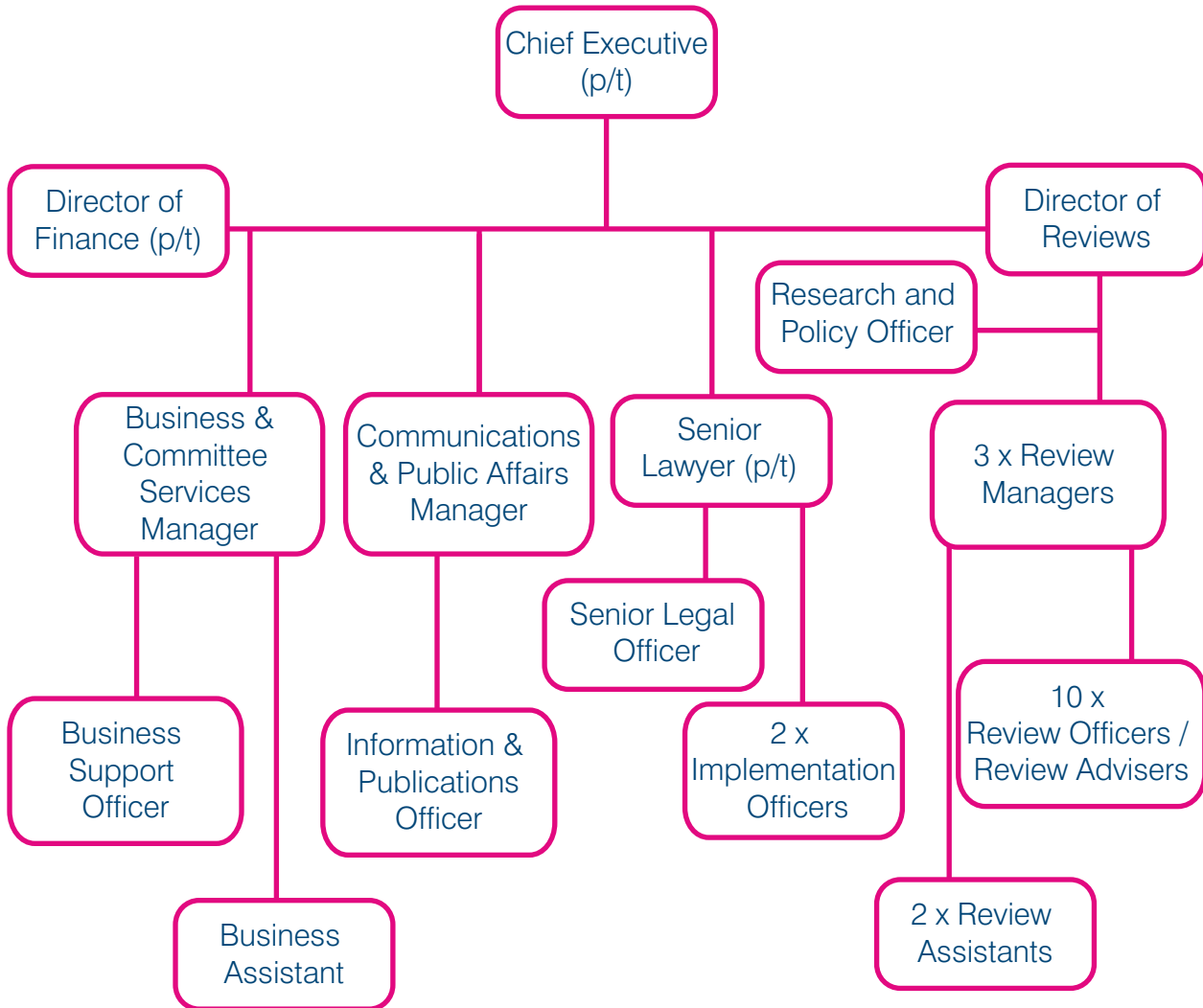
From 1 April 2010 the Local Government Boundary Commission will take over all boundary-related functions from the Electoral Commission, including those of the Boundary Committee for England. Accordingly, it now has to take on corporate functions that it has previously relied on the Electoral Commission for.

At the outset it will have at senior official level a: Chief Executive; Director of Finance (both part time roles); Director of Reviews; and Business and Committee Services Manager. A Communications and Public Affairs Manager will be an early addition to the senior team, the function being covered on an interim basis from 1 April.

Initially the Commission has arranged for any necessary legal advice to be obtained from the Treasury Solicitor, pending appointment of its own Senior Lawyer (which would also be a part time role). It will be recruiting in its first year to a total maximum strength of 28 staff. The prospective organisation chart on establishment in April 2010 is shown overleaf.



Chart 2: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England organisation



As a small body the Commission will find it practical and cost effective to secure its premises and full supporting services – premises management, finance and accounting, human resource and payroll transactions, information and communications technology and office services – from a larger body. This will reduce the costs of the services themselves, through economies of scale, and of procurement and service management.

The Commission has accordingly signed an agreement with the Local Government Association (LGA), under which it will move early in 2010–11 from its offices within the Electoral Commission to share LGA premises at Layden House, London EC1.

The LGA has an outsourced contract with a company which provides the full range of 'back office' services, and the Commission will have the benefit of these services under a shared governance arrangement.

The Commission has satisfied itself that the LGA and its contracted suppliers adopt policies which are consistent with and will support the Commission's own policies on such matters as information security, health and safety, and fair treatment of staff.



# Resources

This section shows in outline our expected resource requirements over the next five years to meet our strategic aim and objectives. The Commission will revisit the resource assumptions and plans during its first year of operation.

## Expected resource requirements for the next five years >

- ① A large part of the set-up costs of the Commission were covered in 2009–10, although some one-off set-up costs will be incurred in 2010–11.
- ② A broadly flat expenditure profile over the remaining four years of the corporate plan period.
- ③ The Commission will generate recurrent efficiency savings to finance inflation over the life of the corporate plan.
- ④ In 2008 funding of £1.815m was agreed over three years to resource the additional boundary reviews the Boundary Committee for England was expected to be requested to conduct as a consequence of the enactment of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIH Act). The last year of this planned funding is 2010–11. Thereafter the reviews and related activities covered by it will be included in the mainstream work of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.



Chart 3 below sets out our estimated requirements for resources during the five years of this plan.

Chart 3: Planned funding profile 2010–11 to 2014–15					
	2010–11 £m	2011–12 £m	2012–13 £m	2013–14 £m	2014–15 £m
<b>Resource</b>					
Core funding	2.152	2.820	2.820	2.820	2.820
LGPIH Act funding	0.693				
Total planned resource	2.845	2.820	2.820	2.820	2.820
<b>Capital</b>					
Total planned per year	3.045	2.920	2.920	2.920	2.920





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ISBN 978-0-10-296472-1

