

## **Chair's foreword**

I am pleased to present the Commission's sixth corporate plan and five-year strategy.

The past twelve months have seen the Commission complete a record number of electoral reviews. This plan sets out how we intend to maintain a high level of outputs in the coming years at the same time as driving further efficiencies and innovations throughout our operations.

The plan shows how, despite inevitable external pressures, the Commission will continue to deliver electoral fairness for voters as well as helping English local authorities provide effective local government to communities.

Last year, we undertook a review of the constituency boundaries of the Greater London Authority as their electorates are seriously out of balance. We concluded that, within current statute, we could not draw up electoral arrangements that both improve the situation and would provide effective representation for Londoners. Our forecasts show that the imbalances will continue to worsen under current trends. We hope to work with government in the near future to amend legislation so that we can ensure electoral boundaries in London match electorate trends and communities.

The plan will be delivered by a restructured management team. I record my thanks to Chief Executive, Alan Cogbill and Director of Reviews, Archie Gall: both of whom have now left the organisation. We have come a long way since the Commission was established as an independent body in 2010. Alan and Archie have made an invaluable contribution to setting up the organisation, building our capacity and capability whilst commanding the full confidence of the Commission throughout.

I am also grateful to those who speak on behalf of the Commission in Parliament: Gary Streeter MP in the House of Commons and Lord Toby Harris and the Earl Cathcart in the House of Lords. Finally I would like to thank those local authorities who been reviewed for their co-operation and support.

Max Caller CBE

## Introduction

This is the sixth corporate plan and five-year strategy of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. The plan sets out how the Commission intends to achieve its two principal goals:

- To provide electoral 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.

## Achieving the goals

The Commission's programme of electoral reviews will continue to reduce levels of electoral inequality affecting English local authorities whilst also responding positively to requests for reviews from councils.

Electoral reviews: reviews of the internal electoral arrangements of local authorities form the main part of the Commission's work in this plan. An electoral review will consider – and make recommendations on - the number of councillors, names, number and boundaries of wards or electoral divisions.

The Commission is on track to complete 30 electoral reviews of English local authorities in 2014-15 and to maintain an output that will reduce electoral inequality across England in every subsequent year of the plan.

By focusing reviews on authorities with significant electoral imbalances between wards or electoral divisions, only four English local authorities would have high levels of electoral inequality by the end of 2019-20. However, external factors could affect the Commission's progress and they are set out in Part Two of the plan.

The plan also maintains the Commission's commitment to carrying out electoral reviews at the request of local authorities where they believe new electoral arrangements will help them deliver more effective local government to citizens. Since the Commission opened its programme to requests, over 30 reviews have been carried out. This plan aims to carry out a further 23 reviews on request.

Other Commission activities:

Principal Area Boundary Reviews (PABRs): reviews of the external boundaries of local authorities. Reviews of this nature range from addressing minor boundary anomalies that hinder effective service delivery to a few properties to whole-council mergers. The Commission's policy is to undertake such reviews only where there is explicit agreement amongst the local authorities affected that a review would be desirable. There are no PABR proposals currently under consideration though the Commission's is always ready to advise local authorities, and interested parties, about the review process.

Related alterations: the Commission is responsible, at the request of local authorities, for making orders for related alterations to ward and division boundaries as a consequence of community governance reviews conducted by them. The Commission will process eight related alterations in 2014-15 but, due to the reactive nature of the activity, it is not possible to predict the volume of requests that will be submitted to the Commission over the course of the plan. However, the Commission is committed to making decisions on every related alteration request in advance of the election at which it is intended to be implemented.

Structural reviews: advising the Secretary of State, at his 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 such advice.

GLA boundaries: the Commission is responsible for reviewing and implementing changes to the constituencies of the Greater London Assembly. We reviewed the Constituencies last year following our noting the increasing imbalances between them. These are now significantly outside the range established when the GLA was established. Our review concluded that, on the basis of current legislation it was not possible to improve the position and that current trends will lead to increasing imbalances. The Commission believes that Parliament will need to amend the present legislation, to enable the Commission to correct these serious and worsening electoral imbalances.

Effective and Convenient Local Government: we will undertake specific reviews on request if we are satisfied that undertaking such a review will lead to improved effective and convenient local government. The Kerslake review into arrangements and governance in Birmingham proposes an electoral review to accompany a move to all out elections and we have concluded that this proposal should be included in our programme.

## Part One: Corporate capacity and resources

When the Commission was established in 2010, its annual budget was set at £3,045m. In 2015-16, its budget requirement is £2,187m – a reduction of 28% in cash and almost 40% in real terms. The budget requirements below are based on the Commission’s strategic financial planning targets and take into account the reductions required by Government of all public bodies.

The Commission will make resource savings in 2015-16 as shown in Table 1. It will make these savings while continuing to achieve the corporate goals set out in the introduction to the plan.

Increased productivity and cost reductions will be achieved by:

- Management restructuring – senior management costs will reduce as a result of the appointment of a single full time Chief Executive, replacing both the part time Chief Executive and the full time Director of Reviews.
- Unit costs – piloting the ‘clustered review’ concept where a county and its constituent districts can undergo an electoral review in a single, coordinated and more efficient process.
- Suppliers – savings will be made in the costs of goods and services procured by the Commission.
- Joint working – the Commission is in discussion with the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England to find ways of sharing best practice, and possibly costs.
- In 2015-16, the Commission’s lease on its current premises draws to a close. The Commission has obtained Treasury and Cabinet Office approval to move within London, and will seek accommodation through the Government Property Unit in the first instance, or will rent from the private sector should nothing suitable be available.
- The Commission’s arrangement for back-office services, secured through a Local Government Association contract, will come to an end in 2015-16. The Commission aims to achieve significant savings in its new back-office services – one of its biggest single costs - in the light of recommendations by the National Audit Office.

**Table 1: resource profile 2015-16 – 2019-20**

	2014-15 £000	2015-16 £000	2016-17 £000	2017-18 £000	2018-19 £000	2019-20 £000
Staff (inc. Commissioners) <sup>1</sup>	1,324	1,188	1,188	1,184	1,184	1,184
Mapping and Printing	186	188	190	172	172	172
Website and Portal	83	83	83	83	83	83
Back Office and Business <sup>2</sup>	593	503	429	397	397	397
Professional	85	85	85	85	85	85
Depreciation	85	90	76	50	50	50
<b>Revenue Total</b>	<b>2,356</b>	<b>2,137</b>	<b>2,051</b>	<b>1,971</b>	<b>1,971</b>	<b>1,971</b>
Capital	95	50	50	50	50	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,451</b>	<b>2,187</b>	<b>2,101</b>	<b>2,021</b>	<b>2,021</b>	<b>2,021</b>

<sup>1</sup> Costs reduce from 2015-16 in part due to deletion of two senior management posts, and in part by re-appraisal of business requirements.

<sup>2</sup> Savings are expected from 2015-16 in the cost of premises and back office services. This line includes transitional costs of the relocation and back office services project

## Part Two: Review Programme 2015-16 – 2019-20

The Commission is set to complete the electoral reviews it set out in its previous Corporate Plan.

The Commission's review programme for 2015-16 and beyond will continue to reduce levels of electoral inequality for English local authorities, whilst helping councils to deliver effective local government by delivering electoral reviews they request. The programme is shown in Table 2 below.

Although the indicative work programme for later years of the plan would almost eliminate significant electoral inequality across English councils, several external factors are liable to negate the steady state assumptions on which, until firmer information becomes available, it has to be based. These include:

- Individual Electoral Registration (IER); analysis suggests that in authorities with certain characteristics, implementation of IER could cause fluctuations in electoral registers from 2015-16 onwards, which could in turn lead to higher levels of electoral inequality between council wards, requiring the Commission's attention.
- Periodic Electoral Review (PER) - a comprehensive review of all English local authorities; the last PER was completed over ten years ago. The Commission could conclude that it should carry out a coordinated review of all 352 English local authorities during the course of this plan, to ensure that electoral arrangements remain relevant to communities as they are now, and reflect local authorities' leadership of their area.
- External environment – the Commission remains ready to assist Government if our expertise is required for *ad hoc* reviews or wider programmes of work arising from developments in local government.
- Government's current 'triennial review' of the (currently defunct) Parliamentary Boundary Commission, and the need to carry through a Parliamentary boundary review by 2017, might in one way or another draw experienced review staff away from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England or its work.

**Table 2: Indicative electoral review work programme 2014-15-2019-20**

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
<b>Electoral reviews of areas with significant levels of electoral inequality, planned for completion</b>	20	17	21	17	17	17
<b>Electoral reviews requested by local authorities or leading to effective and convenient local government, planned for completion</b>	8	4	5	5	5	5
<b>Electoral reviews that have both been requested and have significant levels of electoral inequality, planned for completion</b>	2	2	0	2	2	2
<b>Total electoral reviews planned for completion</b>	30	23	26	24	24	24
<b>Impact on level of electoral inequality over time:</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
<b>No. of local authorities</b>	352	352	352	352	352	352
<b>No. with electoral inequality at start of year</b>	63	51	42	31	22	13
<b>Add new cases of inequality (projected from the average of last 5 years)</b>	10	10	10	10	10	10
<b>Deduct cases of electoral inequality resolved - reviews planned for completion</b>	22	19	21	19	19	19
<b>Authorities with electoral inequality at end of year</b>	51	42	31	22	13	4
<b>As a percentage</b>	14%	12%	9%	6%	4%	1%

### Part three: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

	KPI – 2014-15	Target: end of 2014-15	Projected outturn (at start Q3)	Comment	Target for 2015-16
1	Percentage of local authorities with significant electoral imbalances	14%	14%	Commission is scheduled to complete 30 electoral reviews in the current year	12%
2	Number of reviews requested by local authorities that are programmed for review commencing	7	8	Commission will have completed 33 electoral reviews and PABRs on request since it opened up its work programme in 2010/11	5
3	Aggregate percentage customer satisfaction with review processes <sup>3</sup>	>70%	67% (at start Q3)	Further review completions will impact on overall score	>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%	100%	All reviews currently scheduled to conclude in time for scheduled elections subject to parliamentary scrutiny	95%
5	Average unit costs of reviews	£79,480 (for District reviews only)	£79,800 (District)	Planned reduction for 2015/16 relates to 8% budget reduction and associated savings plans	£70,700 (District)
6	Percentage variance from total budget	<3%	0%	Medium term financial planning figures	<3%

<sup>3</sup> The Commission measures customer satisfaction with how the Commission meets the values set out in its Corporate Plan (namely, its professionalism, independence and impartiality). 'Satisfaction' is defined as the customer providing positive feedback to the Commission's conduct, services, products or publications.