



Electoral reviews: technical guidance

Electoral equality

Convenient and effective local government

May 2011

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What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was established by Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. Independent of central and local government, and political parties, it is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee of MPs chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

The Commission's objectives are:

- To provide electoral arrangements for English principal 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 principal local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens.

We are responsible for, among other things, conducting three types of review of local government:

Electoral Reviews – These are reviews of the electoral arrangements of local authorities: the number of councillors, the names, number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions and the number of councillors to be elected to each. Electoral reviews are initiated primarily to improve electoral equality. This means ensuring, so far as is reasonable, that each councillor elected to a local authority represents the same number of electors. However, electoral reviews can also be carried out at a local authority's request, for example to look at council size (the total number of councillors) or provide for single-member wards or divisions. The Commission is responsible for putting any changes to electoral arrangements into effect, and does this by making a Statutory Instrument or order. The local authority then conducts local elections on the basis of the new arrangements set out in that order.

Principal Area Boundary Reviews (PABRs) – These are reviews of the boundaries between local authorities. Reviews range from addressing minor boundary anomalies that hinder effective service delivery to a few houses, to whole-council mergers. In most cases, a PABR will deal with changes to some or all of the electoral arrangements of the local authorities involved depending on the scale and/or nature of the boundary change. For guidance relating to the review of the boundaries between principal local authority areas, please refer to our companion document; *Principal area boundary reviews: technical guidance*. Unlike electoral reviews, the Commission is not responsible for *implementing* PABRs: the orders relating to changes to administrative boundaries (and any consequential electoral arrangements) are made by the Secretary of State.

Structural Reviews - Advising the Secretary of State, at his request, on proposals he receives from local authorities to change from two-tier to unitary local government. Generally, the establishment, by the Secretary of State, of a new unitary authority will itself be followed by an electoral review of the new authority.

The Commission's website is www.lgbce.org.uk. The website provides details of all reviews. It also provides all representations we have received on current reviews.

1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this document is to provide detailed technical guidance to all those who wish to participate in any electoral review starting after 1 April 2011¹. It is intended to be a resource for anyone requiring detailed information on the legislation, our processes, information requirements and the overall approach we take to our work. It outlines the processes that we will normally follow in such reviews. However, we will consider each review on a case-by-case basis and we may vary our procedure before or during a review where we feel that is appropriate to ensure that our statutory criteria are properly considered. Any such variation in process will be the subject of detailed discussion with the relevant local authorities.

1.2 We also publish shorter, less detailed guidance leaflets which set out in simple terms the purpose of a review, and encourage local people to get involved in the process. These documents are available on our website.

1.3 The electoral arrangements of every principal local authority² in England must, by law, be reviewed from time to time. These reviews are known as periodic electoral reviews (PERs). We decide when there is a need to conduct a programme of such work. The last round of PERs commenced in 1996 and was completed in 2004.

1.4 We can also undertake what we call further electoral reviews (FERs) of individual local authorities where, for example, there has been a significant change in population or localised increases from major housing developments, resulting in electoral imbalances. We might also review a local authority that wants to operate with a different number of elected members or wishes to replace multi-member wards with single-member wards. When a boundary of a principal local authority area undergoes significant change, there will also be a need to examine the electoral arrangements of the authorities affected in order to ensure that electoral fairness is maintained or restored. The types of review, the reasons we conduct them and the overarching purpose of reviews are described in **chapter 2** of this guidance.

1.5 We have limited powers in relation to parish councils. We can neither create nor abolish a parish council. Nor can we change the boundary of an existing parish. However, when making recommendations about the electoral arrangements of a principal local authority, we can make recommendations about the electoral arrangements of any parish councils that might be directly affected by new district ward or county division boundaries.

1.6 When we conduct electoral reviews we *must* adhere to certain legislation which sets out not only the steps which we must take in conducting a review, but also the factors we have to take into account in reaching conclusions on our recommendations. Details of this legislation, and how it affects the way we carry out reviews, can be found in **chapter 3** of this guidance.

1 There is separate guidance for the electoral reviews which commenced before that date. Electoral reviews:technical guidance. LGBCE, April 2010.

www.lgbce.org.uk/guidance-policy-and-publications/guidance

2 A county, district or London borough council or the Council of the Isles of Scilly

1.7 In November 2010, we consulted with local authorities and other interested parties about our electoral review policies and procedures. This guidance reflects the result of that consultation. In particular, people told us that the way in which a review is conducted should be, so far as is possible, proportionate to the matters to be addressed. This now means that the length of time needed to conduct an individual review will depend on the issues involved. A description of our procedures and an illustration of typical review processes can be found in **chapter 4**.

1.8 While chapter 3 describes the factors we are required to take into account, balancing those factors when they conflict, or taking decisions on issues in light of conflicting evidence can present challenges for us. Such issues include deciding on the number of councillors to be elected to the whole council, identifying communities and the way they interact, how to take account of the geographic characteristics of a local authority area and any barriers to movement. **Chapter 5** sets out our approach to these and other matters. We also give guidance on more technical topics, such as electorate forecasts and coterminosity (explained in the chapter).

1.9 Coupled with our independence is our impartiality: our decisions are based on evidence and reason. Our approach therefore is one of evidence-gathering through consultation with local people and organisations, and the analysis of all the evidence we receive from them. It is therefore very important that what people say to us is well-argued, and backed up by credible evidence. We consider what we mean by evidence in **chapter 6**.

1.10 Further technical guidance specifically for a local authority under review can also be found in **chapter 7**, where we give details of information that we require from the authority.

1.11 When conducting electoral reviews in areas that are parished, we try to use parishes as building blocks for new wards or divisions. **Chapter 8** gives some guidance about parishes, our approach to them and what we can and cannot do as part of an electoral review. Finally, we are now responsible for the implementation of our recommendations through the making of a Statutory Instrument or order, which is subject to Parliamentary scrutiny. **Chapter 9** gives information in relation to that process.

1.12 There are several bullet-point lists of factors, considerations, etc set out in this guidance. Unless specifically indicated, the order in which items appear in such lists does not imply any order of priority or weight to be given to them.

2 What is an electoral review?

2.1 In general, we see the main purpose of an electoral review as being to provide for good, or improved electoral representation across a local authority area. This means ensuring that, as nearly as possible, each councillor of a specific local authority³ represents approximately the same number of electors as his or her colleagues.

2.2 We balance this objective with the need to reflect community identities and interests, and provide for effective and convenient local government. We also consider the appropriate number of councillors for each ward or division. In reviews of two-tier county council areas we must also have regard to district ward boundaries. We must strike what we consider to be the best balance between all these factors when conducting electoral reviews. These considerations, often referred to as our statutory criteria⁴, are set out in more detail in the next chapter.

2.3 An electoral review looks at electoral arrangements. This means⁵:

- the total number of members to be elected to the council;
- the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards or divisions) for the purposes of the election of councillors;
- the number of councillors for any electoral area of a local authority; and
- the name of any electoral area.

Why do we conduct electoral reviews?

2.4 All principal local authorities have been the subject of an electoral review, either as part of the programme of PER, or subsequently, in a review specific to the needs and circumstances of a particular local authority area. However, the population – and hence electorate – of any local authority area is constantly changing, with migration into or out of areas as well as within the same area. For example, if a major housing development takes place and doubles the electorate of the ward in which it is located, it is likely that a change in the representational arrangements for that area will be needed. There are two important reasons why this would be so:

- When a council forms its policies or makes other decisions, it does so according to the votes of the members of the council. If the electors in some parts of the council's areas are under-represented relative to those in other parts, then the influence of those electors on the council's decision-making is diminished.
- The accessibility of elected members to their electorate should be, as nearly as possible, equal. This can only be quantified by reference to the numbers of electors.

3 County, district, metropolitan or London borough council and the council of the Isles of Scilly
 4 Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009
 5 Section 56 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

2.5 In a pattern of perfect electoral equality, or fairness, dividing the number of electors in a ward by the number of councillors for that ward should give the same ratio – the electoral ratio – for every ward of the authority. However, even in the period immediately following an electoral review, no authorities have a perfect electoral ratio in every ward. This is because we also consider community identities and interests, the need for strong, clear boundaries and parish boundaries. This means that there will always be some variance of actual representation from a theoretical numerical average. Because of changes in population, almost from the moment we complete a review, the electoral ratio and the electoral variance from ward to ward change over time. When the variances in representation become notable, a further electoral review is required.

2.6 Our criteria for initiating a FER in those circumstances is as follows:

- More than 30% of a council's wards/divisions having an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority; and/or
 - One or more wards/divisions with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%;
- and
- the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period.

We monitor the levels of electoral imbalance across all local authorities in England annually, and those that meet the above-mentioned criteria will, at some point, be included in our review programme.

2.7 However, we also may carry out FERs for other reasons. When new unitary authorities are established by the Government we are required to consider whether we should conduct an electoral review of the new authority, in order to provide appropriate electoral arrangements. All recently established unitary authorities have been subject to a review.

2.8 We may also conduct an electoral review in cases where local authority administrative (ie external) boundaries have been subject to alteration.

2.9 Local authorities that hold whole-council elections⁶ and which have wards represented by two or three members can ask us to undertake electoral reviews with the objective of providing for single-member wards or divisions. Local authorities that want to bring about a change in the total number of councillors to be elected may also ask us to conduct a review. We will not normally review an area for these reasons unless requested to do so by the council.

2.10 If a council wants to change its electoral cycle from whole-council elections to one in which there are elections in alternate years for half its members at a time (elections by halves) or elections in three years out of four for a third of its members at a time (elections by thirds), we are required to consider whether an electoral review is desirable⁷. The purpose of this provision is to ensure that, so far as is practicable having regard to our other statutory criteria, the number of councillors in each ward reflects the council's electoral cycle. This is to give electors in every ward across a local authority's area the same opportunity to participate in every local election.

6 In which elections are held for all councillors every four years

7 Section 43 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

2.11 The rationale for conducting an FER may raise different issues and concerns, but all involve reviews conducted under the same legislation (described in chapter 3). Similarly, our core principles for the conduct of reviews apply to all electoral reviews.

Our core principles

2.12 Councils play a major part in promoting local democracy, encouraging people to register as electors, providing information about local issues and providing pathways by which people can influence decision-making. We see our task as establishing and maintaining the conditions for a fair and representative democracy at local level.

2.13 We recognise that our recommendations will have local political implications but that is not a factor we take into account. We are also alive to the fact that political groups may seek to obtain an electoral advantage in contributing to a review. Our task is to ensure that our recommendations are based on evidence, and that the representations of all those participating in a review are treated equally and without bias. Consistent with this is our determination that reviews will be conducted with transparency and the involvement of local people.

2.14 We also seek to help councils at all levels by putting in place electoral arrangements that are both effective and convenient, both to them and the electorate. In initiating reviews or responding to requests for reviews, we will:

- Support councils in making changes intended to improve their effectiveness and ability to represent fairly the people of their area;
- Provide opportunities for local people and organisations to contribute to reviews;
- Respond to the need for electoral reviews in a measured way, selecting areas for review based on clearly expressed criteria;
- In programming reviews, give priority to areas in which imbalances affect a greater number of electors than those in which a lesser number of electors is affected;
- Have regard to councils' electoral timetable, ensuring that so far as is possible reviews are completed within a reasonable period in advance of elections. So far as is possible, we will seek to make electoral change orders six months in advance of the election in which the changes to electoral arrangements will be implemented;
- So far as legislation permits, conduct reviews in a manner that is proportionate to the scale of the electoral imbalances to be addressed, minimising the administrative and resources burdens on local authorities. Minimising the burden means informing and supporting the timely preparation of relevant and necessary information and proposals but ensuring that we have sufficient information as to enable us to reach decisions on our recommendations;
- Start a review with no pre-determined view of its outcome, whether to reduce or increase council size generally throughout the country, or specifically in the case of any individual council;
- In conducting a review to address electoral imbalances, aim to improve electoral equality at the next election of the council. However, we must always have regard to forecast changes to electorate. Where those forecasts are made with particular confidence, they will carry more weight;

- Precede a review by adopting a preliminary, triage stage in which we will talk to the council concerned and other key partners in the area, and conduct in-house desk research, before reaching a conclusion on how to make the review proportionate to the scale of the electoral imbalances; and
- Give clear guidance and effective support to local authority members and officers regarding the information we require to undertake an effective review.

2.15 Our approach is, therefore, one of consultation, reliance on evidence, openness, transparency and proportionality. We aim to build as many of our recommendations as possible on locally-generated proposals and, to that end, we will gather as much information and undertake consultation as is appropriate to the purposes and the context of any review. We will publicise the review as widely as possible, and we ask that the local authorities, political parties, parish and town councils, community groups, residents' associations and other main stakeholders do the same.

Types of electoral review

2.16 We believe it important that, both for the Commission and the local authorities involved in any electoral review, the effort should be proportionate to the scale of change likely to be involved. Accordingly, we have identified three types of review process. These processes are not cast in tablets of stone but reflect our current thinking as a result of our consultations with local government and other interests. It may be that as a result of information received as part of a review, we will wish to alter our planned approach. Any such alteration would be discussed in detail with the relevant local authorities. This approach identifies three types of electoral review as indicated below.

2.17 Reviews where there is no clear need or desire locally to consider significant changes in council size (we refer to this as a type A review). For example, a review may be triggered by electoral imbalances, single-member warding requests and small-scale principal area boundary review requests. In these circumstances, if there has been an in-depth review of council size in the preceding 10 years and there are no new arguments for a change, it may not be necessary to revisit the council size conclusions reached in that earlier review.

2.18 Reviews where a fairly small change in council size may be desirable (we refer to this as a type B review) but in which opinions regarding a proposed change can be sought during the consultation on draft recommendations.

2.19 Reviews which have raise the prospect of a substantial change in council size (we refer to this as a type C review). The circumstances in which these reviews arise include a council request for a substantial change in council size, the establishment of a new authority following structural change, a principal area boundary review involving a large-scale boundary change or whole-council merger, or where, following initial dialogue and assessment, it appears that a change in council size is likely to give rise to contention. In these reviews we will normally consult with local people on council size before we consider, and ask for their views on, proposed patterns of boundaries and wards.

2.20 The key determining factor for the classification of a review is, therefore, the likely scale of change of council size and the approach to be taken to the determination of that aspect of the council's electoral arrangements. That will influence what the subsequent stages of the review may be and the approach we may take at each stage. This means that if during the course of a review, expectations around council size change, we may need to adapt our plan for the conduct of that review by the introduction of additional steps. This will particularly occur if an expected small change in council size (a type B review) becomes one of large change (type C) which will require a separate consultation phase.

3 The legislation and statutory criteria

3.1 When we conduct electoral reviews we *must* adhere to certain rules. The main piece of legislation to which we work is the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). This consolidates and amends provisions previously contained in the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1992 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

3.2 Section 56 of the 2009 Act requires that we review “from time to time” every principal local authority⁸ in England and make recommendations about electoral arrangements (but not their external boundaries). We call these, periodic electoral reviews (PERs).

3.3 In addition, we can at any time, review the arrangements for all or any part of a principal local authority’s area. This means that we can carry out a review for a particular area if it appears to us to be desirable. We call these, further electoral reviews (FERs).

3.4 Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act sets out the statutory criteria to which we are required to have regard in conducting electoral reviews. In broad terms, in making recommendations, we are required to have regard to:

- the need to secure equality of representation;
- the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

3.5 Included in the community identities and interests criterion is the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable, and which will not break local ties. Our aim is to identify clear and long-lasting boundaries for wards and electoral divisions. We also take into account factors such as the location and boundaries of parishes and the physical features of the local area when drawing boundaries.

3.6 In addition, in reviewing two-tier⁹ county councils we are required to have regard to the boundaries of district or borough wards. We will seek to use them as the building blocks for county electoral divisions. In making our recommendations, we must ensure that every electoral division is wholly within a single district, so that no division crosses the boundary between two neighbouring districts.

3.7 Also, we must have regard to the desirability of securing the appropriate number of councillors in each ward of a district or borough council which elects by halves or by thirds¹⁰.

3.8 We start with a presumption that, for example, for local authorities that elect by thirds we will recommend a uniform pattern of three-member wards (and, by inference, a council size that is divisible by three) so that every elector has the same opportunity to vote whenever local elections take place. In a district that elects by halves, the presumption would be for two-member wards. However, if it can be shown that such a pattern would not meet our statutory criteria, we are prepared to depart from that presumption.

8 A principal council is a County Council, a District or Borough, London Borough Council, a Metropolitan Council, or the council of the Isles of Scilly. In two-tier and single-tier areas, there may be local councils (parish, town councils, etc) but these are not called principal councils.

9 Where there are both county councils and district or borough councils.

10 ‘Elections by halves’ occur every two years, when half the council is elected at each election; elections by thirds’ means one third of the council is elected every year for three years, with no elections in the fourth year. Councillors normally serve a four-year term.

3.9 Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act also states that we should take into account any changes to the number and distribution of electors that is likely to take place within the five years following the end of a review. This requirement means that, at the start of a review we ask local authorities to provide us with electorate forecasts. (Further guidance on forecasting is given in chapter 5).

3.10 In legal terms, these factors are neither prioritised nor sequential. However, as indicated in paragraph 2.1, we see, in general, the main purpose of an electoral review as being to secure electoral fairness. That is to say, that each vote carries the same weight in the election of local councillors. Accordingly, our starting point is to secure equality of representation and to depart from that objective only when we have evidence relating to the other statutory criteria, for example, in order to reflect community identities and interests.

3.11 We return to manner in which we seek to strike the right balance between our statutory criteria in subsequent chapters.

3.12 The legislation also gives us some rules on how we should undertake reviews. As soon as reasonably practical after deciding to conduct a review, we must take steps to let people know. This benefits everyone who wants to take part in a review, because they need time to:

- collect evidence about community identities and interests;
- consider how the number and distribution of electors might change;
- think about what they would like to see as an outcome of the review; and
- present their arguments and the evidence they have collected.

3.13 We cannot complete a review without first publishing draft recommendations, giving people an opportunity to comment on them and then considering any comments made. Only after doing this can we publish our final recommendations.

3.14 We *can* consult before we publish our draft recommendations but do not have to do so; and any such consultations do not *have* to be public ones. This means that we can use such consultations to gather any information we need during the early part of a review. However, if we do see a need to air a particular aspect of a review, such as how many councillors there should be, and share that discussion with the whole electorate, we can and will do so. Our use of consultation processes will therefore be proportionate, intended to add knowledge and value to the review process and to allow people opportunity to influence effectively the review's outcome. Meanwhile, the statutory requirements ensure that in no review will people be excluded from expressing their views and any such views will be considered prior to the making of final recommendations.

11 Local authorities may only resolve to move to whole council elections within a given period once every four years. See sections 32-36 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (as amended by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009)

12 Section 56(9) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

3.15 Section 57 of the 2009 Act enables any local authority that elects the whole council every four years, or has resolved¹¹ to do so, to request that we conduct an electoral review and make recommendations for single-member wards or divisions. In conducting a review in such circumstances, we are required to have regard to the desirability of securing single-member electoral areas but this requirement does not override the statutory criteria referred to above, which take precedence in all electoral reviews. We are not obliged therefore to recommend a uniform pattern of single-member wards or divisions in these cases. If we decline a council's request for such a review we have to give our reasons for doing so.

3.16 We may also be requested by councils to conduct reviews for other reasons. A council may feel that a change in the total number of councillors is necessary to reflect changes in the way it works, or it may feel that a change to ward boundaries is necessary because they are no longer clear and distinct or no longer reflect community identities and local ties. Section 56(2) of the 2009 Act allows us to respond to such requests by conducting a review although it does not compel us to do so.

3.17 Our reviews can have consequences for parishes and their councils, and the legislation requires us to make recommendations to the effect that:

- every ward of a parish having a parish council (whether separate or common) must lie wholly within a single electoral division of the relevant county council, and a single ward of the relevant district council, and
- every parish which is not divided into parish wards must lie wholly within a single electoral division of the county council and a single ward of the district council.

3.18 Sometimes, we will recommend a district ward or county electoral division boundary which bisects a parish that is not warded, or has wards which follow different alignments. In those cases, we will recommend that the parish be divided into parish wards with boundaries that are common, or coterminous with the district ward or county division boundary. We will also consider the number and distribution of electors across that parish before deciding on the need for and extent of parish wards, but this concern will not take precedence over the need to secure good levels of representation at district ward or county division level.

3.19 While the legislation places a number of obligations on us in conducting a review, it also places a requirement on principal local authorities and parish councils. They *must*, "if requested by the LGBCE to do so, provide the Commission, by such date as it may specify, with any information that it may reasonably require"¹².

What can we recommend as part of an electoral review?

3.20 We can make recommendations for the following aspects of local authority electoral arrangements:

- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council (known as ‘council size’);
- the number and boundaries of wards or divisions;
- the number of councillors to be elected for each ward or division; and
- the name of any ward or division.

3.21 Where parish or town councils are directly affected by our recommendations for district ward or county division boundaries, we can make recommendations for their electoral arrangements. These include recommendations for:

- the number of councillors to be elected to the council or, in the case of a common parish council that represents a group of parishes, the number of councillors to be elected from each parish in the group;
- the need for parish wards¹³;
- the number and boundaries of any parish wards;
- the number of councillors to be elected from any parish ward; and
- the name of any parish ward.

3.22 We can recommend changes to electoral arrangements for just part of a local authority. For example, we may find that recommending a change in the boundary between two or three wards resolves unacceptable electoral imbalances if current electoral arrangements for the rest of the local authority area are satisfactory both now and on the basis of five-year forecasts. However, this approach is only likely to be adopted for authorities that hold whole-council elections given that:

- For authorities that elect by thirds or halves, we are required to consider the desirability of providing a uniform pattern of three- and two-member wards respectively for the whole district; and
- We can only implement electoral changes at an ordinary election of the authority, and not all affected wards may hold elections in the same year.

¹³ The Commission will not normally recommend the creation of parish wards that contain no or very few electors (see chapter 8)

What we cannot do as part of an electoral review

3.23 We cannot choose between the statutory considerations to which we are required to have regard. Some people responding to a review may prefer that we focus on reflecting community identities and interests to the exclusion of electoral equality, or vice versa. We need to take account of all strands of our statutory criteria and, where those strands may be in conflict one with another, seek to strike what in our judgement is the right balance, having regard to the evidence provided to us.

3.24 As part of an electoral review we cannot make recommendations for changes to the boundaries *between* local authorities or parishes, or consider the creation of new parishes¹⁴.

3.25 We cannot make changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils that are unaffected by any changes to district wards or county divisions. Community governance reviews by principal local authorities can, however, be used for such purposes and be implemented by those councils' own orders¹⁵.

3.26 We cannot make recommendations about how often local authorities hold elections (the electoral cycle). Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, local authorities can resolve to change their electoral cycle. Where a council resolves to move from whole-elections to elections by halves or thirds, we must make the legal order which implements the change. Before doing so, we must consider whether an electoral review is required in order to ensure that the number of councillors being returned from each ward reflects the proposed electoral cycle.

3.27 We cannot change, or take account of, the boundaries of Parliamentary constituencies. These are reviewed by a completely separate body, the Boundary Commission for England, which bases its recommendations on the ward boundaries put in place as a result of electoral reviews we undertake. Any queries on Parliamentary boundaries should be addressed to the Boundary Commission for England¹⁶.

3.28 Our recommendations do not affect local taxes, or result in changes to electors' addresses or postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that our recommendations have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. They do not determine the size and shape of polling districts, or the location of polling stations, both of which are decided by the local authority. We therefore will not take into account any evidence based on these factors.

14 We can initiate reviews of the external boundaries of counties and districts (known as 'principal area boundary reviews') under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (and make recommendations for consequential changes to electoral arrangements) but we cannot alter them during an electoral review. Local authorities are able to carry out community governance reviews to create new parishes, or amend existing parish boundaries, and implement the outcome.

15 The LGBCE and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) publish separate joint guidance on community governance reviews (through which parishes can be created, abolished or their boundaries and electoral arrangements amended), which is available on our website.

16 The Boundary Commission for England's contact details can be found at www.boundarycommissionforengland.org.uk

4 The electoral review procedure

4.1 Having identified a need for a review, we will seek to include it in our rolling two-year programme of reviews. However, it is likely that at any one time, the total number of reviews for which there is a need or request will exceed the capacity of our resources. This means that we must prioritise.

4.2 We will normally prioritise according to the extent and degree of electoral inequality. However, we recognise that addressing electoral equality may also present an opportunity to respond to a principal local authority's request for a change to one or more facets of electoral arrangements. The strength of justification and evidence of need for requested reviews will be a factor in our prioritising decisions. As we can only implement review recommendations at the ordinary election of an authority, that also will be a factor in determining the programming of a review.

The importance of determining council size

4.3 Council size is the term used to describe the number of councillors elected to a local authority. Decisions on council size are the starting point in any electoral review, since that number determines the optimum councillor:elector ratio for the purposes of achieving electoral equality. However, as shown in our categorisation of reviews by type, a detailed consideration of the justification for council size, whether that is for an increase, a reduction or no change, may not be appropriate in each and every review.

4.4 This approach offers some practical advantages. It ensures that the statutory requirement to consider effective and convenient local government is directly and demonstrably addressed. It also ensures that everyone who wishes to propose patterns of wards or divisions, starts from a common understanding of the council size we are minded to recommend and therefore the average electoral ratio.

Preliminary investigation (triage)

4.5 Each review will generally start with a preliminary period, which will involve the triage element referred to in Chapter 2. This will enable us to reach a common understanding with the local authority concerned of the issues and circumstances to be addressed, the scale of likely change and the identification of clear stages and pathways appropriate to each review. In this stage we will work with members and local authority officers and their key partners to gather information regarding the following:

- details of current electoral arrangements – the current electoral register;
- identification of parishes and their boundaries;
- other indicators which identify and build up a map of communities;
- electorate forecasts.

4.6 We will also need to gain a clear understanding of the extent and nature of communities and the linkages between them. Also, we will wish to explore the way in which councils and councillors aim to work effectively with their communities. It is this which will enable us to categorise our approach to a review and the subsequent process to be followed. We will not normally determine the type of electoral review to be undertaken before we finish this preliminary stage.

4.7 This consideration of the area's characteristics and identification of issues will allow us to work with the council involved to set an initial plan for the conduct of the review. Such plans are described in outline below. However, should a change arise in the issues to be addressed once we have commenced a review, we will discuss any necessary changes to that plan with the council.

4.8 **No expectation of change in council size (type A):** the preliminary stage leads us to conclude that there is neither a clear need to test the degree to which current council size is appropriate nor a desire locally for a change in council size. The information presented to us gives a clear picture of the nature and extent of communities and local ties between communities. This is likely to arise, for example, in reviews triggered by electoral imbalances, single-member warding requests or small-scale anomalies in the boundaries of wards. In these circumstances, if there has been an in-depth review of council size in the preceding 10 years and there are no new arguments for a change, it may not be necessary to revisit the conclusions reached during that earlier review.

4.9 We will then prepare draft recommendations for the electoral arrangements. These draft recommendations will be the subject of formal, public consultation. If the responses do not lead to a clear picture of the degree to which the draft recommendations are acceptable to local people, we retain the right to undertake further information gathering and/or consultation before reaching conclusions on our final recommendations.

4.10 **Expectation that any change in council size will be small (type B):** where the preliminary stage leads us to conclude that a small change (normally of two or three members) in council size may be desirable but in which opinions regarding a proposed change can be sought during the consultation on draft recommendations we will issue a "minded to recommend" notice of council size. We will, in these circumstances, need to undertake further information-gathering to gain an understanding of community identity and local ties on which a change in council size, even of the scale proposed, might have an impact. The council concerned and other local organisations may wish to use this period to make suggestions about ward (or electoral division) patterns and boundaries, and matters such as the naming of wards or divisions.

4.11 Having considered that further information, we will then prepare, publicise and consult on draft recommendations. Because we will, in a type B review, have gathered additional information and views prior to the publication of draft recommendations, we will not normally conduct further information gathering or consultation once we have analysed and considered the response to the draft recommendations. We will, therefore, move on from that consideration and prepare and reach conclusions on our final recommendations.

4.12 **Expectation that a change in council size could be substantial (type C):** this will generally apply where the preliminary stage leads us to conclude that a substantial change in council size (normally of more than 2 or 3 members) may be appropriate. These may be reviews which have arisen because of a council request for a substantial change in council size, the establishment of a new unitary authority following structural change, a major administrative boundary change, or where following initial dialogue and assessment, it appears to us that council size is likely to be particularly contentious.

4.13 In these circumstances, we will undertake a short public consultation on council size. This will be followed by our analysis and consideration of the responses to that consultation. We will formulate a view of appropriate council size and publish a “minded to recommend” notice of council size.

4.14 We will then undertake further information-gathering in order to determine the issues of community identity and local ties on which the indicated change in council size might have an impact. The council concerned and other local organisations may wish to use this period to make suggestions about ward (or electoral division) patterns and boundaries, and matters such as the naming of wards or divisions.

4.15 Having considered that further information, we will then prepare, publicise and consult on our draft recommendations. We will not normally conduct further information gathering or consultation once we have analysed and considered the response to the draft recommendations. We will then prepare and formally decide the final recommendations.

4.15 The nature of the matters to be addressed in the different types of review, and the processes we adopt will have implications for the length of time a review will take, from initiation of the preliminary stage to the resolution of final recommendations. This is demonstrated in Figure 1, which shows the proposed stages for electoral reviews.

* Time periods shown over the page are the expected typical duration of stages. They are not standards or undertakings. The progress of a review will be determined by the nature of the issues to be addressed and the availability of information to underpin sound decision-making, not by a determination to complete a review within any given period.

Stage	Type A review:	Type B review:	Type C review:
Preliminary	Desk research, information gathering, meeting with LA and other partners. Production of draft recommendations. 8-10 weeks	Desk research, information gathering, meeting with LA and other partners. Possible tour. Commission prepares "minded to approve" notice of council size. 6-8 weeks	Desk research, information gathering, meeting with LA and other partners. Possible tour. Make draft recommendations for council size. 6-8 weeks
Council size consultation	N/a	N/a	Open consultation on LGBCE council size recommendations. 6 weeks
	N/a	N/a	Commission considers response and prepares "minded to approve" notice of council size. 4-6 weeks
Further information-gathering and analysis	N/a	Inviting information from public focussing on communities - Commission collates community information and tours area. 8-10 weeks	Inviting information from public focussing on communities - Commission collates community information and tours area. 10-12 weeks
	N/a	Commission uses responses and community information to prepare electoral equality scheme and make draft recommendations. 10-12 weeks	Commission uses responses and community information to prepare electoral equality scheme and make draft recommendations. 10-12 weeks
Consultation on draft recommendations	Public consultation on draft proposals for specific area (i.e. wards with imbalances addressed through boundary changes or adding/taking away councillors). 10 weeks	Public consultation with targeted events if necessary. 6 weeks	Public consultation with targeted events if necessary. 8 weeks
Supplementary consultation	<i>If necessary - further consultation in targeted areas.</i>		
	<i>Analysis of responses.</i>		
Preparation of final recommendations	Analysis of responses and preparation and publication of final recommendations. 8-10 weeks	Analysis of responses and preparation and publication of final recommendations. 10-12 weeks	Analysis of responses and preparation and publication of final recommendations. 10-12 weeks
Total	26-30 weeks*	42-50 weeks*	52-62 weeks*

5 Issues to be considered

5.1 The issues discussed in this section of the guidance will arise in all reviews, but will be handled according to review type. Our advice draws on our experience of conducting electoral reviews. It is also informed by the evaluation of the 1996-2004 PER programme, conducted by the Electoral Commission. Finally, our own consultation on review policies and procedures brought forward views and ideas, many of which were based on respondents' own experience of reviews.

Council size

5.2 In Chapter 4, we looked at the importance to the whole review of deciding on council size. As discussed, council size is the starting point in any electoral review since it determines the average number of electors per councillor to be achieved across all wards or divisions of the authority. We cannot consider the patterns of wards or divisions without knowing the optimum number of electors per councillor, which is derived from dividing the electorate by the number of councillors to be elected to the authority.

5.3 We face a number of challenges in deciding on the most appropriate council size for any authority. There is wide variation in council size across England, not only between the different types of local authority – metropolitan and shire district councils, county councils and London boroughs – but also between authorities of the same type.

5.4 In our opinion, local government is as diverse as the communities it serves, providing services, leadership and representation tailored to the characteristics and needs of individual areas. We believe, therefore, that each local authority should be considered individually and not compared with other authorities of similar geographic or population size, or those facing similar issues and concerns. In addition, the demographic make-up and dispersal of communities in England are such that to aim for equality in the number of electors each councillor represents as an average across the whole country would be impractical, if not unachievable.

5.5 Consistent, therefore, with our desire to support the preparation of electoral arrangements based on the local views and circumstances of councils and their communities, we are unwilling to apply strict mathematical criteria for council size or impose nationally a formula for its calculation. This also means that we will not base our decisions on council size on comparisons between local authorities. It is important therefore that, if we are to reach clear and transparent decisions on council size, we receive well-reasoned proposals that are based on the individual characteristics and needs of each local authority area and its communities.

5.6 Despite this respect for diversity it is important to remember that a local authority may not have fully considered the number of councillors for a number of years, and that during that time the role and responsibilities of local government and councillors have changed considerably. Following the Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act), most local authorities changed the way they make decisions and operate internally, some more so than others.

5.7 The political management structures that have come into place in most local authorities since the 2000 Act have changed the roles of all councillors, both those who sit on the executives and those who undertake the scrutiny and representational roles. In addition, various central government and local authority initiatives have affected the roles of local councillors, and the impact of these may affect the number of councillors needed to politically manage the authority. Finally, the development and the sharing of knowledge has provided opportunities for councils to learn from their own experience and that of others, encouraging innovation. Some councils have, however, used their experience of working in new ways in order to reach a view of the council size they think appropriate for their area, and tested that view through local consultation and electoral review. In a number of instances this has resulted in considerable reductions in council size.

5.8 Local authority proposals for council size that are based solely on an examination of national statistics, or simply an attempt to make it more consistent with that of a neighbouring area may mean that opportunities are missed either to reflect new models of political management or to adapt to changes in the responsibilities of local authorities.

5.9 When requesting a review in order to change council size, most councils indicate the new number they have in mind. We will need to ask questions about proposals to increase council size in order to establish whether there is a sound business management case for the proposed increase. In the case of a proposed reduction, we will need to be assured that the reduction will not jeopardise the ability of a council to manage its business effectively.

5.10 Whilst we have no absolute numbers in mind, there are obviously levels at which an authority risks being too small to discharge its statutory functions or too large to be able to function in an effective manner. For this reason, we will normally wish to give detailed consideration to proposals for council sizes of below thirty councillors. Equally, we will wish to examine closely proposals for council sizes of above a hundred councillors.

5.11 We will look for any measure of local consensus underpinning the proposals for council size that are submitted. In particular, where there has been local consultation on council size, we will consider the evidence which arose from that process.

5.12 Our preliminary discussions with principal local authorities to be reviewed will give us the opportunity to hear their views about council size. We will be able to determine whether there is already sufficient evidence on which we can base our judgement about the type of review to be undertaken (A, B or C) and our ability to tell people what size of council we would be minded to approve. Those preliminary discussions will therefore progress most effectively if the local authorities have by the time they take place, considered the council size issue and assembled any evidence. We will want to test the conclusions that local authorities have reached. However, that testing will not be made in order to promote a preference on our part. It will be to ensure that we have a thorough understanding of why a particular council size has been proposed and that the authority has thought through all relevant considerations.

Factors to consider when making a proposal on council size

5.13 Proposals for council size are most easily, and regularly, argued in terms of effective and convenient local government (in terms of choosing the appropriate number of members to allow the council and individual councillors to conduct the council's business most effectively). Arguments can also be made on the basis of reflecting communities and allowing for fairness of representation.

5.14 We believe the factors that influence council size can be drawn together into four broad elements:

- The decision-making process – what decisions, taken where, and how is it managed?
- Quasi-judicial processes – e.g. planning and licensing – what is the workload and how is it managed?
- The scrutiny process – what is scrutinised and how is the total scrutiny workload managed?
- The representative role of the elected member.

5.15 Those submitting proposals to us should examine the political management and working practices of the council under review, and make well-argued and reasoned proposals. We have no pre-conceived views on the number of councillors necessary to run any particular local authority effectively, and we are content to accept proposals for an increase, a decrease or the retention of the existing number of councillors, but only on the basis that they can be justified. We do not accept, for example, that increases in an authority's electorate should automatically result in an increase in council size.

5.16 In the absence of sufficient justification we will consider responses to our challenge to the rationale for the council size being proposed and reach our own conclusions.

5.17 When we consulted on policies and procedures, some people asked us to consider value for money when we are presented with proposals on council size. We believe that value for money is, in part, addressed by our consideration of effective and convenient local government – that an ineffective council is unlikely to offer good value for money. We do not feel that it would be appropriate to make further judgements on other value for money aspects of council size.

5.18 Even if we are content with the rationale provided in support of a proposal for council size, we may choose to consider whether it is necessary to change this number slightly in order to ensure better levels of electoral representation across the district (or county). Having regard to the nature and extent of communities or to appropriate ward/division boundaries, it is often possible to improve the levels of electoral representation across an authority by making minor modifications of one or two to the council size.

Electoral representation

5.19 Electoral reviews are important in upholding integrity in the democratic process. Fairness at local elections – that is, any elector's vote being worth the same as another's – is a fundamental democratic principle.

5.20 Once we have made a decision on council size, we can work out the optimum number of electors each councillor should represent by dividing the total number of electors by the number of councillors. This produces a figure for the average councillor:elector ratio. Using the average ratio of elector per councillor, we can measure how far the ratio in each current or proposed ward or division departs from that average. When formulating our recommendations, we will be seeking to achieve ratios close to the authority average in every ward or division. The further that electoral equality departs from the average for the authority, the stronger the evidence of the other considerations we take into account will need to be.

5.21 However, in practice we do not see reviews resulting in wards of mathematically equal size. This is because the approach to electoral equality must be tempered by other considerations which generally reflect the particular characteristics of an area under review, and its communities. This recognises that council members represent individual electors *and* collective communities.

5.22 We will therefore look for some rationale explaining why, in community or other terms, a particular pattern or set of boundaries is being proposed. We will take account of geographic considerations if they impede our ability to achieve good levels of representation in a certain area, although the presence of barriers to movement such as rivers with no crossing points or other strong geographical features are likely to be reflected in patterns of community identity and interaction and so taken into account for those reasons.

Community identity

5.23 Community identity and interest is harder to define than electoral equality for which there is a simple mathematical test. It often cannot easily be measured, and can mean different things to different people. It is essential, therefore, that those taking part in a review who make a case on the basis of community identities and interests can explain to us exactly what the community is and, more importantly, what defines it and marks it out as a distinct community.

5.24 For some, community identity could be defined by the location of public facilities such as doctors' surgeries, hospitals, libraries or schools. Evaluation by the Electoral Commission¹⁷ of the conduct of electoral reviews supports this view but notes that such arguments cannot be considered in isolation. It will certainly not be the case that merely saying that such facilities exist can justify a community identity argument. We would be looking for evidence that such facilities stimulate or provide a focus for community interaction: this would be distinct from their role as points of service delivery to individual citizens.

5.25 For others, an area's history and tradition may be the basis of its sense of community identity. However, communities change over time and historical considerations may not have such importance in areas which have been subject to recent development or population dispersal.

5.26 Major roads can be seen to be the focus of an area if they are the location of shops or community facilities which people visit regularly and where they interact. They may themselves be the subject of issue for communities, perhaps when safety, environmental or economic considerations are a catalyst to community interaction. Alternatively, major roads, rivers or railway lines are often physical barriers marking the boundary between different communities.

5.27 Evidence of the identity of a community may be presented where there are recorded community interactions and collective engagements with the principal local authority for their area. Town and parish councils, residents' associations, and local voluntary organisations will, for example, be sources of evidence on this.

5.28 Some councils have made progress in mapping the physical extent of identifiable communities and, where they have done so, such research would help those preparing proposals and our consideration of them considerably. Mapping of communities that depend heavily on area profiling will, however, be treated with caution. Area profiling often uses demographic and/or social and economic data to classify an area according to characteristics common to individuals: it may not reflect that there are (or are not) interactions between those individuals.

5.29 In some areas, a ward or division will be greater in physical extent than an identifiable community: sometimes we have to combine two or more distinct and separate communities within a single ward or division. This is particularly so in rural areas. We will in these cases consider the nature of local ties or interactions *between* communities, as well as within them. Again, there may be opportunities to provide evidence of this, for example through local voluntary organisations or projects. However there are likely to be instances where we recommend a ward or division that encompass communities that have no community linkages.

5.30 We understand that people have strongly held views about their communities and the impact that new warding arrangements may have on them. It is important to us that we hear all those views. However, we ask that, rather than simply asserting that recommendations would affect a community, people explain carefully to us in terms that might be understood by those not living in their locality, why a particular warding pattern we have recommended would – or would not – have an adverse effect on their community. What may be self-evident to local people who work or live in an area may not be obvious to us, or even to people living in another part of a review area. It is for that reason we need to have well-argued evidence of community identity if we are to move away from equality in the number of electors each councillor represents. We will take into account all proposals we receive but those which are supported by argument and evidence are likely to carry more weight with us.

Effective and convenient local government

5.31 Effective and convenient local government is also difficult to define; it is a consideration when we take our decision about council size, but is often overlooked as a consideration by people making proposals to us on warding arrangements. The impact of proposals on the workload of individual councillors needs to be considered, as a ward may be so large in terms of its physical extent or its electorate that it prevents a councillor from effectively representing the people in it. If there are a large number of parish councils, this can also (but does not always) make demands on a councillor's time which are difficult to meet.

5.32 In either case, there should be an explanation of why this effect occurs, having regard to the council's chosen way of working either with individual electors or with parish councils and other community representative organisations. It will be the council's way of working, rather than the individual member's way of working which is important in this respect because an individual member may or may not be returned at subsequent elections. The operation, or otherwise, of area forums or similar mechanisms may, for example, add to or reduce councillor workload and these effects can be evidenced.

5.33 A practical example of effective and convenient local government for us when considering proposed warding arrangements is to ensure that wards are internally coherent. That is to say, that there are reasonable road links across the ward so that it can be easily traversed, and that all electors in the ward can engage in the affairs and activities of all parts of it without having to travel through an adjoining ward.

Number of councillors in each ward or division

5.34 Arguments have been made in the past that if all wards or divisions in an authority return the same number of councillors this helps the local electorate to understand and therefore engage with local government.

5.35 The 2009 Act states that, when reviewing district councils, we have to take account of the scheme for elections used by the council when making our recommendations¹⁸. In some councils, all councillors are elected at the same time; once every four years. Others elect a third of the council in each of three years out of four (elections by thirds), or half the council every two years (elections by halves). The legislation says that we should have regard to the desirability of recommending that the appropriate number of councillors is returned from each ward: where councils elect by thirds this is three, and where elections are by halves, two.

5.36 In each review of local authorities that elect by thirds or by halves we will aim to deliver such patterns of multi-member wards. However, in all cases this consideration will not take precedence over the other criteria, and we will not recommend uniform patterns in the number of councillors per ward or division if, in our view or as is shown in evidence provided to us, it results in unacceptable levels of electoral inequality, does not reflect communities or hinders the provision of effective and convenient local government.

5.37 In addition, we may conduct a review at the request of any authority which elects the whole council every four years (or has resolved to do so) and wishes to move to a uniform pattern of single member wards or divisions across the authority. In conducting any such review we are required to have regard to the desirability of securing single member wards or divisions. This means we *must* assess whether it is appropriate – taking into account our statutory requirement to achieve good levels of electoral equality, reflect community identities and interests and provide for convenient and effective local government – that each ward or division should be represented by one councillor. If in our judgement the statutory criteria cannot be met by providing a uniform pattern of single-member wards or divisions, it is open to us to recommend multi-member wards or divisions.

5.38 Some contributors to past reviews of local authorities that hold whole-council elections have argued that multi-member wards provide, in principle and practice, greater effectiveness and convenience than do single-member wards. Others have argued the reverse. Our consideration of this issue will be aided by evidence of benefits to electors, not benefits to local political organisations, when proposals which are based either on a preference for single- or multi-member wards are presented.

Coterminosity

5.39 When we are conducting a review of a county council, we will also be seeking to provide for coterminosity between district wards and county divisions¹⁹. Coterminosity occurs when district ward boundaries align with county division boundaries; this is also a consideration of convenient and effective local government.

5.40 Coterminosity can improve the convenience and effectiveness of local government by facilitating representation and joint working between the county and district council. However, it is necessary sometimes to divide district wards between county divisions in order either to minimise the levels of electoral inequality or better reflect communities.

5.41 We therefore do not insist on a target for the levels of coterminosity we achieve in any county council area, as it can inhibit us from achieving a good balance between the other statutory criteria. However, if we can balance the criteria acceptably and reflect the evidence put to us, we will also seek to achieve coterminosity when making our recommendations.

Current and forecast electorate

5.42 We require electorate statistics from the local authority. Electorate data will be most useful when they are presented by ward or division, parish and parish ward and polling district. However, we are not constrained to using existing polling districts as building blocks for wards.

5.43 The first set of data we require will normally be the electorate from the 1st of the month during which the review formally starts. This will result in statistics which reflect the changing nature of electoral registers kept up-to-date by rolling registration. Statistics are readily presented by the electoral registration software systems most commonly in use. However, we are willing to consider the use of the register published the previous December if reasons for not using up-to-date information are given. We require this information in a standard spreadsheet format, which is available on our website. Appendix B to this document – Resources – also contains links to the relevant pages.

5.44 Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act states that we must also have regard to the likely increase, decrease or movement in electorate over a five-year period from the making of our final recommendations²⁰. As we ask for forecasts to be prepared at the start of a review, the statutory requirement is normally satisfactorily addressed by *six-year* forecasts of electorate changes.

19 Paragraph 1(3)(d) of Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act

20 Paragraphs 1(4), 2(4), 3(4) and 4(4) of Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act

5.45 We appreciate that forecasting electorates can be difficult, and an inexact science. We ask the local authorities to provide these forecasts because they are best placed to know about planning permissions granted, the likely pattern and timing of future development in the area and, as a consequence, how that is likely to impact on the number of electors in the area. This does not mean that others cannot submit forecasts to us or comment on those prepared by local authorities. We will not apply any lower tests to forecasts prepared by others in order to satisfy ourselves that we can accept them with confidence.

5.46 This means that forecasts and comments upon them should be underpinned by sound evidence. We will consider carefully both the methodology used and the resultant figures. We expect officers preparing forecasts to reflect ONS sub-national forecasts and to consider the impact of likely housing and economic developments, local development frameworks, expected migration into, out of and within the authority and expected occupancy rate in individual areas rather than generally across the authority. We stress that our experience has found that an increase in development in one part of a council's area does not necessarily result in an increase in electorate across the whole authority.

5.47 Once we are content that forecasts are a soundly-based reflection of the electorate expected in six years' time, we will publish the figures on our website so that everyone can use the same data when making proposals to us.

5.48 We have in past reviews, placed greater focus on longer term equality as indicated by the forecasts than we have on an immediate improvement in electoral equality. The effect of this has been, in some reviews, an immediate worsening of electoral inequality in order to accommodate future expected changes in electorates arising from, for example, planned housing developments. Whilst, generally, electorate forecasts have proved to be reasonably good, there have been cases where expected developments have not materialised and our attempts to accommodate them in electoral terms have resulted in major long-term imbalances. There are likely to be circumstances in which there will be a very high degree of certainty that developments will take place and will be occupied by new electors by the end of the forecast period. Where the effect of these developments would be to create significant and lasting imbalances in an electoral scheme based on the present-day electorate, we will of course, be more confident of reflecting them in our recommendations.

5.49 In our consultation on policies and procedures for electoral review, we aired the view that our recommendations should be seen always to bring the greatest improvement to electoral equality at the first election at which they come into effect. This approach attracted broad support although some respondents asked us to continue to base our recommendations on the forecast pattern of electors. Our approach will lie between the two positions; we will endeavour to improve electoral equality at the next election, however we cannot dispense with the need for forecasts since we are required to have regard to them.

Detached wards

5.50 Proposals are occasionally put forward for a detached ward, made up of two geographically separate areas. We have concerns over the use of detached wards. They lend themselves to the creation of electoral areas that lack community identity and which may owe more to purely political considerations than to community identity and interest. We therefore take the view that the use of detached wards, other than to recognise particularly unusual circumstances (offshore islands, for example) is undesirable, and we will not normally recommend them.

Doughnut wards

5.51 From time to time we receive proposals for what we have called doughnut wards, where one ward, normally based on a small town, is completely surrounded by a rural ward. Generally speaking, the rationale sometimes put to us for such a warding pattern has been that it ensures urban and rural interests are separately represented. Such considerations do not form part of our statutory criteria. In any event, they ignore the tendency for the town to be the focus for the rural areas, for shopping, medical and other services. Indeed, rural communities to, for example, the north and south to the town area are likely to identify more with the town than with each other. Accordingly, we will not normally recommend such warding patterns unless it can be clearly demonstrated to us that they would better meet our statutory criteria than any other, alternative pattern.

Rurality

5.52 Many local authorities have both urban and rural areas. When we consulted on our policies and procedures, some people said that urban areas should have proportionately more councillors than rural areas because urban areas present the more complex issues. Others argued that rural areas should have proportionately more councillors because rural populations are more dispersed, and therefore harder to contact.

5.53 There is no provision in legislation for such proportionality. Increasing use of electronic communication methods generally makes no distinction between urban and rural areas. However, there may be exceptions where local characteristics, including topography, lead to an acceptance of a particular variance in electoral ratio for one or more wards.

6 What is evidence?

6.1 In chapter 5, we state clearly the importance of providing evidence when making representations to us. A question often asked, however, particularly when we brief councillors and chief officers, is 'what sort of evidence is required?' Examples are often requested. This is far from straightforward since:

- each review area has its own particular characteristics and is reviewed on its own merits accordingly, evidence submitted in support of, or in opposition to, a particular proposal needs to be considered in the context of the review area concerned; and
- the greater the level of electoral imbalance which would result from the proposals, the more persuasive the evidence will need to be.

The nature of evidence

6.2 So what do we mean by evidence? It can take a number of forms. Perhaps the most straightforward is that which is based on geographic considerations or communication/transportation links. Generally speaking, we will not seek to include areas on either side of a river or canal within the same ward – in particular if there are no bridges – or a railway line which has no crossing points, or areas which have no vehicular transport links. It may be argued that motorways and major roads provide a natural divide between communities, but in some instances they may also link them.

6.3 Parks and recreation grounds may, on the face of it, provide natural breaks between communities but they can also act as focal points. Similar considerations apply to main roads that are also the location of local shopping centres.

6.4 Rather more complex is evidence that seeks to persuade us of a particular view on community identity when proposals for ward boundaries are put forward. It is occasionally said that the local community is totally opposed to a particular proposal. But what is the community, how representative of the community is the respondent and what consultation has he or she undertaken before writing to us?

6.5 The best evidence of community identity is that which comes from community interactions taken outside of the context of electoral review. For example, long-standing residents' associations will have records of their activity and the extent of community involvement in those activities. Similarly, local voluntary and charitable organisations will be able to point to the extent to which people have supported them.

6.6 In determining the strength of local opinion on an issue, sheer numbers of signatures on petitions, or the number of proforma letters received are not necessarily a true guide. They may say more for the enthusiasm and competence of the organisers than for the real views of the signatories. In practice, a well-argued representation containing detailed factual information or records is likely to carry more weight with us.

6.7 Occasionally, local people or groups may arrange public meetings in order to gauge the level of support or opposition to a proposal. The outcome of such meetings may be a better guide to public opinion. But even here, large attendances are unlikely to be conclusive; the proportion of the electorate attending and the breadth of their interests may be more significant than the total number. Moreover, meetings that draw their attendance from a particular political interest group may not express views that are representative of the community as a whole.

6.8 Particularly when describing a case for a certain size of council, local authorities describe the way in which councillors serve their communities through mechanisms such as area forums and attendance at parish council meetings. Parish councils will, in particular, be able to indicate their opinion of the adequacy and success of those mechanisms.

6.9 In summary, we will wish to know *why* a certain view is being put forward. If a particular road is seen as a barrier between communities, why is this the case? If another road is seen as the focus of the community, why is that the case? We would look for explanations of why a particular boundary line might disrupt or help to cement community relations and interactions.

6.10 It is quite common for conflicting evidence to be received on community identity. Where this occurs, our task is to make a judgement on which strand of evidence to follow. We will be aided in this if factual information is accompanied by an explanation of why it is significant to the determination of appropriate representation and why in that respect, a particular area or community should be treated in a particular way.

6.11 We feel it important in all the reviews that we spend some time in the area concerned. This enables us to gain a better understanding of the issues being raised with us, particularly in relation to perceptions of community identity. These visits contribute to our evidence base, and are generally made before we reach conclusions on our draft recommendations, then again before we take decisions on our final recommendations. We do not normally ask interested parties to a review to accompany us on a tour of the area under review. This is both to maintain and to demonstrate our independence. Depending on the circumstances and the issues to be addressed, we may hold meetings in the area which can provide opportunities for people to draw to our attention particular features or issues which we may further investigate.

7 Our information requirements

7.1 When conducting an electoral review, we aim to build a strong partnership with the local authority under review, as a good relationship helps to facilitate a robust, timely and efficient review which is economical in its use of resources. To this end, we will want to hold meetings with the local authority chief officers, political group leaders and full council before the review starts. We will ask the local authority for a main contact – normally its election services manager – to be our main liaison throughout the review.

7.2 In order to conduct the review effectively and thoroughly, we will require some information before the review is commenced. This information will be used by us and anyone wishing to get involved in the review itself, and we will publish it on our website (if it is not otherwise publicly available). All local authorities under review are required, under the 2009 Act, to provide us with information which is relevant to the review. Establishing the information base at the start ensures that the review process tests the quality of possible outcomes rather than the merits of conflicting data. Table 2 provides a list of the minimum information we require at the start of the review.

Table 2: Information required from the local authority under review prior to the start of the review

Information required	Format	Reason
In the case of any review requested by a local authority, a copy of any council report and the minutes of meetings relating to that request.	Electronic file.	In order that we - and anyone else wishing to contribute to the review - can see the reasoning by which the council has formulated its request.
Current electorate for the start of the review. This should be listed by division, ward, parish, parish ward and polling district where appropriate. NOTE: This data should give number of electors entitled to vote at local government elections. The number of people entitled to vote at UK or European parliamentary elections may be different.	Excel spreadsheets available from the Commission.	In order that we - and anyone else wishing to contribute to the review - are working to the same set of electoral data.
A forecast of the local government electorate in six years' time. This should be listed by division, ward, parish, parish ward and polling district where appropriate. NOTE: Forecasts should be accompanied by a description of the forecasting method used and any assumptions made. Where future housing development is expected to have an impact on the size of the electorate, we should have a list of the sites of that development and each site's capacity.	Excel spreadsheets available from the Commission.	In order that we - and anyone else wishing to contribute to the review - are working to the same set of electoral data.

Information required	Format	Reason
Electoral register.	The local authority's chosen secured electronic format.	In order that we can verify electoral figures and consider the impact of warding proposals which cross polling district boundaries. NOTE: we will not make the electoral register publicly available.
A complete list of parishes in the district/county indicating the electoral year(s) of each parish or town council, which parishes do not have a council and those parishes that are grouped under a common parish council.	Electronic file.	For the order-making process.
Maps of the local authority, including maps of each division, ward, parish, parish ward, polling district, topographical maps, and any other mapping the local authority considers relevant (such as community maps, catchments, or travel-to-work patterns).	In GIS format, if available.	As a resource for us and local people to use.
Comprehensive mailing list of community groups, partners and usual stakeholders.	Electronic mergable list.	In order that we can inform all relevant bodies about the review, and encourage them to participate or publicise further.
Neighbourhood/community governance arrangements.	Electronic file.	For us to confirm or otherwise any evidence put to us on the basis of community identity.
Political management arrangements of the council (or proposed arrangements for any new local authority).	Electronic file.	As a resource for us when considering arguments regarding council size.
Latest Annual Management Letter produced by the council's external auditor.	Electronic file.	As a resource for us when considering arguments regarding council size.
Copy of any peer review report produced in the last three years.	Electronic file.	As a resource for us when considering arguments regarding council size.

Information required	Format	Reason
Copy of any corporate governance review produced in the last three years.	Electronic file.	As a resource for us when considering arguments regarding council size.
Performance statistics relating to planning and licensing functions.	Electronic file.	As a resource for us when considering arguments regarding council size.
One copy of every local order made under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 concerning changes to ward or division names.	Electronic file.	As a resource for us to refer to.
One copy of every local order made by the council under the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 or the 2007 Act concerning parishes, parish names, parish wards, parish councillors, parish councils, and parish elections and every resolution passed by the council under section 75 of the 1972 Act and section 32 of the 2007 Act.	Electronic file.	As a resource for us to refer to and for the order-making process.
Evidence to support the name of the authority if it does not follow the formula specified in section 2(3) of the 1972 Act.	Electronic file.	For the order-making process.

8 Implications for parishes

8.1 Much of the country, but not all of it, has civil parishes. Many parishes have a long history, but new ones are also being created today. A parish boundary determines an area for the purposes of collective local responsibility, representation and action. In most parishes, the community's affairs are conducted by a local council. Some parishes have small numbers of residents and do not have parish councils but all parishes have parish meetings in which all electors can take part. In total there are over 10,000 parishes in England, with populations ranging from less than 100 to over 70,000; over 50% of parishes have a population of fewer than 500 people²¹.

8.2 There is no national pattern of electoral arrangements for parishes or towns. The only legislative requirement is that each parish or town council should have no less than five councillors. In practice, most tend to have more. Some parish councils represent a single parish; some parishes are grouped under a common parish council. Some parishes are warded; some parishes are not. Parish council elections are normally held on a whole-council basis every four years, in the same years as those of their district councillors.

8.3 We are able to make recommendations for changes to parish electoral arrangements (i.e. the number of councillors for the parish and for each parish ward, and the number, names and boundaries of parish wards) as part of an electoral review. However, this is restricted to parish councils that are affected by our recommendations for changes to district wards and/or county divisions. We cannot make recommendations to create, abolish or amend the external boundaries of parishes, even if those boundaries are between parishes grouped under a common parish council.

8.4 We will not normally recommend the creation of parish wards that contain no or very few electors (less than a hundred) unless it can be demonstrated to us that, within a short period of time, there will be sufficient electors as to warrant the election of at least one parish councillor. This is because each parish ward must by statute return at least one parish councillor. To do so, there must be a reasonable number of local government electors in the parish ward to make the election of a councillor viable.

8.5 Where a council elects by thirds or by halves it may be necessary to alter parish electoral cycles to ensure that parish elections occur in the same years as district elections in the associated district wards.

8.6 Under the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, local authorities have the power to conduct and implement community governance reviews for the creation, abolition and alteration of parish areas. They may also make changes to parish electoral arrangements. Subject to certain conditions, local people, by raising a petition, can require that their local authority carries out a community governance review.

8.7 The importance of parishes should not be underestimated given that, where they exist, we will seek to use them as the building blocks for wards or divisions. In light of this, it is important that where any council's review of parish arrangements is to be undertaken, the order implementing any external boundary changes is made before we commence an electoral review of the area.

21 Source: 2001 Census. Office for National Statistics

8.8 Very exceptionally, it may be appropriate for a local authority to undertake a community governance review at the same time as an electoral review of the area is being conducted. However, this can cause administrative difficulties for us and confusion for the local people affected, and any authority contemplating this approach is strongly advised to discuss with us in advance.

8.9 Depending on the outcome of a community governance review, the authority may also recommend consequential changes to the boundaries of district wards and county electoral divisions. We are responsible for considering and implementing any such consequential changes, even if the area in question is not part of our established review programme. We have published joint guidance with the Department for Communities and Local Government on the conduct of community governance reviews.

8.10 Parish and town councils are invited to comment on proposals for changes to district or county council electoral arrangements. Their involvement in the electoral review process is valuable, and district and county councils are reminded of the importance of consulting the parish and town councils and parish meetings in their area, and to encourage their active participation. Whenever we have to split a parish into parish wards we particularly welcome the views of the parish on the appropriate number of parish councillors for each of those parish wards. Dealing with this as part of the electoral review may help save the expense of a community governance review of the parish. We write to every parish, town or community council as part of our normal process in each electoral review. We encourage common parish councils to ensure that every parish in their group can contribute to the parish council's reply.

8.11 Particularly in rural areas, parishes often represent separate local identities and because of this, grouping parishes with similar interests to form a district ward will meet opposition in certain circumstances. For example, two parishes within a National Park area might share a common interest, but not necessarily an identity. In practice, however, it is inevitable that sometimes parishes will have to be brought together, sometimes against their wishes, to form a district ward. In some cases it might also be necessary to establish new parish or town wards, not necessarily with the blessing of the councils concerned, in order to facilitate new district ward boundaries.

9 What happens when we complete a review?

9.1 The publication of our final recommendations marks the end of the electoral review process. Our recommendations will be published locally and on our website for anyone to read. There is no provision in legislation for representations to be made on our final recommendations.

9.2 Once our final recommendations have been published, we need to make preparations for the legal order to put them into effect. We will prepare a draft order. The final recommendations mapping will be used as the basis of the map that will be referred to by the order (the order map). The order map will only show new district ward or county divisions and parish ward names and boundaries, and any existing county or district and parish and parish ward names that we do not propose to change. Our reference to those unchanged name and boundaries should be supported by evidence such as previous orders. Council staff are therefore strongly advised to provide copies of all orders and order maps that they have relating to current parish and parish ward names and boundaries. (See chapter 7, Table 2).

9.3 We will make arrangements for the draft order to be laid in the name of the Speaker of the House of Commons before both Houses of Parliament. It will then be subject to what is called the draft negative resolution procedure. This means that we can only confirm the order after it has been before each house for 40 sitting days (the House of Lords and the House of Commons may have different sitting days). Draft orders can be prayed against in either House. In such an event, a debate on the order may take place. If a debate on a draft order is lost, the order will not be made; there is no provision for Parliament to modify the order.

9.4 All orders will come into force at whole-council elections in the next normal year of election for the authority concerned. District councils that elect by halves or by thirds will return to their normal electoral cycles as soon as possible afterwards but no district elections will be held in a year in which they are not normally held. It may be necessary to alter the years of parish elections to ensure that parish elections are held in the same years as district elections in associated district wards.

10 Frequently Asked Questions

Is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England affiliated to any political party or Government department?

No. We are a completely independent body, and are not part of a Government department. Commission members are not permitted to conduct any political activity or have any party affiliation.

Will an electoral review affect my house value, council tax, insurance premium, stamp duty, postcode, school catchment area or hospital?

No. The review is concerned with electoral matters only; all the above factors are decided by other organisations or factors.

Will an electoral review affect who I can vote for?

Yes. The review will determine your ward or division and, in some cases, your parish ward and you can only vote for candidates who stand for election in those electoral areas. It is for the local political organisations, however, to decide who they want to stand as their candidate in any particular ward or for individuals to stand as independent candidates.

Will an electoral review affect the polling station I can vote at?

Not necessarily, but this is a matter for your council, which conducts polling district reviews. They would normally wish to conduct such a review after any changes to the number or pattern of wards in the area. We do not base our recommendations on the current location of polling places.

Will an electoral review affect the dates or years of elections?

We can only implement new electoral arrangements in the authority's normal year of election. However, we can make necessary changes to the years in which parish and town council elections take place to ensure that they do so in the same years as district elections in associated district wards.

My ward is not changing so why do we need an election? Can we not just make the change at a by-election?

We believe that a fresh mandate is necessary for a council that has had an electoral review. Also, even if a new ward has the same boundaries as an old ward, the new ward may return a different share of the total number of councillors on the council. Therefore, we will abolish all of the existing wards and establish new ones that will come into force at a whole-council election.

When the wards are changed what happens to the county division and parliamentary constituency boundaries?

Each review will be of one local authority and we will only look at the electoral arrangements of that authority. Consequently, if we are reviewing a district we will not be altering any county division boundaries, and vice versa. We have no involvement with

parliamentary constituency boundaries, which are reviewed by the Boundary Commission for England – a separate body. They may conduct interim reviews following any electoral review we carry out; but this is entirely at their discretion.

When will the changes to district or county electoral arrangements, i.e. wards or divisions and numbers of councillors, come into force?

As soon as practicable at an election of the whole district or county council. If the district normally elects by halves or by thirds there will be a whole-council election to bring the new wards into force, but they will return the district council to elections by halves or by thirds, as soon as practicable afterwards.

When will the changes to parish electoral arrangements, i.e. parish wards and numbers of parish councillors, come into force?

At the next scheduled whole-council elections in the relevant parishes, unless we decide that there can be whole-council elections in those parishes before those scheduled elections. Parish electoral arrangements come into force at the same time as county or district electoral arrangements only if the parish elections take place at the same time as the county or district elections.

Can the external boundaries of the parish, district or county change?

Not as part of an electoral review. For parish boundary changes, the local district council can conduct a review and implement the recommendations, under the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. We can conduct boundary reviews of district or county councils, either at the request of the Secretary of State, at the request of the relevant authority or if we identify boundary anomalies which in our view warrant a review.

Can I see the boundaries proposed in your mapping more clearly?

We suggest that you view them on the webpage for your review at <http://www.lgbce.org.uk/> because you can zoom in on the pdf versions of the maps to see more detail than you can see on the printed versions. You may find it helpful to compare our draft and final recommendations maps with the current electoral boundaries that are available on Ordnance Survey's website at <http://www.election-maps.co.uk/>. If you need to see the proposed electoral boundaries in more detail and you have access to a GIS application to view electronic maps, then you may wish to contact Ordnance Survey's Boundary Helpline on 023 8030 5092.

Appendix A: Glossary

Community governance review: the process by which a principal local authority reviews and makes changes to the boundaries and electoral arrangements of parishes.

Coterminosity: geographical areas identified for different purposes but having the same boundaries. This also applies where a group of areas defined for one purpose, when taken together, have the same external boundary as a larger area defined for another purpose, (sometimes known as “nesting”).

Council size: the total number of elected representatives. Where a principal local authority has an elected mayor, the mayor is counted in total council size but is not counted in the total number of members for the determination of average electoral ratio.

Divisions: the electoral areas of a county council.

Elections by halves: elections in alternate years for half of a council’s members at a time.

Elections by thirds: elections in three years out of four for a third (or as near as possible) of a council’s members at a time.

Electoral arrangements:

- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
- the number and boundaries of wards or divisions;
- the number of councillors to be elected for each ward or division; and
- the name of any ward or division.

Electoral equality: every vote has the same weight: each councillor represents a similar number of electors or in a council in which not all wards have the same number of councillors, an appropriate multiple. For example, in a council which has a single-member ward and a three-member ward, there is electoral equality if there are three times as many electors in the three-member ward as there are in the single-member ward.

Electoral imbalance: when the electoral ratio for an electoral area differs from the average ratio for the council as a whole.

Electoral ratio: the number of electors for an area divided by the number of elected representatives of that area.

Electoral Review: a review of the electoral arrangements of a principal local authority. A review may result in changes to none, some or all of the electoral arrangements of that authority.

Further electoral review: an electoral review of an individual principal local authority

GIS – Geographic Information System: computer-based system for storing, viewing, reproducing and altering maps.

Multi-member wards (or divisions): an electoral area in which people may vote for, and be represented by, more than one councillor. (Those people will also be entitled to vote for an elected mayor of an authority that has chosen that form of administration).

Order: see Statutory Instrument or order

Parish: in England a civil parish (usually just parish) is the smallest area used for local government. It has a boundary which the Commission cannot change. It may or may not have a parish council. Some parishes have a Town Council. Civil parishes are not necessarily connected to areas defined for ecclesiastical purposes.

Periodic electoral reviews: a programme of reviews of the electoral arrangements of all of the principal local authorities in England.

Polling district: an area defined for the convenient localisation of polling places.

Principal Area Boundary Reviews (PABRs): a review of the boundary between two or more principal local authorities. A review may or may not lead to the change of a boundary. The Commission can make recommendations about boundary changes to the Secretary of State who has the power to implement them by order.

Principal local authorities: County, district or London borough councils or the Council of the Isles of Scilly. Some district councils are officially called Borough councils.

Single-member (wards or divisions): an electoral area in which people may vote for, and be represented by, one councillor. (Those people will also be entitled to vote for an elected mayor of an authority that has chosen that form of administration).

Statutory Instrument or order: a form of legislation. The responsibility for making statutory instruments has been assigned by Parliament in an Act.

Two-tier local government: the responsibilities of principal local authorities are carried out by a county council and by a borough council. There may also be parish councils in two-tier areas.

Unitary local government: the responsibilities of principal local authorities are carried out by a single council. There may also be parish councils in unitary areas.

Wards: the electoral areas of a district council or, where a parish is subdivided, the electoral areas of a parish council.

Whole-council elections: the election once every four years of all of a council's members at the same time.

Appendix B: Resources

This page contains links to a number of resources which those participating in an electoral review may need. The text contains hyperlinks for those accessing the document through our website.

Our website:

www.lgbce.org.uk

About electoral reviews:

<http://www.lgbce.org.uk/about-us/about-electoral-reviews>

On this page, you can find links to this guidance, and the spreadsheets that we ask local authorities to complete at the start of the review.

You can find the legislation referred to throughout this document at the following links.

The Local Government Act 1972:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1972/cukpga_19720070_en_1

The Local Government Act 2000:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/22/contents>

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/28/contents>

Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/contents>

Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Local Government Boundary Commission for England:

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The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament in April 2010. It is independent of government and political parties, and is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. It is responsible for conducting boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government areas.