

## Corporate Plan 2021-22 to 2025-26

update to 2020-21 5-year plan

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## 1. Foreword

I am pleased to present the Commission's Corporate Plan and five-year strategy for the period 2021/22 to 2025/26.

The plan outlines how the Commission intends to deliver fair electoral and boundary arrangements for local government electors in England, and to support related changes in local governance and structures.

Our electoral reviews address electoral inequality in all parts of England. We respond positively to requests from local authorities, and government, when it is felt an electoral review could assist in the delivery of effective and convenient local government. In carrying out these functions we aim to:

- make sure that, within an authority, each councillor represents a similar number of electors
- create boundaries that are appropriate, and reflect community ties and identities
- deliver reviews informed by local needs, views and circumstances

Our new plan sets out how we will continue to pursue these fundamental objectives.

We have an ongoing role since electoral registers change continuously. This impacts on levels of electoral equality within local authorities and our plan commits to monitoring and addressing such imbalances.

We also have a duty to review every council in England 'from time to time' and the early part of our plan will see the completion of a major tranche of work reviewing each of the London boroughs. The plan includes a second tranche when we will be reviewing metropolitan authorities to ensure that they meet statutory requirements.

Like other organisations, our work during 2020 was affected by the pandemic. Whilst we were quickly able to move to remote working, and much of our own work continued as normal, we were sensitive to the many demands placed upon local authorities. Accordingly, we worked close closely with them, and adjusted schedules where appropriate, so that we did not distract them from other vital tasks. We will continue to work flexibly, taking account of the demands placed on local authorities in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are conscious that there may be changes to local government structures

as part of the government's devolution agenda and we will flex and balance our programme so that we can accommodate any requests made of us. We work closely with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and local authorities to build new democratic arrangements wherever they are desired and deemed appropriate. At the same time, we will also remain receptive to individual local authorities seeking an electoral review to help them deliver effective and convenient local government.

Despite these increasing, and sometimes unpredictable, pressures on our programme, we have maintained a focus on the quality of our reviews alongside working productively and efficiently. Since we presented our first Corporate Plan to Parliament in 2010, we have delivered real-term reductions of over £600k in our budget whilst maintaining the quality and quantity of reviews. The new plan maintains that focus.

Our people – officers and Commissioners – are central to our performance and success and, over the past year, we have spent time putting in place a new People Strategy. This looks at how we best develop, motivate, and ensure the wellbeing of colleagues. It

embeds our cultural behaviours in everything we do and is helping how we attract, recruit, retain and build skills to ensure we are equipped to face the challenges that will inevitably occur. We will further develop our IT infrastructure to improve the efficiency and accuracy of our processes and we will continue to exploit digital technology in the way we conduct and present reviews.

In all our work we will continue to engage with local communities, and to develop new ways of interacting with individuals and local groups.

In short, the Commission is committed to finding an appropriate balance between the competing demands of providing fair and meaningful electoral arrangements for voters, helping councils deliver better local government, and responding positively to the changing local government landscape. We believe that this plan strikes the right balance between these objectives. We are grateful for the co-operation of local authorities and local communities in undertaking our work.

**Professor Colin Mellors**

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

## 2. Setting the scene

This is the tenth Corporate Plan and five-year strategy of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. It highlights both our performance since we became independent in 2010 and our plans for 2021/22 and beyond.

### Who we are?

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

- Conducting Electoral Reviews by considering the electoral boundaries of local authorities in England and recommending any changes to Parliament.

We are also responsible for:

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

### What we do

- We recommend fair electoral and boundary arrangements for local authorities in England.

### We aim to

- Make sure that, within each authority, each councillor represents a similar number of electors.
- Create boundaries that are appropriate and reflect community ties and identities.
- Deliver reviews informed by local needs, views and circumstances.

### We want to be regarded as

- Impartial – giving equal consideration to all views
- Objective – making recommendations based on evidence

- Responsive – listening to local opinion
- Transparent – following clear and open processes
- Professional – being reliable, efficient and helpful

### 3. Our work

Since our establishment in 2010, the number of electoral reviews we have undertaken each year has risen considerably alongside efficiencies and budget reductions. Over the last five years, we have aimed to start around 25 reviews annually<sup>1</sup> – each lasting approximately 15 months – and our funding has supported this level of activity. We conduct reviews to achieve electoral equality but also to reflect our duty to review each of the 343 local authorities in England ‘from time to time’ and to respond to local authority requests.

Figure 1 – last three years

Financial Year	Reviews started	Published Reviews	Total Electorate affected
2017-18	26	26	4,077,233
2018-19	25	34	4,522,713
2019-20	23	14	2,683,606
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>11,283,552</b>

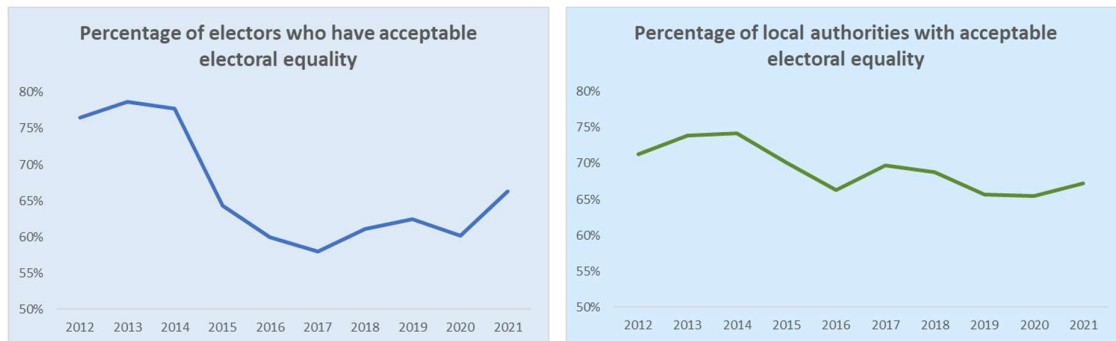
#### Electoral review programme

A variety of factors that affect electoral equality - e.g. population growth, migration, development, levels of individual electoral registration, and student populations - are, of course, outside of the Commission’s control. However, seeking to achieve acceptable levels of electoral equality alongside reviewing all local authorities on a continuing basis to identify appropriate electoral boundaries, forms the statutory basis of our work. Levels of electoral equality also form the shape of our work programme – the blend of (i) intervention (ii) periodic and (iii) requested reviews – given that some authorities experience more rapid changes in number and distribution of electors and, therefore, necessitate more frequent reviews. We assemble data on levels of electoral equality annually and construct a work

<sup>1</sup> As reviews generally straddle financial years, because of the delays due to the impacts of the unexpected General Election (in 2019), the European Parliamentary Elections (in 2019) we commenced 30 reviews during 2020/21.

programme that will deliver the most appropriate, and productive, balance of review types. The graph below indicates the most recent levels of electoral equality amongst English local authorities in terms of the proportion of local authorities with acceptable<sup>2</sup> levels of electoral equality. The graph is affected by the number of local authorities that have been reviewed and data is gathered when the electoral forecasts are published annually.

**Figure 2 – Electors and Local Authorities with acceptable electoral equality**



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

**(i) Intervention electoral reviews** – We will identify authorities with poor levels of electoral imbalance<sup>3</sup> and conduct reviews to address these anomalies. These are known as intervention reviews.

**(ii) Periodic electoral reviews** – The Commission has a statutory duty to review every local authority ‘from time to time’. Whilst intervention reviews are undertaken as and when individual authorities breach what we consider to be acceptable levels of electoral equality, periodic reviews represent more of a rolling element of our review programme. Legislation itself does not define ‘time to time’, we believe that, to secure good governance, such reviews should take place approximately every three to four full electoral cycles, i.e. between 12 and 16 years. We will soon complete our

<sup>2</sup> Acceptable is defined as avoiding the levels of inequality that trigger our intervention criteria (see (3) below)

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

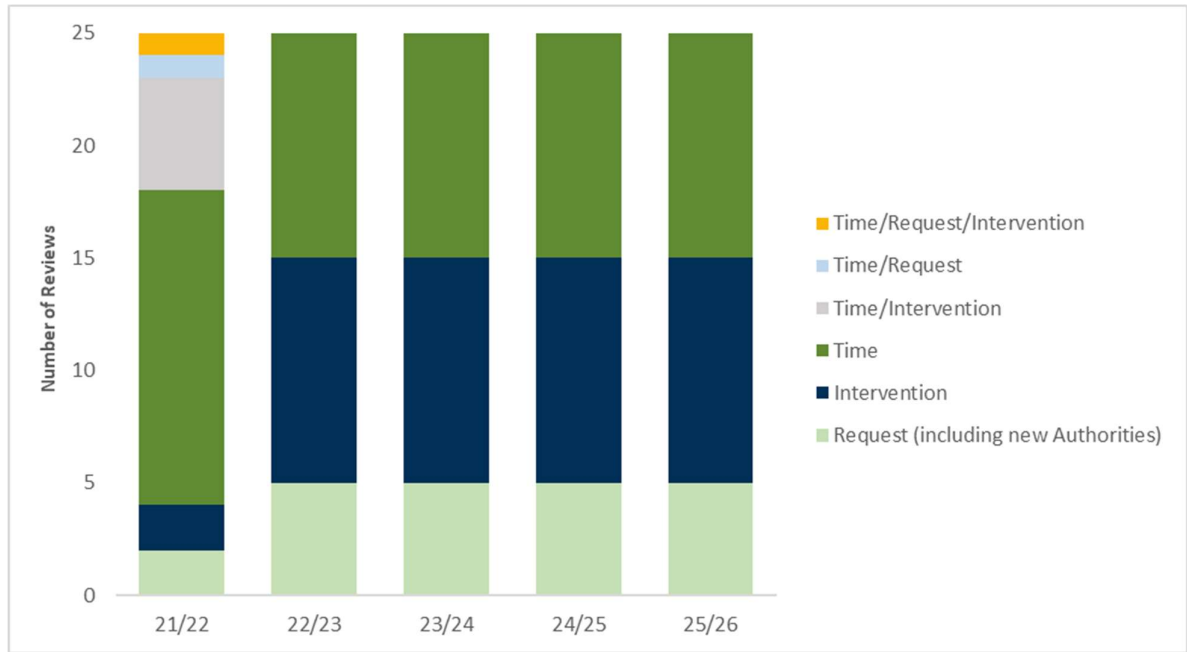
periodic review of London boroughs, many of which had not been reviewed for around 20 years. A small number of these were delayed due to impacts of COVID-19 but they will all be implemented, as planned, at the elections scheduled for 2022. During 2020-21 we began our programme of reviewing metropolitan boroughs and districts that have not been reviewed for 12 or more years. There are 27 metropolitan boroughs and districts in this category, and we plan to complete all these reviews by 2024/25.

**(iii) Requested electoral reviews** – Alongside reviews that are initiated by the Commission, we are keen to retain enough capacity to respond to requests made by local authorities themselves. These are intended to assist their efforts to improve local governance and, typically, result from either the desire to change numbers of councillors or electoral cycles. It is impossible to predict how many such requests we will receive each year and we adjust our other reviews to accommodate these requests. In 2021/22, we currently plan to start four such reviews and will prioritise any requests within our overall programme.

**(iv) Mergers and new authorities** – Finally, we want to assist councils that wish to merge or reorganise where this has been agreed by Government. Again, we will prioritise this work, if requested, to support such aspirations. We have identified space in our future review programme following the creation of two new unitary authorities in Northamptonshire that are due to have elections in May 2021 and have already started a similar review of the new Buckinghamshire unitary council.



Figure 3: Planned review programme for next five years (review starts) <sup>4</sup>



Our scheduling of reviews has been impacted by external events over the last two years. In 2019-20, the completion of some reviews was unavoidably delayed by two unanticipated elections in 2019 – the European Parliamentary elections in May and the UK General Election in December - whilst in 2020-21, as indicated earlier we adjusted schedules in order to allow local authorities to focus on other critical activities during the pandemic. We have delay with these on a case—by-case basis reflecting the demands on, and capacities of, individual local authorities. At the same time, we were able to bring forward some reviews and, although the overall time to complete some reviews has been extended, the overall throughput over a two-three-year period will remain as planned or even exceeded. We now plan to complete the 30 reviews started during 2020-21 between 2021-22 and 2022-23.

### Other activities

As part of our plans to reduce costs and increase efficiency, we have continually reviewed our processes and ways of working through several major projects. In broad terms, during the period 2010-11 to 2014-15 we undertook an average 15 reviews annually at an average cost of £156k per review. During the three-year

<sup>4</sup> Electoral reviews of new and merged authorities are included as 'request' reviews.

period 2017-18 to 2019-20, the equivalent figures were 27 completed reviews at an average cost of £75k per review.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, we believe that our reviews have improved in terms of engagement, quality and presentation.

We have developed and implemented an IT strategy that has enabled us to be flexible and digital. We are continuously developing our website, internal systems and processes, and current plans include improving access, charting a customer journey through our processes and garnering input from local government, community organisations and political parties to understand what works best. Our IT platform also enabled a rapid transfer to virtual working last March.

Since 2017, and encouraged by the Speaker’s Committee, we have conducted a staff modelled on the annual Civil Service Survey. The results indicate a positive trend over this period, and we are encouraged that staff views compare favourably with our colleagues in the Civil Service.

**Figure 4: LGBCE staff survey v Civil Service and Civil Service small bodies<sup>6</sup>**

	LGBCE	Civil Service (2019)	Small bodies (2019)	LGBCE result compared to CC
Employee engagement index	89%	63%	65%	↑
My work	90%	77%	78%	↑
Organisational objectives and purpose	98%	83%	84%	↑
My manager	87%	71%	72%	↑
My team	89%	82%	82%	↑
Learning and development	72%	55%	56%	↑
Inclusion and fair treatment	98%	79%	79%	↑
Resources and workload	91%	74%	74%	↑
Pay and benefits	73%	34%	33%	↑
Leadership and managing change	89%	49%	52%	↑

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

<sup>6</sup> Small departments are those compared to LGBCE by HMT for the purposes of cashflow that have completed the survey. (CPS, SFO, CMA, CO, CC, NA, FSA, GAD, GLD, DIT, NCA, NCA, NSI, OQUER, ORR, OFGEM, OFSTED, ONS, OFWAT, HSE)

We are not complacent, however, and have focussed on both maintaining what we do well and improving on areas where we want to do better. Informed by survey findings, and wanting to be an employer of choice, we have developed our 'culture and behaviours' work and introduced a new People Strategy. This set the aim for the LGBCE to be a 'well-led, high-performing, diverse and inclusive' organisation. It identifies nine work strands that we have been progressing and will continue to implement over the next two years. Results are already encouraging and indicate that we have improved on good results from last year's survey.

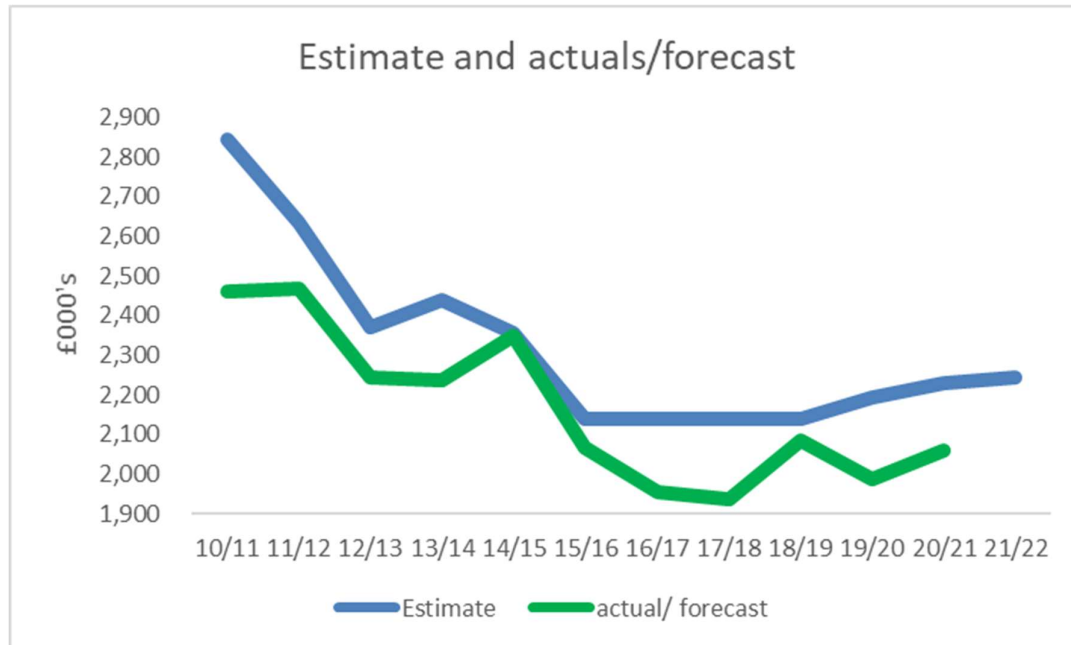
Our work in this area will make us an even better place to work and responsive to what our staff tell us.

As we value diversity and the benefits different perspectives and experiences bring to all our work, we are committed to being a team that is inclusive in the way we work together and the way we engage with those contributing to our reviews.

## 4. Running costs and funding

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

Figure 5: Spending profile<sup>7</sup>



Our budget has remained the same, or reduced, each year since 2010 and now offers little opportunity for further significant efficiencies without reducing staff numbers or compromising the quality of our reviews and the number of reviews we can deliver. Following Treasury guidance, we applied a 2% inflationary increase from 2020/21 and throughout the life of that plan purely to meet the costs of pay inflation, contract inflation and other anticipated increases (such as a rent review). However, for 2021/22 we have included only a one percent increase in staff costs following the impact of COVID-19 to allow us a minor amount of flexibility here.

We expect to just manage within our budget during 2021/22 as we deal with the bulge of reviews that have built whilst we have accommodated the

<sup>7</sup> Our reduced revenue expenditure in 2016/17 and 2017/18 was balanced by increased capital spend on office fit-out and relocation costs and funded by higher staff turnover and delays in the appointment of new Commissioners.

delays occasioned by the unexpected elections and disturbances caused by allowing local authorities to focus on the pandemic.

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

Organisational and financial resilience, both currently and in the future has been considered within our risk management and assurance processes throughout the year. We were well placed to become an on-line organisation due to our Digital IT Strategy and quickly developed new approaches during the Pandemic to ensure we meet our operational and governance responsibilities. Commission decision making, External Audits, Internal Audits, meetings and contact with departments and the Speakers Committee have continued. We have remained within budget during the pandemic and despite some unforeseen expenditure on working from home setup we have offset this in making savings in travelling to local authority areas. We expect to continue to operate within our budget regardless of our future mode(s) of working.

Figure 6: Funding profile 2020/21 to 2025/26 <sup>8</sup>

	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
staff and commissioners	1,414	1,428	1,456	1,486	1,515	1,546
mapping and printing	126	129	132	134	137	140
stakeholder engagement	96	98	100	102	104	106
business costs	492	502	375	381	456	456
legal and professional	54	55	56	57	59	60
depreciation	48	45	178	179	50	50
<b>DEL revenue</b>	<b>2,230</b>	<b>2,257</b>	<b>2,298</b>	<b>2,338</b>	<b>2,321</b>	<b>2,358</b>
AME		60	60	60	60	60
<b>revenue total</b>	<b>2,230</b>	<b>2,317</b>	<b>2,358</b>	<b>2,398</b>	<b>2,381</b>	<b>2,418</b>
capital	50	50	50	50	50	50
<b>total</b>	<b>2,280</b>	<b>2,367</b>	<b>2,408</b>	<b>2,448</b>	<b>2,431</b>	<b>2,468</b>

<sup>8</sup> IRFR16 has been delayed and changes to the 2022-23 estimate reflect the changes necessary to DEL and depreciation from that time.

