

Report Title	Electoral Review of Westmorland & Furness Council – Submission of Warding Arrangements
Meeting	Full Council
Meeting Date	4 November 2024
Report Author	Linda Jones, Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer
Wards Affected	All wards
PUBLIC. PART EXEMPT, OR FULLY EXEMPT	Public
Appendices (if any)	Appendix 1 – Warding arrangements submission (response to LGBCE)

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 To provide an update regarding the current Electoral Review of the authority, and to propose a response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England regarding proposed warding arrangements.

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in this report, Council is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the warding arrangements submission (as attached at **Appendix 1**) for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as the formal response from this Council.
- 2.2 Note the next stages of the Electoral Review.

3. Information: the Rationale & Evidence for the Recommendations

- 3.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) have commenced an Electoral Review of Westmorland & Furness Council. This is due to significant electoral inequality between current wards. The Electoral Review is formally split into two phases:
- i. Council Size, which includes development of electorate forecasts
 - ii. Warding arrangements, which involves setting the boundaries for each ward,
- 3.2 The review is conducted by the LGBCE, and this Council is a consultee. The review timeline is summarised below:

Council Size

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	LGBCE	
Develop council size proposal	Council Political Groups	Officers will be available to answer any technical queries on making a submission.	Now – July 2024
Submission of council size proposals	Council Political Groups	Officers will acknowledge receipt of submissions.	19 July 2024
Commission Meeting: Council Size	Not required	Commission	20 August 2024

Warding Patterns

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	LGBCE	
Consultation on warding patterns	Council Political Groups General Public	Run consultation, collate & analyse responses.	27 August – 4 November 2024
Commission Meeting: Draft Recommendations	Not required	Commission	18 February 2025
Consultation on Draft Recommendations	Council Political Groups General Public	Publish draft recommendations. Run consultation, collate & analyse responses.	4 March – 12 May 2025
Commission Meeting: Final Recommendations	Not required	Commission	August 2025
Final Recommendations Published	Not required	Commission publish final recommendations report and mapping	September 2025

Order

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	LGBCE	
Order laid	Not required	Commission	Autumn 2025
Order made	Not required	Commission	Winter 2025/26
Implementation	Council	Not required	May 2027

- 3.3 Following completion of the review, the new electoral arrangements will take effect from the scheduled elections of May 2027, with the new Council Size and new wards implemented at that point.

Council Size

- 3.4 The initial stage of an Electoral Review is to identify and confirm the preferred Council Size. This is the number of elected members who will serve on the Council and should be the number required to deliver effective and convenient local government.
- 3.5 Following a submission, made following Full Council in July 2024, the LGBCE have confirmed that they are minded to endorse a Council Size of 65 Members through this review. In certain circumstances, the LGBCE may amend the agreed number of Councillors up or down by 1 or 2 later if necessary in order to deliver effective and convenient local government that reflects the statutory criteria most completely.

Warding arrangements

- 3.6 The current stage of the Electoral Review is a consultation, by the LGBCE, on warding arrangements. Any interested individual, Group, Party, Parish/Town, Councillor, Organisation or elected representative may respond to the LGBCE Consultation directly at <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/westmorland-and-furness>.
- 3.7 As a consultee, Westmorland & Furness Council is invited to make a response to the LGBCE consultation. This represents an opportunity to directly influence the future warding arrangements of the authority to ensure they meet the needs of local people and the authority.
- 3.8 In developing warding arrangements, the LGBCE have regard to three statutory criteria; as a result the proposals produced by this Council must also take these into account:
- (1) the need to secure equality of representation (taking future growth into account);
 - (2) the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - (3) the need to secure effective and convenient local government.
- 3.9 There can be considerable overlap between these three criteria, as well as competing priorities. In general, it is not always possible to meet all three criteria perfectly in every ward. There must, therefore, be some level of compromise to develop the best possible warding arrangements for the local communities. Of the three criteria, the 'equality of representation' is the easiest to confirm as it is a numerical assessment (each ward should deliver electoral equality with a variance of less than $\pm 10\%$ from the authority-wide average). However, all three criteria are important and the contributions from local councillors to explain how communities work together, where their boundaries lay, and how they can be best represented is vital.
- 3.10 Further guidance can be found in the [LGBCE Technical Guidance](#).

Review process

- 3.11 In consultation with Group Leaders, a cross-party Member Working Group has been established to lead on developing the Council's response to the LGBCE Electoral Review. This Member Working Group comprises the following Members:
- Cllr Jarvis
 - Cllr Robinson
 - Cllr Carrick
 - Cllr Brook
- 3.12 The cross-party Member Working Group has met to develop the warding arrangements submission. This has also been discussed, by Group Leaders, with colleagues in their Groups and presented at the All Member Briefing for comment and discussion.
- 3.13 Whilst the proposed wards are the best option we have been able to develop, taking geography, community and the statutory criteria into account, following discussions with local Members we recognise that in a small number of cases the wards do not fully reflect community identity and interests - these are highlighted in Appendix 1. However, while the importance of local communities cannot be overstated, it has not been possible to identify an alternative warding configuration that works as effectively to fulfil the three statutory criteria for both these affected wards.
- 3.14 **Appendix 1** sets out the proposed warding arrangements. It is important to note that there is no single solution that works perfectly for every community in terms of community identity whilst retaining acceptable levels of electoral equality. In some areas, very difficult decisions had to be made to try to balance the three statutory criteria as fully as possible.

Future work

- 3.15 Once the final Warding Arrangements submission has been agreed by Council, officers will submit it to the LGBCE. Individual Councillors, Groups or Parties are welcome to make their own submission as well, whether supporting the Council submission or otherwise, and whether a full submission or focussed on a specific part of the local authority area.
- 3.16 The LGBCE will consider the Council's submission, alongside any other submissions and develop, based on the evidence provided along with their own investigations, their Draft Recommendations. These will be published in March 2025, followed by a public consultation to which the Council will be invited to respond.
- 4. Link to Council Plan Priorities: (People, Climate, Communities, Economy and Culture, Customers, Workforce)**
- 4.1 The warding exercise and the number of Council members considers the following :

- (1) the need to secure equality of representation (taking future growth into account);
- (2) the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (3) the need to secure effective and convenient local government

4.2 Having the appropriate number of councillors and efficient warding arrangements will allow us to deliver more effectively our council priorities.

5. Consultation Outcomes

5.1 The Warding Arrangements submission has been developed by the Member Working Group who are representatives of each of the political groups of the Council, in consultation with their group leaders and/or group members. The review is conducted by the LGBCE, who undertake the statutory consultations. Therefore, no consultation with parish councils, community groups or the public is required, and doing so would be inappropriate. Any person or group with an interest in the review is able and encouraged to make their own representations directly to the LGBCE through their consultation process.

5.2 An officer working group was also established and has provided input into this proposal.

5.3 An all member briefing session was held on the 17th October 2024 with follow up meetings with members who wanted to discuss matters in more detail.

6. Alternative Options Considered

6.1 The Council is expected to make a submission to the LGBCE in respect of proposed Warding Arrangements as part of the review. Failure to make a submission would leave the Council at a significant disadvantage, and impose substantial difficulties on the LGBCE as they undertake the review. It may also result in local communities being adversely affected. It is therefore important that an agreed Warding Arrangements submission is made.

6.2 Alternative options have been considered, balancing the three statutory criteria across the local authority area, with a range of alternative warding arrangements considered, discussed, modified and refined into the proposals in **Appendix 1**.

7. Reasons for the Recommendations

7.1 Following discussions with the cross-party Member Working Group, the Warding Arrangements outlined have been identified as the most appropriate; these take the three statutory criteria into account.

8. Climate and Biodiversity Implications

8.1 The Warding Arrangements have no direct impact on climate or biodiversity.

9. Legal and Governance Implications

- 9.1 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 (the 2009 Act). 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.
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 They are responsible for, among other things, conducting three main types of review of local government one of these is Electoral Reviews
- 9.4 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 for any principal council, the ratio of electors to councillors in each electoral ward or division, is the same.
- 9.5 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 the order.

10. Human Resources, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Implications

- 10.1 There are no direct Human Resources, Health, Safety or Wellbeing implication arising from this report.

11 Financial Implications

- 11.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

12 Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty, Armed Forces Veterans, Care Experienced, Rurality, and Socio-Economic Inequalities implications)

- 12.1 The review is led by the LGBCE, who are responsible for taking the public sector equality duty and other equality and diversity implications into account. The work by the Council, in developing and agreeing a Council Size submission and, later, warding arrangements has no direct implications.

13 Background Documents

- 13.1 Electoral reviews (Technical guidance), LGBCE:
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/technical-guidance-june_2023.pdf
- 13.2 General guidance on electoral reviews, LGBCE:
<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/changing-wards-number-councillors-council-has>