

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** FOI  
**Subject:** Freedom of Information request - ideal number of councillors in County Durham and Gateshead.  
**Date:** 15 November 2023 20:18:06

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[You don't often get email from [REDACTED]. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification> ]

Dear Local Government Boundary Commission for England,

I am writing to inquire about the processes and rationale behind the council size reviews in County Durham and Gateshead. I noticed that Gateshead Council is undergoing a public consultation to determine the ideal number of councillors, with an eight-week consultation period from 16 May to 10 July 2023. This seems like an important step in ensuring public participation and transparency.

However, it appears there was no similar public consultation for the council size review in County Durham. Could you please provide details on why this was the case? Understanding the reasoning behind these differing approaches would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

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Please use this email address for all replies to this request:

[REDACTED]

Is [foi@lgbce.org.uk](mailto:foi@lgbce.org.uk) the wrong address for Freedom of Information requests to Local Government Boundary Commission for England? If so, please contact us using this form:

[https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/change\\_request/new?body=lgbce](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/change_request/new?body=lgbce)

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Please note that in some cases publication of requests and responses will be delayed.

If you find this service useful as an FOI officer, please ask your web manager to link to us from your organisation's FOI page.

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**From:** [Hendry, Angela](#)  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** FOI Acknowledgment and Response  
**Date:** 16 November 2023 14:59:00  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[image002.png](#)  
[image003.png](#)  
[image004.png](#)

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Dear [REDACTED],

**FOI Ref: 87749/23**

Thank you for your request for information dated 15 November 2023, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You request:

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

**I am writing to inquire about the processes and rationale behind the council size reviews in County Durham and Gateshead. I noticed that Gateshead Council is undergoing a public consultation to determine the ideal number of councillors, with an eight-week consultation period from 16 May to 10 July 2023. This seems like an important step in ensuring public participation and transparency.**

**However, it appears there was no similar public consultation for the council size review in County Durham. Could you please provide details on why this was the case? Understanding the reasoning behind these differing approaches would be greatly appreciated.**

**Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.**

**Response:**

In a vast majority of electoral reviews, the Commission conducts, we do not run a discrete consultation on the matter of council size. The Commission's view is that, in most circumstances, only the authority and its members have a sufficiently in-depth understanding of the governance and decision-making functions of a local authority as well as councillors' role as representatives in the local community. Our overall technical guidance makes it clear that we will not normally conduct a public consultation on council size.

However, there are circumstances where we consider it necessary to hold a wider consultation on the number of councillors. This is often because the Commission is not convinced it has received sufficient information from a local council to support its proposed number of councillors and considers it would be beneficial to hold a wider public consultation. This was the circumstance in the Gateshead review. We received two submissions (from the Council and the Liberal Democrat Group) for significantly different council size numbers. The Commission decided that more information was required to justify either number and that a public consultation was needed to test the proposals. However, in respect of the County

Durham review, Commissioners were satisfied that they had received sufficient evidence from the authority and its groups to provisionally agree a number of councillors without the need for an initial round of consultation.

I would stress that, under legislation, the Commission is only required to consult once on a set of draft recommendations. However, at minimum the Commission carries out two rounds of consultation during an electoral review on ward / division boundaries. Therefore, we more than comply with the requirements placed upon us in respect of consultation as set out in our founding legislation (the 2009 Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act). When the Commission makes a decision on the number of councillors at the start of an electoral review, it is important to recognise that this decision is provisional – in effect the Commission is ‘minded’ to adopt a specific council size number but reserves the right to alter that number by a few either side if it receives evidence during the public consultation that an alternative number will provide a warding pattern that better meets the Commission’s overall criteria.

For completeness, I have attached guidance on the matter of council size for your information: [https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/council\\_size\\_guidance\\_-\\_jan\\_2023.pdf](https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/council_size_guidance_-_jan_2023.pdf)

I have also attached a copy of the submission template we issue to local councils to complete when making a submission on council size to us:

[https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/council\\_size\\_template.pdf](https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/council_size_template.pdf)

And finally, a link to our overall guidance on council size:

[https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/technical-guidance-june\\_2023.pdf](https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/technical-guidance-june_2023.pdf)

As you may be aware, the council size submissions we receive are uploaded to each individual review area page on our website.

I hope this clarifies the Commission’s approach. If you wish to request a review of our decision, you should write to:

Kathryn Trower  
Director of Corporate Services  
Local Government Boundary Commission for England  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Windsor House  
50 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0TL

Kind regards

**Richard Buck**  
**Review Manager**

**Angela Hendry**  
**Office Manager and HR Lead**  
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Local Government  
Boundary Commission  
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