

The
Local Government
Boundary Commission
for England



Corporate plan

2013-14 to 2017-18

HC 573

Corporate plan

2013-14 to 2017-18

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Chair's foreword

I am pleased to present the Commission's fourth Corporate Plan and five year strategy.

Each of the plans we have put forward over the past three years has proposed to increase outputs with fewer resources. This year's plan is no different and in the first year will mean completing 53% more electoral reviews than in 2011-12 against a budget that is reducing in real terms.

There are good reasons why increasing outputs are important. It means that we are both reducing electoral inequality for voters across England and supporting local authorities to meet the challenges they face.

Local government has changed profoundly in recent years. As a consequence, we are seeing an increasing demand from local authorities that wish to change their governance arrangements to reflect their circumstances, ambitions and political management structures. This plan has a focus on supporting those councils.

Our challenge is to maintain the progress we have already made since our establishment. It won't be easy. We are a small organisation with limited capacity to reduce costs without affecting day to day work. However, we continue to be creative about addressing the challenges. For example, we are conducting a comprehensive review of policies and practices to identify savings. We are also holding discussions with the Boundary Commission for England about how our organisations could work together to share overheads and release further front line capacity.

Delivery of the plan is partly reliant on others. For example, we have asked the Secretary of State to support us by reappointing one of our commissioners and appointing another to help us deal with more reviews. Increasing demand for our services could also lead us to seek additional resources to carry out electoral reviews beyond the targets set out here. But we would only make such a bid if it could be justified in cost-benefit terms.

By the end of this five year plan, if current trends continue, significant levels of electoral inequality will affect only half as many English local authorities as in 2011-12. At the same time, the plan allows the Commission to support English local government at a time when our work with them has never been more valuable.

Max Caller CBE
Chair, Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Introduction

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

Objective One: To provide electoral arrangements for English local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters.

Objective Two: To keep the map of English local government in good repair and work with local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens.

Achieving the objectives

The focus of the Commission's work is to carry out reviews of English local authorities:

Electoral reviews: reviews of the internal electoral arrangements of local authorities. An electoral review will consider – and make recommendations on - the number of councillors, names, number and boundaries of wards or electoral divisions.

Part of the Commission's programme of electoral reviews is targeted at councils with high levels of electoral imbalances between wards or divisions. When conducting electoral reviews, the Commission is statutorily obliged to draw up warding patterns that mean each councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as their colleagues across the authority and that ward boundaries reflect the interests and identities of local communities as well as providing for effective and convenient local government.

By focusing reviews on authorities with relatively high levels of imbalances, the Commission aims to reduce overall levels of electoral inequality affecting English local authorities which meets **objective one**.

The Commission's work programme also includes electoral reviews which have been programmed at the request of local authorities. In December 2010, the Commission opened up the review programme to local authorities that were seeking to address council size (the total number of councillors elected to the authority) or had asked to be subject to an electoral review with the aim of providing for single-member wards or divisions. The Commission commenced eleven electoral reviews on request in 2012-13 which has helped it deliver **objective two**.

The Commission's work programme for 2013-14 currently includes seven electoral reviews to be carried out on request which is in line with its Key Performance Indicator for responsiveness. However, having made productivity improvements in 2012-13, the Commission intends to add a further five requested electoral reviews to its programme for 2013-14. The additional reviews are not explicitly included in Table Two and Table Four of the plan as the timetable for their completion has not yet been finalised.

From its helpful discussions with the Department for Communities and Local Government and others, the Commission has reason to believe that there will be further demand for electoral reviews during 2013-14 and beyond. For example, in

January 2013, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State wrote to all local authorities in England to advise them of the opportunity to alter their year of election so that new electoral arrangements, recommended by an electoral review, could be implemented earlier than their electoral cycle currently allows. As the implementation of the electoral review process becomes more flexible, the Commission believes it could lead to more authorities considering the option. Current financial, economic and policy developments in English local government also point towards potential additional demand for electoral reviews to consider the number of councillors elected to each authority.

Since its establishment in April 2010, the Commission has reduced the proportion of English local authorities which are affected by high levels of electoral inequality. The Commission aims to continue to reduce electoral inequality while also accommodating as many requests for reviews as possible. Although the Commission aims to strike the right balance between the two - occasionally conflicting - objectives, the demand for requested reviews could exceed overall capacity.

In anticipation of its increased workload, the Commission has asked the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to consider appointing a further Commissioner, to bring the total to six as well as reappointing the current Deputy Chair. This is well within the statutory range of between four and eleven Commissioners and will be funded from existing resources.

As set out in Part Four of this plan, the Commission could approach the Speaker's Committee for additional resources to meet demand if a case could be made on a cost-benefit basis if demand continued to outstrip capacity.

Principal Area Boundary Reviews (PABRs): reviews of the external boundaries of local authorities, intended to reflect community identities and to promote effective and convenient and effective local government. Reviews of this nature range from addressing minor boundary anomalies that hinder effective service delivery to a few properties to whole-council mergers. The Commission completed two PABRs in 2012-13 which have contributed to the Commission achieving **objective two**. The Commission's programme remains open to requests from local authorities for PABRs though demand for such reviews is expected to remain low especially in comparison to electoral reviews.

Related alterations: the Commission is also responsible, at the request of local authorities, for making orders for related alterations to ward and division boundaries as a consequence of community governance reviews conducted by them. In 2012-13, the Commission made six related alterations thereby contributing to **objective two**.

Structural reviews: advising the Secretary of State, at his request, on the structure of local government in an area following proposals from local authorities to change from two-tier to unitary local government. The Government has indicated that it has no current plans to seek advice on structural reviews and, as such, they do not form part of this five-year strategy.

GLA boundaries: the Commission is responsible for reviewing and implementing changes to the constituencies of the Greater London Assembly. The Commission has no current plans to review GLA boundaries.

Part One: outputs since last corporate plan

The Commission is currently on track to exceed the commitments it made in its previous corporate plan as set out below.

Table One: outputs 2012-13

Objective	Objective for 2012-13	Output for 2012-13
Objective one: electoral reviews of areas with significant electoral imbalances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will complete reviews for Cumbria, Slough, Derbyshire, Purbeck, Somerset, Swale, Northamptonshire, Rushcliffe, Tonbridge and Malling, Boston and Arun. <p>Total: 11 electoral reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will commence reviews in 18 local authority areas to tackle electoral inequality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews completed for Cumbria, Slough, Derbyshire, Purbeck, Somerset, Swale, Northamptonshire, Rushcliffe, Tonbridge and Malling and Boston. Reviews also on track for completion for Arun, Fenland, Warwick, Herefordshire, Tower Hamlets and Vale of White Horse. <p>Total:16 electoral reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews commenced for 18 local authorities to tackle electoral inequality.
Objective two: reviews included in the programme on request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will complete reviews for Derbyshire, Rushcliffe, Boston and Arun. <p>Total: 4 electoral reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will commence 9 electoral reviews on request. We will complete PABRs for Stevenage/East Hertfordshire and Northumberland/Gateshead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews completed for <i>Derbyshire, Rushcliffe and Boston</i>. Reviews on track for completion for <i>Arun, Warwick, Bromsgrove, Hambleton, Gedling, Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire</i>¹. <p>Total: 10 electoral reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews commenced for 10 authorities on request. PABRs completed for Stevenage/East Hertfordshire and Northumberland/Gateshead.
Total	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will complete 13 electoral reviews. We will complete 2 PABRs We will commence 23 electoral reviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 electoral reviews are on track for completion in 2012-13. 2 PABRs completed. 24 electoral reviews commenced.

¹ Six electoral reviews in the programme deliver both of the Commission's objectives as they have high levels of electoral inequality and have requested a review. These are indicated in *italics* under objective two.

Table Two: objectives for 2013-14

Objective	Objective for 2013-14
Objective one: electoral reviews of areas with significant electoral imbalances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will complete reviews for 18 local authorities to tackle electoral inequality. • We will commence reviews in 17 local authority areas to tackle electoral inequality.
Objective two: reviews included in the programme on request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will complete reviews for eleven local authorities on request². • We will commence seven electoral reviews on request³.
Total	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will complete 23 electoral reviews. • We will commence 22 electoral reviews.

² Six local authorities in the programme will meet the Commission's criteria for electoral reviews as well as requesting a review.

³ The Commission aims to include a further five electoral reviews in the programme for 2013-14 which have been requested by local authorities. However, the timetable for those reviews had not been set when this plan went to print.

Part Two: resources

When the Commission was established in April 2010, its annual budget was set at £3.045m. In 2013-14, its budget requirement is £2.533m.

Throughout the course of the five year strategy, the Commission's resource profile is in line with the Chancellor's Autumn Statements in 2011 and 2012 and Annex A of the Budget 2012. As such, the five-year plan envisages a further reduction to £2.18m by 2017-18. As well as absorbing inflationary pressures, the Commission will have reduced its budget by £863k (28%) since its establishment.

The Commission aims to achieve further budget savings in the following ways:

- **Staff costs:** In 2012-13, the Commission carried out a staff restructure with the aim of integrating its implementation functions into mainstream review work. The changes mean that the Commission no longer requires a separate implementation team which has led to savings and a more efficient review process.
- **Printing:** In line with Cabinet Office guidance on the conduct of consultations, the Commission has developed an online consultation portal that allows it to consult digitally by default.
- **Mapping:** During 2012-13, the Commission has renegotiated its Service Level Agreement with Ordnance Survey to deliver mapping in a more simplified and cost effective way.
- **Productivity:** over the past year, the Commission has improved its understanding of the unit costs of reviews and, in particular, through an analysis of staff time spent on aspects of review work.

During 2012-13 the Commission has carried out a comprehensive review of its policies and processes with a view to identifying further potential savings and areas where the capacity of the organisation could be increased. However, the Commission is mindful that, as a small organisation, there are limits to reductions it can make without adversely affecting the role that Parliament has charged it to undertake.

In addition, the Commission is aware of potential demand from local authorities who wish it to undertake an electoral review to consider the number of councillors representing the authority or to deliver a pattern of single-member wards. As the Commission believes this work can assist local authorities, at a time of challenge for English local government, it aims to meet this demand.

The Commission will continue to seek further productivity improvements which could allow it to accommodate requests for reviews beyond the indicative programme contained within this plan. As such, the Commission aims to include five additional reviews in its programme for 2013-14 beyond those listed in this.

Table Three: resource profile 2012-13 to 2017-18

	2012/13 (£000)	2013/14* (£000)	2014/15* (£000)	2015/16* (£000)	2016/17* (£000)	2017/18* (£000)
Staff (including Commissioners)	1,295	1,282	1,234	1,186	1,140	1,096
Rent, rates and service charges	620 ⁴	594	588	565	543	522
Mapping and printing	350	322	309	297	285	274
Other costs (travel, professional costs etc)	302	285	270	260	250	240
Revenue Total	2,567	2,483	2,401	2,308	2,218	2,132
Capital	50	50	50	50	50	50
Total	2,617	2,533	2,451	2,358	2,268	2,182

The Commission's indicative resource profile takes full account of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and Annex A of the Budget 2012 for the years 2015-16-2017-18 as well as the Autumn Statement 2012 for the years 2013-14 and 2014-15.

* Individual budget headings for 2013-14 to 2017-18 are stated pro rata the total as indicated in *italics*.

⁴ This represents rent of £80, rates of £48 and a total of £492 in charges for outsourced back-office services. In 2012-13, charges under the various elements of service level agreement were: Finance & Exchequer £164, IT £154, HR (including payroll) £44, facilities management £124, miscellaneous £6.

Part Three: review programme 2013-14 to 2017-18

Table Four sets out the Commission's indicative work programme for 2013-14 to 2017-18.

The Commission's corporate plan and five-year strategy aims to reduce levels of electoral inequality affecting voters in local authorities across England. In 2012-13, significant levels of electoral inequality⁵ affected 20% of English local authorities. As in previous years, the Commission's work programme is dependent on the volatility in levels of electoral inequality in England and other challenges set out below and in Part Four: corporate capacity. Subject to those challenges, by the end of the five-year plan, the Commission aims to complete reviews so that 12% of authorities are affected by high levels of inequality.

In addition to reducing electoral inequality for voters, the review programme aims to meet demand for electoral reviews from local authorities that believe a review could help them deliver effective and convenient local government (as set out in the Introduction to this plan).

The Commission is aware of potential demand for electoral reviews from local authorities that wish to consider, in particular, the number of councillors elected to their council. If demand continues to exceed supply, the Commission could approach the Speaker's Committee with a bid for additional resources for 2014-15 so that it can carry out more reviews on request.

The Commission will face considerable challenges to retain current levels of delivery of electoral reviews in the last two years of the plan due to significant planned reductions in resources. It is scrutinising all areas of activity and expenditure in order to find the further economies necessary to sustain the level of output indicated in those years.

⁵ Significant levels of electoral inequality in a local authority are defined by the Commission as: 30% or more of its wards/divisions have an electoral imbalance (ratio of electors to members) of 10% or more from the average for the authority; and/or it has one ward/division with an electoral imbalance of 30% or more; and the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by population change within a reasonable period.

Table Four: indicative review programme 2012-13 to 2017-18

Objective 1 - electoral inequality	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18
No. of local authorities	352	352	352	352	352	352
No. with electoral inequality at start of year	75	69	61	56	51	46
Add new cases of inequality (projected from the average of last 5 years)	10	10	10	10	10	10
Deduct cases resolved - reviews planned for completion	16	18	15	15	15	15
No. with electoral inequality at end of year	69	61	56	51	46	41
As a %	20%	17%	16%	14%	13%	12%
Objective 2 – effective and convenient local government⁶ - reviews planned for completion	10	11	7	7	7	7
Deduct cases where authorities both meet the criteria for intervention and have requested a review ⁷	6	6	-	-	-	-
Total reviews planned for completion	20	23	22	22	22	22

⁶ Electoral reviews undertaken on request.

⁷ The Commission has prioritised requests for electoral reviews from local authorities which also meet the criteria for intervention. Such reviews contribute to both of the Commission's primary objectives.

Part Four: corporate capacity

The Commission's previous two corporate plans set out how it would increase outputs while reducing its overall budget profile. The current corporate plan outlines how the Commission will make further savings while maintaining a level of output that will continue to reduce electoral inequality for voters as well as helping local authorities to deliver effective and convenient local government.

However, the Commission will face considerable challenges during the course of the five-year strategy which are likely to affect its ability to deliver the objectives described elsewhere in the plan. The main challenges are set out below.

Demand for electoral reviews

In December 2010, the Commission opened up its future work programme to include requests from authorities for electoral reviews. The Commission has already been able to accommodate most serious expressions of interest for reviews submitted to it and aims to clear virtually all the current outstanding requests in 2013-14 by including a further five reviews in its programme beyond those set out in its previous corporate plan.

The Commission continues to receive requests for electoral reviews. In most cases, local authorities request a review to consider the total number of councillors elected to the council. Requests are usually forthcoming as a result of authorities' desire to reduce costs and reflect the changing role of local government in a new economic and policy environment. In addition, in many cases, the council size of local authorities has not changed significantly or at all since local government re-organisation in 1974 despite the considerable changes to their role and functions over the last 40 years. The Commission believes that accepting requests can help deliver its objective to assist local authorities in delivering effective and convenient local government for their areas.

The Commission has been able to meet requests for electoral reviews since it invited councils to come forward. However, as 2013-14 is likely to see further demand for electoral reviews (See Part Three: review programme) and it is possible that demand will significantly outstrip supply. If such a situation arises, the Commission could approach the Speaker's Committee for additional resources in 2014-15 to tackle a backlog in requests. Such a bid could be justified on the grounds of the benefits delivered to local authorities through the electoral review process.

In the medium term, and the last two years of the plan in particular, the Commission recognises that it may not be able to achieve the level of output to which its plan aspires within the steadily reducing budget. As a small organisation with limited opportunities to achieve economies of scale, the Commission is likely to face considerable pressures in reducing costs further without affecting outputs directly.

Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

From summer 2014, each person will be required to register to vote individually rather than by household: a profound change in electoral registration practice. As such, the introduction of IER is likely to have an impact on the electoral register of every local authority in England⁸.

⁸ As shown in the Electoral Commission's 2003 report on the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 which can be found at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/news-and-media/news-releases/electoral-commission-media-centre/news-releases-reviews-and-research/the-electoral-commission-launches-report-on-electoral-fraud-act

Volatility of electoral registers affects levels of electoral inequality within local authorities and, as the Commission's work programme is based on those imbalances, could have an impact on overall levels of electoral equality across England.

The challenges set out above could not confidently be offset without altering the resource profile detailed in Part Two of this plan. However, given the current financial environment and the emerging nature of the challenges, the Commission does not presently propose to increase the resource profile.

As well as seeking economies and efficiencies in all its areas of activity, the Commission is exploring whether possible joint working arrangements with other bodies might enable some core costs to be spread across a fuller range of outputs. In particular, the Commission is actively pursuing discussions with the Boundary Commission for England about ways in which the two organisations could share overheads and release additional capacity to carry out local government reviews. The Commission aims to develop these plans further in 2013-14.

Part Five: performance

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Target end of 2012-13	Projected outturn 2012-13	Comments	Target 2013-14
1. Percentage of local authorities with significant electoral imbalances.	24%	20% - full year estimate	<p>The Commission is on track to complete 20 reviews in 2012-13 which exceeds its cautious assumption set out in last year's plan (13). The percentage of authorities with significant electoral imbalances has been further reduced as a smaller number of authorities crossed the threshold for becoming subject to a possible review during 2012-13 than anticipated in the plan. Each year, the Commission forecasts that (net) 10 local authorities that did not meet its criteria in the previous year will experience increases in electoral inequality to the extent that they become subject to a possible review.</p>	17%

2.	Number of local authorities requested reviews that are programmed for review at 1 April.	7	7	Seven reviews are scheduled to begin in 2013-14 which were requested by local authorities. The Commission aims to include a further five requested reviews in its programme for 2013-14. These reviews have not yet been timetabled so do not yet form part of Tables Two and Four.	7
3.	Aggregate percentage customer satisfaction with review processes ⁹ .	More than 70%	92.6% (at Q3)	The Commission's customer satisfaction analysis is based on online surveys via email, through its corporate website and paper surveys distributed at the Commission's meetings with councils and with the public.	More than 70%
4.	Percentage of electoral change orders which, following reviews by the Commission, come into effect at the election expected when the review was first programmed.	95%	100% (at Q3)	The Commission has laid nine draft orders in Parliament so far in 2012-13 all of which have now completed the parliamentary process and will implement recommendations in the year originally envisaged when the review was programmed.	95%

⁹ The Commission measures customer satisfaction with the way the Commission addresses the values set out in its Corporate Plan (namely, its professionalism, independence and impartiality). 'Satisfaction' is defined as the customer providing positive feedback to the Commission's conduct, services, products or publications.

			To be agreed
5.	Average unit costs of reviews.	<£125K £75k (at Q3)	Having delivered markedly more reviews than the cautious figure in last year's plan, and reduced costs in some areas, the Commission is set to report a dramatically reduced unit cost this year. It will consider how best to frame targets for future years, to take account of a varying mix year by year of county and district reviews (the former generally entailing much higher mapping and other costs). In line with the NAO's recommendations in its report of February 2013 on time recording and costing, the Commission will be setting shadow budgets in 2013-14 which will facilitate this.
6.	Percentage variance from total budget	<3% Aprox. £200k underspend – projected outturn	The Commission is on course to deliver its full 2012-13 programme whilst keeping within its budget and has surrendered £150,000 of its operating budget. <3%



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