

# ***Report***



**Local Government Boundary Commission for England  
Electoral Review of Sunderland**

**Report of the Chief Executive**

**1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1** The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) contacted the Council in July 2022 to advise that it intended to carry out a review of the overall composition of the Council, looking at its total number of Councillors and its ward arrangements.
- 1.2** This report updates Council on the process to be carried out by the Commission at stage two of their review, which relates to the development of a new pattern of wards for Sunderland, and potentially new ward names.

**2.0 Background**

- 2.1** At an Extraordinary Meeting on 22 February 2023, the Council approved a submission to the Commission in relation to Council size. The Council submission recommended that the Council size remained at 75 members.
- 2.2** The Commission wrote to the Council on 9 May 2023 and confirmed it was minded to recommend that 75 Councillors should be elected to the Council in the future. The Commission also gave formal notice of the start of its next stage of public consultation, inviting proposals for the development of a new pattern of electoral wards for Sunderland.
- 2.3** Further background to the Commission's review, and the process carried out by the Council to date can be found in the reports to Council on 16 November 2022, 25 January 2023 and 22 February 2023.

**3.0 Ward Patterns review**

- 3.1** The Commission has now invited proposals from residents and organisations on the pattern of electoral wards in the City, based on a Council size of 75 members. This public consultation is running from 9 May 2023 to 17 July 2023. In drawing up a proposed pattern of electoral wards, the Commission will seek to:
- ensure that, within an authority, each Councillor represents a similar number of electors;
  - reflect the electoral cycle so that each ward is represented by three Councillors;
  - create boundaries that are appropriate, and reflect community ties and identities; and
  - deliver reviews informed by local needs, views and circumstances.

- 3.2** Following the close of the consultation period the Commission will test proposals made to them against the above criteria, before drawing up its own proposals.
- 3.3** On 16 November 2022 the Council agreed to establish a politically balanced Boundary Review Working Group of Members, to assist with the formulation of the submission to the Commission relating to Council size. This Working Group was made up of seven members, supported by relevant officers, and met on 3 occasions. The terms of reference agreed by the Council provided for meetings of the Working Group to continue up until submission of the Council size proposal.
- 3.4** The work involved at stage two of the Commission's review involves formulating proposed ward boundaries in a way that meets the Commission's criteria, which is significantly more complex, and potentially more subjective, than the processes involved in preparing a submission in relation to Council size.
- 3.5** Given the potential number of varying approaches to warding patterns, the different criteria which the Commission will take into account, and the relatively short period for the public consultation, it is considered impractical to prepare multiple alternative proposals of ward patterns and ward names for Members and/or their group representatives for consideration, with a view to reaching a consensus and an agreed Council submission.
- 3.6** The Commission has invited proposals from all interested parties and members of the public on the pattern of electoral wards, and as such, each political group, and individual Members may wish to make their own submission to the Commission at this stage of the consultation. The Council is also bringing the consultation to the attention of residents and community groups. It is not however intended that there will be a single agreed Council submission to the Commission, and consequently it is not proposed that the Working Group is reconvened for this or the remaining stages of the review.
- 3.7** Officers from Electoral Services, Governance Services and Corporate Affairs will develop a 'base' scheme which sets out potential new ward patterns, with mind to the current and forecast electorate figures for each ward, and the Commission's requirement that each Councillor represents a similar number of residents. This will not be submitted to the Commission, but the exercise will enable Council officers to properly analyse the Commission's own proposals on ward boundaries as and when they are received, and consider a potential Council response to the next stage of public consultation on the proposals, which is currently scheduled to take place between October 2023 and December 2023. When complete, the base scheme developed by Council officers will be made available to interested parties on request.
- 3.8** An interactive map of current ward boundaries and analysis of current electorate data is available to all interested parties at <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/sunderland>. This includes a breakdown of the current electorate and the 2029 forecast electorate population by reference to current ward boundaries and polling districts. Further technical guidance on electoral reviews together with tips for individuals, local groups and organization on giving their views can be found at <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/changing-wards-number-councillors-council-has>.

**3.9** The Commission will consider representations issued to them during this stage of the consultation process, before drawing up its own warding proposals. The timetable currently published by the Commission for their review is as follows:

- 9 May 2023 - the Commission decide how many Councillors there should be
- 9 May - 17 July 2023 - initial public consultation open
- TBC - Commission presents its own warding proposals
- 3 Oct - 11 Dec 2023 - Commission carry out a public consultation on its proposals
- 27 February 2024 - Commission publish its recommendations
- TBC - Commission asks Parliament to approve its recommendations
- May 2026 - New arrangements apply to local elections

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

There are no additional direct financial implications that arise from this report. The development of the Council base warding scheme will be supported through existing officer working arrangements.

#### **5.0 Reasons for Decision**

- 5.1** At the Extraordinary Council meeting on 22 February 2023, Council was advised that further reports to Council would be submitted as the Commission's review progresses, and it begins the process of reviewing the ward arrangements.
- 5.2** The aim of this process is to deliver electoral equality across the City of Sunderland, by ensuring Councillors represent a similar number of electors, and that future ward boundaries are appropriate and reflect community ties.
- 5.3** At this stage of the Commission's review, it is considered impractical and unrealistic for multiple alternative proposals of ward patterns to be developed and submitted to Members, with a view to trying to reach a consensus on an agreed Council submission.
- 5.4** The Council will have an opportunity to respond to the next stage of public consultation on the Commission's proposals, which is currently scheduled to take place between October 2023 and December 2023

## **6.0 Alternative Options**

**6.1** There are no alternative options presented as part of this report.

**6.2** The Council is not legally required to submit a response to the Commission as part of the public consultation. However, under s56(9) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, the Council must provide the Local Government Boundary Commission for England with any information that it reasonably requires in connection with a review of electoral arrangements if requested to do so. No such request has been received to date, and the work to be carried out by officers as referred to at section 3.7 of this report will enable the Council to provide a timely response to the Commission if ultimately required.

## **7.0 Background Papers**

The Commission's briefing papers to the Council on the process of the review.

## **8.0 Recommendations**

To recommend to Council that it:

- i) notes the response of the Commission to the initial part of its review, and that the Commission is minded to recommend that 75 Councillors should be elected to the Council in the future.
- ii) notes the approach to the public consultation at this stage of the Commission's review, and the resource that will be made available to any interested parties who wish to submit a response.