

REVIEW OF COUNCIL SIZE AND WARD BOUNDARIES**Report of the Chief Executive****1.0 Purpose of the Report**

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) has contacted the Council to indicate that it intends to carry out a review of the overall composition of the Council and Ward arrangements. The previous review was undertaken in 2002, with the final recommendations being published in October 2003, and whole-Council elections taking place in 2004.

This report recommends to Council the process to be adopted in relation to the completion of the Council's submission in relation to Council Size. Further reports to Council in relation to Ward arrangements will be submitted in due course at the appropriate time.

2.0 Description of Decision

To recommend to Council that:

- i) it notes the commencement of the review of the overall composition of the Council and its Ward arrangements by the Commission;
- ii) the timetable for the review process and the date for the submission of the Council size proposal, in particular, be noted;
- iii) a politically balanced Boundary Review Working Group be established of seven members of the Council to assist in the process of developing initially the Council Size Proposal document;
- iv) the terms of reference for the Boundary Review Working Group as set out in Appendix 1 be approved;
- v) the Chief Executive be authorised to draft the Council Size Proposal document in consultation with the Boundary Review Working Group and submit it for approval to the Council Meeting on 25 January 2023 prior to its submission to the Commission by 28 February 2023; and
- vi) it notes that further reports will be submitted to Council as the review by the Commission progresses to consider the Ward arrangements.

3.0 Background

The Commission is an independent and impartial, non-departmental public body which is responsible for reviewing local government ward boundaries in England. The Commission has the task of periodically carrying out Electoral Reviews in all local authorities in England.

In this case, the last review of Council Size and Ward arrangements was undertaken in 2002 to 2003, with the revised boundaries coming into effect in 2004.

In July 2022, the Commission contacted the Council, indicating that it had decided to undertake a review of the Council. The stated purpose of the review is to consider the number of councillors elected to the Council (the Council size), the names, number and boundaries of the wards, and the number of councillors to be elected to each ward.

The information received from the Commission outlines the review process and timetable, with whole-Council elections following at the next ordinary electoral date to implement any changes. Subsequent local elections would then revert to elections to the Council by thirds as is the case presently.

The purpose of the review is to ensure electoral equality across the City's wards, i.e. they have a proportionate number of electors per ward with the right number of elected members.

The review will principally examine and propose, if considered appropriate and necessary, new electoral arrangements for the Council. These are:

- The total number of councillors to be elected to the Council (Council Size)
- The names, number, and boundaries of wards
- The number of councillors to be elected from each ward

Please note this review is separate to the Parliamentary Constituency Boundary Review.

3.1 The Review Process

There are two distinct parts to the review:

1. **Council Size** - the Commission will decide the total number of councillors to be elected to the Council; and
2. **Ward Arrangements** – the Commission may/will also re-draw ward boundaries so that they meet statutory criteria.

The conclusion made by the Commission regarding the size of the Council will be influenced by the Council's (and/or councillors') submissions during the preliminary phase of the process.

With regard to the Ward arrangements, the Commission will also undertake two phases of public consultation.

The whole review process is set out in the Commission's timetable below.

The Commission have indicated that they anticipate that a Parliamentary Order will be laid in Spring 2024 for the new arrangements, following which 'all out' elections to the new wards will take place in **May 2026**. Following those all out elections in May 2026, the Council would then revert to local elections of members to the Council in thirds as is the case at present.

The Review Timetable

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	Commission	
Council Size			
Develop Council Size proposal	Council Political Groups	Officers available for questions	Submission deadline 28 Feb 2023
Commission meeting: on Council Size	Not required	Commission	11 April 2023
Warding Patterns			
Consultation on warding patterns	Council Political Groups General Public	Run consultation, collate and analyse responses.	9 May – 17 July 2023
Commission meeting: on draft recommendations	Not required	Commission	12 Sept 2023
Consultation on draft recommendations	Council Political Groups General Public	Publish draft recommendations. Run consultation, collate and analyse responses.	26 Sept – 4 Dec 2023
Commission meeting: Final Recommendations	Not required	Commission	13 Feb 2024
Publication of Final recommendations	Not required	Commission	27 Feb 2024
Order			
Order laid	Not required	Commission	Spring 2024
Order made	Not required	Commission	Summer 2024
Implementation	Council	Not required	2026

3.2 Next Steps

The Commission has already conducted a briefing session with the Leaders of the political groups and a separate session for all Members of the Council.

In order to meet the timescale set out by the Commission's timetable in relation, in particular, to the submission of the Council Size proposal – no later than 28 February 2023- it is proposed to establish a politically balanced Boundary Review Working Group of Members. It is proposed that the Boundary Review Working Group is made up of seven members (4 Labour, 2 Conservative and 1 Liberal Democrat). A draft Terms of Reference for the Boundary Review Working Group is set out at Appendix 1.

It is also proposed that the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Boundary Review Working Group, to draft the Council Size submission document for its approval by Council at its meeting in January 2023.

Further reports to Council will be submitted as the Commission's review progresses beyond the considerations of the proposals relating to the Council Size and it begins the process of reviewing the Ward arrangements.

4.0 Financial Implications

There are no additional direct financial implications that arise from this report. The development of the Council Size proposal document will be supported through existing officer time.

5.0 Reasons for Decision

The review is a periodic review undertaken by the Commission. By developing and putting in place appropriate arrangements within the Council, it will be able to participate in the review process and respond accordingly.

6.0 Alternative Options

There are no real alternative options available. The Council has to participate in the review to provide certain information such as property forecasts and data. The Council is invited by the Commission to submit Council Size proposals during the preliminary stage of the review. If the Council did not submit a proposal response then it would mean that the Commission would make its final recommendations without the benefit of the Council's views.

7.0 Background Papers

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