

The Boundary Committee

for England

Part of the Electoral
Commission

Electoral reviews



Boundary changes may mean that you are no longer in the same ward or division that you used to be. As a result there may be a different collection of communities within your ward or division. Electoral reviews do not affect postal addresses or postcodes, house prices, ecclesiastical parishes (although civil parish and town councils may be affected) or the catchment areas for schools.

How can I get more information?

We will respond to any enquiries you may have, whether by letter, telephone, fax or email. Contact details are on the back page of this leaflet. Please contact us if you would like to know when your area will next be reviewed, or if you would like a copy of the *Guidance and procedural advice*, which sets out in more detail the principles and our approach to electoral reviews.

What else does the Committee do?

We can be asked by the Electoral Commission or the Government to review:

- local authority (county, district and parish council) external boundaries;
- the structure of local government;
- the electoral arrangements of elected regional assemblies; and
- district ward or county division boundaries following a change to external parish boundaries.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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The Boundary Committee for England has the task of conducting electoral reviews of local authority areas in England. These reviews are necessary because of population changes and movement over time, which result in electoral inequality. This means that the number of electors each councillor in a local authority represents may differ considerably. The electoral reviews help ensure that, so far as possible, each councillor represents the same number of electors, while taking into account other factors such as reflecting local communities and providing effective and convenient local government.

What is the Boundary Committee for England?

We are a statutory committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by the UK Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. One of our current responsibilities is to carry out electoral reviews of local authority areas in England. We report to the Electoral Commission, which takes decisions on any changes recommended and their implementation. We are chaired by an Electoral Commissioner and have five deputy commissioners drawn from various backgrounds. We are supported by a director and a small full-time staff.

The Boundary Committee for England and the Electoral Commission are completely independent from Government and political parties.

What is the purpose of an electoral review?

The primary purpose of an electoral review is to achieve equality of representation, that is to say, to ensure that each councillor in a local authority represents the same number of electors. In carrying out a review, we must also take into account the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government. Boundaries must also be easy to identify. These criteria, and our approach to them, are discussed in the Electoral Commission's *Guidance and procedural advice*. This document is available on our website at: www.boundarycommittee.org.uk

In reviewing local authority areas, we can make recommendations for changes to the number of councillors elected to the council, the number and boundaries of wards or divisions, and the names of wards or divisions. We can also recommend changes to parish electoral arrangements.

What happens during a review?

Each review is in four stages:

In **Stage One** we invite proposals from local authorities, town and parish councils, local people and other interested parties on how the present arrangements can be improved.

In **Stage Two** we consider these proposals and decide on our draft recommendations.

In **Stage Three** our draft recommendations are published and comments on them are invited from local authorities, town and parish councils, members of the public and other interested parties.

In **Stage Four** we consider any comments made and decide whether to change our recommendations, before publishing our final recommendations and sending them to the Electoral Commission.

There is then a further period when the Electoral Commission considers our final recommendations and any representations received on them during the six weeks following their publication. The Electoral Commission makes the electoral change orders to implement new electoral arrangements.

What does the Committee consider when making its recommendations?

The objective of an electoral review is to improve electoral equality. That is to say, to ensure that each councillor represents approximately the same number of electors. However, we also need to reflect community identities and interests in our recommendations. There is often a tension between these factors.

For this reason, we always seek to base our recommendations on locally-derived proposals. We believe that local people are best placed to consider how community identity can be reflected in new warding patterns.

We look for proposals for changes to electoral arrangements to be well argued and backed up by strong evidence, rather than based on assertion. The starting point in developing proposals to put to us should be the achievement of electoral equality. The further a proposal moves away from the achievement of electoral equality, the more persuasive the evidence, in terms of community identity and interests and effective and convenient local government, will need to be. Examples of what we consider as valid evidence can be found in the Electoral Commission's *Guidance and procedural advice*.

How will an electoral review affect me?

In some cases, because of population changes, the ward or division in which you live may either gain a councillor or lose a councillor.