The
Local Government
Boundary Commission
for England

Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Reading Borough Council Electoral Review

Members' Briefing Pack

Table of Contents

A Message from the Chair of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Professor Colin Mellors OBE

This briefing tells you all you need to know about the electoral review of your council. It tells you what an electoral review is, why we are conducting it and how you can influence the outcome.

***The electoral review is an opportunity for you to shape your council for the future**. On council size, the review will help you decide how you will represent communities in the future and ensure that your governance arrangements reflect your long-term ambitions. When we come to consider boundaries, we will aim to build electoral wards that reflect communities and lock in electoral fairness for future elections.*

***The outcome of the review is not pre-determined**. The Commission will only take decisions after giving careful consideration to the evidence provided by you, your council and local communities throughout the process.*

***Your local knowledge will be valuable in helping us come to our conclusions**. The best electoral reviews are those where councillors engage with the process. The Commission will take decisions on the strength of evidence provided during the review after we have assessed all submissions against our statutory criteria. It doesn't matter whether evidence comes from the council, council groups or individual councillors, we have an open mind about which proposals we will put forward as formal recommendations.*

***The electoral arrangements of your council will change**. Our experience of electoral reviews clearly shows that changing boundaries in one part of your area will inevitably have an impact on other areas. Most wards are likely to experience a change to one or more of their boundaries, name or number of councillors representing them. We will look to you to influence the nature of those changes.*

***We will make it as easy as possible for you to influence the process.** In addition to our preliminary dealings with the council, we will hold at least two phases of public consultation before we finalise the recommendations of the review. We encourage you to engage with your communities about the review, so we can get the broadest possible spread of evidence.*

I hope you find this briefing helpful.

Professor Colin Mellors OBE

Local Government Boundary Commission for England

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body established by Parliament in April 2010. We are not part of government and are accountable to Parliament through the Speaker's Committee.

Our organisation consists of the Chair of the Commission and five Commissioners who are supported by approximately 20 members of staff.

What is an Electoral Review?

An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for the whole local authority. 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.

The review is likely to have implications for the whole local authority not just areas with high levels of electoral inequality.

Why Reading?

Electoral reviews look at whether the boundaries of wards or divisions within a local authority need to be altered. We might conduct these reviews either to ensure fairer representation at local government elections after any significant changes in the distribution of electors, or at the request of a local authority for other reasons.

Reading meets the Commission's criteria for electoral inequality with 5 of 16 wards (31%) having a variance of outside 10%.

The Commission will seek to deliver electoral equality for voters in local elections.

A full table of current wards and their variances can be found at Appendix 1. A map showing the distribution of any electoral imbalances across the authority can be found at Appendix 2.

Electoral Review Process

The electoral review will have two distinct parts;

- *Council size:* before we re-draw ward boundaries, the Commission will come to a view on the total number of councillors to be elected to the council in future. We will come to a conclusion on council size after hearing the council's (and/or councillors') views during the preliminary phase.

- *Ward boundaries:* we will re-draw ward boundaries so that they meet our statutory criteria. You will have an opportunity to put forward your ideas in two phases of public consultation.

You, and the communities you represent, can influence the review. Please refer to the timetable in Appendix 3 to find out when you can have your say.

Part One: Council Size

The first part of the review will determine the total number of councillors to be elected to the council in the future. We call this 'council size'. We will not consider ward boundaries until we have completed this phase.

By the end of the preliminary stage of the review, we expect the council and/or its political groups, to present the Commission with a case for a council size that they believe is right for their authority.

The Commission will make its judgment on council size by considering three broad areas:

- We will look at the **governance arrangements** of the council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities.

- The Commission will look at the council's **scrutiny functions** relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies.

- We will also consider the **representational role of councillors in the local community** and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.

If you plan to make a submission to us on council size (whether it's for an increase, reduction or maintaining current arrangements), you should make sure you address these areas and that your view is backed up by evidence.

Governance Arrangements

The Commission aims to ensure that councils have the right number of councillors to take decisions and manage the business of the council in an effective way now and in the future.

To support your view, the Commission is looking for evidence about cabinet and/or committee responsibilities, number of committees and their workload, delegation to officials, other bodies and plans for the future.

Scrutiny Functions

Every local authority has mechanisms to scrutinise the executive functions of the council and other local bodies. They also have significant discretion over the kind (and extent) of activities involved in that process. In considering council size, the Commission will want to satisfy itself that these responsibilities can be administered in a convenient and effective way.

To support your view, the Commission is looking for evidence about the number of councillors your authority needs to hold the decision makers to account and ensure that the council can discharge its responsibilities to other organisations (e.g. other public-sector bodies, partnerships, and trusts).

Representational Role of Councillors

The Commission understands that there is no single approach to representation and members will represent and provide leadership to their communities in different ways. However, we are interested in hearing about the extent to which members routinely engage with communities and how this affects workload and responsibilities.

To support your view, the Commission is looking for evidence about how councillors interact with their communities, their caseloads and the kind of support they need effectively to represent local people and groups.

Part Two: Warding Patterns

We will carry out two phases of public consultation when we will invite you to present your proposals for new ward boundaries.

At the first round of consultation will ask for proposals on new ward boundaries. We will use responses to that consultation to draw up draft recommendations for new boundaries across your area. We will hold a second round of consultation on those proposals during which time you will be able to comment on them and propose alternatives.

The Commission will draw up new electoral arrangements that provide the best balance of our statutory criteria. The criteria include three main elements:

- *Delivering electoral equality for local voters. This means ensuring that each councillor represents roughly the same number of voters so that the value of your vote is the same regardless of where you live in the local authority area.*

- *Interests and identities of local communities. This means establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, avoid splitting local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable.*

- *Effective and convenient local government. This means ensuring that the wards can be represented effectively by their elected representative(s) and that the new electoral arrangements, including both the council size decision*

and warding arrangements, allow the local authority to conduct its business effectively.

You should ensure that any proposal you make to the Commission, during either phase of consultation, takes into account the statutory criteria. The most persuasive cases are those that are also supported by evidence. Over the next five pages, you will find further explanation about the types of evidence the Commission usually receives under each of the criteria. This might help you build your own submission.

Delivering Electoral Equality for Local Voters

The Commission aims to deliver a pattern of wards where each councillor represents approximately the same number of electors.

We base decisions on the number of electors in a ward and not the total population. The Commission's obligation, set out in law, is to deliver electoral equality where councillors represent a similar number of electors. This could not be achieved if we considered population statistics rather than electoral register totals.

Once the Commission has taken a view on council size, it gives us, and anyone interested in submitting proposals to the review, a clear idea of the target for achieving electoral equality for future patterns of wards.

Although we strive for perfect electoral equality for all wards, we recognise that this is unlikely to be exactly achieved. If you propose a boundary that would lead to an electoral variance for the ward (see exhibit 1), the Commission will need to see evidence that such electoral inequality is justified on the grounds of the Commission's other statutory criteria. The higher the level of electoral variance you are proposing for a ward, the more persuasive your evidence will need to be.

The Commission has an obligation, set out in law, to consider electorate forecasts five years after the completion of the review. The purpose of the forecasts is to try and ensure that the review delivers electoral equality for voters in the longer term. We will work with council officers to draw up realistic forecasts for your authority. Further guidance on how we calculate projected electorates are available on our website at: https://www.lgbce.org.uk/how-reviews-work/technical-guidance

Table 1, below, shows how the Commission calculates and presents electoral variances in its reports. You can read the full report here: https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/east-sussex/eastbourne.

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2015)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2021)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Devonshire	3	8,623	2,874	6%	9,006	3,002	5%
2	Hampden Park	3	7,422	2,474	-8%	7,872	2,624	-8%
3	Langney	3	7,817	2,606	-4%	8,197	2,732	-4%
4	Meads	3	8,094	2,698	0%	8,566	2,855	0%
5	Old Town	3	8,339	2,780	3%	8,793	2,931	3%
6	Ratton	3	7,392	2,464	-9%	7,747	2,582	-9%
7	Sovereign	3	9,135	3,045	13%	9,517	3,172	11%
8	St Anthony's	3	8,106	2,702	0%	8,715	2,905	2%
9	Upperton	3	8,018	2,673	-1%	8,420	2,807	-1%
	Totals	**27**	**72,946**	**–**	**–**	**76,832**	**–**	**–**
	Averages	**–**	**–**	**2,702**	**–**	**–**	**2,846**	**–**

Table 1: Final Recommendations for Eastbourne Borough Council (2016)

Interests and Identities of Local Communities

Unlike electoral equality, it isn't possible to measure levels of community identity, so we will be looking for evidence on a range of issues to support your reasoning. The best evidence for community identity is normally a combination of factual information such as the existence of communication links, facilities and organisations along with an explanation of how local people use those facilities.

Below are some issues that we often use to assess community interests and identity. You may wish to use some of these examples to tell us why you are putting forward your view:

- *Transport links*. Are there good communication links within the proposed ward? Is there any form of public transport? If you are proposing that two areas (e.g. streets, estates or parishes) should be included in the same ward together, how easily can you travel between them?

- *Shared interests*. Are there particular issues that affect your community which aren't necessarily relevant to neighbouring areas that might help us determine where a ward boundary should be drawn? For example, many local authorities contain areas which have urban, suburban and rural characteristics. Each of those areas may have different needs and interests though they could be located next to each other. One area might be more affected by urban issues such as the local economy while an adjacent area might be more concerned with local transport matters. We would like to hear evidence about what those issues are and how they mean boundaries should combine or separate the areas in question.

- *Community groups*. Is there a residents' group or any other local organisation that represents the area? What area does that group cover? What kind of activities do they undertake and are there any joint-working relationships between organisations that could indicate shared community interests between different geographical areas?

- *Facilities*. Where do local people in your area go for shopping, medical services, leisure facilities etc? The location of public facilities can represent the centre or focal point of a community as do some service arrangements such as NHS commissioning groups. We would like to hear evidence from local people about how they interact with those facilities so that we can understand the shape of local communities and the movement and behaviours of their residents.

- *Identifiable boundaries*. Natural features such as rivers can often provide strong and recognisable boundaries. Similarly, constructions such as major roads, railway lines or commercial developments can also form well known and effective barriers between communities.

- *Parishes*. In areas where parishes exist, the parish boundaries often represent the extent of a community. In fact, the Commission often uses parishes as the building blocks of wards. Parishes which share a secretariat or other arrangements often fit together well in the same ward.

These are issues you may wish to consider when proposing a pattern of wards or if you are commenting on the Commission's proposals. It is not – and is not intended to be – an exhaustive list of matters the Commission will consider when coming to a conclusion on wards and their boundaries. Similarly, the Commission attaches no specific weighting to any of the issues above when taking decisions. This guide simply intends to provide some prompts for you to be able to have your say.

There are also a number of things the Commission does not consider to be strong evidence when it takes decisions. For example, an area's history and tradition may be the basis of a sense of community identity. However, communities change over time and perceptions can vary between individuals as to the nature of those ties. The Commission would need to hear how and why those traditional arrangements reflect communities now.

In addition, whilst social and economic data (e.g. from the census or other statistical sources) can tell you a lot about individuals living in an area, it doesn't necessarily explain the nature of communities and is often a poor guide their interests and identities. The Commission considers that this kind of evidence can provide useful background information for an area, but we will treat it with caution when proposing new wards.

Effective and Convenient Local Government

We also consider whether a ward pattern would help deliver effective and convenient local government to people. If you are providing evidence to the Commission, there are a number of issues you might want to consider so that our recommendations can help us meet this obligation.

- *Ward size.* We will look at the geographic size of the ward and try to ensure that it is not so large that it would be difficult for a councillor to represent. Similarly, in urban areas, a ward might be so small in area that its councillor might not be able to contribute effectively to the wider business of the council.

- *Ward names*. Councils and their communities are usually able to suggest appropriate names for wards that reflect community identities and mean something to local people. In determining names for wards, we aim to avoid causing confusion amongst local electors and ensure that names are distinct and easily identifiable, for example, our preference is for names that are short rather than those which attempt to describe an area exhaustively.

- *Internal access*. Recommendations for ward boundaries will normally provide for people to move between all parts of the ward without having to venture outside of the ward. This normally means vehicular access by road. However, there may be occasions when parts of a community are linked not by vehicular routes but by footpaths, footways, pedestrianised streets etc. These will be more likely to be acceptable in densely populated residential areas of towns or cities.

- *Barriers.* Transport links such as roads and railway lines can unite communities or serve to divide them. For example, a parade of shops can act as the focal point for an area, but a main road can signify the boundary between communities. The Commission will aim to reflect these differences in its recommendations.

- *'Doughnut' wards*. We occasionally receive proposals for a pattern of wards which propose an 'inner' ward and an 'outer' ward for a settlement. We will not normally recommend this kind of pattern because the communication links between the north and south of the outer ward are usually poor and we also often find that people in the northern part of the outer ward share higher levels of community identity with residents in the north of the inner ward than with residents in the south of the outer ward. Where we need to divide a settlement or an estate to achieve electoral equality, we will usually seek an alternative to this pattern.

- *Detached wards*. The Commission is sometimes presented with proposals to include two geographically separate areas in the same ward. We will not usually accept a proposal of this kind, except in extraordinary geographical circumstances such as for offshore islands, as it is unlikely to meet our criteria for promoting community identity and interests or delivering effective and convenient local government.

- *Number of councillors for each ward*. There is no limit, in law, to the number of councillors that can be elected to represent a ward. However, as a matter of policy, the Commission will not accept a proposal for more than three councillors to represent a ward as we do not think such an arrangement would promote effective and convenient local government or local accountability.

- *Electoral Cycles.* For councils that hold whole-council elections every four years, the Commission is able to propose any pattern of wards that it believes best meets its statutory criteria. This is usually a mixture of single-, two- and three-councillor wards.

  For councils that elect by thirds, there is a presumption in legislation that they will have a uniform pattern of thee-member wards. The Commission will require compelling evidence to move away from a uniform pattern of wards in these circumstances.

Consultation: How to 'Have your say'

An electoral review is a consultative process. You, and your community, can influence the outcome. We have an open mind about adopting proposals from groups or individuals that are supported by evidence and complement the statutory criteria.

In addition to the preliminary phase of the review, when we gather information about the council and assess your views on council size, we will hold at least two phases of public consultation.

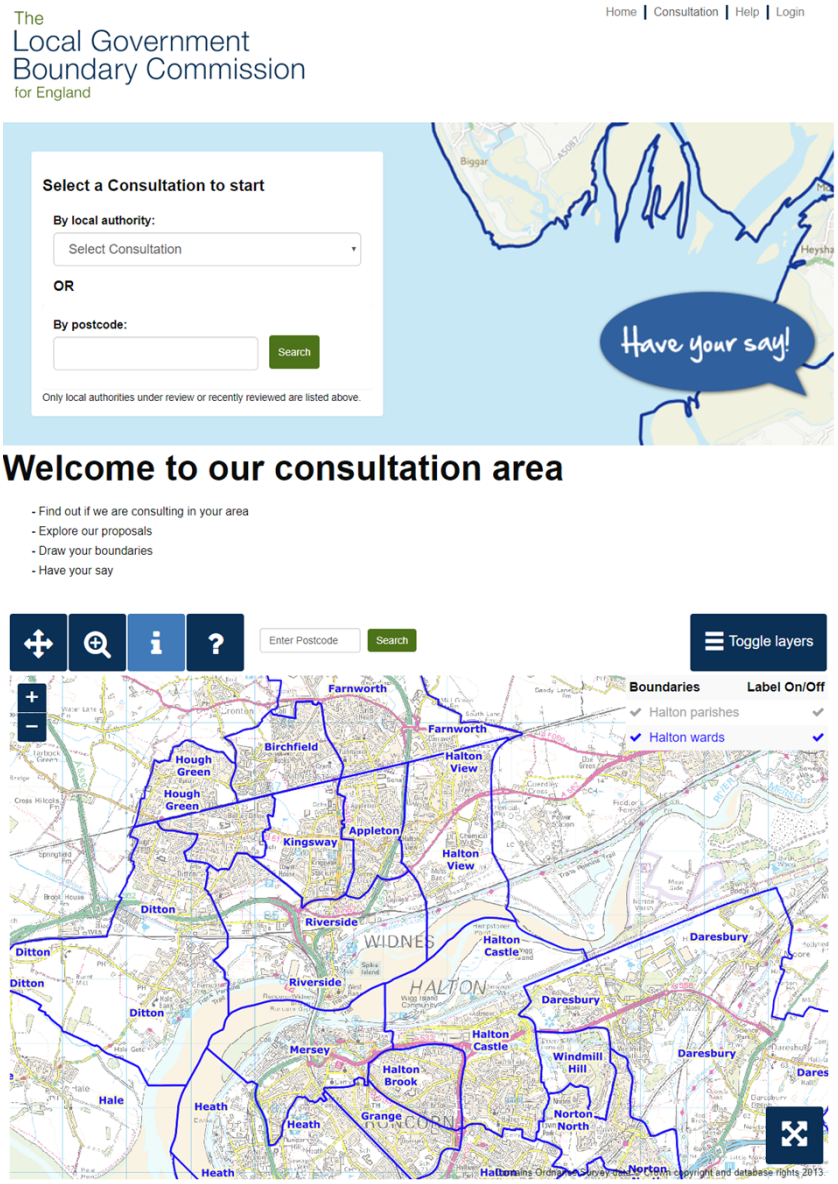
We encourage councillors to take part in each phase of consultation, as individuals or as groups, and we hope that elected members can also encourage communities to take part in consultation.

We are only able to consider evidence that is made to us in writing as all decisions are taken by formal meetings of the whole Commission. The best evidence includes the reasons why you agree with our proposals or why you disagree with them. If you do not think our proposals are right for your area, we would welcome alternative suggestions for boundaries that meet our criteria.

There are several ways in which you can keep up to date with the progress of the review and to have your say:

- *Website.* You can keep track of the electoral review for your area through our website at http://www.lgbce.org.uk/. We set up a dedicated web page for each review where you will find details of its timetable, our reports, maps, proposals and guidance. You can comment on our proposals directly through our website or by emailing: reviews@lgbce.org.uk. And you can write to us at the address shown on the contacts page. We also publish all the submissions we receive so you can see what kind of evidence we relied on to make our decisions.

- *Interactive consultation portal.* The portal allows you to view and interact with our maps as well as comment on our proposals directly. By logging on to https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/ you will be able to view our proposals down to street level, draw your own pattern of wards or annotate the maps to tell us about the nature of community interests and identities in your area. Below, you can see what the site looks like and how you might be able to put forward your views. Log on to https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/ to find out how you can interact with our mapping.



- *Parishes and/or residents groups.* If your area has parish councils, we will offer to hold a briefing meeting locally at the start of an electoral review with representatives of the parishes. Alternatively, we will consider offering a briefing meeting for resident's associations at the start of a review to brief them on the process.

- *Members of Parliament.* The Commission offers to brief all local MPs at each phase of consultation and will keep them updated on the progress of the review.

- *Lead commissioner.* One of our commissioners will be appointed as lead commissioner for the review and will represent the Commission in meetings with the council though all decisions are taken by the Commission collectively. The lead commissioner and key staff will also conduct at least one tour of the local authority area to assess the issues 'on the ground' and areas of contention as we draw up recommendations.

- *Publicity.* We will issue a press release at every stage of an electoral review to local press and media to encourage engagement in the process by local people. We will also ask the council to publicise the review. We will produce posters at each stage to be displayed in council offices, libraries and by local organisations and we will ensure that we produce hard copies of all our reports and maps for display in council buildings and libraries for those who do not have internet access. Follow us on Twitter @LGBCE.

- *Community groups.* At the start of a review, we will ask your local authority for information and contact details for local community groups and organisations that might be interested in the review and who might also wish to contribute to it. We will write to all those groups with information about the review at each stage and invite evidence from them. We will also ensure that we make contact with local organisations that represent minority groups that might otherwise have been excluded from the consultation process. We will provide translations and accessible versions of our material on request.

Making effective representations

Council Size

When you put forward a council size, we will assess your number (or range of numbers) against your 15 'nearest neighbour' authorities as set out by CIPFA. Refer to Appendix 4 to see how your authority compares to its 'nearest neighbours'.

If your proposal means that your council size would be well above or below the average of your statistical neighbours, you need to ensure your case for that council size is particularly strong. In some cases, your current council size could put you outside the range of your neighbours, so we would need a strong case to retain the status quo.

If you want to make sure your case on council size is as strong as possible, you should:

- Make sure you address your governance arrangements, scrutiny functions and the representational role of councillors.

- Support your case with evidence e.g. of councillor workload, volume of decisions and councillor representation in the community.

- Ensure that you have taken into account future trends and that the council size you suggest will still be right in future years.

- Find out more about council size in our technical guidance: https://www.lgbce.org.uk/how-reviews-work/technical-guidance

Boundaries

A persuasive representation regarding the warding arrangements for an authority will usually;

- *Be submitted at the right time.* If you have a view on division boundaries, don't just wait until we have published draft recommendations. Make a submission during the Stage One consultation to ensure we can build in your proposal at the earliest possible stage.

- *Take account of our statutory criteria.* The Commission will judge all submissions, and make recommendations, based on those criteria.

- *Consider the consequences of the proposal across the wider area.* Most proposals will have a knock-on effect elsewhere in the borough.

- *Be based on evidence.* Tell us why your view should be accepted and how your suggestion meets the criteria.

- *Suggest an alternative.* If you are objecting to a proposal, tell us where we should draw the boundaries.

Finally, the Commission welcomes submissions that support its recommendations as much as those that propose alternatives. It is very likely that people who oppose our draft recommendations will get in touch with the Commission to put forward their alternative proposals. So, if you support our recommendations, you should make sure you tell us so that we can balance the evidence.

Recent Reviews

The Commission's rolling programme of reviews means that many other local authorities have been through the process in recent years. You may find their experiences useful for a number of reasons:

- Read their council size submissions to find out what arguments they put to the Commission and the evidence they provided.

- Find out how councils put their ward patterns together and which proposals the Commission found persuasive.

- Look at the submissions we received from groups and individuals during consultation.

Our website includes dedicated web pages for all previous electoral reviews and you can read all the evidence we received as well as our draft and final recommendations reports. Specific examples of some recently completed reviews can be found at Appendix 5.

Contacts

The key contacts for this electoral review of Reading Borough Council are:

Review Officer	Paul Kingsley
Email	Paul.kingsley@lgbce.org.uk
Telephone	0330 500 1275
Review Manager	Richard Buck
Email	Richard.buck@lgbce.org.uk
Telephone	0330 500 1271

If you want to send in a submission on the review:

Address	Review Officer (Reading) LGBCE 1st Floor, Windsor House 50 Victoria Street London SW1H 0TL
Email	reviews@lgbce.org.uk
Consultation Portal	consultation.lgbce.org.uk

Switchboard: 0330 500 1525
Website: www.lgbce.org.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/LGBCE
Twitter: @LGBCE

Appendix 1: Electoral Data Summary

Electoral Variance by Ward

Ward Name	No. Councillors	Electorate*	Variance*
Abbey	3	9,190	25%
Battle	3	7,666	5%
Caversham	3	7,385	1%
Church	3	6,466	-12%
Katesgrove	3	6,870	-6%
Kentwood	3	7,276	-1%
Mapledurham	1	2,473	1%
Minster	3	7,404	1%
Norcot	3	7,665	5%
Park	3	6,833	-7%
Peppard	3	7,535	3%
Redlands	3	5,868	-20%
Southcote	3	6,560	-10%
Thames	3	7,360	0%
Tilehurst	3	7,205	-2%
Whitley	3	8,606	17%

*Data based on December 2017 electoral registers.

Data Summary

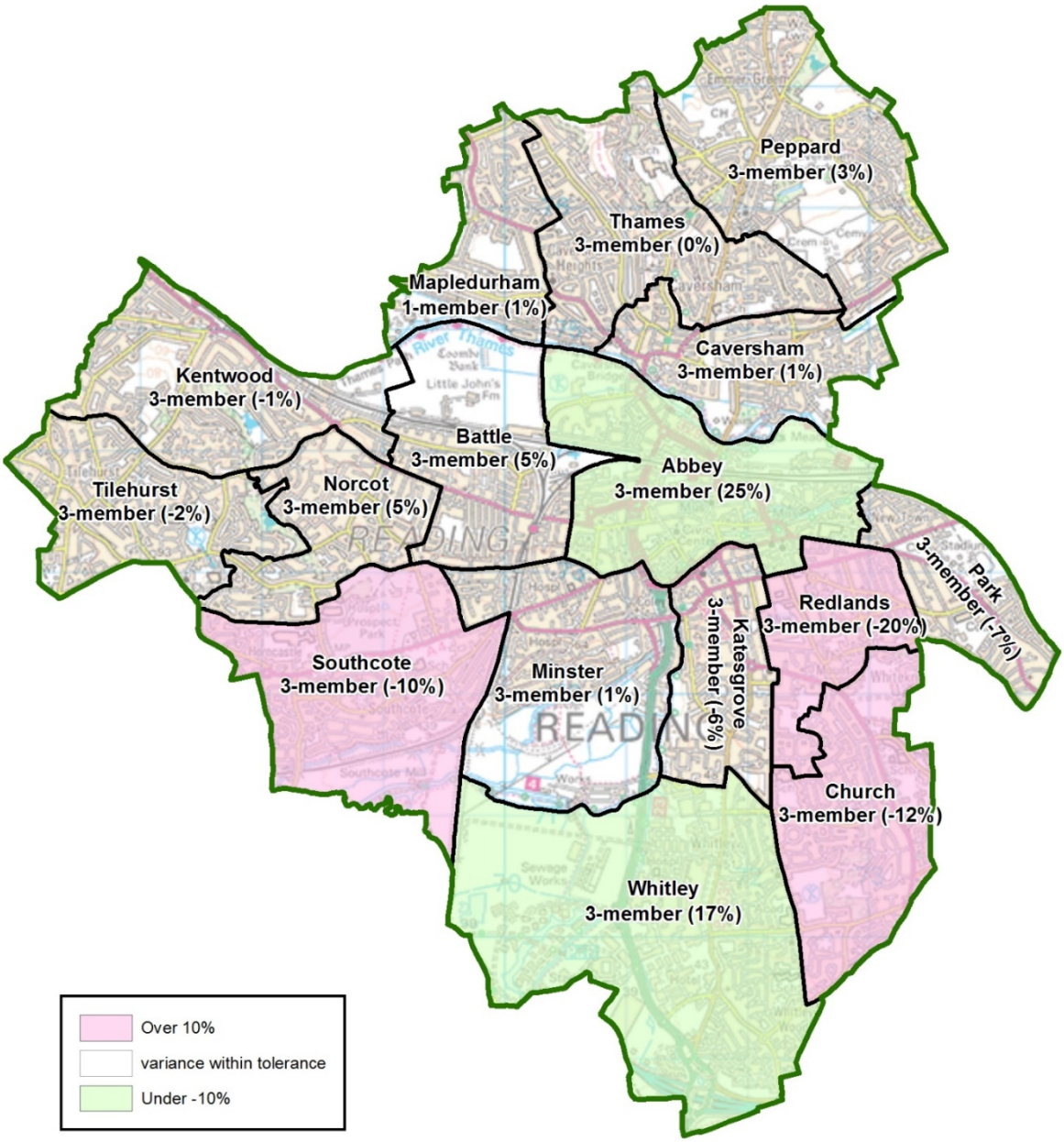
No. Cllrs	No. Electors	Cllr: Elector Ratio
46	112,362	2,443

	No. Wards
One-Councillor Wards	1
Two-Councillor Wards	0
Three-Councillor Wards	15
Total No. Wards	16

Electoral Imbalance	No. Wards	% Wards
>10%	5	31%
>20%	1	6%
>30%	0	0%
>40%	0	0%

Outliers	Positive	Negative
Abbey	25%	
Redlands		-20%

Appendix 2: Map of Electoral Variances



Appendix 3: Electoral Review Timetable

Reading Borough Council: Electoral Review Timetable

These timetables outline the key dates and activities for both the Council (shown in bold) and the Commission during the review process.

Preliminary Period

Briefings	***Attendees***		***Key Dates***
	Council	***LGBCE***	
Initial Meeting	**Council Leader Chief Executive**	Chair Chief Executive	**19 November 2018**
Officer Briefing	**Council Officers involved in review**	Review Manager	**February 2019 to March 2019**
Group Leader Briefing	**Council Group Leaders**	Lead Commissioner Review Manager	
Full Council Briefing	**All Councillors**	Lead Commissioner Review Manager	
Local Groups Briefing	Not required	Review Manager Review Officer	**TBC**

Council Size

Activity	***Involvement***		***Key Dates***
	Council	***LGBCE***	
Develop council size proposal	**Council Political Groups**	Officers will be available to answer any technical queries on making a submission.	**Now to 15 July 2019**
Submission of council size proposals	***Council Political Groups***	Officers will acknowledge receipt of submissions.	**15 July 2019**
Commission Meeting: Council Size	Not required	Commission	20 August 2019

Warding Patterns

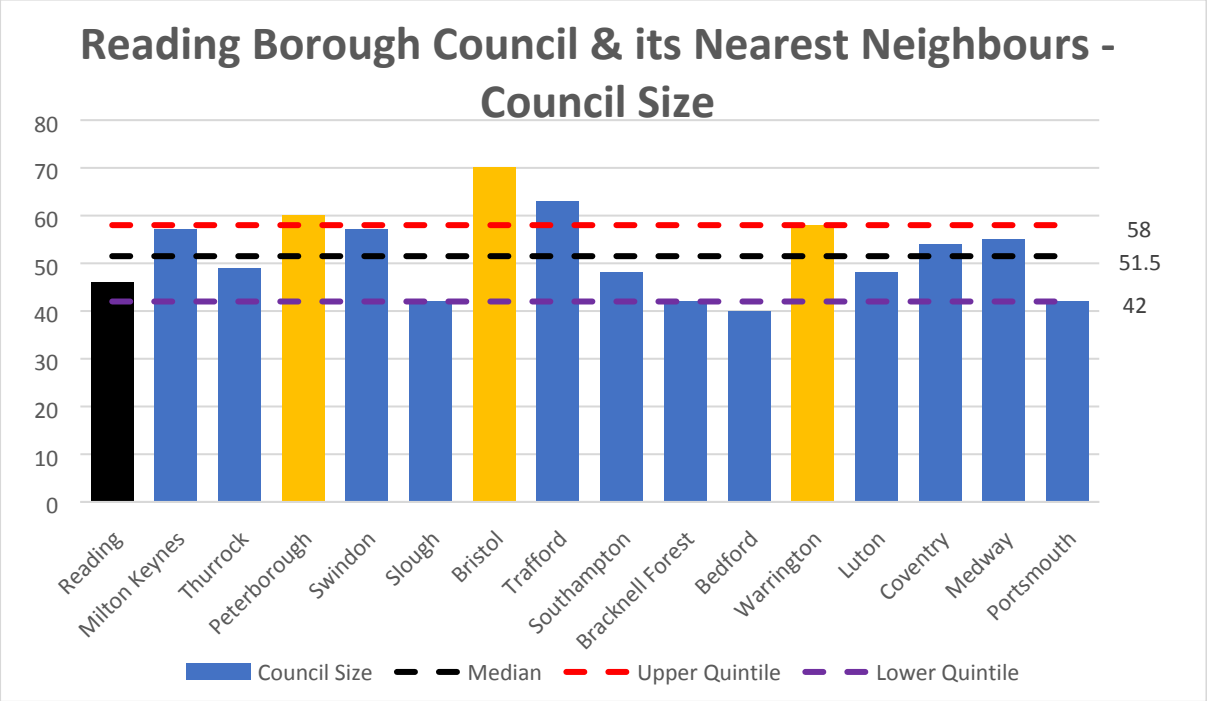
Activity	*Involvement*		*Key Dates*
	Council	*LGBCE*	
Consultation on warding patterns	**Council Political Groups General Public**	Run consultation, collate & analyse responses.	**27 August 2019 to 04 November 2019**
Commission Meeting: Draft Recommendations	Not required	Commission	**17 December 2019**
Consultation on Draft Recommendations	**Council Political Groups General Public**	Publish draft recommendations. Run consultation, collate & analyse responses.	**07 January 2020 to 16 March 2020**
Commission Meeting: Final Recommendations	Not required	Commission	**19 May 2020**
Final Recommendations published	Not required	Publish final recommendations	**02 June 2020**

Order

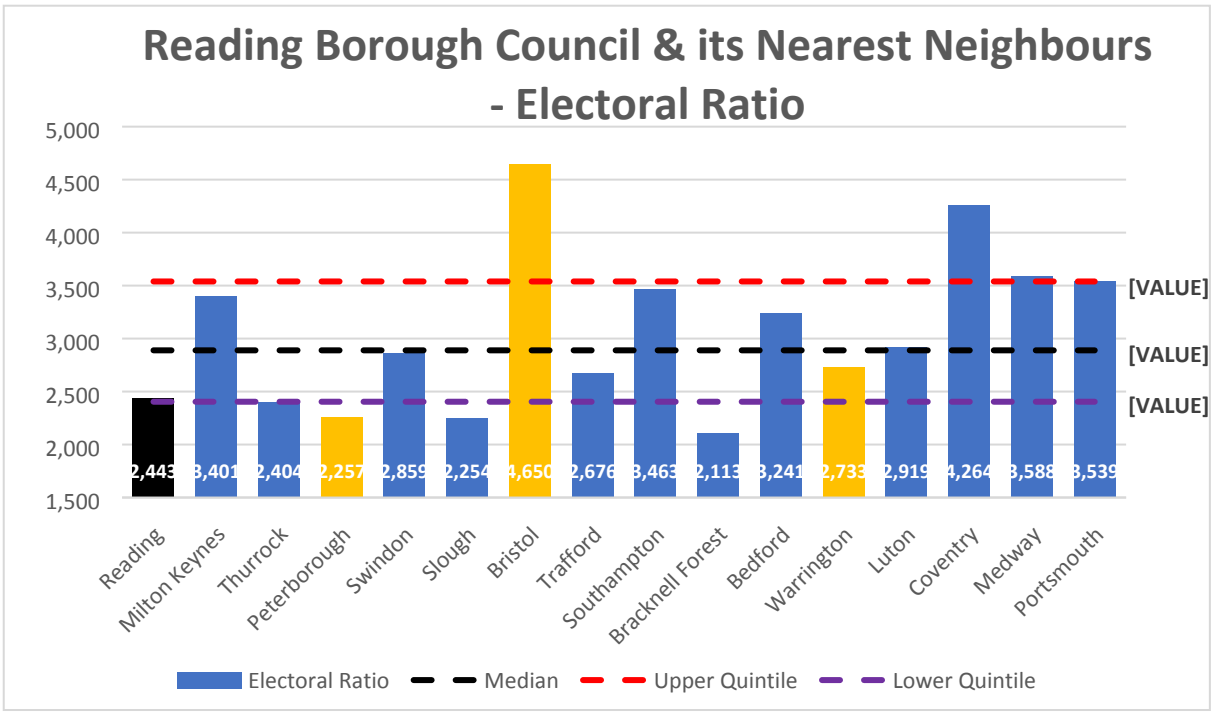
Activity	*Involvement*		*Key Dates*
	Council	*LGBCE*	
Order laid	Not required	Commission	**Autumn 2020**
Order made	Not required	Commission	**Autumn 2020**
Implementation	**Council**	Not required	**2022**

Appendix 4: Council Size Expected Range

The Nearest Neighbour graph shows Reading relative to other councils that have been identified as statistically similar by CIPFA. It gives a guide as to where their council size fits and if there may be any interest in altering it.



Most Simila - → **Least Simila -**



Appendix 5: Recently Completed Reviews

Babergh
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/eastern/suffolk/babergh

Carlisle
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/north-west/cumbria/carlisle

Copeland
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/north-west/cumbria/copeland

Crawley
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/west-sussex/crawley

Dartford
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/kent/dartford

Dover
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/kent/dover

Mid Suffolk
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/eastern/suffolk/mid-suffolk

North Devon
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-west/devon/north-devon

Norwich
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/eastern/norfolk/norwich

Reigate and Banstead
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/surrey/reigate-and-banstead

South Somerset
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-west/somerset/south-somerset

Warwick
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/west-midlands/warwickshire/warwick

Appendix 6: Frequently Asked Questions

What characterises a good electoral review?
The best electoral reviews are those where the council and councillors have engaged with the process at an early stage.

On council size, authorities that have thought seriously about how they want to manage the business of the council and represent local people for the long term, usually put forward strong submissions.

Where local authorities and/or members have put together a ward pattern that meets our statutory criteria and where the proposals are supported by evidence, we tend to be able to draw up recommendations that are largely built on consensus.

Councils that have been able to gain input from local groups and individuals on their proposals usually put forward a strong submission especially where it is supported by evidence.

What don't you consider in an electoral review?
Polling districts, school catchment areas, addresses and postcodes are not matters the Commission will take into account when drawing new ward boundaries. Although some existing wards may have strong boundaries and reflect local communities, we start with a clean sheet of paper when drawing up recommendations.

We take no account of parliamentary constituency boundaries (see below for more details).

Similarly, we do not take into account possible political implications of our recommendations.

Why can't you consider boundaries at the same time as the number of councillors?
The Commission will make a judgment on council size before we consider ward boundaries. This means that everybody who wishes to take part in the consultation will know the optimum number of electors per councillor which we need to achieve to deliver electoral equality in our pattern of wards. If you do not know the total number of councillors who will be elected to the council, it makes it very difficult to come up with a proposal for a ward pattern that will deliver this crucial statutory criterion.

On some occasions, the Commission will alter its view on council size in its draft or final recommendations by one councillor if that number provides for a scheme of wards which better reflects our statutory criteria.

How much will the review cost?
The Commission does not charge local authorities to undertake an electoral review and our funding is agreed by the Speaker's Committee in the House of Commons.

Every review is different, and some are more resource intensive than others. For example, a county will require more resources than a small district in terms of the quantity of maps, time spent drawing up recommendations and consultation materials.

Like most other public-sector organisations, the Commission is under an obligation to reduce costs. Since 2010, the Commission has reduced its budget by around 30% in real terms and will make further savings in the coming years.

My ward has the right number of electors already. Will it change?
Changes to wards are usually extensive in every review we conduct. For example, if we propose to change council size in a significant way, it is unlikely that your ward will then contain the optimum councillor: elector ratio. In addition, the knock-on effects of changing boundaries in one part of the local authority can have an impact elsewhere which usually leads to substantial changes.

If you wish to retain an existing boundary, you should tell us why such an arrangement complements the statutory criteria.

Will you look at the external boundaries of the council?
No. The electoral review will only consider internal ward boundaries. External boundaries can only be changed through a different type of review called a Principal Area Boundary Review (PABR).

More details on PABRs can be found on our website at:
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/how-reviews-work/technical-guidance

Will parliamentary constituency boundaries be affected?
Reviews of constituency boundaries are the responsibility of the Boundary Commission for England which is a separate body and operates under different legislation. You can find out more about their work on their website at: boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/.

The Commission has no obligation to consider constituency boundaries as we draw up recommendations. As such, there is a possibility that new wards could cross constituency boundaries.

Will parishes be affected?
We have no powers to alter the external boundaries of local parishes. However, if our recommendations propose to divide parishes between wards, we will alter the electoral arrangements of that parish to create parish wards. We can also make changes to the years in which parish council elections take place so that they do so in the same years as borough elections in their associated wards.

More information about possible implications for parishes are set out in our technical guidance: https://www.lgbce.org.uk/how-reviews-work/technical-guidance

Can the council veto your recommendations?
No. We will work consultatively with you throughout the review and seek to build consensus. However, the final recommendations of the review are those of the Commission. After we publish our final recommendations, we will lay a draft order – the legal document that seeks to implement the recommendations – in both Houses of Parliament. It is up to Parliament to approve or reject that draft order before it is implemented.

Will you hold public meetings and/or meet with political groups during the process?
We will always brief a meeting of the full council in the early stages of the review. We will also offer a briefing meeting with local parishes and/or residents groups.

During the rest of the review, we will not usually offer to meet any groups or individuals. We try to ensure that everyone has an equal chance of influencing the Commission during consultation and, as such, we do not want to be seen to favour any group by holding meetings them to which other interested parties do not have access.

Why don't you consider the population of wards and not just the electorate?
The Commission has a statutory obligation under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 'to secure that the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of members of the council to be elected is, as nearly as possible, the same in every electoral area of the council'. This means that we can only consider the number of local government electors when we draw up boundaries which will deliver electoral equality.

In what forms do you accept submissions?
The Commission only accepts submissions which are made in writing by hard copy, email or through our website. The Commission takes decisions collectively and will consider every submission received before coming to a conclusion.

You can also use our consultation portal to draw your own boundaries and submit them directly to the Commission. You are strongly advised to include an explanation of why the boundaries you are putting forward are appropriate and complement our statutory criteria.

Submissions to the Commission are rarely persuasive if they are not supported by an explanation of how the proposal meets the Commission's statutory criteria. As such, petitions which simply object to a proposal do not usually constitute strong evidence on which the Commission can base alternative recommendations. In the same way, resolutions of council which do not provide for alternative arrangements that are supported by a rationale will not normally prove to be persuasive.

To what extent do you change your recommendations during the process and as a result of consultation?
Since the establishment of the Commission as a stand-alone body in April 2010, the Commission has made amendments to its draft recommendations in most cases as

a result of submission received during consultation. We consider every submission and believe the electoral review process is strongest where local authorities have engaged in it.

How will you involve local people in the review?
We will engage with local press and media at every stage of consultation through press releases and social media. We also publish all relevant information on our website, including every submission we receive. Our online consultation portal allows users of the site to draw their own boundaries and engage in the process in a detailed way.

If your area has parishes, we will engage directly with them through a briefing meeting and via correspondence to alert them to each phase of consultation. Similarly, we have asked the council for their help in identifying local resident's groups and organisations, so we can write to them with advice and guidance on the review.

We have also asked the council to help us publicise the review by using its own communication channels with residents and local groups and we will provide posters to display in council buildings. We hope elected members can also use their networks to engage communities in the process.