

Council response to Local Government Boundary Commission England (LGBCE) electoral review

1. Aim

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has a legal duty to carry out an electoral review of each council. The last electoral review of Walsall took place in 2003. The commission are currently consulting on new proposed warding patterns that aim to ensure there is equality of representation across the borough. This consultation closes on 8 April 2024.

2. Summary

2.1 The Council is required to support the LGBCE in their electoral review. This support includes the provision of specific data to inform the commissions consideration of the future size of the council (number of elected members to ensure business can be delivered) and the promotion of the 2 consultation phases the commission undertake. In addition, the Council can provide their own response to the commissions proposals. Attached is the Council's draft response to the LGBCE proposed warding patterns. This response considers the process followed by the commission, the use of evidence and the proposals for future warding patterns.

2.2 The electoral review focuses on developing a ward pattern that provides equality of representation, reflects community interests and identities, and provides for effective and convenient local government.

2.3 Whilst the council strives to improve quality of life and community well-being perceptions of communities and community interests are very subjective and will vary greatly across the borough. The draft response to the commissions proposed ward patterns are based on an objective review of the commission's report.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Council are asked to note the report and approve its submission as the council's response to the LGBCE consultation based on the consideration of evidence used in forming the proposed ward patterns.

3.2 As community leaders, members of council are encouraged to submit evidence-based responses to the commission directly before the consultation closes on 8 April 2024.

4. Report detail – know

The attached document (Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Walsall electoral review – March 2024 Response from Walsall Council) details the process of the review undertaken and summaries the proposed changes to current ward patterns. It is intended that this will be submitted to the commission as the council’s response to their proposed warding patterns.

5. Financial information

There are no financial implications relating to this report, or the review being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

6. Legal Implications

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has a legal duty to conduct an electoral review of each council area. They are directly answerable to the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission and their recommendations are passed in parliament.

The Council has a legal obligation to support the commission in the delivery of the electoral review and to implement any changes to ward boundaries that are recommended and laid in parliament.

7. Decide

As council are being asked to note the council’s draft response to the ward pattern proposals there is no decisions to be made.

8. Respond

Any motions made and approved at council will be included in the council response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

9. Review

The consultation closes on 8 April 2024. After this point the Local Government Boundary Commission for England will meet and review all responses received. The draft recommendations may be amended if the commission is persuaded by evidence presented in responses to the consultation. Following this internal review the commission will publish their final recommendations on 2 July 2024, before laying an order in parliament for the recommendations to be adopted.

Background papers

[Walsall Council – council size submission](#)

[LGBCE – electoral review of arrangements for Walsall draft recommendations](#)

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Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Walsall electoral review – March 2024

Response from Walsall Council

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an overview of activity completed in relation to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) electoral review of Walsall leading to their recommendations regarding ward patterns. In addition, this paper sets out considerations of the recommendations made by LGBCE based on their methodology and the evidence used.

2. Background

- 2.1. The LGBCE (the commission) is an independent body established in 2010 to replace the Boundary Committee for England. They are directly answerable to the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission and are led by a team of independent commissioners.
- 2.2. The commission has a legal duty to carry out an electoral review of each council. The aim of the review is to ensure that councillors represent a similar number of electors as population changes over time can lead to areas being over or underrepresented. The last electoral review of Walsall took place in 2003.
- 2.3. 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
- 2.4 The electoral review cannot affect the external boundaries of the borough and does not consider parliamentary constituency boundaries. The focus of their approach is:
- Equality of representation
 - Reflecting community interests and identities
 - Providing for effective and convenient local government
- 2.5 As the review process seeks to ensure equality in local representation the commission considers ONS electoral data for each ward. Their methodology is to achieve a representation that is within a 10% tolerance. In their consideration of December 2021 electoral data, they identified four wards where there was a variation greater than 10%. Three wards were identified as being overrepresented (Pelsall, Pheasey Park Farm and Short Heath) and one ward was underrepresented (Willenhall South).
- 2.6 As part of the Council's submission on council size 2023 electoral data was used. This highlighted six wards had a variance in representation that was greater than 10%. In addition to the wards identified in 2.3 above, Blakenall was overrepresented, and St Matthews was underrepresented.
- 2.7 As the electoral review seeks to create a ward pattern that is fit for purpose for future years the variance for wards increases when considering electoral data for 2029. This data is included in Appendix A of the [commission's report \(pages 29 and 30\)](#).

3. Review timeline

3.1. The review process is broken down into distinct phases over an eighteen month to two-year period. This is summarised in the following table:

Phase	Activity
Preliminary Period	An initial meeting is held with the Chief Executive and followed briefings with political group leaders. A full briefing for all councillors was held on 9 January 2023 .
Council size	<p>Councils are required to collect and provide data and information for the commission to consider as part of their development of proposals concerning council size. This includes population data, electoral data and planning data. Information should also forecast forward around 10 years to ensure any recommendations are 'future proofed'.</p> <p>Walsall Council completed and submitted this data to the commission on 7 July 2023. This data was subsequently shared with all elected members and published by the commission on their website. https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-08/walsall_council_-_council_size_submission_.pdf</p> <p>The council size submission included the views of elected members and senior officers on the number of councillors needed to ensure effective representation and to enable the delivery of council business. These views supported the view that the current size (60 councillors, 3 councillors per ward) should be retain. The commission agreed with this and confirmed the council size would remain 60 councillors, 3 councillors per ward.</p>
First phase of consultation.	<p>The commission opened its first phase of consultation on 22 August 2023 and this ran until 30 October 2023. This initial consultation sought views on the future pattern of electoral wards. Views from residents, local groups and organisations, elected representatives.</p> <p>The Council's duty is to widely promote the consultation to ensure all that want to respond can. This was fulfilled via various communication platforms and provision of materials in public buildings.</p>
Warding patterns consultation	<p>Following an internal meeting to review the responses and data captured from visits to the borough the commission published their proposals for future warding patterns on 30 January 2024. The consultation will remain open until 8 April 2024.</p> <p>The report, including the proposed changes and evidence to support the proposals they are consulting on is available on the LGBCE website.</p> <p>Following the consultation closing the commission will collate and review all responses before they meet in mid-June 2024 to finalise</p>

	their recommendations. Final recommendations will be published on 2 July 2024.
Order	It is anticipated that the commission will lay an order in Parliament for the recommendations to be adopted in Summer / Autumn 2024. This order will be made in Autumn 2024 for implementation by the Council May 2026.

4. Warding pattern proposals

- 4.1 The commission have considered the predicted population growth and proposals are based on electorate figures in 2029. This sees the average number of electors per councillor rise from 3,337 in 2023 to 3,750. In addition to the predicted population growth the commission have considered planning information to understand where housing developments are being built. This provides a geographical perspective for where the population growth is likely to occur. This data jointly provides evidence for the commission to consider alongside the views and evidence presented in responses to their consultation. This information jointly informs the warding patterns being proposed by the commission.
- 4.2 The commission are proposing changes to the boundaries of thirteen wards and the change of two ward names. The table below summaries the changes being proposed to ward boundaries:

Ward	Summary of change
Aldridge Central and South	Transfer of part of ward to Streetly
Birchills-Leamore	Transfer of part of ward to St Matthews
Blakenall	Transfer part of ward to Bloxwich East and part to St Matthews
Bloxwich East	Transfer part of ward to Bloxwich West. Gain part of ward from Bloxwich West and Blakenall wards
Bloxwich West	Transfer part of ward to Bloxwich East. Gain part of ward from Bloxwich East
Paddock	Transfer part of ward to Pheasey Park Farm. Gain part of ward from St Matthews
Pelsall	Gain part of ward from Rushall-Shelfield
Pheasey Park Farm	Gain part of ward from Paddock
Rushall-Shelfield	Transfer part of ward to Pelsall. Gain part of ward from St Matthews
St Matthews	Transfer part of ward to Rushall-Shelfield and Paddock. Gain part of ward from Birchills-Leamore and Blakenall
Short Heath	Gain part of ward from Willenhall South
Streetly	Gain part of ward from Aldridge Central and South
Willenhall South	Transfer part of ward to Short Heath

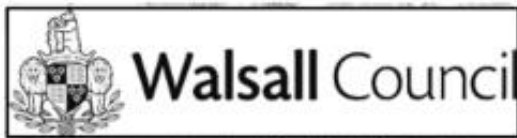
- 4.3 In addition to the boundary changes summarised above the commission is proposing changes to two ward names. Firstly, they are proposing the change of name from Willenhall North to New Invention. Given this proposal, the commission are proposing Willenhall South is renamed as Willenhall as there would no longer be a need to distinguish between the two wards.

- 4.4 Maps have been included as appendices. Appendix 1 shows the current ward boundaries and appendix 2 shows the boundaries proposed by the commission.
- 4.5 In addition to electoral and planning data the proposals by the commission have considered the responses received during their initial consultation phase. The commission received 26 responses, 16 of these were from local residents. For example the view from a local resident that Chuckery being split between St Matthews and Paddock wards harms community identity has informed the proposal to place Chucker in its entirety in Paddock.
- 4.6 The commission have also looked at natural boundaries when proposing changes to ward boundaries. For example, in seeking to achieve equality in representation in St Matthews the proposed gains from Birchills-Leamore and Blakenall mean that the boundary for St Matthews will follow the former Walsall and Wolverhampton railway line.

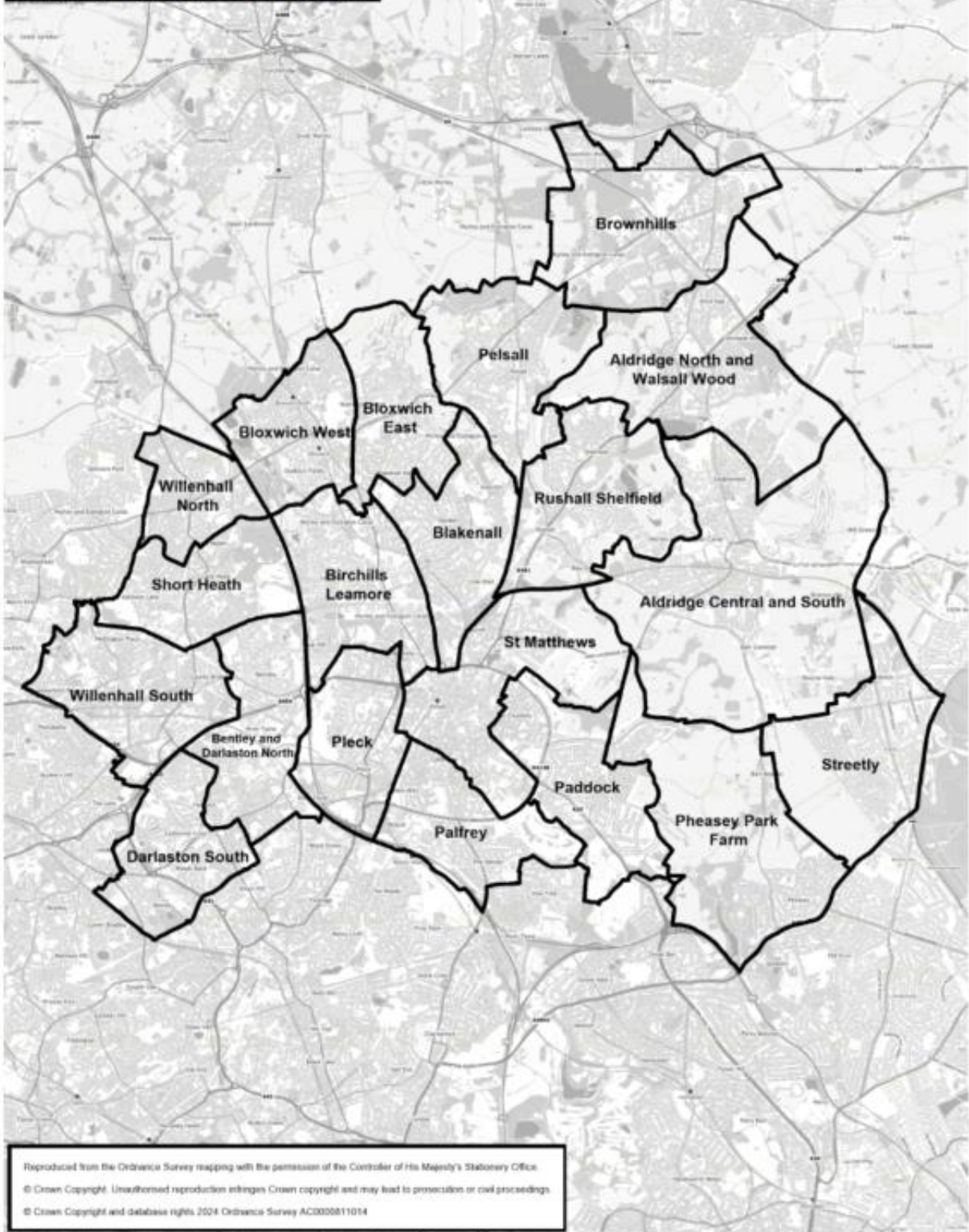
5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The proposed warding pattern the commission are currently consulting on has followed the methodology they shared with the council at the start of this process. Proposals take into consideration the electoral and planning data available, the responses submitted during the initial and the use of natural boundaries where possible.
- 5.2 From the perspective of data, the proposals achieve equality of representation with electorate for all proposed wards being within the 10% tolerance the commission use and therefore the Council feel the proposals are proportionate.

Appendix 1



CURRENT WARD BOUNDARIES



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Appendix 2

