

A Short Guide to

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England



About this guide and contacts

This Short Guide summarises the work of The Local Government Boundary Commission for England including what it does, how much it costs, and recent and planned changes.



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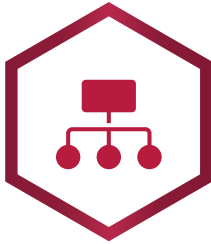
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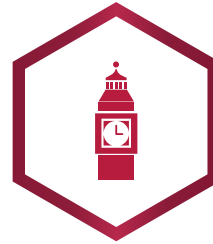
Key facts



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electoral arrangements
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Key facts



29

Number of reviews completed in 2016-17 due to local authority requests, to meet intervention criteria and to tackle electoral inequality



£1,996,000

The Commission's total spend in 2016-17



7

Commissioners in post including the chair. The Commission should have a chair and between four and 11 other commissioners



£68,000

Average unit cost per review in 2016-17



60%

Percentage of the Commission's operating expenditure that is staff costs (£1,200,000)



73%

Customer satisfaction with the review process in 2016-17

About The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) is a statutory body accountable to Parliament that conducts reviews of local authority electoral arrangements in England. It is independent of government and political parties, and is directly accountable to the Speaker's Committee of the House of Commons. Its statutory obligations are set out in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

MISSION



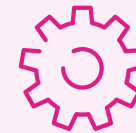
To sustain fair electoral arrangements and keep the map of English local government in good order.

VISION



The Commission is an independent body that consults and decides on the most appropriate electoral arrangements for local government. It seeks to promote openness, integrity and rigour in all of its dealings, to use its resources responsibly and always strive to do things better.

CORE ACTIVITY



Delivering fair electoral arrangements in local government.

The Commission has three strategic objectives:

1 To deliver fair electoral arrangements by carrying out reviews to correct electoral imbalance and carrying out reviews which have been requested by local authorities.

2 To deliver high-quality reviews which consult and engage with people and communities.

3 To monitor the efficiency of its processes and keep the organisation fit for purpose.

The Commission aims to fulfil its mission and achieve its objectives by:

- reviewing the electoral boundaries of local authorities in England and implementing any changes;
- reviewing the administrative boundaries of local authorities in England and making recommendations for any changes to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government; and
- reviewing the constituencies of the London Assembly and implementing any boundary changes.

The different types of review and what they entail are explained on [page 7](#).

Delivering fair electoral arrangements in local government



What does the Commission deliver?

The Commission carries out around 25 reviews on average per year. A typical review lasts 18 months from initial contact with an authority through to presentation to Parliament. The different types of review are explained on [page 7](#).

Reviews arise for a number of reasons:

- **Triggering the intervention criteria on electoral variances** – The Commission aims to ensure fairness in the value of a vote within an authority. To do this, it looks at the average number of electors per councillor. An authority is considered not to be representative of its voters if more than 30% of wards or divisions have an average number of electors per councillor that is at least 10% from the average or any single ward or division has an average number of electors per councillor that is at least 30% from the average. These authorities will be selected for review.
- **Authorities requesting a review** – Local authorities may request reviews themselves.
- **Authorities that have not been reviewed in line with regulation** – The Commission has a statutory obligation to review every local authority in England 'from time to time'. It has updated its review criteria to include councils in its work programme that have not been reviewed for 12 years or more. This underpins the Commission's recent decision to undertake reviews of 23 London boroughs which have not undergone reviews since 2003.

- **Government decisions** – Electoral reviews can also arise from government decisions. The government is currently considering proposals for structural change in Dorset which could potentially create two new unitary authorities for the county. At the same time, it is also considering proposals for mergers in West Suffolk, East Suffolk and Taunton Deane & West Somerset. In the event that the government agrees to the changes, the Commission has agreed to carry out electoral reviews to produce electoral arrangements for the new authorities.

All 29 of the reviews completed in 2016-17 were undertaken because the Commission's intervention criteria were triggered, or because the local authority requested a review, or both.

The Commission can recommend changes in the following:

- The total number of councillors to be elected to the council.
- The number of wards and divisions and their boundaries.
- The number of councillors to be elected for each ward or division.
- The name of each ward or division.

Delivering fair electoral arrangements in local government: types of electoral review



Electoral review

The Commission carries out electoral reviews to improve electoral equality by ensuring that the ratio of electors to councillors in each authority is roughly the same.

The Commission looks at:

- whether the boundaries of wards or divisions in a local authority should be changed to take account of changes in the electorate, to reflect community ties and to promote effective local government;
- the number of councillors, and the number of wards or divisions;
- whether the wards or divisions should be represented by a single councillor, or jointly by two or three councillors; and
- the names of the wards and electoral divisions.

The Commission implements any changes to electoral arrangements by making a statutory instrument or order. Local authorities then run local elections using the new arrangements set out in the order.



Principal area boundary review

Principal area boundary reviews are narrower in scope than electoral reviews. The Commission carries one out when it only needs to look at whether the boundaries between authorities should be changed.

Reviews vary in size, ranging from those looking at minor boundary anomalies that prevent local authorities from delivering services effectively through to reviews caused by whole council mergers.

Following a principal area boundary review, the Commission may decide to carry out an electoral review of the local authorities involved, depending on the scale of the change.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government makes any changes recommended by principal area boundary reviews.



Structural review

A local authority may ask to change from a two-tier structure – having both a county council and district councils – to a single local government authority. When this happens the Secretary of State may ask the Commission to carry out a structural review.

If the review results in the Secretary of State setting up a new unitary authority, the Commission might then carry out an electoral review of the new authority.

The most recent structural reviews were in 2009, when the structure of local government was reviewed in Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk. The government is currently considering a unitary structure for Dorset.

Delivering fair electoral arrangements in local government: stakeholder engagement

The Commission considers stakeholder engagement integral to any electoral review, and community consultations sit at the heart of all reviews it undertakes.

The Commission cannot complete a review without first publishing draft recommendations, giving people an opportunity to comment on them and then considering any comments made. Only after doing this can the Commission publish its final recommendations.

The Commission has three statutory criteria for its reviews:

1

Secure equality of representation – The Commission aims to ensure that, within a single authority, a vote in one ward is the same in value as a vote in another ward.

2

Reflect identities and interests of local communities – The Commission's core principles ensure that any reviews undertaken by the Commission reflect community identities and interests.

3

Secure effective and convenient local government – The Commission looks to establish strong and long-standing boundaries to ensure consistently effective local government for all authorities across England.

Accountability to Parliament: the essentials of accountability

Our report on [Accountability to Parliament for taxpayers' money](#) highlighted the four essentials of accountability:

1



A clear expression of spending commitments and objectives

Each financial year, the Commission must present an estimate of its income and expenditure to the Speaker's Committee. The Commission lays the estimate before the House of Commons on behalf of the Speaker's Committee.

This is part of Parliament's supply procedure, through which the Commission's resource requirements are approved. The Commission reports on outturn against the estimate in its annual report and accounts, which is audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General through the National Audit Office.

As part of our audit of the Commission's annual accounts, we assess the design and implementation of the Commission's financial planning and monitoring controls. We did not identify any significant issues with this process as part of our 2016-17 financial audit.

2



A mechanism or forum to hold to account

The Commission was established as an independent body by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 having previously been part of the Electoral Commission and is accountable to Parliament directly through the Speaker's Committee. The Committee's functions include examining the Commission's five-year plan, financial estimates and annual report and designating the Commission's Accounting Officer.

Commissioners are appointed by Royal Warrant to exercise the Commission's functions. The Commission should have a chair and at least four, and no more than 11, additional members. The Board is supported by the Remuneration Committee, which agrees staff pay awards and changes to staff terms and conditions, and the Audit and Risk Committee. The Audit and Risk Committee scrutinises risk management and business activities, reviews and approves governance policies and procedures, monitors the work of Internal Audit and oversees the production of the annual report and accounts.

3



Clear roles and someone to hold to account

The Chief Executive (Jolyon Jackson CBE) is appointed by the Speaker's Committee as the Commission's Accounting Officer. The Chief Executive and Accounting Officer is personally responsible to Parliament for the organisation and quality of management in the Commission, including its use of public money for recording and safeguarding the Commission's assets, as set out by HM Treasury in *Managing Public Money*.

The Board authorises the Chief Executive to appoint other officers of the Commission to act on his behalf. These will normally be the Director of Strategy and Communications for all review-related activity and the Director of Finance for all financial and business activity.

4



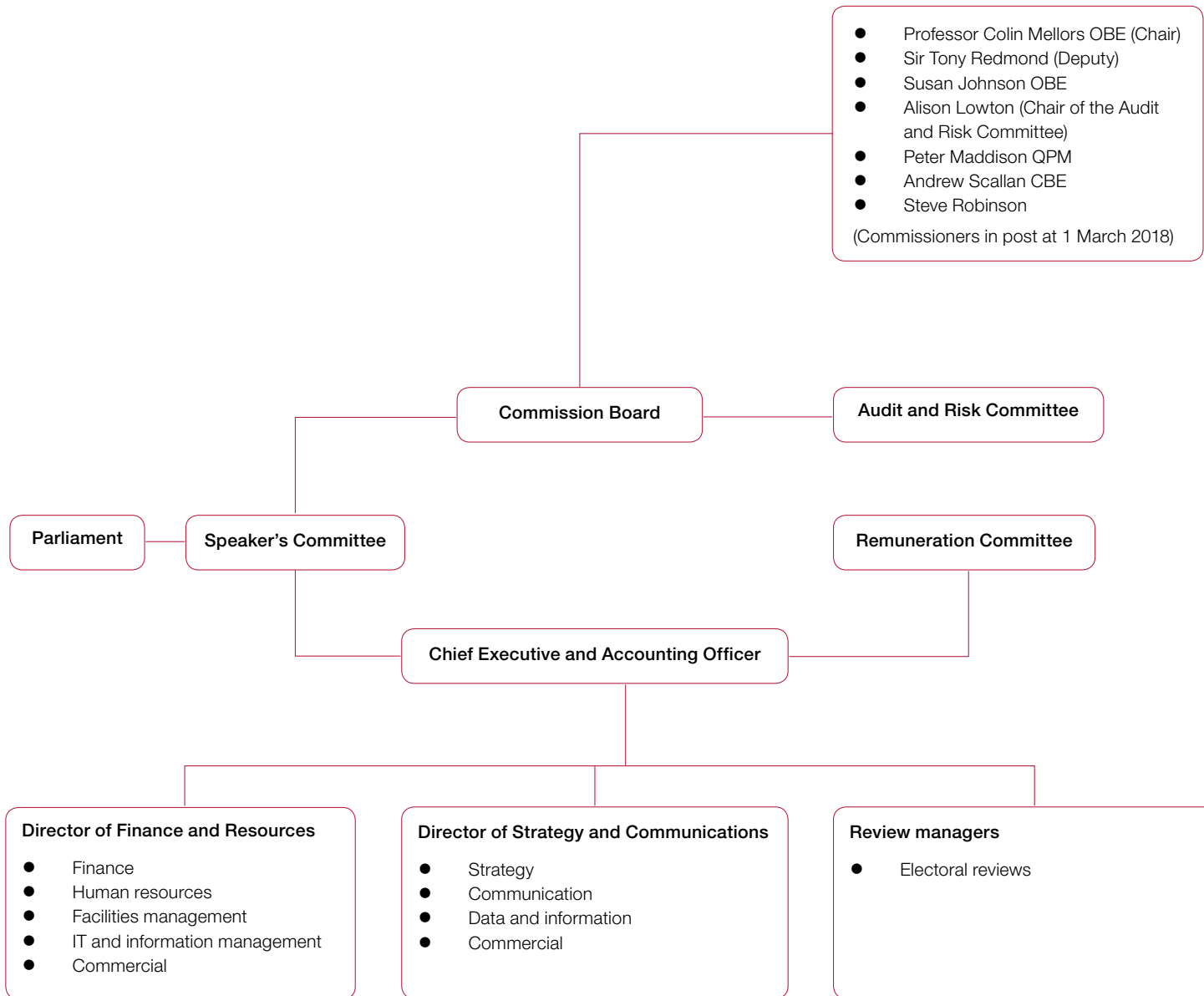
Robust performance and cost data

The Commission's performance measures are agreed annually by the Board and are reported to the Board on a quarterly basis.

The Commission's achieved performance against these measures is published in the annual report and accounts. In 2016-17 the Commission fully achieved five of its six annual performance indicators. The Commission's performance in 2016-17 meant that 29 electoral reviews of local authorities were completed across every region in England: 12 more than 2015-2016.

The Commission has developed a new suite of performance measures which will be used from 2018-19 ([see page 20](#)). The new measures are designed to better reflect the full scope of the Commission's activities. The new measures aim to focus more on outcomes than the existing measures, and will address electoral imbalance, responsiveness and use of resources.

Accountability to Parliament: organisational structure



The Commissioners

The commissioners are appointed by Royal Warrant to exercise the Commission's functions as described in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. All commissioners are members of the Remuneration Committee.

The Commission is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for managing risk.

Commissioners provide strategic leadership and decision-making on electoral reviews and related matters and make final agreements on five-year corporate plans, annual accounts and budgets.

The Accounting Officer is accountable for the propriety and regularity of the public finances, keeping proper records and safeguarding the Commission's assets as set out by HM Treasury in *Managing Public Money*.

Managing risk: overview and strategic risks

The Commission is committed to seeking assurance that the controls it relies on to mitigate risk (of not meeting its objectives) are proportionate and effective.

The Commission's objectives for managing risk are designed to:

- identify, measure, control, and report on any risk that will impact on the achievement of the corporate plan;
- promote awareness of risk throughout the organisation; and
- monitor the overall effectiveness of its risk policy.

To support these objectives, the Commission:

- ensures sufficient resources are available to support risk management initiatives and measure the outcomes;
- encourages all staff and other stakeholders to develop and maintain a culture of risk-management; and
- ensures that all staff receive the necessary training, ongoing support and advice.

Strategic risks identified by the Commission

The relocation project (see page 16)

There is a separate project-specific risk register in place to help manage all the project risks. These include the risk to business continuity and the need to manage costs against the budget.

The Commission or Audit and Risk Committee becomes inquorate

An inquorate Commission would be unable to make any decisions, rendering it ineffective.

This risk is mitigated through dialogue with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and an early recruitment process for replacement commissioners.

Failure to gain support from the Speaker's Committee

There is an inherent risk that any lack of support for change orders requested by the Commission could have a significant effect on the delivery of outcomes.

This risk is mitigated by maintaining a good working relationship with the Committee through frequent dialogue and through the Commission's corporate plan and business plan.

Lack of cooperation from local authorities

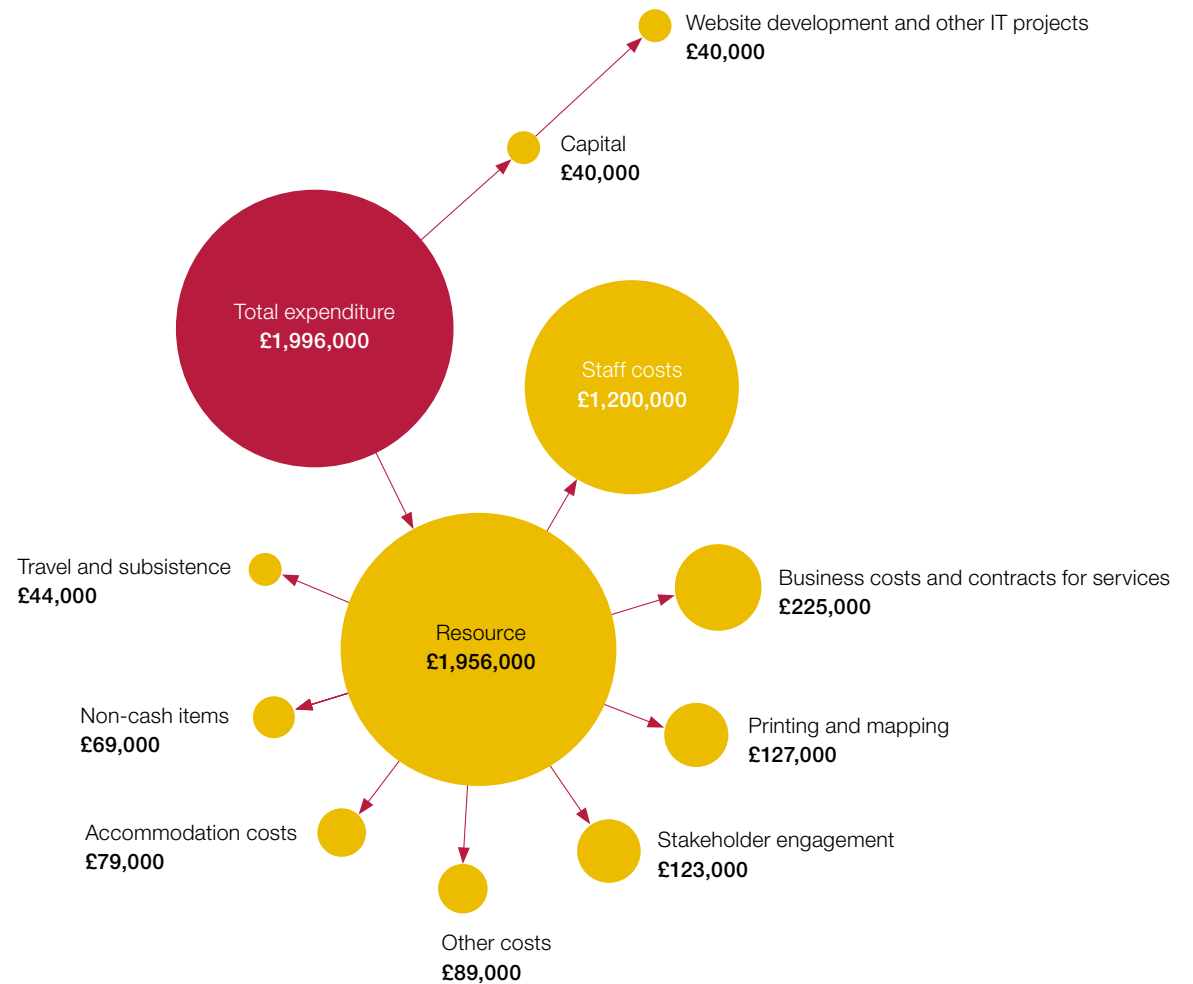
The Commission manages these risks through providing clear guidance and meeting key people at the beginning of reviews.

The Commission has recently conducted 'deep reviews' into the following areas it has identified as risks due to the effect any potential failure to comply would have on the Commission's reputation, business and governance:

- **Failure to comply with equalities and diversities legislation** – An equality working group was set up to ensure the Commission was content with their approach both internally and externally.
- **Health and safety breaches**
- **Information management**

Where the Commission spends its money: 2016-17

The Commission's total expenditure in 2016-17 was £1,996,000. The Commission's resource budget is spent on day-to-day operations, with staff costs accounting for the majority of the spend. Its capital expenditure in 2016-17 was spent on website development and other IT projects. Longer-term trends are shown on the next two pages.



Notes

- 1 Figures are taken from the Commission's *Annual Report and Accounts 2016-17*.
- 2 The £89,000 of other costs are made up of training and recruitment, internal audit, bank charges and legal and professional fees.
- 3 The £69,000 of non-cash items are made up of depreciation and amortisation of non-current assets and the external auditor's remuneration.

Source: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Trends in the Commission's expenditure

The Commission expects to underspend slightly against its resource budget of £2 million in 2017-18. During the year it has moved planned expenditure from its resource budget to its capital budget. The increase in the capital budget is to fund projects to develop the Commission's external website and its use of SharePoint (see page 17). The SharePoint project involves developing an intranet, sites for ongoing reviews, departmental sites and an externally accessible site for commissioners and other external parties.

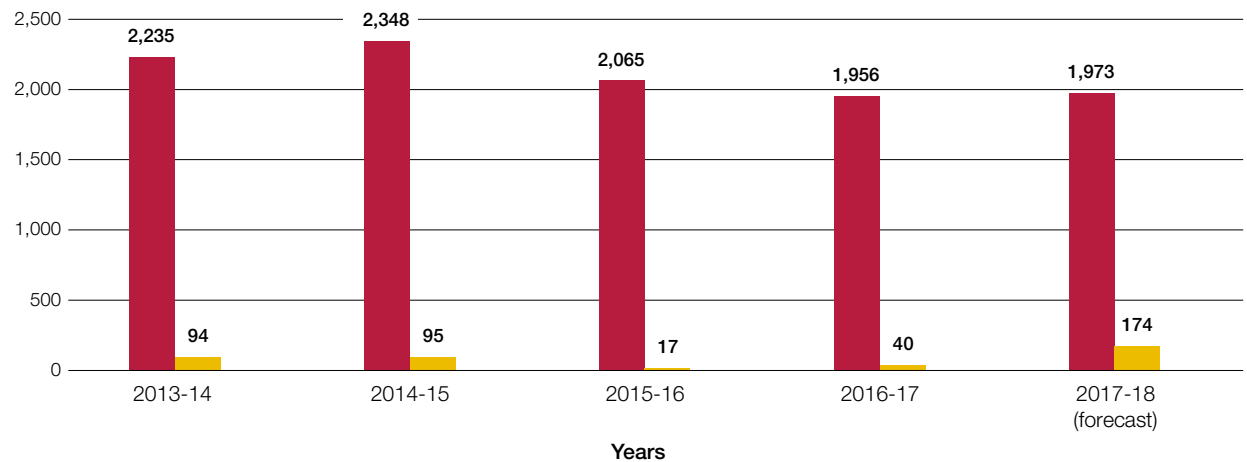
Resource spending fell between 2014-15 and 2015-16 because of the reconfiguration of back-office services and relocation. We looked at this project, which was planned to achieve savings, in our 2015-16 report (see page 21).

The Commission's spending fell further in 2016-17. This represented an underspend against budget due to delays in appointing new commissioners and high staff turnover leading to both staff and project underspends.

The Commission is moving to a new office with higher rent in 2018. The move fits in with the *Government's Estate Strategy* and will also provide the Commission with a meeting room, which will remove the need to hire external venues. There will also be a short period of a few months during which the Commission will be paying rent on both its old and new offices. The Commission will contain the rent increase and period of double rent within its existing budget using ongoing efficiencies. The move is discussed on [page 16](#).

The Commission's expenditure

Expenditure (£000)



■ Resource
■ Capital

Notes

- 1 The 2013-14 to 2016-17 are based on supply outturn from annual accounts.
- 2 The 2017-18 figures are taken from the 2017-18 quarter 3 projections.

Source: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Trends in the Commission's expenditure *continued*

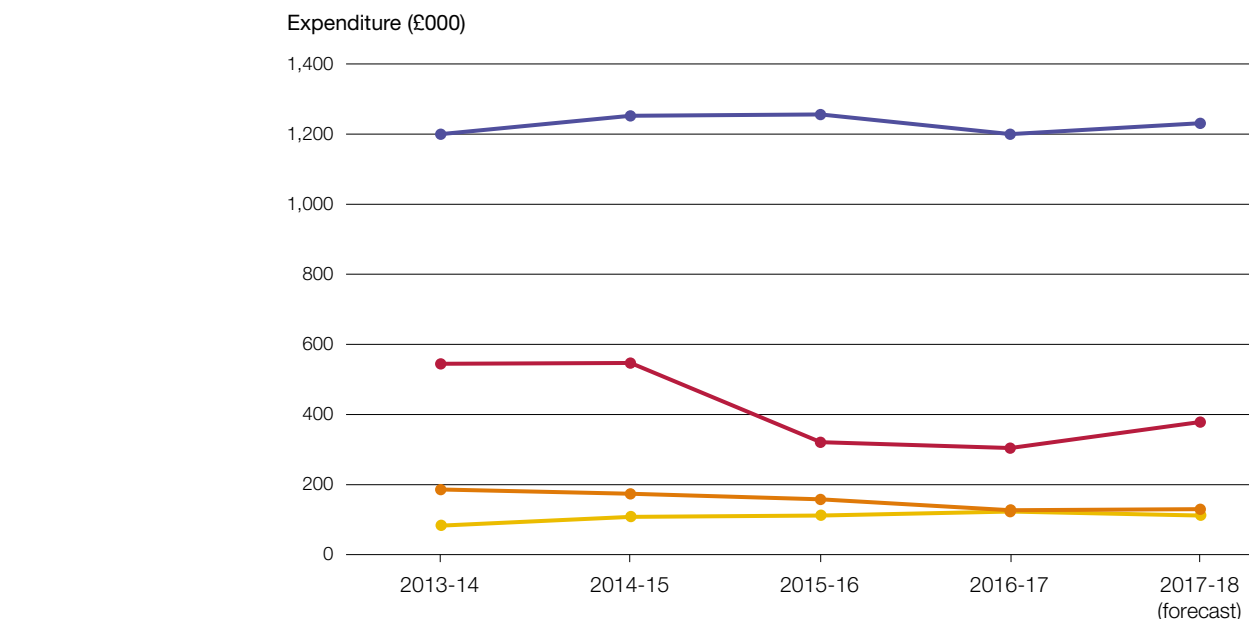
Staff costs account for 60% of the Commission's annual spend. Staff costs fell slightly in 2016-17 due to high staff turnover and delays in appointing new commissioners. Staff costs are forecast to rise again in 2017-18, in part because three new commissioners were appointed.

Business and accommodation costs are forecast to rise in 2017-18 in part due to the Commission's relocation, which will lead to a period of double rent and a higher rent going forward. Further rises will be due to additional rates and expenditure on social media pilots and plain English work. The fall in business costs and contracts for services in 2015-16 was because of the reconfiguration of back-office services and relocation which are discussed in our 2015-16 report ([see page 21](#)).

Costs related to stakeholder engagement are predicted to decrease slightly in 2017-18. These costs relate to maintaining the website and holding regular conferences. The fall is due to a decrease in website maintenance costs.

The Commission's spending on printing and mapping fell between 2013-14 and 2016-17 and is forecast to remain broadly flat in 2017-18. This is largely as a result of the Commission's 'digital by default' agenda. Online interactive mapping has meant that Ordnance Survey needs to produce fewer maps for the Commission. For example, in its 2011 review of Cornwall, the Commission needed 20 maps to illustrate recommendations for each part of the county. For its current review of Cornwall, the Commission will only need one map as the details will be accessible online. Online mapping has also led to the Commission printing fewer reports and maps.

The Commission's expenditure by key area



| | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| ● Staff costs | 1,200 | 1,252 | 1,256 | 1,200 | 1,231 |
| ● Business costs and contracts for services, and accommodation costs | 545 | 547 | 321 | 304 | 379 |
| ● Printing and mapping | 186 | 174 | 158 | 127 | 130 |
| ● Stakeholder engagement | 83 | 108 | 112 | 123 | 112 |

Notes

- 1 The 2014-15 to 2016-17 figures are based on supply outturn from the Commission's annual report and accounts for each year.
- 2 The 2017-18 figures are taken from the 2017-18 quarter three projections.

Source: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Staff and pay: 2016-17

The Commission is a small organisation of around 20 staff, a Commission chair and between four and 11 other commissioners. In 2016-17, 21 staff and commissioners provided diversity data. Due to the low numbers it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons with civil service figures.

The Commission runs an equalities working group that has a work programme covering key issues of equality in review work and internal processes and procedures. The group's current action plan includes reviewing policies and screening guidance, providing regular equality and diversity training for staff and providing guidance on completing equality impact assessments.

Staff engagement

The Commission does not run an annual staff survey but it has various mechanisms to allow staff to raise issues.

It has a forum for staff below manager level which meets monthly to discuss issues it wants to raise with management. There is a standing item on the monthly management team agenda for these issues. Issues raised recently include Christmas working arrangements, line management cover, closure of the cafe and recruitment.

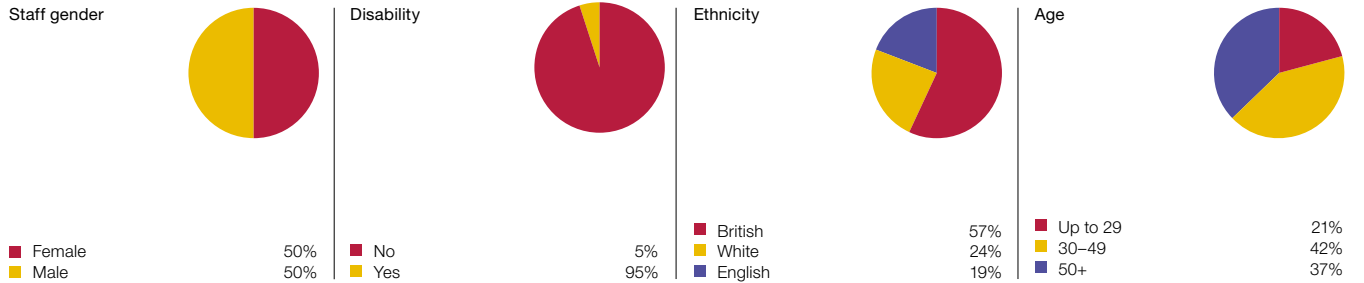
In addition there is a monthly full staff meeting and Commission staff are invited to engage with commissioners at lunch before the monthly commissioner meetings.

The Commission is a small body and so an increase in staff turnover can have a disproportionate effect on median pay. This explains why the median pay fluctuates over time.

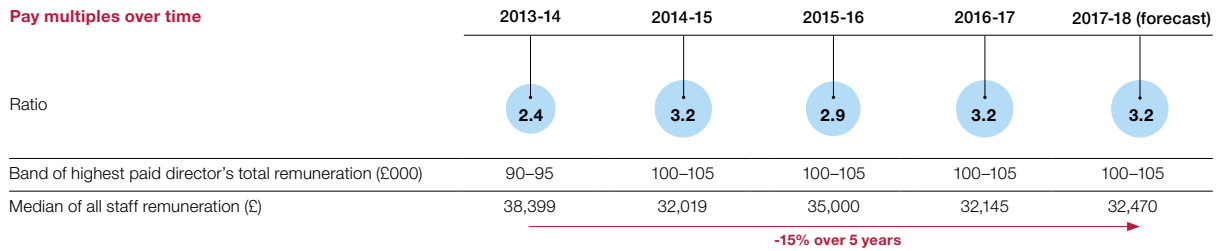
Zoom Out

Zoom In +

Workforce in The Local Government Boundary Commission for England 2016-17



Pay multiples over time



Note

1 The median pay figure excludes the highest paid director but includes all other staff including commissioners. The ratio is that between the highest paid director and median staff pay.

Staff sickness record

| Financial year | Days lost to sickness | Average per person |
|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 2016-17 | 141 | 6.9 |
| 2015-16 | 70.27 | 3.3 |

Notes

- Sickness figures are higher in 2016-17 due to three separate long-term sickness absence periods recorded during the year.
- Sickness figures do not include commissioners.

Sources: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England's *Annual Report and Accounts 2016-17*

Significant developments for the Commission

Office relocation

The Commission is relocating from Millbank Tower to Windsor House in Victoria. The current lease expires in December 2018. The Cabinet Office is planning to take over a six-year lease on Windsor House and the Commission's move fits in with the Cabinet Office's plans and the *Government's Estate Strategy*, which seeks to make savings for government as a whole through creating regional property hubs.

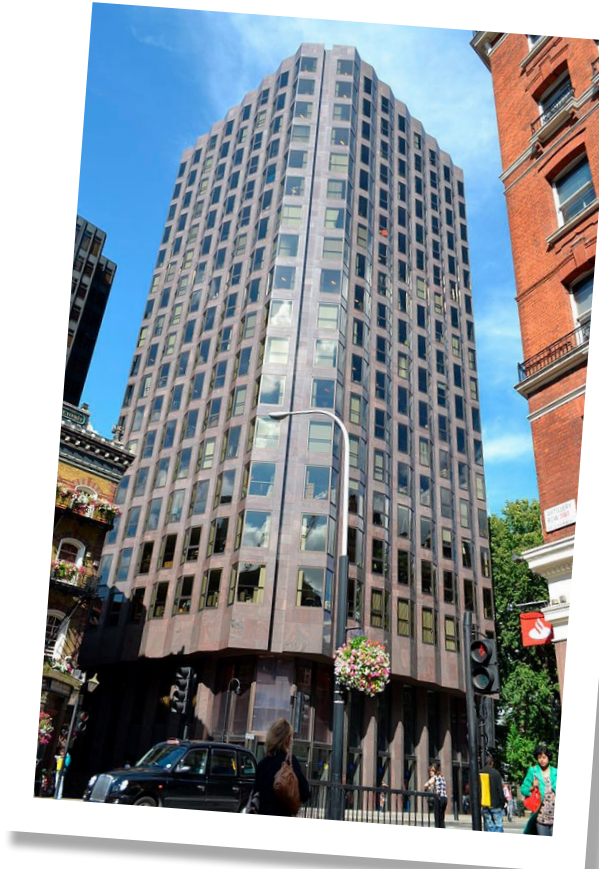
Before making its decision, the Commission agreed three key business objectives for the move:

- There should be business continuity for the Commission's review programme.
- A move should represent value for money.
- A location should offer excellent transport links for frequent access to Parliament, government and the rest of England.

The Commission examined three options for the relocation before deciding on a move to Windsor House:

- Moving to Birmingham.
- Moving to Windsor House.
- Extending the lease on Millbank Tower.

Although Windsor House is more expensive than Millbank Tower, the new location has a meeting room which can be used by the commissioners removing the need to hire an external venue which it currently does about 15 times a year. The Commission is likely to move in the summer of 2018. This means there will be a period of a few months when the Commission will be paying rent on both offices. The Commission will contain the additional costs within its existing budget using ongoing efficiencies.



Windsor House

Image courtesy of: Minky69 – Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=16220490>

Significant developments for the Commission *continued*



New website platform

The Commission wants a new corporate website to replace the current platform. It wants the new site to present information in an accessible way and allow multiple audiences to engage with the Commission's work. The Commission is increasingly using social media platforms to engage people and organisations in reviews and, therefore, the new site needs to integrate with these platforms.

There are three main objectives for the site:

- To engage people and organisations in public consultations on boundary changes.
- To present information about the Commission and its activities to a range of audiences.
- To promote the Commission's reputation as a professional, impartial organisation.

The Commission has a small project team working on the procurement and development of the new website and plans for it to be live by the end of March 2018.

The site will largely contain information about the Commission and the reviews it carries out, with the aim of stimulating public engagement. The content of the current site will need to be migrated to the new platform and the new site needs to be flexible to deal with other potential reviews.



Developing SharePoint sites

In 2015, the Commission migrated to Microsoft Office 365, which included SharePoint. The Commission has now started to develop its use of SharePoint and has identified various site types it needs as part of the project:

- An intranet site.
- Sites for ongoing reviews.
- Departmental team sites.
- An externally accessible area for Commissioners and other external parties.

The Commission has not had an intranet before but hopes that introducing one will lead to more efficient ways of working. The intranet will be used to share organisation-wide announcements. It will also act as a navigation tool to the different review project sites, team sites, staff-related content and links to other external sources. The review sites will be collaborative work areas that can be used by all the different parties involved.

The Commission also plans to create a template site for reviews. It has been recommended to the Commission to consider implementing the document storage solution and the intranet solution at the same time.

Performance: achievement against key performance measures

The Commission achieved against its targets for all but one of its key performance indicators in 2016-17.

- There was a 50% reduction, down to 8%, in percentage of councils with significant electoral imbalances.
- Customer satisfaction fell slightly from 2015-16 but remained above the 70% target. Customer satisfaction for the first 10 months of 2017-18 was 78%.
- The Commission maintained its 100% success rate of change orders which, following review by the Commission, came in to effect at the election at which they were expected to when the review was first initiated.
- The Commission's significant underspend in 2016-17 was due to high staff turnover and delays in appointing new commissioners.

These key performance measures will be reported against for the last time in 2017-18. The Commission has developed new performance measures that will be used from 2018-19. These are discussed on [page 20](#).

| Key performance indicator | 2015-16 | | | 2016-17 | | |
|--|---------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|-----------|
| | Target | Outturn | Achieved? | Target | Outturn | Achieved? |
| Percentage of local authorities with significant electoral imbalances | 12 | 16 | No | 16 | 8 | Yes |
| Number of local authorities requesting reviews that were programmed for review at 1 April 2016 | 5 | 3 | No | 5 | 8 | Yes |
| Aggregate percentage customer satisfaction with review process | >70 | 75 | Yes | >70 | 73 | Yes |
| Percentage of electoral change orders which, following reviews by the Commission, came into effect at the election expected when the review was first programmed | 95 | 100 | Yes | 95 | 100 | Yes |
| Average unit cost of reviews (£000) | 71 | 69 | Yes | 71 | 68 | Yes |
| Percentage expenditure variance from total revenue budget | <-3 | -3 | Yes | <-3 | -8.5 | No |

Notes

- 1 The figures have been taken from the Commission's annual reports and accounts for 2015-16 and 2016-17 and have not been subject to audit.
- 2 This is an average calculated from several questions in the satisfaction survey. The survey is on the Commission's website and is sent to anyone who responds to a review.

Source: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Performance: reviews

During 2016-17, the Commission completed 29 electoral reviews. One planned review was delayed due to a proposed merger between West Somerset and Taunton Dean district councils and the another as a result of a specific request by Ashford Borough Council.

The average cost per review fell in 2016-17 to £68,000 (2015-16 – £69,000). The Commission has only had systems in place to accurately calculate costs for individual reviews for the past two years. These data will continue to be collected in future years.

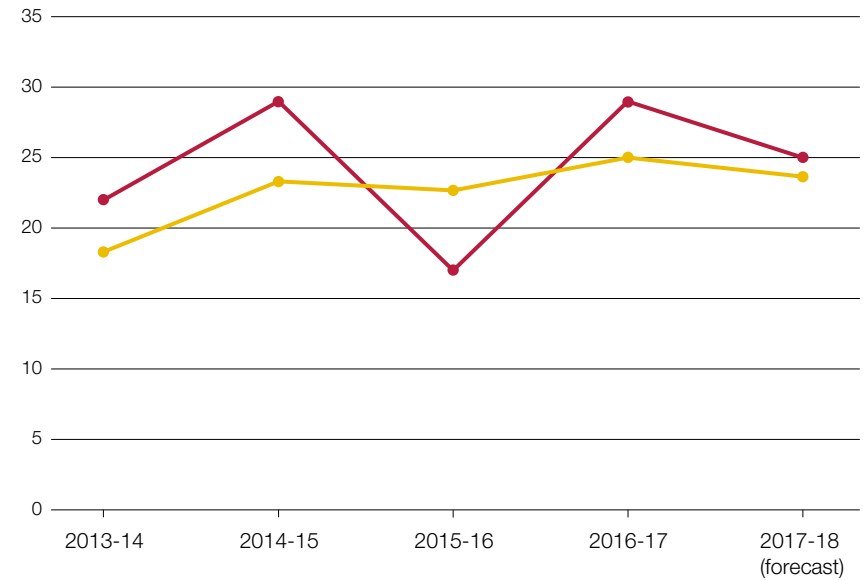
| | Objective | Outcome |
|---|-----------|-----------|
| Reviews to tackle electoral inequality – where local authorities met the intervention criteria (see page 6) | 21 | 17 |
| Reviews requested by local authorities which also met the intervention criteria | 2 | 4 |
| Reviews requested by local authorities | 8 | 8 |
| Total | 31 | 29 |

Each review takes about 18 months and so can span up to three financial years. This means that the number of reviews can fluctuate between years depending on when reviews begin. For example a significant amount of work was done on reviews in 2015-16 which completed in 2016-17.

The graph shows both the absolute number of reviews completed each year and the three-year moving average, which may give a better indication of the trend.

Trend in reviews completed over time

Number of reviews completed each year



- Number of reviews completed in the year
- Three-year average

Note

1 Three-year average figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Performance: the Commission's new performance measures

The Commission has developed a new suite of performance measures which will be used from 2018-19. The new measures are designed to better reflect the full scope of the Commission's activities and reflect the Audit and Risk Committee's desire to measure the benefits and outcomes from policy and procedure.

When developing the new measures the Commission's objective was to identify information that was relevant, easy to gather and interpret and would allow for informed decision-making. The exact targets are still to be agreed.

| Key performance indicator (KPI) | Description | How is it measured? |
|---|--|---|
| KPI 1: Level of electoral equality in England | A – Percentage of authorities that meet the intervention criteria | The percentage of authorities, from the data returned in December before the start of the financial year, which meet the Commission's intervention criteria. |
| | B – Percentage of authorities that meet the intervention criteria, less reviews started or completed within 5 years | KPI 1A minus any authorities currently being reviewed and any which have been reviewed within five financial years of the start of the current one. |
| | C – Percentage of authorities at the five-year forecast date that still meet the intervention criteria (snapshot of five years ago) | The percentage of authorities which meet intervention criteria five financial years after the date at which their orders were made. |
| | D – Percentage of authorities not reviewed in the past 12 years | The percentage of authorities which have not been reviewed within 12 preceding financial years of the current one. |
| | E – Percentage of electors living with electoral imbalance (as defined by KPI 1A) | Assuming all authorities in KPI 1A are out of balance, this is the number of electors that they contain as a percentage of all registered local government electors. |
| KPI 2: Quality of stakeholder engagement | A – Percentage of reviews (requested and intervention) completed in time for the agreed election | The percentage of reviews which are completed in time for the election, as agreed at the start of the review process. This should encompass reviews whose orders were laid in the present financial year. |
| | B – Satisfaction levels identified through the stakeholder surveys | The number of positive answers to individual, numerical questions in the satisfaction survey as a percentage of all such answers. |
| | C – Website sessions (in 000's) | The number of prolonged visits to the Commission's site over the financial year. |
| | D – Responded within our services standard to all correspondence | The percentage of different types of communication that are responded to within the agreed timeframes. |
| KPI 3: Effective use of resources | A – Number of final recommendations delayed | The percentage of final recommendations due to be published in the financial year which were delayed by any amount of time. |
| | B – Recruitment time (days) | Days between management decision to recruit and job offer. |
| | C – Average sick days | Days sick divided by average employees. |
| | D – Turnover | Leavers divided by establishment. |
| | E – Training plan | Training compared to plan for job type. |
| | F – Payment days | Average number of days to pay after invoice/services received. |
| | G – Clean NAO opinion | As per last annual accounts production. |
| KPI 4: Achievement of business plan projects | Achievement of key projects | Projects from the business plan will be identified as critical or non-critical and achievement of the critical projects against the timeframe agreed will be measured. |

Source: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Key themes from NAO reports

Past NAO reports have had generally positive conclusions, making some recommendations for improvement. The table summarises the main findings from recent reports and relevance to current events.

| Report | Key findings | Conclusion | Relevance |
|---|---|--|---|
| <i>2015-16: Benefits realised from the back-office and relocation project</i> | <p>The Commission's options appraisals were well informed by market research.</p> <p>The preferred option was to remain in London, despite the potential to make greater financial savings in other locations. This was because of the potential impact on its programme of electoral reviews.</p> | The Commission successfully planned and delivered the back-office and relocation project, enabling the Commission to move into its new accommodation. | The Commission has to relocate again in 2018. This is discussed on page 16 . |
| <i>2014-15: Website and online consultation portal</i> | <p>The Commission had developed an award winning business asset, resulting in improved functionality and increased stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>Key areas of concern were governance processes and gaps in skills and experience.</p> | The Commission achieved value for money through the development of its website and online consultation tool, but it did not measure its performance against all objectives. | The Commission is launching a new website platform. This is discussed on page 17 . |
| <i>2012-13: The costing system</i> | <p>The costing system has helped the Commission to monitor the costs of reviews more closely, leading to a better understanding of costs throughout the Commission.</p> <p>Increased understanding of costs enabled the Commission to make its processes more efficient, helping it to identify key areas of cost and potential areas for efficiency savings.</p> <p>Detailed budgets for individual reviews were still not produced, but the Commission was beginning to have sufficient information to consider doing so.</p> | The Commission continues to make good progress in understanding its costs. The commission is building the reliability of its understanding of staff costs and the costing system, generally, is changing how the Commission does business. | The Commission has recently completed an updated costing exercise, using the findings to prepare its five-year corporate plan to 2021-22. |

The 2013-14 report was on a specific contract that has now ended. The recommendations were specific to that contract so we have not included this report.

Progress against past NAO recommendations

Our recommendations

The Commission's response

2015-16 report: *Benefits realised from the back-office and relocation project*

When the Commission appraises its accommodation options in future, it should, in accordance with the Government Property Unit Hub Programme, consider opportunities to share accommodation with other public bodies. The Commission should also consider the actions it could take to avoid delays to its electoral reviews, and the cost of these actions. This would enable it to explore the options to relocate outside London.

In looking at options for when its current lease on Millbank tower runs out, the Commission considered relocating out of London. It has decided to remain in London but to share accommodation with other public bodies as recommended.

Complete

Considering the performance conditions stated under contractual agreements with suppliers, together with a range of performance measures that would enable performance comparison with similar government entities, the Commission should now develop its means for assessing back-office service performance across a range of relevant criteria.

The Commission has developed management information that gets reported to the Operational Management Team. This draws on a range of data sources such as correspondence, website hits and performance against contract service-level agreements. The information is weighted according to risk.

Complete

Now that the Commission has clearer information on the costs of its back-office services, it should assess how these costs compare with government shared services, as well as back-office services that can be offered by their government host organisation. In doing this, the Commission will be able to determine whether it can make further savings when its back-office service arrangements are due for renewal.

The Commission renewed most of its contracts for two years in 2017. The Commission plans to start examining whether it can make additional savings from April 2018.

Not yet started

The Commission should periodically compare its performance and costs with similar organisations to assess and track whether its back-office services are cost-effective. The Commission should consider using benchmarking data, such as that offered by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, to do this. This should enable the Commission to improve its back-office performance or reduce costs, or both, over the longer term.

The Commission plans to start working towards this from April 2018.

Not yet started

2014-15 report: *Website and online consultation portal*

The original project objectives should be revisited and refined to reflect what the portal and website need to deliver in the future.

The Commission has considered the original objectives and on further analysis has developed three objectives for the project to migrate its corporate website on to a new platform, which are set out on [page 17](#).

Complete

Performance against each revised objective should be measured, and target levels of performance, and by when these should be achieved, should be defined.

To monitor and measure whether the platform is engaging, the Commission reviews reports on website hits, sessions and sources of engagements in the monthly management reports. The new performance framework will include a target on website sessions ([see page 20](#)). The Commission's new customer satisfaction survey includes a specific question on the perceived presentation of information by users.

In progress

Progress against past NAO recommendations *continued*

We recommended the Commission should:

The Commission responded by:

2014-15 report: *Website and online consultation portal continued*

Assessment of the ongoing contract risks should be incorporated into the organisational risk register. The Commission should also consider if the risk register is complete and up to date for all areas of the business.

One of the contract risks has been addressed by the Commission by including a guarantee regarding 'up times' for the website in the service management agreement which was renewed in March 2017. The Commission has centralised its contract management arrangements, which are now kept centrally as part of the corporate risk management process. In addition, the contract is reviewed every six months to ensure performance and compliance.

Complete

Proposals for major projects should be presented to the commissioners to give them the opportunity to provide guidance and fulfil their governance role.

The Commission has developed a corporate business plan for the commissioners to agree and monitor its core review work and projects across the organisation. The plan is seen quarterly by the commissioners.

Complete

Appropriate and proportionate reporting on projects including subsequent operational phases should be agreed with senior management and the commissioners.

The business plan framework has been incorporated in the Operational Management Team meeting structure so that reports and updates on projects are made at each meeting. Each project has a specific update slot that is embedded into the agenda.

Complete

2012-13 report: *The costing system*

The Commission should enhance its controls on cost data to ensure accuracy and completeness of information used in decision-making. The key elements are to:

- a** require all staff to book all their time;
- b** provide direct codes for all work leading to identifiable outputs; and
- c** assess the reasonableness of the level of time booked to indirect codes.

The Commission has introduced an improved system to record staff time covering both project spend and flexi-time. Staff allocate their time worked, where relevant, to a specific review and review stage. Staff may also book time to general review work or non-review work. This has fed into the unit costing exercise (see below).

Complete

The Commission should review its management information to reduce the cost of producing it. The aim should be to identify and remove less useful parts.

The Commission has developed new management information as detailed on the previous page.

Complete

The Commission should consider setting shadow budgets for individual reviews during 2013-14. Budgets would include the full cost of staff time, with overheads and indirect costs absorbed in proportion to staff time.

The Commission introduced new accounting software in 2015 and has used this opportunity to better split costs between expenditure on specific review, general review expenditure and other costs. Staff time is recorded separately (see above). The Commission has used data from reviews completed in 2015-16 and 2016-17 to develop average costs (mean and median) for different types of review but has decided not to set shadow budgets for each review because review managers are not able to control a sufficient amount of the costs to be held accountable.

Complete – the Commission has decided not to implement this recommendation and has developed an alternative approach