



National Audit Office

An Overview of the
**Local Government Boundary
Commission for England**
for the new Parliament 2023-24

February 2025

OVERVIEW

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1 Introduction to the National Audit Office

Welcome to our overview of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission), which summarises the work of the Commission including what it does, how much it costs, and recent and planned changes.

The National Audit Office (NAO) is the UK's independent public spending watchdog and is responsible for scrutinising public spending for Parliament. We audit the financial accounts of all departments, executive agencies, arm's-length bodies, some companies and charities, and other public bodies. We also examine and report on the value for money of how public money has been spent.

The NAO is independent of government and the civil service. The NAO's wide remit and unique access rights enables us to investigate whether taxpayers' money is being spent in line with Parliament's intention and to respond to concerns where value for money may be at risk.

We support all Members of Parliament to hold government to account and we use our insights to help those who manage and govern public bodies improve public services. In 2023, the NAO's work led to a positive financial impact through reduced costs, improved service delivery, or other benefits to citizens, of £1.59 billion.

We are funded by, and accountable to, Parliament. As an Officer of the House of Commons, I am committed to ensuring that we support you and your staff in your work as a Member of Parliament, and your scrutiny of public spending and performance.

My dedicated Parliamentary Team can offer you support and put you in touch with our experts on subjects of interest to you and your constituents. If you would like more information about our work, or to arrange a briefing with me or one of my teams, please contact our Parliamentary Relations team at parliament@nao.org.uk.



Gareth Davies

COMPTROLLER & AUDITOR GENERAL
NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE

Gareth Davies was appointed Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) in June 2019. He was appointed by the Monarch, following the approval of the House of Commons.

The C&AG has statutory authority to examine and to report directly to Parliament on whether government departments and other public sector bodies have spent taxpayers' money in the way Parliament intended. The C&AG and his staff are totally independent of government.

Gareth is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. He is a non-executive Board member of the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI), which supports Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) in developing countries to sustainably enhance their performance and capacity.

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2 How the NAO can help you as a Member of Parliament

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How we support Parliament

We produce reports:

- on the annual accounts of government departments and their agencies;
- on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which government has spent public money; and
- to establish the facts where there are concerns about public spending issues.

We do not question government policy objectives. We look at how government has spent money delivering those policies and if that money has been used in the best way to achieve the intended outcome.

What we can offer

Through our website or our Parliamentary Relations team, MPs, peers and staff can:

- request a personal briefing on areas of our work that are of interest to them;
- sign up to receive embargoed copies of our reports on subjects of interest;
- make general queries about public spending, or raise concerns with us about value for money; and
- request advice on understanding and scrutinising departments' annual reports and accounts.

Resources available on our website

- **Reports:** Reviews of public spending and how well government is delivering.
- **Insights:** Learning and best practice to help people across government and the wider public sector.
- **Overviews:** Factual overviews of government departments, sectors and services.
- **Work in progress:** Our schedule of future publications.
- **Briefings:** Background information and factual analysis to support Select Committees.

Keep up to date with our work

- Sign up to our [latest report updates](#)
- Follow us on [X](#) or [LinkedIn](#)

How to get in touch

- Via our Parliamentary email inbox: parliament@nao.org.uk.



Auditing the accounts of all government departments and public organisations, helping assure money is being spent the way Parliament intended



Reporting to Parliament on the value for money of how public money has been spent and what has been achieved



Sending you embargoed copies of our reports before they are available to the public



Providing briefings to you or a member of your team on our work



Providing advice and training on examining government departments' annual reports and accounts



Giving evidence to Select Committees



Our fortnightly newsletter with our latest reports and new work



You can write to us with any queries or concerns about the misuse of public money or behaviour in public bodies we audit

3 About this Overview

This overview has been produced to provide an introduction to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) and the National Audit Office examination of its spending and performance.

It is intended to support the Speaker's Committee of the House of Commons and Members across the House in their examination of the Commission. Until 2015-16, the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) was required under statute to report annually to the Speaker's Committee on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission. The Deregulation Act 2015 amended the statute so that the C&AG is only required to issue a report following a UK General Election. To discharge this responsibility, following the 2024 UK General Election, the C&AG issued this 2025 overview.

It summarises the key information and insights that can be gained from our examinations of the Commission and the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts. The Commission spends over **£2 million** each year to deliver fair electoral arrangements for local authorities in England.

The report includes:

- how the Commission is structured and what it works on;
- where the Commission spends its money;
- the Commission's performance, stakeholder engagement and top risks;
- the Commission's staff;
- significant developments for the Commission; and
- things to look out for.

This report updates our previous report, a [short guide to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England](#), published in March 2020.

How we have prepared this report

The information in this overview draws on the findings and recommendations from our financial audit and value for money work, and from publicly available sources, including the annual report and accounts of the Commission.

We have cited these sources throughout the guide to enable readers to seek further information if required. Where analysis has been taken directly from our value-for-money or other reports, details of our

audit approach can be found in the Appendix of each report, including any evaluative criteria and the evidence base used.

Other analysis in the guide has been directly drawn from publicly available data and includes the relevant source as well as any appropriate notes to help the reader understand our analysis.

Other relevant publications

More information about our work on the Commission, as well as information about our other recent and upcoming reports can be found on the [NAO website](#).



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The Commission is a statutory body that carries out reviews of the electoral arrangements of local authorities across England and makes recommendations for change. The Commission was established by Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The Commission is independent from government and political parties. It is accountable to Parliament through the Speaker's Committee of the House of Commons.

The Commission's main responsibility is conducting electoral reviews by considering the electoral boundaries of local authorities in England and recommending any changes to Parliament.

It is also responsible for:

- reviewing the administrative (external) boundaries of local authorities in England and making recommendations for changes to the Secretary of State;
- advising the Secretary of State, at their request, on proposals they receive from local authorities for changes to unitary status; and
- reviewing the constituencies of the London Assembly and recommending any changes to Parliament.

The Commission's remit covers all principal English local authorities. The Commission has a duty to review all 317 councils in England "from time to time".

When carrying out electoral reviews, it aims to:

- ensure that, within each authority, every councillor represents a similar number of electors to others in that authority;
- create boundaries that are appropriate and reflect community ties and identities; and
- deliver reviews that are informed by local needs, views and circumstances.



5 How the Commission is structured

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.

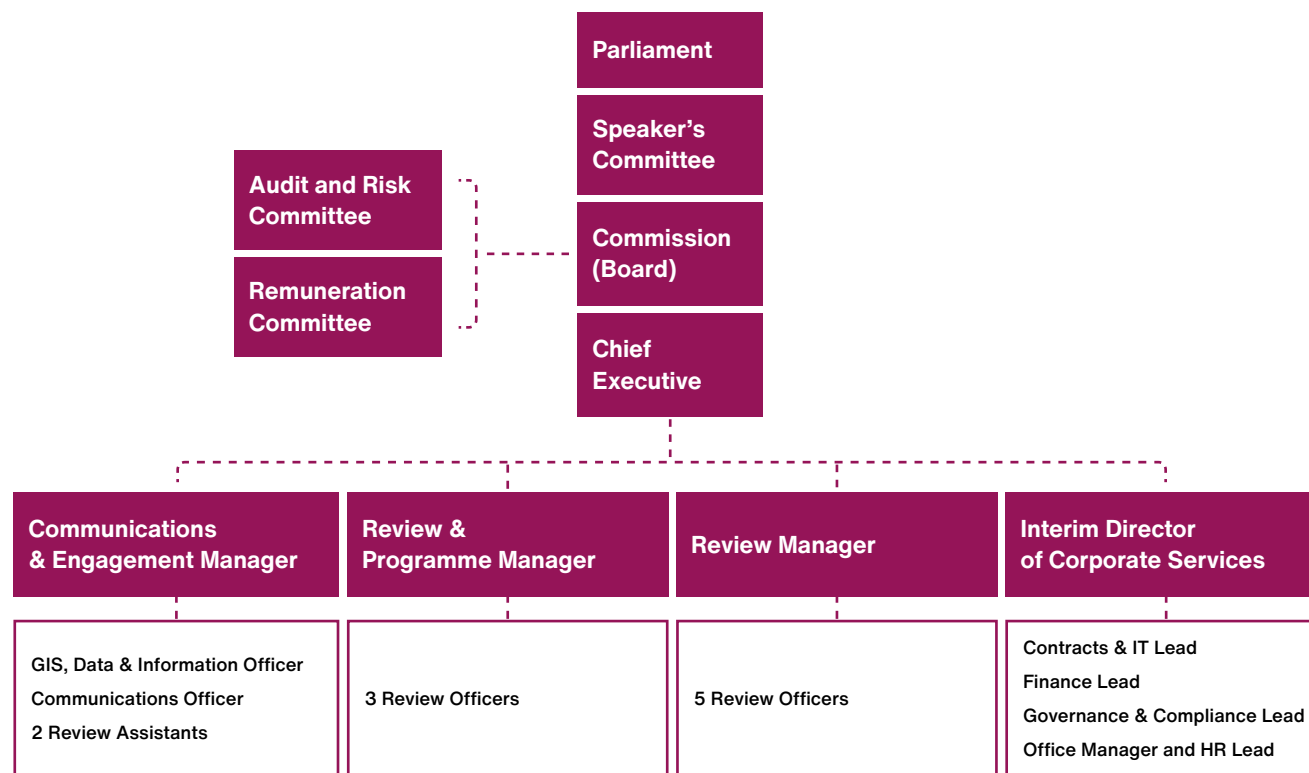
Commissioners provide strategic leadership and decision-making on electoral reviews and related matters and make final agreements on five-year corporate plans, annual accounts and budgets.

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is, as the Accounting Officer, 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.

Organisational Structure of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, 2023-24

The Commission is accountable to Parliament through the Speaker’s Committee



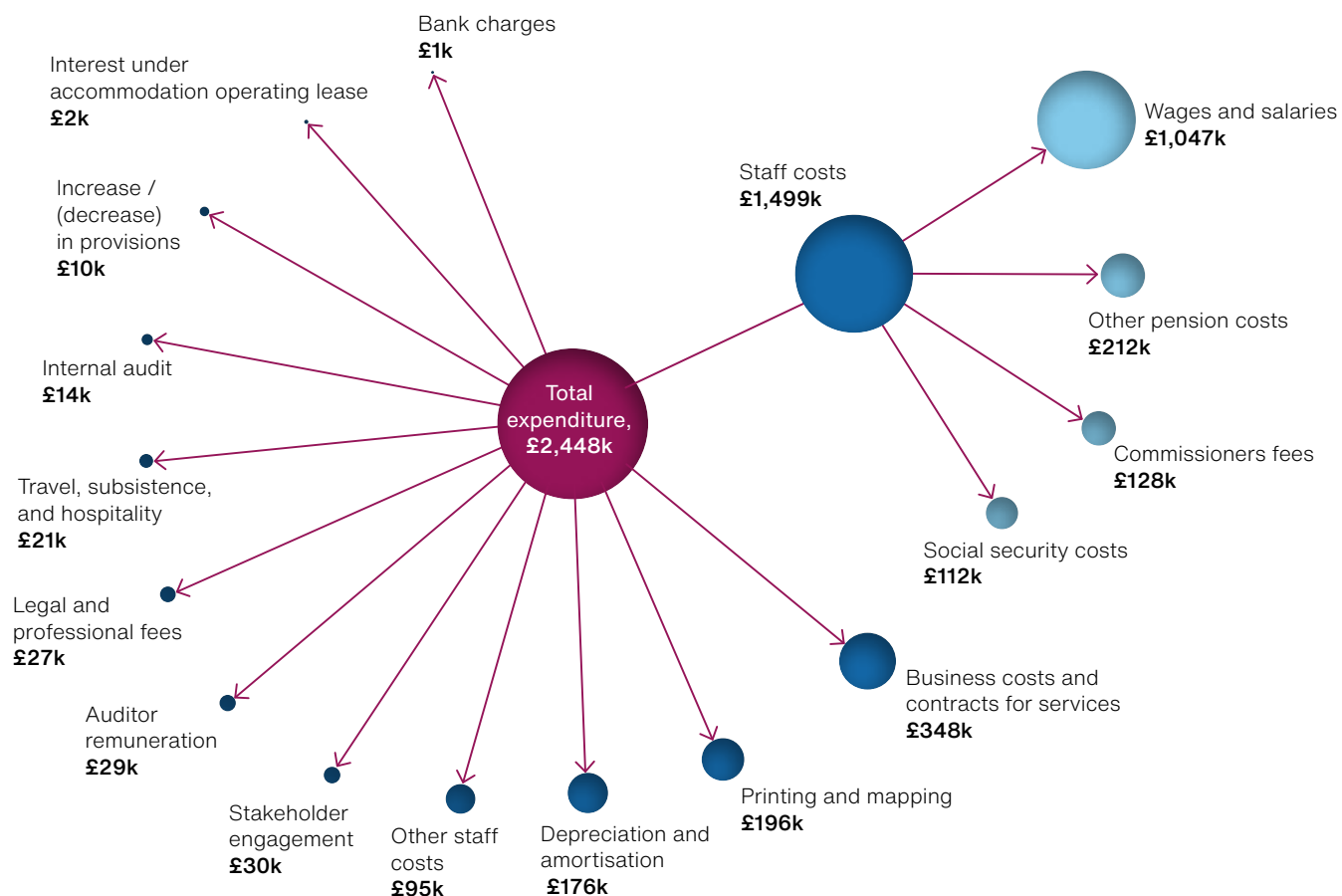
- Commissioners in post as of 31 March 2024 are Professor Colin Mellors OBE (chair), Andrew Scallan CBE (deputy chair), Amanda Nobbs OBE, Steve Robinson, Wallace Sampson OBE, Liz Treacy, and David Horne (Independent Member of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC))
- In January 2024 the Commission welcomed a new Chief Executive, Ailsa Irvine.

6 Where the Commission spends its money

The Commission's total expenditure in 2023-24 was £2,448,000. The Commission's expenditure relates to day-to-day operations. Staff costs account for over half of the spend.

Total fees paid to the Commissioners were £124,088. Commissioners were paid a daily fee of £382 (compared to £364 in 2022-23) for each day worked during 2023-24. Commissioners do not receive a salary and are not permitted to join the Commission's government pension schemes. Commissioners' fees increase on 1 April each year informed by the percentage increase paid to High Court Judges as part of the Senior Salaries Review Body's work. In 2023-24 Commissioners received a (4.5% compared to 3.5% in 2022-23) fee increase.

Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Total Expenditure, 2023-24



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24

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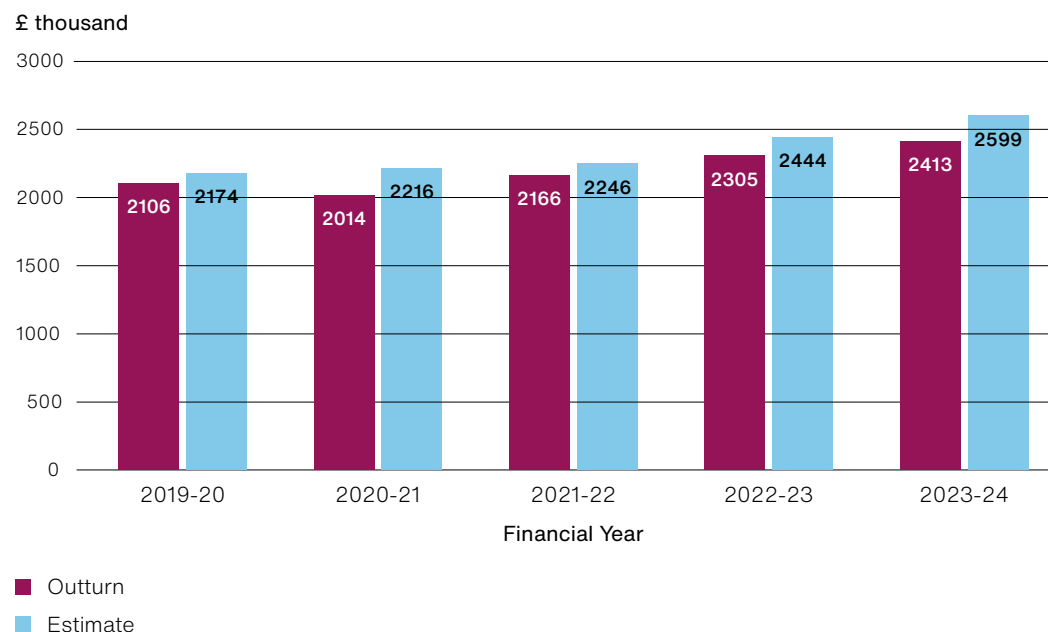
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The Commission's spend has increased by 15% in the past five years, less than expected by inflation.



The Local Government Boundary Commission for England's yearly spend compared with its Parliamentary estimates 2019-20 to 2023-24

The Commission has spent less than its Parliamentary approved estimate each of the past five years



Notes

- 1 Estimates are documents setting out Government departments' spending plans for the year. They show how much the government plans to spend, and on what. Parliament must then approve the spending plans through the Estimates process.
- 2 Spending shown in nominal terms.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of *Local Government Boundary Commission for England's 2019-20 to 2023-24 annual report and accounts*

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The Commission undertakes six types of reviews. It aims to start 25 reviews per year. Each review takes approximately 15 months. At any given time, approximately 50 reviews are in progress.

- 1. Intervention electoral reviews** – these are carried out in authorities with poor levels of electoral equality. The Commission started 11 intervention reviews in 2023-24.
- 2. Periodic electoral reviews (PERs)** – these are undertaken every three to four electoral cycles (12 to 16 years) to fulfil the Commission's statutory duty of reviewing all local authorities "from time to time". These make up the majority of the Commission's work. The Commission started 15 PERs in 2023-24.
- 3. Requested electoral reviews** – undertaken in response to requests from authorities who wish to change the number of councillors or their electoral cycle. It is not possible to predict how many such requests the Commission will receive each year and the Commission adjusts other reviews to accommodate these requests.

4. New authorities – undertaken to support councils that have been established on new boundaries where this has been agreed by the government and Parliament. The Commission recently completed reviews of West Northamptonshire, North Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire councils. Reviews of the new unitary authorities in Somerset, Cumberland, Westmorland & Furness and North Yorkshire are planned for 2024-25.

5. Related alterations and consent cases – undertaken to make changes to parish electoral arrangements, ward or division boundaries following community governance reviews if requested.

6. Principal Area Boundary Reviews (PABRs) – undertaken at the request of adjoining authorities, typically to regularise anomalies in boundaries.

Reviews are informed by local needs, views and circumstances. With each review, the Commission recommends fair electoral and boundary arrangements, aiming to create boundaries that are appropriate, and reflect community ties and identities. Once the Commission has agreed recommendations for changes to the electoral arrangements of an authority, a draft order is laid in Parliament to bring them into effect. A total of 27 electoral changes orders were laid in Parliament during the 2023-24 financial year.



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The Commission measured its performance over 2023-24 against three **key performance indicators** (KPIs). It assessed the delivery of electoral reviews against the numbers set out in its corporate plan.

1. KPI 1A: Agreed programme

Reviews can take place over three financial years. Each year, the Commission aims to start approximately 25 electoral reviews.

In line with the year before, in 2023-24 the Commission started 26 reviews. Of these 26 reviews, 15 were PERs and 11 were intervention reviews.

2. KPI 1B: Reviews completed in time for election

The Commission aims to complete all reviews in time for the changes to be implemented at the election agreed at the start of the review.

As in the year before, in 2023-24, all orders were made in time for the new electoral arrangements to be implemented at the election agreed at the start of the review.

3. KPI 2A: Customer satisfaction

The Commission values satisfaction of customers in their overall experience of dealing with the Commission.

In 2023-24, the overall satisfaction rate was 71%, a decrease from the year before (77%).

The response rate to the customer satisfaction survey was also lower. In 2024-25 the Commission will review the survey and explore how to increase response rates.

To complement the KPIs, the Commission also monitors management information on forecasting accuracy, correspondence and engagement.

Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) forecasting accuracy and engagement rates in 2022-23 and 2023-24

The Commission has experienced a slight decline in forecasting accuracy and submissions on review consultations received but has seen an increase in some of its engagement, including website traffic

	2023-24	2022-23
Forecasting accuracy: the Commission assesses the accuracy of local authority electorate forecasts on which electoral equality is measured		
Accuracy of the electorate forecasts ¹	82%	85%
Engagement: the Commission measures website and social media engagement		
Number of website sessions (user actively engaging with website)	386,547	256,480
Number of posts seen on Facebook	1,326,366	1,756,981
Facebook actions taken	91,578	93,316
Number of posts seen on X (previously Twitter)	47,341	44,153
Correspondence: the Commission measures correspondence rates, including submissions on review consultations received and responses to complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests		
Submissions on review consultations received	4,747	5,850
Responses to complaints within the deadline	100%	100%
Responses to FOI requests	92% ²	100%

Notes

- 1 The Commission is required to consider the forecast electorate five years after the completion of the review. The figures for the forecasting accuracy therefore refer to the reviews undertaken five years previously.
- 2 One Freedom of Information (FOI) request was not responded to within the deadline due to a website error, which meant the FOI was not received.

Source: Local Government Boundary Commission for England 2022-23 and 2023-24 annual report and accounts

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The Commission has three statutory criteria for its reviews:

1 The need to secure equality of representation.

The Commission aims to ensure that, within a single authority, the number of electors represented by a councillor is similar in each ward or division.

2 The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities.

The Commission's core principles ensure that any reviews that it undertakes reflect community identities and interests.

3 The need to secure effective and convenient local government.

The pattern of wards or divisions, and the numbers of councillors in each, should support good representation of people and good local government.

The Commission aims to base as many of its recommendations as possible on locally generated proposals, and engages stakeholders in several phases throughout the review process.

It also encourages councils, their partners and the public to state what they would like to see in the electoral arrangements for their local authorities.

The Commission reports that it received 4,747 submissions in 2023-24.

The Commission states that stakeholder engagement is crucial to its work in providing fair electoral arrangements. It undertakes to consider all the suggestions and comments received before making final recommendations to Parliament.

The Commission regularly reviews how it engages with residents and communities. Since our short guide on the Commission in 2020, it has focussed on improved digital working and making it easier for local people to submit their views to inform electoral reviews. A selection of actions it has undertaken include:

- reviewing the communications channels and materials, being especially mindful of the issue of digital inclusion;
- holding online parish and community briefings, which has increased accessibility and attendance rates; and
- launching a new website that combined two previous sites, leading to increased engagement.

The Commission also publicises reviews through a variety of means, including local media and targeted social media campaigns.

Developments in relation to technology are further highlighted on page 16.



The Commission monitors the key risks that might prevent it from meeting its objectives through a corporate risk-register.

The register assigns inherent, current and target scores to each risk, and sets out the controls and assurance processes through which each risk is mitigated. The Commission aims for its controls to be both effective and proportionate to the size of the organisation.

The Commission regularly reviews and updates its risks, risk scores, assurance framework and risk controls. Risk is considered at each Commission Board meeting, at each ARC meeting, at each leadership team meeting (where they act as the Risk Management Group) and in staff teams and staff meetings.

In 2023-24, the Commission Board has considered the Commission's risk appetite statement and risk policy and conducted 16 deep dives into risks, assurances and control processes.

The Internal Audit Association noted during its annual internal audit that the Commission has reasonable and effective risk management processes in place.

The Commission's top risks and mitigation strategies as of 2024¹

Fatality, injury or serious injury

Unsafe working conditions could lead to increased staff sickness, and poor staff mental health and wellbeing.

The Commission states it mitigates these risks through assurances such as health and safety policies and statutory health and safety check, a mental health and wellbeing framework, a hybrid model of working and workstation assessments.

Information, security and management

Most organisations are at risk of cyberattacks, data breaches, and inaccurate or corrupt data.

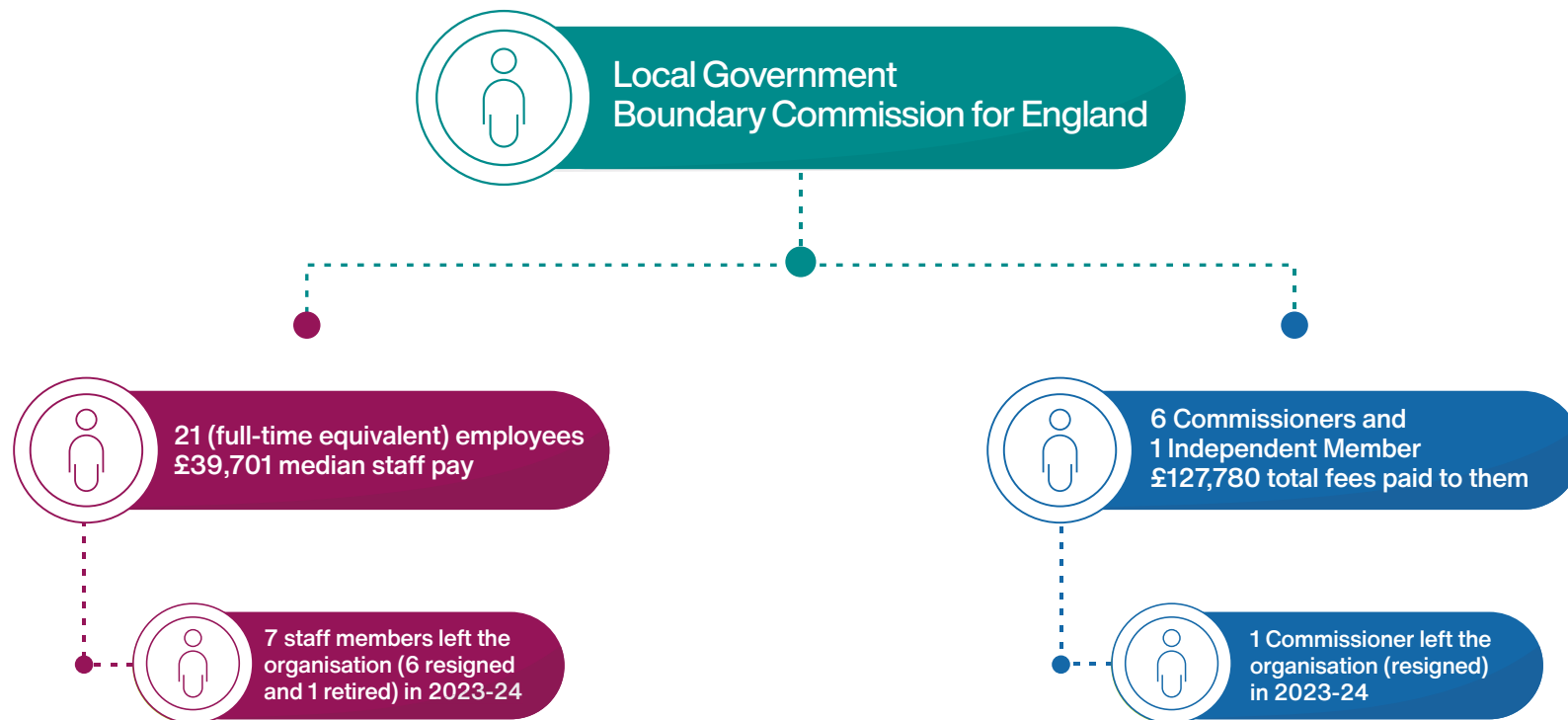
The Commission states it mitigates these risks through assurances such as information security policies, training on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), additional layers of IT security and a Cyber Essentials certification.



¹ The most significant risks also included 'operational resilience' due to delayed review requests and 'failure to have a resilient workforce' due to staff turnover, but no longer rank as top risks since August 2023.

12 Staff

The Commission is a small body, with only 21 total staff, plus six Commissioners and one Independent Member. It experienced high turnover in 2023-24 with seven staff members and one Commissioner leaving the organisation.



Section 12: Staff *continued*

The Commission has stated its commitment to equality and diversity. It has an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and equal pay policy to promote equality for staff, Commissioners and customers, the impacts of which are regularly reviewed.

Diversity information

Twenty-one of the Commission's staff and Commissioners provided their diversity information

Age	11 out of 21 were over age 50.
Gender	13 out of 21 identified as male and 8 as female.
Ethnicity	15 out of 21 identified as white.
Disability	5 out of 21 identified as disabled.
Caring	3 identified as a primary carer and 3 as a secondary carer.

Note

1 "White" includes White – British, White – Irish, and White – Other.

Source: National Audit Office Analysis of *Local Government Boundary Commission for England Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 and 2023-24*

Disability Confident Employer

The Commission seeks to give full and fair consideration to applications for employment made by disabled persons.

The Disability Confident scheme is a government scheme designed to encourage employers to recruit and retain disabled people and those with health conditions. To qualify for the scheme, the Commission commits to undertaking specific activities when recruiting staff and in the way it supports staff during their time with the Commission. Such activities range from offering an interview to a disabled person who meets the minimum criteria, to supporting an employee with reasonable adjustments to enable them to carry out their role.



13 Developments

Technology

The Commission reports that it has progressed its work on enhancing the use of technology, to improve information security and to engage actively with local people. It reported that it:

- worked closely with council communications teams to increase the use of technology and to better tailor the provision of information to meet the needs of local authorities;
- started work to review the communications channels and materials it uses to communicate with local people, being mindful of the issue of digital inclusion;
- embedded its new website, and monitors how it is supporting users to engage with it and its work, to support a process of continual improvement;
- developed its mapping tools to use Esri Sweet Boundary Editor. This software will enhance quality and accuracy when mapping recommendations; and
- started work on a database of historic reviews, to ensure learning is captured and informs future activity.

The Commission also successfully achieved Cyber Essentials accreditation in 2023-24.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

The Commission reports it has continued its work on EDI throughout the year.

The Commission has an EDI and equal pay policy to promote equality for staff, Commissioners and customers. EDI compliance is overseen by the leadership team, ARC, an EDI working group, staff champion and Commissioner champion.

The Commission is also a Disability Confident employer (see p.15 for more information), which is promoted on the recruitment page of its website. In 2023-24, 24% of staff indicated they identified as having a disability, compared with the 12% as reported in our 2020 Short Guide.

In 2023-24, the Commission reviewed its EDI working group terms of reference and EDI policy and ran a whole-team session which focussed on EDI in electoral reviews.

In the latest staff survey, 94% of staff indicated that they would recommend the Commission as “a great place to work”. The Commission compared the staff results with the latest reported annual Civil Service People Survey (CSPS) and scored well in comparison, in line with previous years.



14 Things to look out for

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The government's *English Devolution White Paper* outlined its plans for the “biggest transfer of power out of Westminster to England’s regions this century”. The government expects much of this transformation to occur during this Parliament. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is not mentioned in the white paper but might be affected by the proposed changes.

English Devolution White Paper

Our goal is simple. Universal coverage in England of Strategic Authorities – which should be a number of councils working together, covering areas that people recognise and work in. Many places already have Combined Authorities that serve this role. The government will continue to develop new Strategic Authorities collaboratively and in partnership with places. However, in order to ensure that citizens across England benefit from devolution, and to ensure the effective running of public services, we will legislate for a ministerial directive. This will allow the creation of those Strategic Authorities where local leaders have, after due time has been allowed, not been able to make progress.

Look out for the possible impact on the Commission

- The number of reviews performed each year.
- The types of reviews that the Commission performs.
- The staff and funding requirements of the Commission.



15 More information about our work on the Commission

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Until 2015-16, the Comptroller & Auditor General was *required under statute* to report annually to the Speaker's Committee on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission. *The Deregulation Act 2015* amended the statute so that the C&AG is only required to issue a report following a UK General Election. Past reports can be found below.

A Short Guide to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

March 2020

Following the 2019 UK General Election, the C&AG published a short guide in 2020. It analysed the Commission's spend from 2010-11 to 2019-20, as well as the Commission's performance, accountability arrangements, and people strategy.

A Short Guide to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

March 2018

Following the 2017 UK General Election, the C&AG published a short guide in 2018. It analysed the Commissions performance, spending, risks, and accountability arrangements.

