

Proposal for Number of Councillors for the new Unitary Authority

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) carried out an electoral review of Cumbria County Council between October 2010 - December 2012. This proposed a council size of 84, comprising 84 single-member divisions, and these recommendations were implemented through the Cumbria (Electoral Changes) Order 2012 and came into force at the local elections on 2 May 2013.

Analysis of Cumbria's 15 CIPFA Nearest Neighbours indicates that the number of electors per councillor in Cumbria is currently half that of the comparator authorities (Cumbria = 4,669, Average of 15 CIPFA Nearest Neighbours = 9,336). Analysis of the 6 district councils in Cumbria indicates that the average number of electors per councillor is 1,594.

As the new single unitary authority for Cumbria will assume the functions of the county and district councils, an analysis of the number of councillors for unitary authorities recently established has been undertaken as a benchmark (overleaf), while recognising the diversity of communities and characteristics and needs of individual areas will impact on arrangements in different areas.

The County Council understands the importance of ensuring the correct number of councillors to enable effective decision making, the successful discharge of its business and responsibilities, and to provide for effective community leadership and representation.

Our Proposition and Business Case is based on retaining the current number of county councillors (84) initially for the new unitary council. This would result in an average number of electors per councillor of 4,669. While this is towards the upper end of the range across unitary authorities recently established, it is not significantly above the more recent LGBCE electoral review recommendations. It is also consistent with our proposal for the County Council to be the continuing authority, to minimise the complexity, administration and costs of transition.

As can be seen overleaf, moving to the average of the authorities analysed would imply a number of councillors of 103 (the lowest number of electors per councillor would imply 124 councillors and the highest would imply 77 councillors). Given the County Council's current electoral arrangements of 84 single member divisions, transitioning to anywhere in this range would be complex. Amending arrangements to two members per division would result in 168 councillors and 2,334 electors per councillor, far below the comparator authorities analysed.

The County Council recognises the increased scope of the role of councillors in the new unitary authority and is committed to ensuring, as part of the transition, that support arrangements for councillors are considered and improvement activity, to ensure that duplication is removed and processes are more streamlined and efficient, will benefit councillors. A key part of the County Council's existing Customer & Digital transformation programme is focussed on its Highways Service, and includes a new information management system, which will improve the availability and quality of information on the service, which will reduce the number of queries received by councillors.

As it is unlikely that an electoral review to consider councillor numbers and divisional arrangements could be completed before elections to the new unitary council (which are assumed to take place shortly after vesting day), we propose that this is scheduled to commence shortly after the new unitary council is established to enable future arrangements to be confirmed in advance of the subsequent election.

Electoral Arrangements – Recently Established Unitary Authorities

Unitary Council ¹	Date of most recent LGBCE electoral review (Final Recommendations)	Council Size (Number of Councillors)	Electorate	Average number of electors per councillor
Central Bedfordshire	June 2020 (draft)	63 ²	217,035	3,445
Wiltshire	October 2019	98	384,578	3,924
Cornwall	December 2018	87 ³	441,474	5,074
Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole	October 2018	76	309,695	4,075
Dorset	October 2018	82	306,624	3,739
Cheshire West & Chester	March 2018	70	276,179	3,945
Cheshire East	July 2010	82	311,173	3,795
Durham	November 2011	126	397,094	3,152
Northumberland	March 2010	67	246,347	3,677
Shropshire	November 2008	74	252,633	3,414
<i>Average</i>				3,824

Cumbria County Council	July 2012	84	392,191	4,669
	<i>Lowest</i>	124	392,191	3,152
Number of electors per councillor implied by comparator authorities	<i>Average</i>	103	392,191	3,824
	<i>Highest</i>	77	392,191	5,074

Source: Local Government Boundary Commission for England Electoral Data (last updated 12 November 2020, including 2019 data) and most recent electoral review for each Council

¹ Buckinghamshire Council was established on 1 April 2020 including all county and district councillors (c200 in total), planned elections for 2020 were postponed and a LGBCE electoral review is currently being considered, so has been excluded from this dataset

² Electoral review draft recommendations propose increasing the number of councillors from 59 to 63

³ The Cornwall (Electoral Changes) Order 2019 decreased the number of councillors from 123 to 87 (from 2021 elections).