

Report to Council

17 September 2024

Subject:	Sandwell Council Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) – proposed ward pattern
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1 Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that Full Council –

- 1.1 agree a ward pattern of 24 wards each represented by 3 Councillors be recommended to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE);
- 1.2 delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Cross Party Member Working Group to make any minor technical amendments to the Council's submission; and
- 1.3 approve the submission and accompanying documentation as set out at Appendices 1 to 4 of this report to the LGBCE, fulfilling stage two of the LGBCE electoral review process.



2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 This report seeks Full Council endorsement of a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on a proposed new ward pattern for Sandwell MBC at stage two of the review process.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

Growing Up in Sandwell	The Council plays a major part in promoting local democracy, encouraging people to register as electors, providing information about local issues and providing pathways by which people can influence decision-making. Electoral reviews seek to establish and maintain the conditions for a fair and representative democracy at local level. In addition, the review will ensure that the council size and ward pattern is appropriate for ensuring that the Council is able to deliver on its corporate priorities and in a manner consistent with the Council's desire to be open and accountable to its residents. The geographic configuration of wards identified through the review has been undertaken in accordance with LGBCE requirements, including recognition of the need to ensure community identity and accessibility within wards, often associated with key community facilities, infrastructure, and transport hubs.
Living in Sandwell	
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	
Healthy in Sandwell	
One Council One Team	

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Full Council at its meeting of 19 March 2024 approved a submission on a future council size for Sandwell MBC of 72 councillors to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
- 4.2 The LGBCE announced on 24 July 2024 draft recommendations for a future council size of 72 Councillors, having accepted the representations of Sandwell MBC. The announcement formally



started the review process. A public consultation was launched on the same date, inviting proposals on a new ward pattern for Sandwell based on forecast data for the period 2023-2030 for both 18+ population and electorate within the borough. The consultation period concludes on 30 September 2024. This is known as stage two of the review process.

4.3 Stage two of the review process considers the boundaries between all wards within the borough – the ward pattern. In proposing a new ward pattern, any Council submission must propose new electorate arrangements that provide the best balance of the statutory criteria within which the LG BCE must make their decisions. The criteria comprises three elements –

4.3.1 Delivering electoral equality for local voters

This means ensuring that each Councillor represents roughly the same number of voters so that the value of an elector's vote is the same regardless of where they live in the local authority area.

4.3.2 Interests and identities of local communities

This means establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, avoid splitting local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable.

4.3.3 Effective and convenient local government

This means ensuring that the wards can be represented effectively by their elected representative(s) and that the new electoral arrangements, including both the council size decision and warding arrangements, allow the local authority to conduct its business effectively.

4.4 The proposals put forward by the Council have been designed to directly address these three statutory criteria.

Methodology

4.5 The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) and programme team appointed to lead stage one of the review process has again led the review process, with warding pattern proposals developed in consultation with and under the oversight and direction of a cross-



party working group. The cross-party working group comprised representatives from each political group and independent members, with all materials and proposals generated by the working group circulated to all political group leaders during the review process.

4.6 Representatives appointed to the cross-party working group in turn engaged and consulted with all elected members in their respective groups and provided direct feedback the proposed warding pattern throughout the review process. A clear, consistent, structured work programme was followed by the cross-party working group based on –

4.6.1 **an intensive work programme.** Using the existing 6 towns model to focus on each area of the borough in sequence, working north to south. Large-scale town and borough-wide maps were provided at each meeting during which indicative boundaries and potential revisions for each were examined in sequence by the cross-party working group;

4.6.2 **robust population and electorate forecasts combined with detailed mapping data for all areas of Sandwell** – the Technical Report and Sandwell Forecast Model (SFM) approved by Full Council and the LGBCE at the first stage of the review forms the bedrock from which this submission was developed. The SFM incorporates data from multiple sources including the Office for National Statistics (ONS), electoral roll and local planning authority amongst others;

4.6.3 **a methodical analysis of every area, community, and neighbourhood** – supporting data produced as part of the first stage of the review comprising current and historical identified communities provided a baseline from which a warding pattern was developed. Large scale maps for each zone were examined in detail, each meeting of the cross-party working group generated extensive feedback both directly at the working group and indirectly from representatives as views were canvassed from respective political groups.

4.6.4 **clear and consistent principles for the location of boundaries based as far as possible on natural or well-acknowledged boundaries** – working with the cross-party



working group and guided by the 3 statutory criteria, the following principles were applied –

- boundaries as far as possible to be located to rear of residential properties to unify roads and communities;
- boundaries located in line with or running along the mid-point of designated A or B roads or other main roads as natural divisions; and
- natural or man-made boundaries to be used including as railway lines, embankments, retail or industrial parks, woods, parks, greenspaces, and watercourses.

4.7 During an intensive four-week period, the SRO has, based on continuous detailed feedback from the cross-party member working group, produced several iterations of proposals for new ward boundaries. Each proposal has been subject to careful review by the SRO against the three statutory criteria. The proposals set out in this report represent the culmination of this process.

4.8 In designing a pattern of wards, both the forecast 18+ population and forecast electorate for 2030 have been used both datasets having been analysed against each proposal to ensure the three core review criteria are met.

4.9 The LGBCE recognises that perfect electoral equality is unlikely to be obtained for every ward and therefore will accept variances (as a general guide usually variances of +/- 10% at most) although the larger the proposed variance the more persuasive the evidence provided to justify must be.

Ward pattern and local communities

4.10 The warding pattern is based on a pattern of 24 wards with an average 18+ population of 11,318 and an average electorate of 10,294. Each ward will in turn be represented by 3 Councillors.

Ward names

4.11 Guidance provided by the LGBCE sets out its approach to naming wards. It recommends that where wards remain largely unchanged



the existing name should be retained unless a good reason is provided to justify the change.

- 4.12 In developing the Council's submission, care has been given to ward names that reflect continuity of community identification in respect of the proposed wards, as well as other factors including local community landmarks and smaller area names. The Council has also considered whether existing ward names are still relevant where community identities may have changed over time. Alternative name options are set out in the proposed ward profiles at Appendix 3 to this report.

Conclusions

- 4.13 The Council has a strong and positive view of the future relationship between the Council and its electorate. This forms an essential part of the delivery of the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030, enabling and empowering local communities. The emergent neighbourhood arrangements underpin these objectives.
- 4.14 The proposed ward pattern of 24 wards each represented by 3 Councillors is considered optimum for that relationship to develop and embed over the long term and will contribute to the positive improvement in outcomes that the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030 envisage.
- 4.15 The proposed ward pattern has also been designed to allow all elected Councillors to discharge statutory and regulatory functions satisfactorily and efficiently, to fulfil council duties as a strategic place maker, deliver high quality and efficient services, allow for adequate citizen representation, and deliver robust governance. These considerations recognise continuous improvements and transformation in service delivery models and governance that the Council continues to implement.

What happens next?

- 4.16 The Council's ward pattern submission set out in this report and accompanying appendices must be sent to the LGBCE before 30 September 2024 when the consultation on a future ward pattern ends.



- 4.17 The LGBCE will consider the Council’s submission and any other representations received during the consultation period and assess each submission against the 3 statutory criteria. The LGBCE Board will meet on or about 21 January 2025 at which it will come to a view on its proposed ward pattern, taking account of all representations.
- 4.18 A further public consultation on final draft recommendations for the future ward pattern will take place 4 February 2025 to 14 April 2025. It is proposed that any response to this consultation be undertaken through the Cross-Party Member Working Group.
- 4.19 The LGBCE Board will meet again to agree its final recommendations on 15 July 2025, following which the final recommendations report, borough-wide and ward level maps will be published to the LGBCE website.
- 4.20 Following publication of the final LGBCE recommendations, the new ward pattern is subject to Parliamentary approval through an Order. This will take place between the summer and autumn of 2025.
- 4.21 The new ward pattern and boundaries will be implemented through all-out elections for all wards and seats to be held on Thursday 7 May 2026.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Alternative options are considered and set out at section 7 of the Council’s submission document.

6 Implications

Resources:	As the electoral review process progresses and the warding pattern for the Council is agreed, any additional financial implications arising from that will be set out in the proposals and reports to Full Council.
Legal and Governance:	The LGBCE operates under the provisions of Part 3 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). This established the LGBCE in place of the



	<p>former Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission.</p> <p>Under s.56(1) of the 2009 Act, the LGBCE must, from time to time, conduct a review of the area of each principal council, and recommend whether a change should be made to the electoral arrangements. In this regard, “electoral arrangements” means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total number of Councillors • The number and boundaries of electoral areas for the election of Councillors • The number of Councillors to be returned by any electoral area • The name of the electoral area <p>The legislation does not set out how many Councillors each authority (or type of authority) will have. It is the LGBCE’s responsibility to determine the appropriate number of Councillors for each authority. In making recommendations, Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act requires the LGBCE to have regard to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The need to secure that the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of Councillors is, as nearly as possible, the same in every electoral area – over the five-year period following the implementation of recommendations (b) The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and, the desirability of fixing boundaries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • which are and will remain easily identifiable • so as not to break any local ties (c) The need to secure effective and convenient local government
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	<p>Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act also states that the LGBCE should consider any change to the number and distribution of electors that is likely to take place within the five years following the end of a review.</p> <p>The Council has previously provided the LGBCE with six-year forecasts of 18+ population and electorate changes in all polling districts for the period up to and including 2030, as part of its stage 1 submission.</p> <p>The LGBCE’s decision on council size made 24 July 2024 marked the formal start to the review process. However, this decision will not be formalised until their Final Recommendations are agreed and published at the end of the process.</p> <p>This is because the number of Councillors may change marginally (generally ± 1) from the initial decision if it is felt that modifying the number of Councillors may provide for a pattern of wards that better reflects the three statutory criteria.</p> <p>The Final Recommendations describe the complete set of electoral arrangements, including ward names and locations, as well as the number of elected members. This report sets out Sandwell MBC’s submission on a proposed ward pattern for the borough based on a model of 24 wards each represented by 3 Councillors.</p> <p>These recommendations will be implemented at the next scheduled borough-wide council elections in May 2026 by means of an Order laid before Parliament.</p>
Risk:	Sandwell Council has a duty to comply with the requirements of LGBCE during an electoral review.



	<p>The main risk is that if a proper and robust review is not conducted, there may be an unfair and disproportionate number of members to electors throughout the borough.</p> <p>If the Council does not produce a detailed, evidenced-based submission on its council size, the LGBCE will impose its own recommendations for the future electoral arrangements for Sandwell. The Council's submission must be clear and evidence the Council's requirements.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>S.149 of the Equality Act 2010 states a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act. • advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and • foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. <p>These requirements are known as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). In complying with this duty, the Council must consider whether the decision will or could have a differential impact on ethnic minorities; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their gender; people due to their religious belief; or people who are pregnant</p> <p>The Council must ensure that all communications are as inclusive and accessible as possible throughout the review. An equality impact assessment is not necessary for the purpose of</p>



	responding to the LGBCE on the number of councillors or patterns of ward boundaries.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities arising from this report.
Social Value	There are no implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g., employment of local traders, young people) arising from this report.
Climate Change	There are no relevant climate change implications arising from this report.
Corporate Parenting	The are no corporate parenting implications arising from this report.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Proposed Ward Pattern Submission

Appendix 2 – Proposed Wards Summary Data Table

Appendix 3 – Proposed Wards Profiles

Appendix 4 – Proposed Wards Maps

8 Background Papers

Report to Full Council 19 March 2024 - [Sandwell Council submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England \(LGBCE\) - proposed council size](#)

