

Full Council

10 February 2026

Electoral Review of Dorset Council – Council Size Submission For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr N Ireland, Leader of the Council, Climate, Performance and Safeguarding

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

J Mair, Director of Legal & Democratic

Report author and job title:

Jacqui Andrews, Service Manager, Democratic and Electoral Services

Email: jacqui.andrews@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority:

Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

Report status: Public

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament that undertakes electoral reviews of local authorities with the aim of delivering electoral equality for voters, establishing electoral areas for local authorities that reflect, as far as possible, community identities in that area and promoting effective and convenient government.
- 1.2 An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for a local authority including the total number of councillors to be elected to the council, the names, number and boundaries of wards and the number of councillors to be elected for each ward.
- 1.3 Following the resolution of Full Council on 10 July 2025 seeking an electoral review by the LGBCE, which the Commission agreed, this report seeks a recommendation in respect of a council size (number of councillors) submission to the LGBCE which is the first stage in the electoral review process.

2. **Recommendation**

- 2.1 That Full Council agrees the council size submission (attached at Appendix 1) with a recommended council size of 82 members that will be forwarded to the LGBCE for consideration.

3. **Reason for the recommendation**

- 3.1 An electoral review was sought by Dorset Council to ensure that electoral equality is achieved across the Dorset Council area. The first stage of the electoral review is to make a council size submission to the LGBCE.

4. **Introduction**

- 4.1 Electoral reviews are carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.
- 4.2 Electoral reviews assess and adjust the electoral arrangements of local authorities, including the number of councillors, ward boundaries, and councillor-to-electors ratios. These reviews may recommend new patterns of wards so that each councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, and that the pattern of wards reflects community ties and identities and promotes effective and convenient local government.
- 4.3 Dorset Council wards were set in 2018 as part of the local government reorganisation process when the council was created. [LGBCE New electoral arrangements for Dorset Council - October 2018](#)).
- 4.3 On 10 July 2025, Full Council agreed that a cross-party task and finish group be established to make recommendations to Full Council on various submissions to the LGBCE, the first of which is a council size submission. The task group has the following membership:
- 3 Liberal Democrat councillors
 - 2 Conservative councillors
 - The group leader or deputy group leader of the Green, Independent and Labour political groups or their nominated substitute.
- 4.4 The task and finish group met on 15 October 2025 and 3 December 2025 to consider advice from officers based on data and also to consider the guidance on boundary reviews to oversee and shape the development of this council size proposal. The majority of the group felt that although the electorate ratio was likely to increase over time, the programme of work underway to modernise the council's operating model, together with the potential of devolution arrangements and ongoing discussions with town and parish councils about the potential opportunities for double devolution, were factors that would support councillors in their role making them more effective and efficient, and therefore able to manage any increase in casework that may

result from a larger electorate. Taking these factors into account, on balance the majority of the group felt that an increase in council size was not necessary to enable councillors to continue to support their residents effectively, but expressed concern that a reduction in council size might impact councillors' ability to meet any increased demand arising from an increase in the electorate. The considerations of the task and finish group are set out in the council size submission at Appendix 1.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 The task and finish group considered both reducing and increasing council size, but the arguments for maintaining a council size of 82 members are set out in the submission at Appendix 1.

6. Legal considerations

- 6.1 The electoral review is conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. They will follow a timetable that is compliant with legislation and Dorset Council will provide data and information in accordance with the requests from the Commission.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Following the Full Council meeting in July 2025, the council has used some unallocated electoral grant funding to purchase an "add-on" to the existing software that is used for both electoral registration and elections, to enable the council to easily review boundaries online, create new scenarios for consultation and balance electoral totals of wards facilitating the preparation of a warding submission to the LGBCE. There is no expenditure in addition to this mapping software.
- 7.2 The Council has agreed a scheme of allowances under which each councillor is entitled to receive a basic allowance of £16,000. The recommended council size of 82 would not change the cost of these allowances. An increase in council size by 5 councillors would cost £80,000 per annum or £320,000 over the four-year life of the council from 2029 and there would be a corresponding saving of those amounts if the council size was to reduce by 5.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 There are no natural environment, climate or ecology implications associated with this report.

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 There are no well-being and health implications associated with this report.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 There are no other implications associated with this report.

11. **Risk implications**

- 11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:
Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

12. **Equalities**

- 12.1 The intention of requesting an electoral review is to ensure that, in so far as is possible, electoral equality is achieved. The review will be carried out by the LGBCE who will be responsible for conducting an appropriate equalities impact assessment.

13. **Appendices**

- 13.1 Appendix 1 – Proposed Council size submission.

14. **Background papers**

- 14.1 [Local Government Boundary Commission for England Council Size Submission Guidance](#)
[Local Government Boundary Commission for England Electoral Reviews Technical Guidance](#)

15. **Report sign-off**

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Corporate Director Finance and Commercial (Acting Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder.