

Research – background paper

Action required

1. The Commission is invited to consider this paper before discussing whether research should be commissioned before the 2032 Electoral Reviews.

Previous LGBCS research

2. Independent research was commissioned by LGBCS in 2014 and a copy of the report is attached as Appendix A. This research examined the role and workload of councillors to help inform future reviews of electoral arrangements.

Other UK Commissions

3. As referred to in previous papers, the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (now Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC)) published [Research on the Workload of County Councillors in Wales in June 2024](#). Appendix B summarises the key features of local government in Scotland compared to Wales and the methodology and findings of the Welsh research paper.
4. DBCC has developed a research programme and are looking to commission research to inform “An All Wales Community and Town Council Size Policy” and on the factors that influence ‘effective and convenient local government’.
5. LGBCS carried out research with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny on “*Council Size Changes: Learning Lessons from submissions and implementation*” [Appendix 1](#) of this research provides a useful summary of the resulting key findings of fact. There is also a podcast [Conversation about governance and councillor numbers](#) relating to this research.
6. The UK Commissions meeting and informal meetings between the Secretariats may provide the opportunity to hear more about the other Commission’s experience of tendering for research and if any shared research would be of value.

Other research

7. As discussed at the September Commission meeting, research is currently being carried out by Dr Lynn Bennie and Dr Malcolm Harvey, Aberdeen University (*Defenders of Local Democracy: Profiling Aberdeen City and Shire Councillors and their Interests*). The Secretary contacted Dr Bennie who confirmed that their academic paper will be published within months. They will also be publishing a more accessible version of their research for councillors.
8. The *Defenders of Local Democracy* research involved:
 - conducting a study of Aberdeenshire councillors with a focus on understanding their day-to-day experiences as locally elected members
 - 30 interviews focussing on a) the roles and experiences of councillors in Scotland and b) aspects of representation, exploring links between who represents and how they represent.
 - No direct questions about electoral boundaries and not raised as a pressing issue. Does involve account of how councillors navigate large multi-member (and multi-party) wards

9. A copy of this research will be shared with Commissioners once published. The Commission may also wish to ask Dr Bennie and Dr Harvey to attend a meeting in 2026

10. The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) carried out a survey of councillors across the UK and published a [Striving to Thrive](#) report in 2024. APSE is owned by its members and maintains and develops a network of local government officers, managers and councillors from local authorities across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. While this research does not specifically consider the impact of ward boundaries it does provide useful insight into the challenges facing councillors across the UK.

Conclusion

11. The Commission is asked to consider this background paper and discuss whether any research should be commissioned before the 2032 electoral reviews.

Secretariat
December 2025