

## Research – background paper

### Action required

1. At the 9 December 2025 meeting, it was agreed that research should be undertaken to strengthen the Commission's understanding of what "effective and convenient local government" looks like. This paper provides further detail about research that is currently available and highlights areas where further research may be beneficial.
2. Commissioners are asked to consider this paper, agree what research should be commissioned and which areas should be prioritised.

### Existing research

3. Appendix A lists relevant research which may assist in strengthening the Commission's understanding of what "effective and convenient local government" looks like. It is proposed that the first step be a desk-based literature review which will summarise key findings of the existing research.

### Potential areas – further research

4. Potential areas of research which have been identified include: -

#### Understanding Councillors' workload

- which aspects of the rules have the most impact on Councillor workload?
- impact of internal structure/demographics/remoteness/social and economic structure.
- impact of Councillor's own characteristics(demography/gender/location/remoteness).
- impact of different types of multi member ward on workload.
- testing the assumption that post Covid, more work is online rather than in person.

#### Understanding what effective and convenient local government looks like

is parity important to stakeholders or are there other, more important factors like community.

- size of Councils – 18-85 range is the current range– is there any evidence to support this assumption?
- what is the optimum size for a Council and what factors should be considered when recommending councillor numbers?

#### Understanding what good engagement looks like

- what does best practice look like?
- understanding approach of other Commissions and what would work for boundaries reviews.
- methods for reaching marginalised groups such as prisoners, mental health patients, homeless, travelling communities etc.

### Proposed approach

5. It is proposed that a desk-based literature review of current research should be undertaken. This could then be complemented by surveys and case studies which will help strengthen the Commission's understanding of the factors that influence councillors' workload and what "effective and convenient local government" looks like. Separate to this, a desk-based analysis of different

approaches to engagement and what best practice looks like could also be carried out (as a follow on to paper BS 204).

**Conclusion**

6. The Commission is asked to consider this paper and discuss a potential programme of research.

**Secretariat**  
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