

Minutes of General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

12 October 2023 at 5.30pm

Present: Councillor Dhariwal (Vice Chair in the Chair);
Councillors Johnston and Kalari.

In Attendance: Tracey Hurst (Electoral Services Manager), Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic and Member Services Manager) and Johane Gandiwa (Committee and Constitutional Services Lead Officer).

32/23 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the Chair, Councillor Melia.

33/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared at the meeting.

34/23 Urgent Items of Business

There were no additional items of business to consider as a matter of urgency.

Local Government Boundary Commission Periodic Electoral Review of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

The Electoral Services Manager updated the Committee on the Local Government Boundary Commission Periodic Electoral (LGBCE) Review of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. The LGBCE had informed the council of its decision to carry out an electoral review of Sandwell. The review covered both the council size (number of elected councillors) and the number of wards and ward boundaries.

The Committee was advised of the detailed timelines of the boundary review process, planned governance arrangements and the methodology to be used.

The review would take place from October 2023 through to September 2025. Any changes made regarding council size and ward boundaries for Sandwell MBC would come into effect for the Local Elections in May 2026.

The successful delivery and implementation of the electoral review was a council-wide corporate priority. The delivery of the project would be overseen by the Council's Chief Executive and Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) and the Council's Monitoring Officer. A clear governance pathway for decision making and submission of the relevant information and proposals was necessary to ensure the successful delivery of the electoral review.

In November 2022, the Council resolved to undertake a further public consultation on the electoral cycle (whether to retain the current frequency of elections or move to an all-out election once every four years) during 2024. It was now proposed that the LGBCE electoral review should be prioritised and completed first, which would conclude with an all-out election to the new warding pattern. Subject to the agreement of Full Council, its previous resolution would then be implemented and a further consultation on the electoral cycle undertaken.

In response to comments and questions from the Committee, the Electoral Services Manager explained that the delivery of the project would be overseen by the Council's Chief Executive and there were adequate number of people to drive the process. A project lead would lead the process and there was a clear governance pathway for decision making and submission of the relevant information and proposals to ensure the successful delivery of the electoral review. The LGBCE would also look at other comparable Metropolitan Authorities.

The last electoral review of Sandwell MBC was conducted in 2002. The electoral changes and the arrangements came into effect at the borough-wide elections in 2004. In general, the purpose of the review, amongst others, was to ensure that there was electoral equality across all wards.

Resolved that Council be recommended to:

- (1) to note the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBGE) intention to carry out a periodic electoral review of Sandwell Council during the period October 2023 until September 2025 with implementation of any changes will take effect at the Local Government Election due to be held on 7 May 2026;
- (2) to authorise the Chief Executive as Senior Responsible Officer (SRO), following consultation with Group Leaders and the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee, to submit any necessary documentation or evidence to the Local Government Boundary Commission in connection with the successful delivery of the electoral review of Sandwell Council;

- (3) to establish a cross-party Boundary Review Working Group comprising 7 members to progress the electoral review of Sandwell in accordance with the Terms of Reference set out at Appendix 1;
- (4) to undertake, subject to receipt of a confirmed timetable from the LGBCE, implementation of the Full Council resolution of November 2022, an additional electoral cycle consultation be postponed until July 2026 following the all-out elections taking place on 7 May 2026 to allow implementation of Sandwell's new electoral arrangements following the conclusion of the LGBCE review.

Meeting ended at 5.55pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

**Boundary Review Working Group –
Terms of Reference**

1. Aims & Objectives

- 1.1. To oversee the development of formal Council proposals on council size and a proposed warding pattern for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), ensuring full involvement and co-ordination between Members and Officers throughout the electoral review process.

2. Membership & Quorum

- 2.1 The Group shall comprise up to 7 Members of the Council, allocated based on the political proportions of the council. Nominations to be made by Group Leaders to the Monitoring Officer.
- 2.2 The quorum of the Group shall be 3 Members including a minimum of 1 opposition Member.

3. Procedure Rules

- 3.1 The Group shall, at its first meeting, appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair drawn from its membership.
- 3.2 The Group shall complete its task upon the LGBCE publication of its final proposals for revised electoral arrangements for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.
- 3.3 Alternate/substitute arrangements will not apply.

4. Terms of Reference

- 4.1 To provide support in the provision of information required by the LGBCE in their conduct of the electoral review.
- 4.2 To review representations made in relation to the electoral review and inform recommendations to be made to the General Purpose and Arbitration Committee and Full Council.

- 4.3 To facilitate, coordinate, involve and consult all Members throughout the review process to ensure effective consultation and participation in the Council's submissions.
- 4.4 To formulate draft recommendations to the LGBCE for consideration by the General Purpose and Arbitration Committee and Full Council relating to –
 - 4.4.1 the proposed total number of members of the Council.
 - 4.4.2 the proposed number and boundaries of wards for the purposes of 4.4.1.
 - 4.4.3 the proposed number of Councillors to be returned by any ward.
 - 4.4.4 the proposed name of any ward.
- 4.5 To the extent feasible within the review timeline, the Working Group will consult the General Purpose and Arbitration Committee in respect of its work and recommendations.