EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE COUNTY DURHAM (ELECTORAL CHANGES) ORDER 2024

2024 No. 279

1. Introduction

1.1 This explanatory memorandum has been prepared by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and is laid before Parliament by Command of His Majesty.

2. Purpose of the instrument

2.1 The Order provides for new divisions and numbers of councillors for Durham County Council at the authority's elections in 2025 and thereafter.

3. Matters of special interest to Parliament

Matters of special interest to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments

3.1 None.

4. Extent and Territorial Application

4.1 The territorial extent of this instrument is England and Wales.

4.2 The territorial application of this instrument is England.

5. European Convention on Human Rights

5.1 As the instrument is subject to negative resolution procedure and does not amend primary legislation, no statement is required.

6. Legislative Context

6.1 The Commission has power under section 59 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act) to make an order giving effect to recommendations contained in a report, prepared under section 58(4) of the 2009 Act, after conducting an electoral review under section 56(1) of that Act. This instrument is being made to give effect to the Commission's recommendations for new electoral arrangements set out in its report prepared following an electoral review of the Council.

7. Policy background

What is being done and why?

7.1 The purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements including the number of councillors and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions for a specific local authority. The Commission began the electoral review in November 2022. The Commission decided to conduct the review as, based on the December 2020 electorate figures, one division had an electoral variance of greater than 30%.

7.2 An electoral review aims to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is as close to equal as possible, but the recommendations must also have regard to community identities and interests and the need for effective and convenient local government. To achieve these aims, the Commission tries to ensure that the number of electors per councillor in every division or ward is as close as possible to the average for the authority, but is happy to show flexibility in moving away from the average based on the evidence provided during the consultation stages of the review. Following a four-stage review process the Commission published its 'New electoral arrangements for Durham County Council - Final Recommendations'[1] on 28 November 2023.

7.3 The Order provides for changes to the electoral arrangements for Durham County Council at its elections in 2025 as recommended by the Commission. The existing divisions of the council will be replaced by 51 new ones. Nine divisions will each return three councillors, 29 divisions will each return two councillors and 13 divisions will each return a single councillor. The Commission considered that the evidence received justified one division having an electoral variance of greater than 10% from the authority's average by 2028.

7.4 Under section 56 of the 2009 Act, whenever the Commission recommends changes to the electoral arrangements for a borough, district or county council it must also recommend whether, in consequence of those changes, any changes should be made to the electoral arrangements for any parish council that is within the authority. Among other things, under Schedule 2 to that Act, recommendations must ensure that no parish ward is split between new county divisions, and under section 56 of that Act, recommendations must be made regarding the number of parish councillors for each parish ward.

7.5 Consequently, in addition to making changes to the electoral arrangements for the county council the Order also, where necessary, makes provision with respect to the establishment of new parish wards and sets the number of parish councillors for each of those parish wards.

8. European Union Withdrawal and Future Relationship

8.1 This instrument does not relate to withdrawal from the European Union.

9. Consolidation

9.1 This Instrument does not amend or revoke any legislation.

10. Consultation outcome

10.1 The Order gives effect to recommendations that were consulted on during the review of electoral arrangements from November 2022 to July 2023. During the course of the review, the Commission received approximately 371 representations. The consultations involved the County Council, parish and town councils, local MPs, local residents and other interested parties. There was an initial ten-week consultation, during which the Commission asked for proposals on the most appropriate division boundaries for the county. The Commission considered that a council size of 98

[1] https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-11/final_recommendations_long_report.pdf.

would ensure effective and convenient local government for the authority. Having considered the submissions received, the Commission published its 'New electoral arrangements for Durham County Council – Draft Recommendations'[2] on 2 May 2023. Following a 10-week consultation on the draft recommendations, the Commission considered the further evidence received and published its final recommendations.

10.2 In response to the consultation on the draft recommendations, the Commission modified its recommendations in the Consett, Teesdale and West Auckland areas based upon strong community-based evidence the Commission received during consultation on its draft recommendations.

10.3 Subject to more minor modifications, the Commission confirmed its draft recommendations for the remainder of the county as final.

10.4 A detailed analysis of the outcome of the consultation is set out in the report 'New electoral arrangements for Durham County Council – Final Recommendations' dated 28 November 2023. As indicated in the Order, the mapping referred to in the Order is normally accessible at all reasonable times at the Commission's offices. If any person wishes to view the map and the report, the Commission will consider this and seek to make appropriate arrangements. Moreover, the relevant map, as well as the report are accessible on our website, which is available at https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/county-durham.

11. Guidance

11.1 The Commission does not intend to issue any guidance alongside this instrument. This is not considered necessary as the Order is self-explanatory and gives effect to recommendations following consultation with interested parties as to the changes to electoral arrangements.

12. Impact

12.1 There is no, or no significant, impact on business, charities or voluntary bodies.

12.2 The impact on the public sector will be limited to the area for which the Order makes provision. The one-off cost of producing the map referred to by the instrument is to be funded by the Commission. The one-off cost of amending the electoral register to reflect the new divisions is to be funded by Durham County Council.

12.3 A full Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this instrument because the impact is limited and relates to the specific local authority area under review.

13. Regulating small business

13.1 The legislation does not apply to activities that are undertaken by small businesses.

14. Monitoring & review

14.1 The Commission will have no role in monitoring the Council's implementation of the County Durham (Electoral Changes) Order 2024. The Commission is not required to undertake such monitoring; that is a matter for the relevant officers of Durham County

[2] https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-05/durham_-_dr_-_report_v2.pdf.

Council. The Order will be reviewed insofar as the Commission continually monitors local authorities in England to identify any that meet its criteria for electoral reviews.

15. Contact

15.1 Hayley Meachin, Communications & Engagement Manager at the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (Telephone: 0330 500 1250 or email: hayley.meachin@lgbce.org.uk), can be contacted with any queries regarding the instrument.