

Cumberland

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Comment text:

Related subject: File attached detailing full response

File attached detailing full response

Attached Documents:

- srpc-response-to-lgbce-cumberland-ward-boundary-review.pdf



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RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

The Local Government Boundary Commission For England (LGBCE) - Review of Cumberland Council Wards and Ward Boundaries 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cumberland covers an area of 3,012² km - 1,163² miles. It is much more sparsely populated than the national average, having a population density of 91 people per square km. This varies greatly across its wards, from 13 people per km² in Bothel and Wharrels, to 4,499 people per km² in Upperby. Cumberland's population is aging with a lower proportion of residents aged 0-15 years and 16-64 years and a higher proportion of residents aged over 65.

Members representing large rural wards may reside almost an hour from some of their communities and electors while those in urban wards may live less than 10 minutes, at most, from their furthest elector.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England seeks views on the influences that might reflect local communities and identities and help to create appropriate and meaningful boundaries, while simultaneously seeking to create, approximately equal electorates.

While the Parish Council is entirely aware of the binding legal requirement to pursue the ideal of equal electorates, it stresses that this entirely fails to comprehend the major influence of Cumberland's unique topography and population distribution in establishing, and maintaining, community boundaries and identities that may stretch back almost 1000 years.

The enforced lack of accessibility imposed by remoteness, and exacerbated by an undeviating quest for equal electorates, serves only to discourage active participation in democratic engagement across large swathes of Cumberland.

The Parish Council believes that when redrawing ward boundaries it is essential for the LGBCE be fully cognisant of the real world injustice that may often be the consequence of its actions. It therefore urges the LGBCE to define boundaries that assign the 9 new seats in the way that most effectively reduces the huge democratic deficit occasioned by the physical area of the largest existing wards.

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND (LGBCE) - REVIEW OF CUMBERLAND COUNCIL WARDS AND WARD BOUNDARIES

LGBCE OBJECTIVE:

- Increase the number of councillors +9 from 46 to 55

LGBCE KEY CRITERIA:

- Each councillor to represent about the same number of electors
- That the wards they represent reflect community identities.

CUMBERLAND COUNCIL

Cumberland Council was created as a Unitary Authority on 1 April 2023, by virtue of Statutory Instrument, The Cumbria (Structural Changes) Order 2022. It supersedes the former Allerdale Borough Council, Carlisle City Council, Copeland Borough Council and the relevant area of Cumbria County Council.

The Order stated that the area of each Cumberland Council Electoral Division be the same as those of Cumbria County Council (as they existed on 31 March 2022). For this reason (with the exception of quotations) the existing term 'Division', or Electoral Divisions (EDs) is hereafter used to refer to council electoral seats, in preference to the LGBCE term 'Ward' which as yet remains unconfirmed.

"Cumberland covers an area of 3,012 square km. With an average population density of 91 people per square km, Cumberland is much more sparsely populated than the national average (England & Wales 399 people per square km). Population density varies greatly across Cumberland's wards ranging from 13 people per square km in Bothel and Wharrels ward to 4,499 people per square km in Upperby ward."

– Cumberland Council Statistical Summary, February 2024

CONFLICTING CRITERIA

In an article, 'Public consultation still open for changes to council boundaries', published 9 January 2024, the News and Star quoted Professor Colin Mellors, Chair of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England:

"We are looking for your views, as local people, on how you think Cumberland should be represented in wards that reflect local communities and identities.

By telling us about where you live and where you access local services, it will help us to create appropriate and meaningful boundaries.

It might be something as straightforward as where you go for shops, schools or a sporting venue, whether you see a road, park or river as a dividing feature or the heart of a community, or which areas have joint projects."

Professor Mellors's statement highlight the important LGBCE Key Criteria, that Wards should reflect community identities, and is helpful when suggesting some of the considerations that may often influence the shaping and defining those identities.

These, and other significant factors are, however, frequently at odds with the LGBCE's other Key Criteria – that each councillor will represent the same approximate number of electors. In reality Cumberland Council's population density and demography – unevenly distributed across its large area and dispersed by its topography – dictate that an overriding adherence to this requirement will inevitably militate against any aspiration to create artificial boundaries that will also meaningfully reflect community identities.

Artificial boundaries that fail to fully recognise the constraints presented by Cumberland's unique character will certainly exert a significantly greater detrimental impact upon democratic engagement, between The Council its communities and electors, than might be imposed by even a significant comparative variance in electorates.

To appreciate the magnitude of these constraints it is important to understand the major physical disparities that often exist between Electoral Divisions. These are illustrated using the following examples - each Electoral Division is represented by 1 elected member.

EXAMPLE COMPARISONS OF EXISTING ELECTORAL DIVISIONS

1. Bothel & Wharrels ED and St Michaels ED – MAP A

	Bothel and Wharrels ED	St Michaels ED
Electorate 2024	4,293	4,604
MIls ²	155	1.1
Km ²	402	3
Parish Councils	16	0

Bothel and Wharrels ED

In a straight line this ED is 18 miles (29km) long, from north to south and is bisected by the A66. To the north of this major route, the A595 and the A591 traverse the ED enabling easier travel between communities than might be enjoyed in its south.

It would take an minimum of 40 minutes to travel, via the A595 and B5289, from Blennerhasset, in the north of the ED, to Buttermere in the south. Slow moving agricultural vehicles, adverse weather conditions and tourist traffic, all common in Cumberland, often conspire to considerably extend real world journey times.

The northern part of the ED is generally lower lying than the south, its settlements also tend to be larger enabling easier access to community facilities than may be enjoyed by the smaller and more dispersed settlements lying among the Lake District mountains, south of the A66.

St Michaels ED

The ED lies entirely within area of Workington Town Council CP

In a straight line this ED is only 1.1 miles (2.62km) long, from east to west, a significant part of the ED forms one of Workington's industrial/commercial areas. The remaining, primarily residential, part has an area of only 83 ha (205 acres), or 0.83km² (0.32mi²).

The ED's extremities of Isabella road, to the north of the ED, and Moorbanks Road to its south lie 1.8 miles apart by road. Travel times between these points will vary between 5 and 15 minutes, depending on route and traffic density. The same journey on foot might take approximately 30 minutes.

Community assets are readily accessible within the ED, and include: 4 nursery schools; 4 primary schools; a secondary school; 2 community centres; a theatre/arts centre and 7 churches.

2. Millom Without ED and Bransty ED – MAP B

	Millom Without ED	Bransty ED
Electorate 2024	3,846	4,285
MIs ²	138	1.1
Km ²	357	3
Parish Councils	9	0

Millom Without ED

In a straight line this ED is 19 miles (30.5km) long, from north to south. Much of this ED forms the western flank of the Lake District, Scafell Pike, England's highest mountain lying on the northern boundary.

The A595 skirts the west and south of the ED, the north being traversed by the C4026 and U4059 – the latter including the notorious Hardknott Pass. The narrow gauge Eskdale to Ravenglass Railway operates primarily from March until the end of October, with limited services outside that period.

Settlements tend to be small and dispersed, the larger of these lying predominantly in the west, along the A595 corridor. Of these Drigg, Ravenglass, Bootle and Silecroft are served by served by Northern Rail services.

The shortest journey time from Eskdale Green, in the north, to Haverigg, in the south, is approximately 40 minutes via the A595. Slow moving vehicles, adverse weather, and tourist traffic often increase this time quite significantly.

Community assets are also dispersed and predominantly local within the Civil Parishes, some being better provided for than others. From Boot, in the north of the ED, the closest hospital is the West Cumberland Hospital in Whitehaven 18.5 miles and 39 minutes distant.

Bransty ED

The ED lies entirely within area of Whitehaven Town Council CP

This ED measures 1.16 miles (1.88km) from north to south. It is served by the A595, the A5094 and the C4032 all of which are aligned approximately north/south. The U4012 is aligned east west in the south of the ED and serves its Harras Park area. Whitehaven Railway station lies in the ED and regular services are operated by Northern Rail and connect to Carlisle, Windermere and Manchester Airport.

A journey from The Mount, at the ED's northern boundary, to the Dental Centre in Millenium Way, in its south, may take as little as 9 minutes. The Mount is also approximately 8-10 minutes from the major West Cumberland Hospital. A wide range of other community assets are close to hand.

3. Longtown ED and Denton Holme ED – MAP C

	Longtown ED	Denton Holme ED
Electorate 2024	4,130	4,883
MI ^s ²	127	0.9
Km ²	329	2.36
Parish Councils	7	0

Longtown ED

Longtown ED is served by 7 CPs - Parish Councils

The northwestern boundary of the ED also forms the border with Scotland while the northeastern boundary adjoins Northumberland. This ED stretches 25 miles (40.4km) from the north, reaching almost to Port Carlisle in Solway Coast ED in the south. The extreme southwestern part, west of Rockcliffe Cross, is largely tidal and uninhabited. The remaining part of the ED, from Rockcliffe Cross to the northern extremity, being a distance of 21 miles (33.8km). Kershope Forest and Bewcastle Fells dominate a large part of the ED northeast of the B6318.

Longtown ED is named after its largest settlement. The village of Rockcliffe 4.5 miles (7.km) to its south is perhaps the next settlement in size, small hamlets and steadings being dispersed throughout the larger part of the ED. Residents in the more remote parts of the ED may often find it more convenient to rely on facilities in nearby Scottish villages, e.g. an 8 minute drive

from Kershopefoot to Newcastleton rather than 22 minutes to Longtown. As with other rural EDs slow moving agricultural vehicles, adverse weather conditions and tourist traffic often extends optimum journey times.

Although within the ED Caulside, Bailey, Penton, Roadhead and Bewcastle lie within the catchment of NHS Borders. Those living near these locations may often find it more convenient to attend Newcastleton Health Centre, rather than a surgery within the ambit of North Cumbria NHS.

Denton Holme ED Electoral Divisions within the urban area of Carlisle are unparished.
The ED measures 1.7 miles (2.7km) from north to south. Commercial/industrial property occupies a significant proportion of the ED's north, while to the south amenity greenspace, Carlisle Cemetery and the Pirelli Tyre factory occupy almost half of the ED's total area. The remainder of the EDE is residential, largely of 19th century terraces, with pre-war semi-detached to the west. Pockets of more modern housing occupy redeveloped brownfield sites.

Denton Holme is often described as a village and offers a range of facilities including a primary school, a range of shops and leisure facilities, a community centre and an arts centre.

It is a 5 minute drive from one of the ED's southernmost dwellings, in Holme Head Way, to the Conference Centre at its northernmost point.

4. Houghton & Irthington ED and Morton ED – MAP D

	Houghton and Irthington ED	Morton ED
Electorate 2024	4,546	4,883
MIs ²	59	0.9
Km ²	152	2.36
Parish Councils	7	0

Houghton & Irthington ED The ED is served by 7 CPs - Parish Councils

The ED stretches 21 miles (33.8km) from north of Roadhead, in the neighbouring Longtown ED, to south of the hamlet of Aglionby near J43 of the M6. The ED is transected east/west by the A689 and several miles further north by the A6071, the M6 cutting through the southwestern corner. Carlisle Lake District Airport lies close to the A689, near Irthington and the boundary with Brampton ED.

The ED's largest settlement, Houghton, lying between Carlisle and the A689, has a shop, a post office, a school, a church and a village hall. The area between A689 and A6071 has several small villages and hamlets some of which have a school, a village hall or a church, and is therefore more densely populated than the area north of the A6071, wherein dispersed

settlements become markedly smaller with a commensurate decrease in the accessibility of facilities.

The fastest journey time via, the A7 and M6, from Lyneholme Ford in the north of the ED to Aglionby in the south, is approximately 27 minutes over a distance of almost 18 miles (29km). As a rural ED it is typical to encounter slow moving agricultural vehicles and tourist traffic, these and or adverse weather conditions frequently extending journey times.

Morton ED Electoral Divisions within the urban area of Carlisle are unparished.

This ED measures just 1.2 miles (1.9km) from north to south, and is almost universally residential, having a large amenity greenspace near its centre. It is bounded to the west by the A595, and to the east by the B5299.

Community facilities are well provided these include a community centre with gym, cafeteria, members bar, Library Link, and nursery; 2 residential care homes; a primary school; a post office; a pharmacy; a doctors surgery/health centre and a pub.

The 1.6 mile journey by road from Fairybeck Gardens, in the extreme southeastern corner of the ED, to the opposite extreme in Ullswater Road may take as little as 5 minutes.

COMMUNITY PANELS

In endeavouring to engage with its communities, Cumberland Council has established 8 Community Panels across its area. The panels meet quarterly and are composed of the relevant elected members and 3 non-voting co-opted members.

As with the Electoral Divisions, there exists a great disproportionality in the physical areas covered by the Community Panels – Table 1 below.

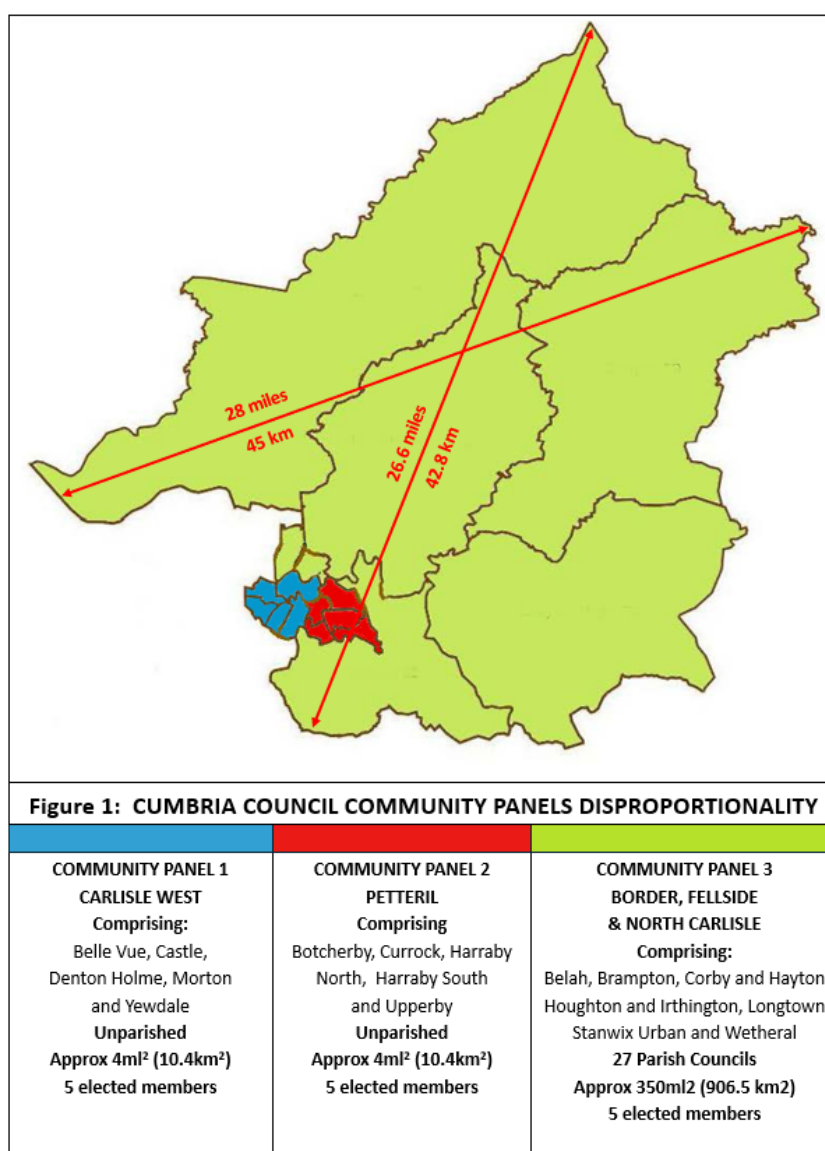
Table 1: Cumberland Council Community Panels – Approximate Areas		
Community Panel	Area Mls²	Area Km²
1 Carlisle West	4	11
2 Petteril	4	11
3 Border, Fellside & North Carlisle	350	906
4 Fells & Solway	263	681
5 Lakes to Sea	275	712
6 Workington Together	22	56
7 Whitehaven and Coastal	30	78
8 South Cumberland	270	699

The greatest disproportionality exists between the Panels of Carlisle West and Petteril, and Border Fellside & North Carlisle Panel - Figure 1, below.

This huge imbalance in the physical size of the Community Panel areas generates an equally huge imbalance in opportunities for community engagement.

In order to attend a meeting of the Border, Fellside & North Carlisle Panel held in Wetheral, an elector living in Stapleton would be required to make a round trip of over 28 miles (45km). To attend a meeting in Longtown a resident of Wreay would need to make a round trip of almost 30 miles – 37 miles (48km-59km) if the A7 is closed for any reason.

The above journeys are in stark contrast with those required of electors in Carlisle West Panel area. Glaramara Drive in Morton to the Civic Centre requiring a round trip of only 5 miles (8km). Similarly, Petteril Panel area, electors in Oaklands Drive need only make a round trip of 5 miles to attend a meeting in Botcherby Community Centre.



These inequalities apply also to those elected members, who must travel significantly greater distances than their colleagues to fulfil the same democratic obligations with regard to community engagement.

Elected members will undoubtedly endeavour to attend meetings of any Parish Councils within their ED. St Michaels and Bransty ED, being contained within Workington and Whitehaven Town Council CP areas respectively, do not themselves contain Parish Councils, while Denton Holme and Morton, lying with urban Carlisle, are unparished. This greatly simplifies the task of members for these, and similar EDs, to serve the interests of electorate they represent.

In contrast, Bothel and Wharrels ED covers up to 16 civil parishes, often serving small dispersed communities. This imposes a considerable additional burden of responsibility on its elected member, and an immensely greater personal investment in time and effort than the that expected of the member for St Michaels.

It is not surprising, therefore, that 79.3% of members who responded to an internal questionnaire in May 2024 stated that that they spend more than 3 hours per week travelling on council business; with 44.8% travelling for more than 4 hours per week. [Cumberland Council Boundary Review 2024 Councillor Questionnaire]

These hours spent travelling no doubt contribute in no small measure to the issue of time management, identified as their biggest challenge by 96.5% of respondents to the survey.

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF EQUAL ELECTORATES

As shown above, members in large rural divisions may reside almost an hour from some of their communities and electors while those in urban divisions may live less than 10 minutes, at most, from their furthest elector.

Electors who wish to attend a Councillors surgery in the EDs of St Michaels, Bransty, Denton Holme or Morton may be able to walk there in minutes. Similarly, the elected member for St Michael's etc., who may be required to visit several locations within a given time frame will find them just a few minutes apart.

However, Electors in Bothel and Wharrels, Millom Without, Longtown, or Houghton and Irthington may be required to make lengthy and time consuming round trips, while the members for these EDs must often to spend considerable periods of time travelling between locations.

These major disparities in physical area, topography, community amenity, and character of EDs and Community Panels, militate more significantly against opportunities for meaningful democratic engagement, between Cumberland Council and its electors, than would any similarly marked disparity in their relative electorates.

The Cumberland Council Size Submission to LGBCE, 'Community Leadership', states: *"Councillors also increasingly use digital technology to engage with their communities. 21out*

of the 29 respondents to the survey stated that they regularly used social media to engage with residents.”

However, the Cumberland Council Size Submission also states that Cumberland has a population ageing faster than in other areas of the country, with over 65s due to increase from 64,000 to 82,100 by 2040, while the working age population is decreasing. It is likely that many of these older electors may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with, online communication or unable to afford its cost.

It must be remembered that travelling has a cost, and while short trips are easily made in compact urban and semi-urban areas long time consuming journeys add to the burden of the Rural Penalty, when those on lower incomes are impacted by higher living costs, more limited job opportunities, and more restricted access to services and public transport than if living in an urban area.

Members of dispersed rural communities – especially those who may be older, financially disadvantaged, or have reduced mobility, are then further penalised when their opportunities for direct engagement are obstructed by an unreasonable and unfair requirement to make greater time and financial commitments than those of their urban counterparts.

Professor Mellors seeks views on how access to local services, shops, schools or a sporting venue, or features such as a road, park or river, might reflect local communities and identities and help to create appropriate and meaningful ward boundaries. These aspirations are patently at odds with ensuring that each councillor represents the same approximate number of electors.

The LGBCE’s overriding demand for electorate equality entirely fails to comprehend the major influence of Cumberland’s unique topography and population distribution in the establishment and continuity of its community identities.

The enforced lack of accessibility imposed by a remoteness, and exacerbated by an undeviating quest for equal electorates, serves to greatly discourage active participation in democratic engagement across large swathes of Cumberland.

While the Parish Council is entirely aware of the binding legal requirement to pursue the ideal of equal electorates, it believes that when redrawing ward boundaries it is essential for the LGBCE be fully cognisant of the real world injustice that may often be enacted by this decree.

The Parish Council therefore urges the LGBCE to define boundaries that assign the 9 new seats in the way that most effectively reduces the huge disparity in the physical area of the largest existing wards.