

## Corporate Plan 2022–23 to 2026–27

Second update to 2020–21 Five Year Plan

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## 1. Foreword

I am pleased to present the Commission's Corporate Plan and Five-Year Strategy for the period 2022–23 to 2026–27.

The plan outlines how the Commission intends to deliver fair electoral and boundary arrangements for local government electors in England, and to support related changes in local governance and structures.

Our electoral reviews address electoral inequality across all areas of England. We respond positively to requests from local authorities, and government, when it is felt an electoral review could assist in the delivery of effective and convenient local government. In carrying out our duties we aim to:

- make sure that, within an authority, each councillor represents a similar number of electors;
- create boundaries that are appropriate, and reflect community ties and identities;
- deliver reviews informed by local needs, views and circumstances.

Our new plan sets out how we will continue to pursue these fundamental objectives.

We have an ongoing role since electoral registers change continuously. This impacts on levels of electoral equality within local authorities and our plan commits to monitoring and, where appropriate, addressing such imbalances.

We also have a duty to review every council in England 'from time to time'. Having recently completed reviews of all London boroughs, we are now beginning a programme of reviews of metropolitan districts. Initially, we are focusing on

local authorities in the Greater Manchester area and will then move on to other metropolitan areas. In addition, we will continue to review other local authorities where changed electorates have led to significant electoral inequality between the number of electors that individual councillors represent in that authority.

Our Corporate Plan is also intended to support those authorities that wish to change whether through modifying aspects of their own governance arrangements (for example, their electoral cycles or the overall number of elected members) or as part of broader reorganisation. We are, therefore, sensitive to the current devolution agenda and its potential consequences, including potential changes to local government structures. We are keen to make a helpful contribution and will work closely with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and with affected local authorities, to build new democratic arrangements wherever such changes are being implemented. In this context, subject to their creation, we are likely to be undertaking early reviews of potential new unitary authorities in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset during the period of this plan.

We will always remain receptive to individual local authorities seeking an electoral review to help them deliver effective and convenient local government.

Like other organisations, our work has been impacted by the pandemic, and awareness of the many other demands on local authorities during this period and support for our own staff, have been twin concerns over the last two years. Whilst we have been intent on continuing to progress reviews during this period, we have tried to do so in ways that would not distract local authorities from their

key public health and related responsibilities. We believe that we have succeeded in striking a good balance between these two concerns, and this was assisted by our ability to move quickly to remote working. As a result, much of our work continued as normal.

To achieve these twin ambitions, we have done some things differently during the pandemic. We have learned from this experience and will continue to develop our working practices to apply those things that worked well. These include the effectiveness and greater flexibility of remote meetings in some circumstances. Attendances at our community briefings, for example, have been higher when held online where people are not required to travel to a physical location. The approach also enables people who cannot attend at the set time the opportunity to view the meetings at a time that suits them. Within the Commission, we are now able to deal more quickly with urgent issues that arise outside the regular cycle of our own board meetings. We are working to embed these, and other, positive developments in our routine practice.

Since we presented our first Corporate Plan to Parliament in 2010, we have delivered real-term reductions of over £1,338k<sup>1</sup> (36%) to our budget.

We are a small and lean organisation. Our challenge is to manage a portfolio of reviews that both reflect our statutory responsibility to undertake periodic reviews and to maintain electoral equality with requests, either from individual authorities or by government, for additional reviews. We achieve this through actively and flexibly managing

our work programme and resources both from year to year and within years to ensure we maintain the quantity, quality and rigour of our reviews.

A key resource is, of course, our people – both staff and commissioners. Our People Strategy is crucial in helping us to develop, motivate and ensure the wellbeing of colleagues. It embeds our cultural behaviours in everything we do and underpins how we attract, recruit, retain and build the skills that are essential to the delivery of our programme.

As well as the need for good people, the pandemic has demonstrated the critical importance of sound infrastructure. Accordingly, we will further develop our IT infrastructure to improve the efficiency and accuracy of our processes and we will continue to exploit digital technology in the way we conduct and present reviews.

Engaging with local communities is an essential part of our work. We will develop a new website and online consultation opportunities to maximise public engagement in our reviews.

All of our work is dependent on the participation of local authorities, local communities and organisations and, not least, the thousands of local people who provide their views and insight during our reviews. We are indebted to them all for their assistance.

**Professor Colin Mellors**  
**Chair, Local Government Boundary**  
**Commission for England**

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<sup>1</sup> Using the Bank of England inflation calculator plus reductions in budget.

## 2. Setting the scene

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (The Commission) is required to lay a new five-year strategy in Parliament every five years or following each new Parliament. In addition, in order to inform the Speaker's Committee about our plans and the consequent resource requirement, we produce an annual update. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> update to the original 2020–21 Corporate Plan and Five-Year Strategy of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. It highlights both our past performance and plans for 2022–23 and beyond.

### Who we are

The Commission is an independent body, established by Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. Our main responsibility is:

- Conducting Electoral Reviews by considering the electoral boundaries of local authorities in England and recommending any changes to Parliament.

We are also responsible for:

- Reviewing the administrative (external) boundaries of local authorities in England and making recommendations for changes to the Secretary of State.
- Advising the Secretary of State, at their request, on proposals they receive from local authorities for changes to unitary status.
- Reviewing the constituencies of the London Assembly and recommending any changes to Parliament.

### What we do

- We recommend fair electoral and boundary arrangements for local authorities in England.

### We aim to

- Make sure that, within each authority, each councillor represents a similar number of electors.
- Create boundaries that are appropriate and reflect community ties and identities.
- Deliver reviews informed by local needs, views and circumstances.

### We want to be regarded as

- Impartial – giving equal consideration to all views
- Objective – making recommendations based on evidence
- Responsive – listening to local opinion
- Transparent – following clear and open processes
- Professional – being reliable, efficient and helpful

### 3. Our work

Since our establishment in 2010, the number of electoral reviews we have undertaken has risen considerably.<sup>2</sup> This has been accompanied by efficiencies and budget reductions. Over the last five years, we have aimed to start around 25 reviews annually<sup>3</sup> – each lasting approximately 15 months – and our funding has supported this level of activity. We conduct reviews to achieve electoral equality, reflect our duty to review each of the 332<sup>4</sup> local authorities in England ‘from time to time’, and in response to local authority requests.

Figure 1 – Last four years

Financial Year	Reviews Started	Reviews Published	Total Electorate Affected
2021–22 <sup>5</sup>	28	36	5,659,534
2020–21	29	19	2,903,321
2019–20	23	14	2,683,606
2018–19	25	34	4,522,713

#### Electoral review programme

A variety of factors that affect electoral equality – e.g. population growth, migration, development, levels of individual electoral registration and student populations – are, of course, outside of the Commission’s control. However, seeking to achieve acceptable levels of electoral equality, alongside reviewing all local authorities on a continuing basis to identify appropriate electoral boundaries, forms the statutory basis of our work. Levels of electoral equality also help shape our work programme – the blend of (i) intervention (ii) periodic and (iii) requested reviews – given that some authorities experience more rapid changes in number and distribution of electors and, therefore, necessitate more frequent reviews. We assemble data on the levels of electoral equality in each local authority annually. This informs our work programme and the most appropriate, and productive, balance of review types.

The graphs below indicate the most recent levels of electoral equality amongst English local authorities and electors in terms of the proportion of local authorities with acceptable<sup>6</sup> levels of electoral equality. The graph is affected by the number of local authorities that have been reviewed and data is gathered when the electoral registers are published annually.

<sup>2</sup> From eight in our first year of establishment to a ‘running rate’ of around 25 now.

<sup>3</sup> As reviews generally straddle financial years, because of the delays due to the impact of the unexpected General Election (in 2019), as well as the European Parliamentary Elections (in 2019), we commenced 29 reviews during 2020–21.

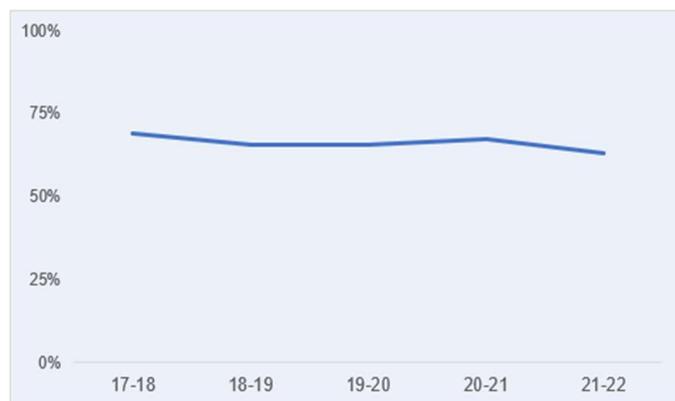
<sup>4</sup> Local Authority numbers have reduced over recent years due to mergers between authorities.

<sup>5</sup> Figures for 2021–22 are estimated based on nine months’ data.

<sup>6</sup> Acceptable is defined as avoiding the levels of inequality that trigger our intervention criteria. We consider a poor level of equality to be when any ward or division in an authority has a variance greater than (+/-) 30% from the average for that authority or when 30% or more of wards or divisions have a variance greater than (+/-) 10% (i.e. where councillors represent considerably different numbers of electors compared with other councillors within their local authority).

Figure 2 – Local authorities and electors with acceptable electoral equality

### Local authorities



### Electors<sup>7</sup>



Over the next five years, we plan to undertake the following forms of electoral reviews:

**(i) Intervention electoral reviews** – We will identify authorities with poor levels of electoral equality and conduct reviews to address these anomalies. These are known as intervention reviews.

**(ii) Periodic electoral reviews** – The Commission has a statutory duty to review every local authority ‘from time to time’. Whilst intervention reviews are undertaken as and when individual authorities breach what we consider to be acceptable levels of electoral equality, periodic reviews represent more of a rolling element of our review programme. Whilst the legislation itself does not define ‘time to time’, we believe that, to support good governance, such reviews should take place

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<sup>7</sup> Electors in two-tier areas are eligible to vote in both county and an associated two-tier district. Accordingly, they are counted as electors in both sets of councils and the totals aggregated for the purpose of calculating overall percentages. This graph indicates the percentages of electors in wards or divisions that have acceptable electoral equality.

approximately every three to four full electoral cycles, i.e. between 12 and 16 years. We have completed our periodic review of London boroughs, many of which had not been reviewed for around 20 years. A small number of these were paused due to impacts of COVID-19 but they will all be implemented, as planned, at the elections scheduled for 2022. During 2020–21 we began our programme of reviewing metropolitan districts that have not been reviewed for 12 or more years. We have sought the views of the authorities on the precise timing of the reviews, and we intend to conduct them so that they are completed in time for elections in 2026 (unless they have requested an earlier date). We will also conduct reviews of those six counties which, by the time of their elections in 2025, will not have been reviewed in over 14 years.

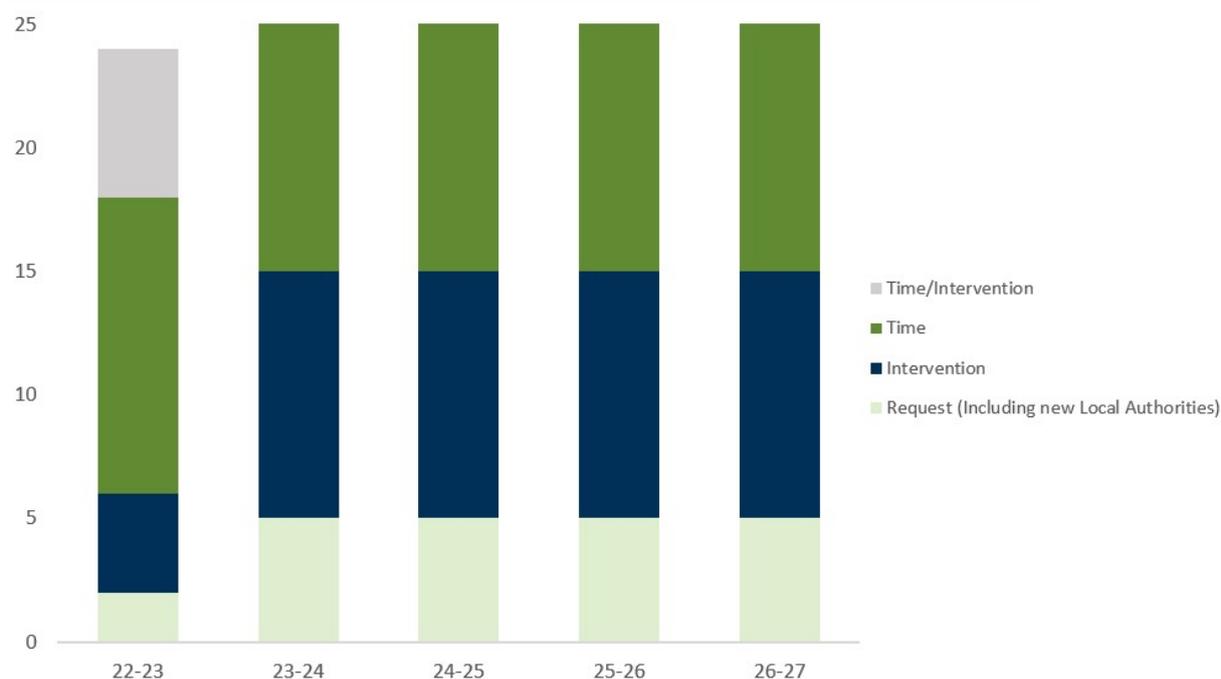
**(iii) Requested electoral reviews** – Alongside reviews that are initiated by the Commission, we are keen to retain sufficient capacity to respond to requests made by local authorities themselves. These are intended to assist their efforts to improve local governance and, typically, result from the desire either to change numbers of councillors or the pattern of electoral cycles. It is impossible to predict how many such requests we will receive each year<sup>8</sup> and we adjust our other reviews to accommodate these requests.

**(iv) Mergers and new authorities** – Finally, we want to assist councils that wish to merge, or reorganise, where this has been agreed by Government and Parliament. Again, we will prioritise this work, if requested, to support such aspirations. We will be reviewing West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire and have already started a review of the new Buckinghamshire Council. We are ready to review the unitary authorities in Somerset, Cumbria and North Yorkshire should they be created.

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<sup>8</sup> Number of requested reviews: six in 2021–22, four in 2020–21, one in 2019–20.

Figure 3 – Planned review programme for next five years (review starts)<sup>9</sup>



The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our review programme has eased. Where we paused our reviews to allow councils to focus on critical activities at the beginning of the pandemic, this has extended the timescale for some reviews. However, the programme is now nearly back to normal. The overall throughput over a two to three-year period will remain as planned, or even exceeded. We now plan to complete the 29 reviews started during 2020–21 between this year and 2022–23.

## Other activities

As part of our plans to reduce costs and increase efficiency, we have continually reviewed our processes and ways of working through several major projects. In broad terms, during the period 2010–11 to 2014–15 we undertook an average of 15 reviews annually at an average cost to the Commission of £156k per review. During the three-year period 2017–18 to 2019–20, the equivalent figures were 27 completed reviews at an average cost to the Commission of £75k per review.<sup>10</sup>

In 2019–20, the average cost of a district/borough review to the Commission was £72k whilst the average cost of a Unitary Review to the Commission was £79k.

We have continued to focus on maximising public engagement with our work. To this end, we established an ‘Improving External Involvement’ project. This has delivered

<sup>9</sup> Electoral reviews of new and merged authorities are shown as ‘request’ reviews. 24 reviews are currently scheduled for 2022–23 but we expect to add to this programme in the coming months.

<sup>10</sup> Numbers of reviews undertaken are from the Commission’s Annual Reports and Accounts. Unit costing information is based on expenditure and review numbers until 2014–15 and from then on detailed unit costing work which considers length of reviews, size of review, hours allocated to reviews and a more sophisticated method of allocating overheads to reviews.

improvements such as user-friendly guides to our review process, better external presentation materials and a consultation app. We commissioned a piece of work on how people use our website and have made improvements as a result and will also use the research as part of the specification to develop a new website during 2022–23. Our consultation pages now use simpler language and more intuitive navigation. We have put in place mechanisms to collect, analyse and act upon customer insight in a systematic and ongoing manner. This will allow us to target improvement in those areas that matter most to our stakeholders and customers.

Commission satisfaction rating	2021–22 Q1–3
People who express a definite opinion about satisfaction, i.e. are <b>‘highly satisfied’</b> or <b>‘quite satisfied’</b> with their overall experience of dealing with the Commission	<b>76%</b>

At the start of 2021–22, we refined our approach to understanding and assessing the satisfaction levels of those taking part in our reviews, in particular by adding descriptors to ratings rather than just using a numerical scale. Accordingly, our KPI now indicates the proportion those who specifically express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with our process, setting aside those who indicate that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (although this score is used for management information purposes). As a result, whilst providing us with an improved understanding, this means that the new KPI is not strictly comparable with figures for previous years. If the ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’ rating was included, then the resultant aggregated score would be 84%.

During the pandemic we used available time to ensure that mapping files on our server were transferred to our website and SharePoint site. This significant project means that we are currently decommissioning the final parts of our on-premises server and our ambition for our IT infrastructure to be entirely cloud-based is now almost complete.

Since 2017, encouraged by the Speaker’s Committee, we have conducted a staff survey modelled on the annual Civil Service Survey. The results indicate a positive trend over this period, and we are encouraged that staff views compare favourably with our colleagues in the Civil Service.

In our 2020 staff survey, results were especially strong, and we attribute some of this to the manner in which we were quickly able to support staff working from home during the pandemic. The effective IT system and the new communication and staff support systems we developed were especially helpful in this regard.

Our 2021 results remain high although a few have probably been impacted by the longevity of the pandemic. Significantly, however, they remain substantially higher than in 2018 and 2019 and demonstrate the value of our work on the People Strategy.

Figure 4 – LGBCE staff survey v Civil Service and Civil Service small bodies<sup>11</sup>

	LGBCE 2021	Civil Service Mean (2020)	Small bodies (2020)	Similar or higher than CS
Employee engagement index	64%	66%	67%	
My work	79%	80%	80%	
Organisational objectives and purpose	95%	85%	85%	
My manager	82%	74%	74%	
My team	84%	84%	84%	
Learning and development	61%	56%	56%	
Inclusion and fair treatment	90%	82%	82%	
Resources and workload	87%	75%	75%	
Pay and benefits	56%	40%	38%	
Leadership and managing change	83%	58%	59%	

Our People Strategy set the ambition to be a ‘well-led, high-performing, diverse and inclusive’ organisation and we are on track to complete the seven large projects intended to deliver this ambition.

- LGBCE vision and leadership training
- Internal communication protocol
- Workforce and recruitment
- Performance management/recognition and reward
- Manager’s guide
- New ways of working
- People policies

We want to be an even better organisation to work for and responsive to what our staff tell us and, during 2022–23, we will develop our second three-year People Strategy.

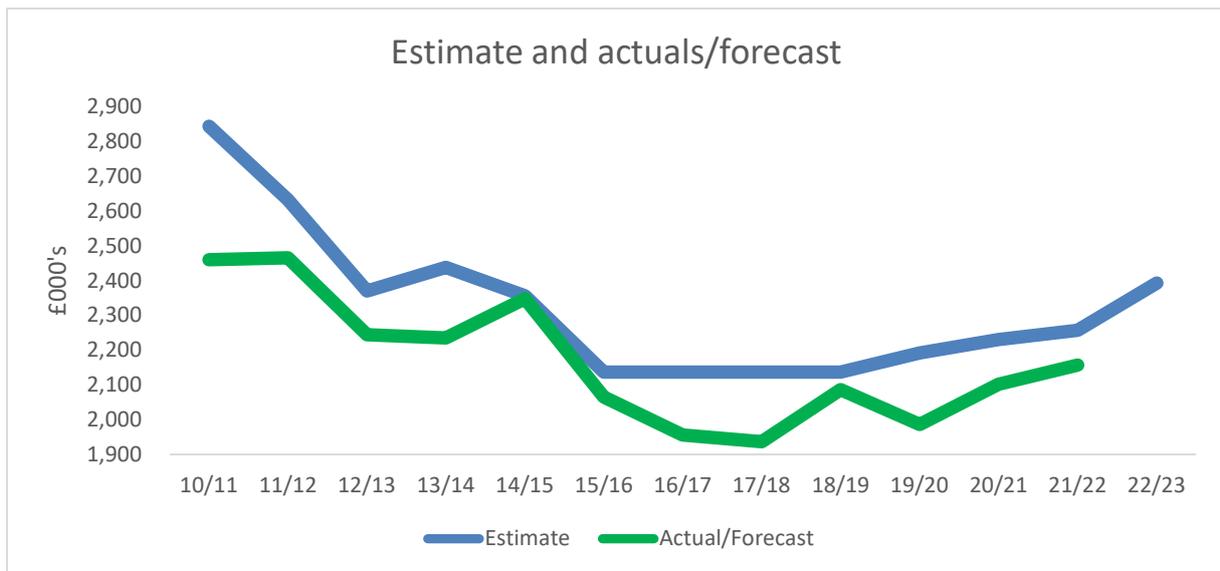
We value diversity, alongside the benefits that different perspectives and experiences bring to all our work, and are committed to being a team that is inclusive in the way we work together and the way we engage with those contributing to our reviews.

<sup>11</sup> Small departments are those compared to LGBCE by HM Treasury for the purposes of cashflow that have completed the survey (CPS, SFO, CMA, CO, CC, NA, FSA, GAD, GLD, DIT, NCA, NCA, NSI, OQUER, ORR, OFGEM, OFSTED, ONS, OFWAT, HSE).

## 4. Running costs and funding

Since 2010, we have significantly reduced both overall expenditure and budget and the cost of individual reviews, whilst increasing the quantity and, we believe, the quality, of reviews delivered.

Figure 5 – Spending profile<sup>12</sup>



Our budget has remained the same, or reduced, each year since 2010 and currently offers little opportunity for further significant efficiencies without reducing staff numbers or compromising the quality of our reviews and the number of reviews we can deliver.

We ask for inflationary and other increases to our budgets following a mixture of HM Treasury guidance and discussions, likely market conditions, and negotiations with our suppliers.

<sup>12</sup> Our reduced revenue expenditure in 2016–17 and 2017–18 was balanced by increased capital spend on office fit-out and relocation costs and funded by higher staff turnover and delays in the appointment of new Commissioners.

	Staffing changes	Price changes	
<b>2021–22</b>	1%	2%	No pay award but a small amount of flexibility built in to increased programme
<b>2022–23</b>	5%	5%	5% increase to staffing costs and 5% increase to prices based on inflation and direct and associated increases to utilities
<b>2023–24 and remainder of plan</b>	2%	2%	2% increase on both staffing and prices currently assumed

During 2022–23 we will still be smoothing out the bulge of reviews that has built over the 2020–22 period caused by unexpected elections and disruption to councils caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We expect to deal with this backlog within the budget requested for 2022–23.

We have a small annual capital budget of £50k which we use for investment in our IT and software solutions (website, Consultation Portal, SharePoint, intranet and other IT projects). For 2022–23, we ask for a one-off increase of £70k as our website and Consultation Portal reach end of life and no longer support our increased focus on accessibility and stakeholders. We plan to replace it. We also intend to specify a website that can be maintained and updated to a far greater extent in-house. We expect this to lead to future efficiencies in both maintenance and system updates. This capital expenditure on the website in 2022–23 will lead to an increase of around £12k per annum in depreciation for the lifetime of the asset (six years).

Organisational and financial resilience, both short- and long-term, feature prominently in our risk management and assurance processes. Our Digital & IT Strategy meant that we were well placed to be able to move quickly to working online whilst adhering to all operational and governance imperatives and meeting the needs of our various stakeholders during the pandemic. Commission decision making, external audits, internal audits, online meetings with local authorities, and engagement with departments and the Speaker’s Committee, have all continued, uninterrupted and effectively. Despite some unforeseen expenditure on equipment to support home working, we have remained within budget, by offsetting such costs through savings on travel and other running costs. We are grateful to the Speaker’s Committee for endorsing our excess vote of £53k to cover a dilapidation provision that had not been included in our Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) cover.

We are committed to continuing to operate within budget, regardless of future mode(s) of working, and will continue to focus on ensuring that we possess robust and resilient organisational and financial systems.

Figure 6 – Funding profile 2021–22 to 2026–27<sup>13 14 15</sup>

### Corporate Plan figures 2022-23

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
staff and commissioners	1,428	1,499	1,529	1,560	1,591	1,623
mapping and printing	129	135	138	141	144	147
stakeholder engagement	98	103	105	107	109	111
business costs	502	415	423	495	569	581
legal and professional	55	58	59	60	61	63
depreciation	45	182	194	125	62	62
<b>DEL revenue</b>	<b>2,257</b>	<b>2,393</b>	<b>2,448</b>	<b>2,488</b>	<b>2,536</b>	<b>2,587</b>
AME	73	15	15	10	-	-
<b>revenue total</b>	<b>2,330</b>	<b>2,408</b>	<b>2,463</b>	<b>2,498</b>	<b>2,536</b>	<b>2,587</b>
DEL capital	50	120	50	50	50	50
<b>total</b>	<b>2,380</b>	<b>2,528</b>	<b>2,513</b>	<b>2,548</b>	<b>2,586</b>	<b>2,637</b>

<sup>13</sup> IFS16 (lease arrangements) has been delayed for several years. Changes to the 2022–23 estimate reflect the changes necessary to business costs and depreciation from that time.

<sup>14</sup> From September 2024 rental costs revert to pre-IFRS16 levels.

<sup>15</sup> Our accommodation dilapidation provision (2022–23 £15k) will always be our best estimate as the Government Property Agency does not produce figures in time to be included within our supply estimate.