

Local Government
Boundary Commission
For England
Report No. 543

Review of Electoral Arrangements
DISTRICT OF
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BOUNDARY COMMISSION

FOR ENGLAND

REPORT NO. 543

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE DOUGLAS HURD MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT

PROPOSALS FOR CHANGES TO THE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH
STAFFORDSHIRE IN THE COUNTY OF STAFFORDSHIRE

INTRODUCTION

1. The present electoral arrangements for the District of South Staffordshire date from May 1979 when the District of South Staffordshire (Electoral Arrangements) Order 1977, giving effect to the proposals contained in our Report No. 202, came into force. The Order provides for 30 wards, six represented by three members, eight by two members and 16 by one member, giving an overall size of 50 councillors. The District has whole council elections and is entirely parished.

2. In July 1982, following informal correspondence on the subject, the Chief Executive and Clerk of South Staffordshire District Council wrote formally requesting us to undertake a further review, limited to the fast-growing Perton ward, in time for the elections due in May 1983. A review of the district as a whole under section 50(3) of the Local Government Act 1972 is, however, the only means by which a substantive change in the electoral arrangements for a district may be brought about, and we also noted that the standard of representation in several other wards was very uneven. We decided that a review was needed and on

3 December 1982 we invited the District Council to prepare a draft scheme of representation for the district. Copies of our letter were sent to interested persons and bodies and the District Council was asked to place notices in the local press and on public notice boards.

3. On 17 May 1983 the District Council asked for an extension of the time allowed for the preparation of the scheme so that it could take account of our proposed modifications to the changes recommended by the District Council in its parish review report previously submitted to us. We decided that the review should be deferred until the new parish pattern had been settled and our decision was announced in a letter to the District Council which was copied to all the recipients of our previous letter.

4. We submitted our final proposals in the parish review to the Department of the Environment on 9 March 1984. On 11 December 1985 the Department published the Secretary of State's decision to give effect to our proposals under an Order coming into force on 1 April 1986.

5. We announced the re-commencement of the electoral review in a letter dated 16 April 1986, in which we formally invited the District Council, having regard to the requirements in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act, to prepare and submit to us a draft scheme of representation for the whole of the district. Copies of the letter were sent for information to Staffordshire County Council, the Member of Parliament for South Staffordshire, the clerks to all the parish councils in

the district, the headquarters of the main political parties, local newspapers, the local government press and all the other recipients of the original letter announcing the start of the review in 1982. The start of the review was also announced by public notice in the usual way. Our letter to the District Council emphasised that the object of the review was to reduce, and as nearly as possible eliminate, the imbalances between district wards and not simply to increase the number of councillors in the Perton ward.

THE DRAFT SCHEME

6. South Staffordshire District Council duly prepared a draft scheme, taking account of the 1986 electorate and that forecast for 1992, and submitted it to us on 2 July 1986. The published scheme provided for 29 wards, five returning three councillors, thirteen returning two councillors and eleven returning one councillor, increasing the council size by two to 52. The proposed ward boundaries reflected the changes to parish boundaries and consequential changes to ward boundaries introduced by the South Staffordshire (Parishes) Order 1986. In addition, the scheme proposed the absorption of the Great Wyrley North ward within the Great Wyrley Town ward with the loss of one councillor. It further provided for changes to the number of councillors in four wards: for Perton, an increase from one to three, for Featherstone and Huntington each, an increase from one to two, and for Codsall South, a decrease from three to two.

COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT SCHEME

7. The draft scheme had been advertised locally and the District Council forwarded letters it had received from six parish councils and two private individuals together with its observations on their comments. Codsall Parish Council had objected to the proposed loss of one of the members for the Codsall South ward and two local residents objected to the loss of separate representation for the Great Wyrley North ward. The District Council pointed out that maintaining the present arrangements in these areas would not provide an acceptable standard of representation. Brewood Parish Council suggested that the parish of Blymhill and Weston-under-Lizard should be moved from the Bishopswood ward to the Lapley ward. The District Council observed that this would mean that the Lapley ward would then fall into two county electoral divisions.

8. However, in response to criticism from Perton Parish Council, the District Council accepted that there should be four members for the parish as a whole, divided equally between two wards, Perton Central and Perton Dippons. This would have the effect of raising the council size to 53.

OUR DRAFT PROPOSALS

9. We considered the District Council's scheme, as amended, in the light of the comments on the scheme, including one letter sent to us direct by a parish

council. Generally, we found that although the draft scheme would be an improvement on the existing arrangements, it did not go far enough towards eliminating some of the more serious imbalances between the wards. Whereas fewer than a quarter of the wards have a wholly acceptable standard of representation (that is, within 10% of the average number of electorate for each councillor in the district) the scheme would raise this proportion to no more than a third. The scheme would also leave a quarter of the wards seriously over- or under-represented (that is, more than 20% beyond the average). Even the amendment to the scheme in the Perton area would not be satisfactory since it was clear that a total of five members would be needed to provide a satisfactory standard of representation, taking account of the anticipated growth in the electorate by 1992. We were not convinced that any of the alternatives suggested by the parish councils and residents would help to improve the scheme.

10. We noted two factors which might have prevented the District Council from producing a more satisfactory scheme. The Council seemed to have assumed that a larger council would be needed so that additional members could be allocated to Perton, rather than assessing the needs of the district as a whole, and had not considered whether the present number of councillors could be distributed more fairly. It also appeared that the Council believed that wards should be wholly compatible with county electoral divisions even though this was not one of the requirements of the rules concerning district electoral reviews set out in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

11. We found that it was possible to devise a scheme of representation, based on the same council size as at present, which would provide a much more even standard of representation and which would not, in our view, depart radically from the existing arrangements. We were aware that we might be criticised locally for not having had sufficient regard for local ties but the prior requirement in Schedule 11 is that the ratio of electors to councillors should, as far as possible, be the same in every ward and we decided that this must take precedence.

12. Our draft proposals were published on 16 July 1987 in a letter to South Staffordshire District Council. Copies were sent to Staffordshire County Council and to all those bodies and persons who had received our consultation letter or who had commented on the District Council's scheme. Notices announcing that our draft proposals had been issued and could be inspected at the District Council's offices were inserted in the local press and displayed on public notice boards. The notice also stated that additional copies of our letter could be obtained from our office. Comments were invited by 10 September 1987. We subsequently noticed that our letter had omitted to show that the proposed Lower Penn ward was to be represented by one member and, for the avoidance of doubt, we drew this to the attention of the District Council in a letter dated 21 July 1987, copies of which were sent to the County Council, the Member of Parliament and the parish councils concerned.

RESPONSE TO OUR DRAFT PROPOSALS AND OUR FINAL PROPOSALS

13. South Staffordshire District Council stated that our proposals went too far in placing electoral equality before local ties. It argued that an estimated increase of 32% in the electorate between 1977 and 1992 justified a modest increase in size. It claimed that its own scheme improved the standard of representation and had proper regard to the needs of individual areas. The District Council's views were supported by Mr Patrick Cormack MP and by a number of parish councils.

14. Staffordshire County Council was concerned that some of our proposed wards would not be wholly compatible with its county electoral divisions.

15. Before turning to individual areas where there had been objections to our proposals, we considered the general points raised by the District and County Councils. We saw no merit in an increase in council size unless it could be shown that the Council's functions could thus be better discharged. We received no evidence that this would be the case and we were not persuaded that a rapid growth in the district's electorate was in itself sufficient justification for an increase in council size, having regard to the general level of representation in districts of a comparable size.

16. We understood the County Council's preference that the boundaries of district wards should coincide with county electoral divisions. However, as

the County Council acknowledged, this is not required by the rules on district electoral reviews and we did not think it likely that confusion would be caused in the few instances where our proposed wards would fall between two divisions.

Featherstone, Shareshill, Huntington and Essington

17. At present, the Featherstone, Huntington and Shareshill wards are each represented by one member while the Essington ward has two. The District Council's scheme proposed that Featherstone and Huntington should each acquire an extra member. However we considered that a more balanced arrangement would be to divide the Shareshill ward between Huntington and Featherstone.

18. In response to our proposal, the District Council argued that the three rural parishes that formed the Shareshill ward had very close ties with each other and none with either Featherstone or Huntington. In a separate letter, the district councillor for Shareshill provided numerous details of the strong community ties within the ward and forwarded over 400 duplicated letters of objection from local residents. He pointed out that the standard of representation in the ward was, and would continue to be excellent. He suggested that an alternative arrangement would be to join the Westcroft ward of the parish of Essington on to Featherstone so as to justify the two members in Featherstone.

19. Similar objections were made by the Parish Councils of Shareshill, Saredon and Hatherton (the three parishes in the Shareshill ward) and by several local

residents. Featherstone Branch Labour Party suggested that the growth in Featherstone would justify two councillors without the inclusion of part of the Shareshill ward.

20. We noted that our proposals were acceptable to the parish councils of Featherstone, Hilton, Essington and Huntington. However, in view of the weight of opinion in favour of respecting local ties we decided to amend our proposals so as to allow Shareshill to continue as a separate ward. We did not consider the resulting imbalance between electorates to be unacceptable. We were not persuaded that the suggested alternative involving Featherstone and Essington would be justified.

Lower Penn, Perton Dippons, and Perton Central

21. At present, the fast-developing Perton ward is represented by only one member. The District Council proposed that there should be two wards, Perton Central and Perton Dippons, each with two councillors. However we did not think this sufficient, taking account of the further growth expected by 1992 and we decided that Perton Central should have three members and Perton Dippons should have two. We also proposed that the currently over-represented single-member Lower Penn ward should be combined with the Trescott ward of the parish of Perton so as to provide a more even standard of representation in Lower Penn and Perton Dippons.

22. In their responses to our proposals, neither South Staffordshire District Council nor Staffordshire County Council thought it appropriate that Lower Penn

should be combined with the Trescott parish ward; it was argued that the local ties of the Trescott area lay very clearly with Perton, rather than with Lower Penn.

23. We decided to accept this argument and to propose that the pattern of wards in this area should be as recommended by the District Council. However we remained of the view that there should be three councillors in Perton Central and two in Perton Dippons.

Cheslyn Hay, Great Wyrley Town and Great Wyrley Landywood

24. The District Council's scheme proposed that the two Cheslyn Hay wards, North and South, (which had come into being as a result of the implementation of our separate parish review proposals) should each continue to have two members. It proposed the merging of the existing North and Town wards of Great Wyrley to form a three-member Town ward and that Great Wyrley Landywood should continue to have two councillors. We decided however that this would not provide a sufficiently even standard of representation and we formulated draft proposals for Cheslyn Hay to form a single three-member ward and for Great Wyrley Landywood to have three councillors. We accepted the District Council's scheme in respect of Great Wyrley Town.

25. Cheslyn Hay Parish Council and Great Wyrley Parish Council objected to our proposals. The District Council supplied amended electorate forecasts for Cheslyn Hay South and Great Wyrley Landywood in 1992, and in the light of

these changes we decided that Great Wyrley Landywood would not require more than two councillors. However, we remained convinced that three councillors would be sufficient for a single Cheslyn Hay ward. Great Wyrley Labour Party objected to the proposed merging of the North and Town wards but we had no doubt that this was necessary.

Kinver and Stourton

26. At present, and as proposed by the District Council's draft scheme, the parish of Kinver is represented by the single-member Stourton ward and the three-member Kinver ward. However we considered that the electorate for the area as a whole, taking account of the five year period up to 1992, warranted only three members.

27. Kinver Parish Council, Christian Action for Kinver and Kinver Civic Society objected to our draft proposals mainly on the grounds that Stourton needed separate representation and that the new ward would be too large. We considered their representations but we were not persuaded that there was sufficient reason to amend proposals that would provide a standard of representation comparable with other areas of the district.

Bishopswood and Lapley

28. The District Council's scheme proposed that the present single-member wards of Bishopswood (comprising the parish of Blymhill and Weston-under-Lizard and

the Bishopswood ward of the parish of Brewood) and Lapley (comprising the parish of Lapley and Stretton) should continue unchanged. We found that this would not provide a satisfactory standard of representation and proposed a single two-member ward of Bishopswood and Lapley.

29. Lapley and Stretton Parish Council had no objection to our proposals but Blymhill and Weston-under-Lizard Parish Council objected on the grounds that the ward would be over-large and would not take account of local ties. Penkridge Labour Party objected also.

30. We were not convinced that local circumstances outweighed the need for equality of representation and we decided to adhere to our proposals in this area.

Wombourne

31. The District Council's scheme proposed the retention of the existing pattern of wards and of the distribution of councillors. The standard of representation remained uneven, however, and we decided that this should be remedied by the reduction of the representation in the North ward from three to two.

32. Wombourne Liberal Association accepted the need for a reduction in the overall number of councillors representing Wombourne but suggested that re-warding was necessary to produce a fairer distribution of the electorate between the North and South-East wards.

33. We recognised that there might have been advantages from the re-drawing of ward boundaries in this area but we felt that the standard of representation under our proposals was acceptable and we therefore decided to adhere to our draft proposals.

34. In conclusion, therefore, we are satisfied that, with the amendments detailed in paragraphs 20, 23 and 25, our proposals would provide as even a standard of representation as is possible, having regard to local ties. A list of the wards and the distribution of councillors that we propose is at Annex A; the wards are illustrated in the sketch map bound into the report. A larger-scale map is also submitted with this report.

PUBLICATION

35. In accordance with Section 60(5)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, a copy of this report and of the large-scale map is being sent to South Staffordshire District Council, to be placed on deposit and made available for inspection. The submission of our report will also be advertised in local newspapers. Copies of the report are being sent to all the recipients of our consultation letter and to those bodies and persons who submitted comments on our draft proposals.

LS

Signed: G J ELLERTON (Chairman)

J G POWELL (Deputy Chairman)

JOAN ACKNER

G R PRENTICE

PROFESSOR G E CHERRY

K J L NEWELL

BRIAN SCHOLES

S T GARRISH

Secretary

22 October 1987

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SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL:
NAMES OF PROPOSED WARDS AND NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS

	<u>Name of district ward</u>	<u>No of councillors</u>
1*	Acton Trussell	1
2	Bilbrook	2
3	Bishopswood and Lapley	2
4	Brewood and Coven	3
5	Cheslyn Hay	3
6	Codsall North	2
7	Codsall South	2
8	Essington	2
9	Featherstone	2
10	Great Wyrley Town	3
11	Great Wyrley Landywood	2
12	Huntington	2
13	Kinver	3
14	Lower Penn	1
15	Pattingham	1
16	Penkridge North East	1
17	Penkridge South East	2
18	Penkridge West	1
19	Perton Central	3
20	Perton Dippons	2
21	Shareshill	1
22	Swindon	1
23	Trysull and Seisdon	1
24	Wombourne North	2
25	Wombourne South East	2
26	Wombourne South West	3

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* Location on attached plan

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE DISTRICT
FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW



