

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for East Northamptonshire in Northamptonshire

Further electoral review

February 2006

Translations and other formats

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by The Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Robin Gray
Joan Jones CBE
Ann M. Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

When conducting reviews our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

Executive summary

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A further electoral review of East Northamptonshire is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. This review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. The Boundary Committee was asked to undertake an electoral review of East Northamptonshire on 12 May 2005.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing electoral arrangements 10 of the 20 wards have variances of more than 10% from the district average. This is not expected to improve by 2009, with 10 wards having variances of more than 10% from the district average.

Every review is conducted in four stages:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	12 July 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	4 October 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	21 February 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	23 May 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Submissions received

During Stage One we received two submissions. East Northamptonshire Council put forward proposals for the whole district. Rushden Town Council put forward names for district wards and proposed a redistribution of town councillors.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

The Council is predicting electorate growth of 9% over the next five years. This will be spread across the district. The Committee note that this figure is high. However, on the evidence received, it considers that this is the best estimate currently available.

Council size

We received one proposal on council size. East Northamptonshire Council proposed an increase of four councillors to 40. The Council put forward strong arguments for this increase, and as a result we have been persuaded to adopt the Council's proposal for this increase.

General analysis

We propose adopting a mixture of one-, two- and three-member wards based on the Council's proposals. We propose a number of amendments in Rushden and Higham Ferrers areas to improve electoral equality and ensure that each area is represented by the correct number of councillors. We propose creating a two-member Higham Ferrers Wharf ward taking in an area of Rushden parish. This has been necessary to ensure that Rushden parish receives its correct allocation of councillors. In the remainder of the district we propose adopting the Council's proposals without amendment.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on our draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for East Northamptonshire contained in this report. We welcome views from all parts of the community and believe that the more feedback we receive, based on clear evidence, the better informed we will be in forming our final recommendations. We will take into account all submissions received by 22 May 2006. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for East Northamptonshire and welcome comments from interested parties. In particular, we found our decisions regarding Higham Ferrers and Rushden areas required making difficult judgements between our statutory criteria. We would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

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This report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Draft recommendations: summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Barnwell	1	Parishes of Aldwincle, Barnwell, Clopton, Hemington, Lilford-cum-Wigsthorpe, Luddington, Thorpe Achurch, Thurning and Titchmarsh
2	Fineshade	1	Parishes of Collyweston, Duddington-with-Fineshade, Easton on the Hill, Harringworth and Wakerley
3	Higham Ferrers Chichele	2	Parishes of Chelveston-cum-Caldercott and Newton Bromswold and the proposed Higham Ferrers Chichele parish ward of Higham Ferrers parish
4	Higham Ferrers Wharf	3	Proposed Higham Ferrers Wharf parish ward of Higham Ferrers parish and proposed Spencer Park parish ward of Rushden parish
5	Irthlingborough John Pyel	2	Proposed Irthlingborough John Pyel parish ward of Irthlingborough parish
6	Irthlingborough Waterloo	2	Proposed Irthlingborough Waterloo parish ward of Irthlingborough parish
7	Kings Forest	1	Parishes of Apethorpe, Blatherwycke, Bulwick, Deene, Deenethorpe, King's Cliffe and Laxton
8	Lower Nene	1	Parishes of Ashton, Cotterstock, Luton, Polebrook, Tansor and Warmington
9	Lyveden	1	Parishes of Brigstock, Lowick, Sudborough, and Twywell
10	Oundle	3	Parishes of Benefield, Oundle, Pilton, Stoke Doyle and Wadenhoe
11	Prebendal	1	Parishes of Fotheringhay, Glapthorn, Nassington, Southwick, Woodnewton and Yarwell
12	Raunds Saxon	2	Proposed Raunds Saxon parish ward of Rushden parish
13	Raunds Windmill	2	Proposed Raunds Windmill parish ward of Raunds parish
14	Rushden Bates	2	Proposed Rushden Bates parish ward of Raunds parish
15	Rushden Hayden	3	Proposed Rushden Hayden parish ward of Rushden parish
16	Rushden Pemberton	3	Proposed Rushden Pemberton parish ward of Rushden parish

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
17	Rushden Sartoris	2	Proposed Rushden Sartoris parish ward of Rushden parish
18	Rushden Spencer	2	Proposed Rushden Spencer parish ward of Rushden parish
19	Stanwick	1	Parishes of Hargrave and Stanwick
20	Thrapston Lakes	2	Parish of Islip and Thrapston Lakes parish ward of Thrapston parish
21	Thrapston Market	2	Parishes of Denford and Ringstead and the proposed Thrapston Market parish ward of Thrapston parish
22	Woodford	1	Parishes of Great Addington, Little Addington and Woodford

Notes:

1. The whole of the district is parished.
2. The maps accompanying this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.
3. We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Draft recommendations for East Northamptonshire District

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Barnwell	1	1,509	1,509	-1	1,637	1,637	-1
2	Fineshade	1	1,515	1,515	0	1,644	1,644	0
3	Higham Ferrers Chichele	2	3,118	1,559	3	3,361	1,681	2
4	Higham Ferrers Wharf	3	4,668	1,556	3	4,910	1,637	-1
5	Irthlingborough John Pyel	2	2,778	1,389	-8	3,014	1,507	-8
6	Irthlingborough Waterloo	2	2,809	1,405	-7	3,048	1,524	-7
7	Kings Forest	1	1,425	1,425	-6	1,547	1,547	-6
8	Lower Nene	1	1,620	1,620	7	1,757	1,757	7
9	Lyveden	1	1,595	1,595	5	1,731	1,731	5
10	Oundle	3	4,214	1,405	-7	4,572	1,524	-7
11	Prebendal	1	1,566	1,566	3	1,700	1,700	3
12	Raunds Saxon	2	3,315	1,658	9	3,442	1,721	5
13	Raunds Windmill	2	3,012	1,506	-1	3,423	1,712	4

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
14	Rushden Bates	2	3,098	1,549	2	3,362	1,681	2
15	Rushden Hayden	3	4,579	1,526	1	4,990	1,663	1
16	Rushden Pemberton	3	4,654	1,551	2	5,071	1,690	3
17	Rushden Sartoris	2	3,122	1,561	3	3,387	1,694	3
18	Rushden Spencer	2	3,030	1,515	0	3,422	1,711	4
19	Stanwick	1	1,658	1,658	9	1,799	1,799	9
20	Thrapston Lakes	2	3,012	1,506	-1	3,267	1,634	-1
21	Thrapston Market	2	2,887	1,444	-5	3,132	1,566	-5
22	Woodford	1	1,526	1,526	1	1,655	1,655	0
	Totals	40	60,710	-	-	65,871	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,518	-	-	1,647	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by East Northamptonshire Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our draft proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of East Northamptonshire, on which we are now consulting.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 The Electoral Commission agreed that The Boundary Committee should make on going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a periodic electoral review (PER) has elapsed. More specifically, it was agreed that there should be a closer scrutiny where either:

- 30% of wards in an authority had electoral variances of over 10% from the average; or
- any single ward had a variance of more than 30% from the average.

3 The intention of such scrutiny was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances, to consider likely future trends, and to assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of East Northamptonshire. East Northamptonshire's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in March 1997. An electoral change Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 8 October 1998 and the first elections on the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out our work, The Boundary Committee has to work within a statutory framework.¹ This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
- secure effective and convenient local government; and
- achieve equality of representation.

In addition we are required to work within Schedule 11 of the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of East Northamptonshire is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (published by The Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review and will be helpful both in understanding the approach taken by The Boundary Committee for England and in informing comments that interested groups and individuals may wish to make about our recommendations.

7 Our task is to make recommendations to The Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for any parish and town councils in the district. We do not in these reviews consider changes to the external boundaries of areas.

¹ As set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962).

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole, i.e. to ensure that all councillors in the local authority represent similar numbers of electors. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

9 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a 'vote of equal weight' when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as nearly as possible, the same across a district. In practice, each councillor cannot represent exactly the same number of electors given geographic and other constraints, including the make-up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identity and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive about council size and acknowledge that there are valid reasons for variations between local authorities. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. Indeed, we believe that consideration of the appropriate council size is the starting point for our reviews and that whatever size of council is proposed to us should be developed and argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure.

11 As indicated in its *Guidance*, The Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just to address any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's optimum political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government, and we must be satisfied that there is evidence for this.

12 In addition, we do not accept that an increase or decrease in the electorate of the authority should automatically result in a consequent increase or decrease in the number of councillors. Similarly, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of neighbouring or similarly sized authorities; the circumstances of one authority may be very different from that of another. We will seek to ensure that our recommended council size recognises all the factors and achieves a good allocation of councillors across the district.

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an

unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

14 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	12 July 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	4 October 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	21 February 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	23 May 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

15 Stage One began on 12 July 2005, when we wrote to East Northamptonshire Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Northamptonshire Police, the Local Government Association, parish and town councils in the district, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, Members of the European Parliament for the East Midlands Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited East Northamptonshire Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 3 October 2006.

16 During Stage Two we considered all the submissions received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

17 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 21 February 2006 and will end on 22 May 2006, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation about them. **We take this consultation very seriously, and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

18 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to modify them, and submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. It will then be for the Commission to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an electoral change Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report The Boundary Committee has had regard to:

- The general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and
 - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Broads

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by section 97 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

2 Current electoral arrangements

21 East Northamptonshire is a predominantly rural district, located in the north of Northamptonshire County. It comprises the six towns of Rushden, Thrapston, Oundle, Raunds, Irthlingborough and Higham Ferrers and 53 villages. The population of the district is around 82,000 and the whole district is parished.

22 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the district average in percentage terms. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district, 60,710, by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, currently 36. Therefore the average number of electors per councillor is currently 1,686. In Fineshade ward, currently represented by one councillor, there are currently 1,311 electors, therefore the councillor represents 22% fewer electors than the current district average.

23 The electorate of the district is 60,710 (December 2004). The Council presently has 36 members who are elected from a mixture of 20 single-, two- and three-member wards. At present each councillor represents an average of 1,686 electors, which the Council forecasts will increase to 1,830 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained.

24 Under the existing electoral arrangements 10 of the 20 wards have variances of more than 10% from the average and two have variances of more than 20% from the average. This situation is not expected to improve by 2009. Of particular concern are Fineshade, Prebendal, Ringstead, Rushden South and Thrapston wards where the variances are significantly greater than was anticipated at the time of the PER.

25 Following meetings with council officers, the Committee was of the view that these imbalances were unlikely to improve given the planned developments and expected changes in numbers of electors in different wards over the next year.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in East Northamptonshire

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Barnwell	1	1,596	1,596	-5	1,731	1,731	-5
2	Dryden	1	1,479	1,479	-12	1,605	1,605	-12
3	Fineshade	1	1,311	1,311	-22	1,423	1,423	-22
4	Higham Ferrers	3	5,700	1,900	13	6,185	2,062	13
5	Irthlingborough	3	5,587	1,862	10	6,062	2,021	10
6	Kings Forest	1	1,520	1,520	-10	1,650	1,650	-10
7	Lower Nene	1	1,593	1,593	-6	1,728	1,728	-6
8	Lyveden	1	1,498	1,498	-11	1,625	1,625	-11
9	Oundle	2	3,753	1,877	11	4,072	2,036	11
10	Prebendal	1	1,345	1,345	-20	1,460	1,460	-20
11	Raunds Saxon	2	3,315	1,658	-2	3,597	1,799	-2
12	Raunds Windmill	2	3,012	1,506	-11	3,268	1,634	-11
13	Ringstead	1	1,329	1,329	-21	1,442	1,442	-21
14	Rushden East	3	4,707	1,569	-7	5,107	1,702	-7

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
15	Rushden North	3	5,349	1,783	6	5,804	1,935	6
16	Rushden South	3	5,671	1,890	12	6,153	2,051	12
17	Rushden West	3	4,842	1,614	-4	5,254	1,751	-4
18	Stanwick	1	1,658	1,658	-2	1,799	1,799	-2
19	Thrapston	2	3,919	1,960	16	4,252	2,126	16
20	Woodford	1	1,526	1,526	-10	1,655	1,655	-10
Totals		36	60,710	-	-	65,871	-	-
Averages		-	-	1,686	-	-	1,830	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by East Northamptonshire Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2004, in Fineshade ward there are 22% too few electors, while Thrapston ward has 16% too many electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Submissions received

26 At the start of the review, members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for East Northamptonshire Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

27 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Committee visited the area and met with officers and members from the Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their cooperation and assistance. We received two representations during Stage One, including a district-wide scheme from the Council, both of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the District Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

East Northamptonshire Council

28 The Council proposed a council size of 40 members, four more than at present, serving 22 wards, two more than at present. It proposed a number of amendments across the district to improve electoral equality, providing a mixture of single-, two- and three-member wards. Under its proposals 10 wards would have electoral variances of over 5% by 2009, with no ward having a variance of over 9%

Town councils

29 Rushden Town Council put forward names for East Northamptonshire Council's proposed wards. It also proposed revised electoral arrangements for the town council.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

30 Before finalising our recommendations on the electoral arrangements for East Northamptonshire we invite views on our initial thoughts as expressed in these draft recommendations. We welcome comments from all those interested relating to the number of councillors, proposed ward boundaries, ward names and parish and town council electoral arrangements. In particular, we found that our decisions regarding Rushden and Higham Ferrers areas required difficult judgements between our statutory criteria. This was due to the issue of allocation between the two areas and limited evidence of communities within the Council's submission. In these cases we have sought to achieve the best levels of electoral equality in the absence of any strong evidence reflecting the other two criteria, and would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

31 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for East Northamptonshire is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) which defines the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government;
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- secure the matters in respect of equality of representation referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

32 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'. In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing clearly identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

33 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep variances to a minimum.

34 If electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate should also be taken into account and we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

35 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, or local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Electorate figures

36 As part of the previous review of East Northamptonshire, the Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 8% between 1996 and 2001. However, between 1996 and the start of this review the electorate increased by 13%. The Council predicts that significant growth will continue, with the electorate increasing by 9% from 60,710 in 2004 to 65,871 by 2009.

37 We consider that these electorate projections predict a very high growth rate, but we concur with the Council's evidence that this level of growth will be achieved given the number of outstanding planning permissions. We consider that the Council put forward reasonable evidence for these projections. We acknowledge that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the Council's figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

Council size

38 East Northamptonshire Council presently has 36 members. The Council proposed an increase of four to 40 members. It stated that 'The Council's powers and duties have expanded; it now looks at the community in a different light and seeks to influence the well-being of its inhabitants by engaging with partners, and delivers services in an innovative way'. It added that 'the greater involvement in community issues; the wider remit; and more cost-effective delivery of services has led to increased roles and responsibilities for Councillors'.

39 The Council outlined changes to its political management structure and adoption of a 'revised committee structure', stating that 'the two policy committees, Resource and Strategy (meeting every eight weeks) and the main regulatory committee (Planning – meeting every three weeks) involve 28 individual Councillors (77.77% of the membership)'. It also outlined the role of the East Northamptonshire Standards Board, arguing that its members 'are involved in a comprehensive range of activities, including Standards hearings training and mock hearings, participation in an Ethical Governance pilot, and special meetings on proposed changes to the Standards Framework'. Scrutiny 'is another new area of activity for Councillors since the last review [...] This is not just about attendance at regular scheduled evening meetings [...] the nature of the Committee's work requires a considerable time commitment during the day and the extensive reviews carried out by teams of Councillors and officers have involved in depth investigations'. It stated that 'in addition to the policy, regulatory scrutiny and standards committees, monitoring of Council performance is undertaken by Councillors via a Performance Committee'.

40 The Council went on to discuss the changes to the Licensing Act 2003, stating that it 'is already impacting considerably on the role of [...] Councillors', adding that 'because there is a greater potential for challenge, and the Council must guard against bias, considerable efforts have been made to ensure that the new arrangements are robust and Members have received comprehensive training'. It stated that 'nearly half the Council's membership are likely to be called upon to attend hearings and make judgements', adding that 'if the potential for Councillors acting in a representative role, on behalf of their residents, is realised, an even larger proportion of Members will be affected'.

41 The Council described members' role as 'Champions' and stressed their community involvement. Eight Councillors have been appointed as champions for various functions and they contribute to the development of Council policy and direction, and attend meetings and functions which have a bearing on their areas of interest'. The Council stated that 'twenty five of the District Councillors (69%) also serve on town [...] or parish councils'.

42 It argued that 'the role of Councillors on outside bodies has changed significantly in recent years. The need to demonstrate community leadership, to engage in county-wide, regional (and sub-regional) issues, and to support the implementation of local responses to Government initiatives have all added weight to the complexity of the role Councillors need to play'. It added that 'the Council makes, annually, 85 Councillor appointments to a range of outside bodies and groups [...] a number of which did not exist at the time of the last electoral review, and reflect the community leadership role'. It stated 'the Council has, since 1997, adopted an innovative approach to service delivery, and sought to engage partners and trusts in the operation of specific services [...] which] has substantially increased the number of meetings Councillors are expected to attend'.

43 The Council also stressed 'the importance of training and development – and the need to balance all the responsibilities of Councillors with their home life'. It also cited the impact of new legislation, stating that 'Central Government, Audit Commission and other agencies continue to urge improved performance in local government and the introduction of new initiatives and legislation advances without interruption'.

44 The Council concluded that this shows that 'Councillors have a wide range of responsibilities quite apart from their representative role', adding that 'members are not "full time" Councillors drawing large allowances. There is a limited pool of Councillors to feed the extensive range of Council activities'.

45 We have given careful consideration to the evidence put forward by the Council. We consider that it has highlighted a number of substantial changes to the roles of members since the last review, including the role of community involvement and the involvement in numerous committees and outside bodies. However, while it outlined these different functions, we did have some concerns that it did not fully quantify the impact of these different roles. As a consequence we wrote to the Council requesting additional evidence on the time and level of involvement in these tasks.

46 The Council responded, highlighting that in 1997/8 it had held 65 Council, committee and sub-committee meetings, adding that this had risen to 90 by 2004/5 and is projected to increase to 133 by May 2006. It stated that 'the increase clearly reflects the change in the nature of the Council's corporate governance; its engagement with the community and, to an extent, its participation in joint arrangements. The figures are separate from Councillor attendance at meetings of other bodies'. The Council acknowledged 'that it would not be logical to suggest an increase in numbers which exactly reflected the additional workload', adding 'an increase of four Councillors is therefore seen as a modest and reasonable addition. It would increase the capacity sufficiently to make a difference. The workload could be spread more evenly amongst Councillors and reduce the considerable pressure on a number of current senior Councillors'. Finally it stated that 'The increased time spent at meetings has also put into focus the role of Councillors as representatives for the local community. The Council feels that it is essential Councillors do not become remote from the people they serve. They must be able to achieve a reasonable

balance between decision making and policy formulation on the one hand and engaging with their constituents on the other. This reasonable increase in Council numbers will contribute to a rebalancing of Council roles and responsibilities'.

47 We note the additional evidence that the Council provided and concur with its argument that members already face exacting demands and that the addition of four members would help address this. We therefore propose adopting the Council's proposal for a council of 40 members.

Electoral equality

48 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. The Electoral Commission expects The Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. Therefore when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where inadequate justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality, seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and the provision of effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence must be provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria.

49 The Council's proposals secured good electoral equality, with no ward having a variance of over 9%. It explored a number of options to improve these variances, but concluded that these alternative options did not reflect community identities.

50 In light of the limited community identity evidence provided we did explore a number of options to see if these variances could be improved further. However, we concluded that given the size of the constituent parishes, the distribution of electors and the low councillor:elector ratio it is very difficult to address these variances without worsening electoral equality elsewhere in the district. For example, given the councillor:elector ratio of 1,647 (by December 2009) moving just 180 electors will worsen electoral equality by 10% in a single-member ward.

51 The district average for 2009 is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district, 65,871, by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 40 under our draft proposals. Therefore the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 1,647.

General analysis

52 The Council put forward a single scheme for the whole district. As stated above, we concur with the Council's argument for an increase in members of four, to give a council of 40 members.

53 However, we note that the Council has not given the town areas the correct allocation. Under a 40-member council, the town of Rushden is entitled to 13.55 councillors by 2009, while the Council only allocated the area 13 councillors. We note that a council size of either 37 or 41 would give the correct allocation to Rushden and consequently improved levels of electoral equality, while maintaining the correct allocation for the other towns. As stated above, we consider that the Council has put forward a strong case for a significant increase in council size. Therefore, we do not consider that a council size of 37 would be sufficient to enable it to function efficiently.

54 We did not receive any evidence to justify a council of 41 members. Therefore, based on the strong evidence received for an increase in council size, we propose adopting a council size of 40. However, we noticed a number of opposing variances between the wards in Rushden and Higham Ferrers. Rushden contained two wards with over 6% more electors than the district average, while Higham Ferrers contained two wards with 6% fewer electors than the district average. Therefore, to ensure the highest levels of electoral equality achievable we propose creating a two-member ward which includes electors from both Higham Ferrers and Rushden. We note that the urban areas of Rushden town run directly into the urban areas of Higham Ferrers; we consider that the parish boundary between these two towns does not reflect a natural break between the two communities and there is no obviously distinguishable boundary between them. Indeed, we note that the boundary of Rushden and Higham Ferrers parishes cuts across a number of roads arbitrarily. As a consequence of our revised three-member Higham Ferrers Wharf ward, we also propose a number of other amendments to the Council's proposals for Higham Ferrers and Rushden in order to improve electoral equality.

55 Throughout the rest of the district the Council's proposals secure good levels of electoral equality. In a number of areas we investigated options to see whether these variances could be further improved. However, we noted that given the size of the constituent parishes, the distribution of electors and the low councillor:elector ratio, we have concluded that it is very difficult to address these variances without worsening electoral equality elsewhere in the district. As stated earlier, moving just 180 electors will worsen electoral equality by 10% in a single-member ward. We therefore propose adopting the Council's proposals for the remainder of the district without amendment.

Warding arrangements

56 For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- a Barnwell, Dryden, Fineshade, Kings Forest, Lower Nene, Lyveden, Oundle and Prebendal wards
- b Irthlingborough, Raunds Saxon, Raunds Windmill, Ringstead, Thrapston, Stanwick and Woodford wards
- c Higham Ferrers, Rushden East, Rushden North, Rushden South and Rushden West wards

57 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2 (pages 9–12), and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Barnwell, Dryden, Fineshade, Kings Forest, Lower Nene, Lyveden, Oundle and Prebendal wards

58 Under the existing arrangements Barnwell, Dryden Fineshade, Kings Forest, Lower Nene, Lyveden, Oundle and Prebendal wards are all parished. Table 5 below shows the constituent parts of these wards. Table 4 (pages 18–19) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 5: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Barnwell	Parishes of Barnwell, Clopton, Hemington, Lilford-cum-Wigsthorpe, Luddington, Polebrook Thorpe Achurch, Thurning and Titchmarsh	1
Dryden	Parishes of Aldwincle, Islip, Lowick, Pilton, Stoke Doyle, Twywell and Wadenhoe	1
Fineshade	Parishes of Collyweston, Duddington-with-Fineshade, Easton on the Hill and Wakerley	1
Kings Forest	Parishes of Blatherwycke, Bulwick, Deene, Deenethorpe, Harringworth. King's Cliffe and Laxton	1
Lower Nene	Parishes of Ashton, Cotterstock, Fotheringay, Glapthorn, Lutton, Tansor and Warmington	1
Lyveden	Parishes of Benefield, Brigstock and Sudborough	1
Oundle	Parish of Oundle	2
Prebendal	Parishes of Apethorpe, Nassington, Southwick, Woodnewton and Yarwell	1

59 At Stage One, in the north of the district the Council proposed a number of small amendments to the existing wards to improve electoral equality. It proposed a revision to the existing Barnwell ward, adding Aldwincle parish from Dryden ward and transferring Polebrook parish to Lower Nene ward. It stated that 'this will not alter any central distinguishable community identity'. It proposed adding the parish of Harringworth from Kings Forrest to the existing Fineshade ward, stating that 'this will not alter any central distinguishable community identity'. As stated, the Council proposed removing Harringworth parish from Kings Forest ward, but adding Apethorpe parish, currently in Prebendal ward. It stated that 'this will not alter any central distinguishable community identity as the parish of Apethorpe has been integral with Kings Cliffe since the Council's inception'. The Council proposed removing Fotheringhay parish from Lower Nene ward and adding Polebrook parish stating that 'this will not affect any central distinguishable community identity'. It

proposed removing Benefield parish from Lyveden ward, but adding Twywell and Lowick parishes. It stated that 'this will not alter any central distinguishable community identity', adding 'Sudborough and Lowick churches are linked'.

60 The Council acknowledged that 'the town of Oundle cannot now achieve electoral equality with two councillors and adding a third would not improve equality'. It therefore proposed adding Benefield, Pilton, Stoke Doyle and Wadenhoe parish and an additional councillor. It noted that 'these parishes are in the same county division [and that] Oundle and Benefield churches are linked'. Finally, it proposed adding Fotheringhay and Glapthorn parishes to the existing Prebendal ward, highlighting links between local churches.

61 We received no other comments regarding these wards. We have given careful consideration to the evidence received and note that the Council's proposals secure good levels of electoral equality. However, in light of very limited community identity evidence, we did consider whether any of these variances could be improved further. We note that the Council's Kings Forest ward would have 6% fewer electors than the district average by 2009 and neighbouring Prebendal ward, would have 3% more electors by 2009. We also note a number of opposing variances between Barnwell, Lower Nene and Oundle wards (1% fewer, 7% more and 7% fewer electors, respectively, than the district average by 2009). We therefore looked to see whether any area could be transferred between these wards to further improve electoral equality. However, we note that given the size of the constituent parishes, it is not possible to transfer a whole parish without significantly worsening electoral equality. In addition to this, given the size and distribution the electorate in these parishes we have not been persuaded that parish warding would provide for the best reflection of the statutory criteria. We therefore propose adopting the Council's proposals without amendment.

62 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9–12) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Barnwell, Fineshade, Kings Forest, Lower Nene, Lyveden, Oundle and Prebendal wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Irthlingborough, Raunds Saxon, Raunds Windmill, Ringstead, Thrapston, Stanwick and Woodford wards

63 Under the existing arrangements Irthlingborough, Raunds Saxon, Raunds Windmill, Ringstead, Thrapston, Stanwick and Woodford wards are all parished. Table 6 shows the constituent areas. Table 4 (on pages 18–19) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements remain in place.

Table 6: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Irthlingborough	Parish of Irthlingborough	3
Raunds Saxon	Raunds Saxon parish ward of Raunds parish	2
Raunds Windmill	Raunds Windmill parish ward of Raunds parish	2
Ringstead	Parishes of Denford and Ringstead	1
Thrapston	Parish of Thrapston	2
Stanwick	Parishes of Hargrave and Stanwick	1
Woodford	Parishes of Great Addington, Little Addington and Woodford	1

64 At Stage One, in the centre of the district the Council acknowledged that the existing Irthlingborough ward contains too many electors to be served by three members. It therefore proposed dividing the parish in two, to create a two-member Irthlingborough John Pyel ward and two-member Irthlingborough Waterloo ward. It stated that ‘there is no change to the size of the area covered nor will it affect any community identity as no parishes have been removed or added and electoral equality is improved’.

65 The Council proposed retaining the existing Stanwick ward, stating that ‘no change is proposed for this ward because the changes proposed in other wards keeps it within the 10% variance and it will retain its community identity’. We note from the Council’s submission that this proposal was supported by Stanwick Parish Council.

66 In Thrapston, the Council acknowledged that electoral equality could not be achieved with three councillors. It therefore proposed dividing the parish in two and combining these areas with neighbouring parishes. It proposed creating a two-member Thrapston Lakes ward, comprising the northern part of Thrapston parish and Islip parish. It stated that ‘the Council takes the view that the parish of Islip has a close affinity with Thrapston. It is within walking distance of the town. Indeed it takes longer to walk from the southern boundary of Islip to the north of Islip than it does to the centre of Thrapston’. It also noted that placing Islip in a ward with part of Thrapston parish helped secure electoral equality in the surrounding area. It also proposed creating a two-member Thrapston Market ward comprising the south of Thrapston and Denford and Ringstead parishes. It stated that ‘residents of Denford and Islip tend to use the facilities of Thrapston for Post Office, shopping, dentist, doctor and banking’.

67 We note from the Council’s submission that Thrapston and Ringstead parishes objected to the Council’s proposals. Ringstead Parish Council argued that ‘Ringstead and Stanwick are really satellite villages of Raunds, using facilities from that town i.e. doctors, schools etc and it would be a mistake to draw them into Thrapston boundaries for the purpose of wards’. We also note that Islip Parish Council objected to the Council’s proposals, stating that ‘we have always been the principal part of Dryden Rural ward and have no affinity with the town of Thrapston’.

68 The Council proposed minor amendments to the existing Raunds Saxon and Raunds Windmill wards. These would transfer a small number of roads with the aim of improving electoral equality. It stated ‘this will not affect any central distinguishable community identity’. The Council proposed no change to the existing Woodford ward, stating that ‘No change is proposed for this ward because the changes proposed to other wards improves electoral equality and its community identity will not be affected’.

69 We received no other comments regarding these wards. We have given careful consideration to the evidence received and note that the Council’s proposals secure reasonable levels of electoral equality. We note the relatively high electoral variances for its Irthlingborough John Pyel and Irthlingborough Waterloo wards (8% fewer and 7% fewer electors than the district average by 2009). However, these wards are part of Irthlingborough parish and we can see no sensible option for including electors from the surrounding parishes to improve electoral equality, without adversely affecting community identity. We therefore propose adopting these wards. We also note the relatively poor electoral equality of the Council’s Stanwick ward, but are unable to improve this without impacting significantly on the electoral equality in neighbouring wards.

70 We note from the Council’s submission that a number of the parishes in the area have concerns about the mixing of urban and rural areas. While we note these concerns, we concur with the Council’s view that given the size and distribution of the electorate this is unavoidable. We concur with its view that Islip parish has good links with Thrapston parish. We also note the concerns of Ringstead parish and while this area is further from Thrapston, we note that it has good road links. In addition to this, we can see no viable option for transferring it to Raunds, without significantly worsening electoral equality.

71 We therefore propose adopting the Council’s proposals for this area without amendment. Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9–12) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Irthlingborough John Pyel, Irthlingborough Waterloo, Raunds Saxon, Raunds Windmill, Thrapston Lakes, Thrapston Market, Stanwick and Woodford wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1, Map 2, Map 3 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

Higham Ferrers, Rushden East, Rushden North, Rushden South and Rushden West wards

Table 7: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Higham Ferrers	Parishes of Chelveston cum Caldercott, Newton Bromswold and Higham Ferrers	3
Rushden East	Rushden East parish ward of Rushden parish	3
Rushden North	Rushden North parish ward of Rushden parish	3
Rushden South	Rushden South parish ward of Rushden parish	3
Rushden West	Rushden West parish ward of Rushden parish	3

72 At Stage One the Council acknowledged that Higham Ferrers parish now contains too many electors to be served by three members. It therefore proposed creating two two-member wards, Higham Ferrers Chichele and Higham Ferrers Wharf wards. It stated that ‘this adjustment would bring in a built in defence against electoral imbalance for future years’, adding that ‘there is no change to the size of the area covered nor will it affect any community identity as no parishes have been removed or added and electoral equality has been improved’. Under its proposals Higham Ferrers Chichele and Higham Ferrers Wharf wards would both have 6% fewer electors than the district average by 2009.

73 In Rushden, the Council proposed dividing the existing Rushden South ward given the large amount of development that has occurred since the last review. It proposed creating a two-member Rushden Bates and two-member Rushden Sartoris wards. These wards would have 2% more and 3% more electors than the district average by 2009. It also proposed a number of other minor amendments to the other existing wards ‘so that electoral equality is improved’. It added ‘it is realised that the ward variance is greater in some than in others but it is believed that the boundaries used are easy to identify rather than moving one or two streets for equality but resulting in unwieldy ward boundaries’. It also proposed renaming the existing wards to ‘reflect the history of the areas of the town covered by the new wards’. Rushden Town Council expressed support for these names. Rushden East ward would be renamed Rushden Hayden ward and have 6% more electors than the district average by 2009. Rushden North ward would be renamed Rushden Spencer ward and have 1% more electors than the district average by 2009. Rushden West ward would be renamed Rushden Pemberton ward and have 7% more electors than the district average by 2009.

74 We received no other comments regarding these wards. We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. As stated earlier, we note that the Council has not given the Rushden parish area the correct allocation of councillors. Under a 40-member council, the town of Rushden is entitled to 13.55 councillors by 2009, while the Council’s proposals only allocate the area 13 councillors. As a

consequence this area does not receive sufficient representation. Given our proposal to endorse the Council's 40 member council we have proposed an amendment to improve the levels of electoral equality and give the area the correct allocation of councillors.

75 As stated above, Rushden is entitled to 13.55 members, while Higham Ferrers is entitled to 3.76 members. This equates to 17.31 members for the two areas as a whole. We note that the Council has given the two areas as a whole the correct allocation of 17 members. We also note that the urban areas of Rushden town run directly into the urban areas of Higham Ferrers; there is no obviously distinguishable boundary between them. We therefore propose creating a three-member Higham Ferrers Wharf ward which includes electors from both Higham Ferrers and Rushden. We consider that the boundary between these two towns does not reflect a natural break between the two communities. Indeed, we note that the boundary of Rushden and Higham Ferrers parishes cuts through a number of roads arbitrarily.

76 Our proposed Higham Ferrers Wharf ward would take in 2,086 electors from the Council's proposed Rushden Hayden ward, to the north and west of the dismantled railway line. We consider that this area has good links into Higham Ferrers and that a number of roads such as Larkin Gardens and The Hedges are actually divided between Higham Ferrers and Rushden parishes. We acknowledge that there may be some concerns about creating a ward that joins these two separate parishes. However, in order to ensure the correct allocation and good levels of electoral equality we consider that this ward provides the best solution.

77 As a consequence of our proposal we propose a number of amendments to the Council's proposed wards in Rushden in order to improve electoral equality. We propose transferring 501 electors to Rushden Spencer ward from its proposed Rushden Hayden and Rushden Pemberton wards to the south of the dismantled railway and northwest of Fitzwilliam Street and Duck Street and northeast of the back of the odd numbered houses on Wellingborough Road. The resulting Rushden Bates ward would have two members and have 2% more electors than the district average by 2009. We also propose transferring 235 electors to the south of Wellingborough Road from the Council's Rushden Pemberton ward to Rushden Hayden ward. As a consequence these wards would have 3% more and 1% more electors than the district average by 2009, respectively. We do not propose any changes to the Council's Rushden Bates or Rushden Sartoris wards as they provide good levels of electoral equality.

78 We propose a minor amendment to the Council's Higham Ferrers Chichele ward to improve electoral equality. We propose transferring 195 electors from Higham Ferrers Wharf ward in Oaks Drive and 77 electors in Chamberlain Way and Hachenburg Place to Higham Ferrers Chichele ward. Higham Ferrers Chichele would have 2% more electors than the district average by 2009 and Higham Ferrers Wharf would have 1% fewer electors.

79 We consider that these amendments secure the best available levels of electoral equality, while still representing community identity and providing strong boundaries. Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9–12) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Higham Ferrers Chichele, Higham Ferrers Wharf, Rushden Bates, Rushden Hayden, Rushden Pemberton, Rushen Sartoris and Rushden Spencer wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1, Map 3 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

80 Table 8 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2004 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2009.

Table 8: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Draft recommendations	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
Number of councillors	36	36	40	40
Number of wards	20	20	22	22
Average number of electors per councillor	1,686	1,830	1,518	1,647
Number of wards with a variance of more than 10% from the average	10	10	0	0
Number of wards with a variance of more than 20% from the average	2	2	0	0

81 As shown in Table 8, our draft recommendations for East Northamptonshire Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 10 to zero. By 2009 no ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

Draft recommendation:

East Northamptonshire Council should comprise 40 councillors serving 22 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

82 As part of an FER, the Committee can make recommendations for new electoral arrangements for parishes. Where there is no impact on the district council's electoral arrangements, the Committee will generally be content to put forward for consideration proposals from parish and town councils for changes to parish electoral arrangements in FERs. However, The Boundary Committee will usually wish to see a degree of consensus between the district council and the parish council concerned. Proposals should be supported by evidence, illustrating why changes to parish electoral arrangements are required. The Boundary Committee cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an FER.

83 Responsibility for reviewing and implementing changes to the electoral arrangements of existing parishes, outside of an electoral review conducted by The

Boundary Committee, lies with district councils.² If a district council wishes to make an Order amending the electoral arrangements of a parish that has been subject to an electoral arrangements Order made by either the Secretary of State or The Electoral Commission within the past five years, the consent of the Commission is required.

84 The parish of Higham Ferrers is currently served by 16 councillors, representing one ward. We propose changes to the electoral arrangements of the parish, in order to reflect our proposals for district wards in the area, and have allocated parish councillors on the basis of the size of electorate represented in each ward.

Draft recommendation:
Higham Ferrers Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Higham Ferrers Chichele (returning eight councillors) and Higham Ferrers Wharf (returning eight councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large maps at the back of the report.

85 The parish of Irthlingborough is currently served by 12 councillors. We propose changes to the electoral arrangements of the parish in order to reflect our proposals for district wards in the area, and have allocated parish councillors on the basis of the size of the electorate represented in each ward.

Draft recommendation:
Irthlingborough Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Irthlingborough John Pyel (returning six councillors) and Irthlingborough Waterloo (returning six councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large maps at the back of the report.

86 The parish of Raunds is currently served by served by 12 councillors, representing two wards. We propose changes to the electoral arrangements of the parish in order to reflect our proposals for district wards in the area, and have allocated parish councillors on the basis of the size of the electorate represented in each ward.

Draft recommendation:
Raunds Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Raunds Saxon (returning six councillors) and Raunds Windmill (returning six councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large maps at the back of the report.

87 The parish of Rushden is currently served by 20 councillors and divided into four parishes, Rushden North (served by five councillors), Rushden East (served by five councillors), Rushden South (served by five councillors) and Rushden West (served by five councillors). Rushden Town Council put forward comments about the

² Such reviews must be conducted in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

allocation of members for its parish wards. It stated that ‘Spencer, Hayden and Pemberton [should have] five members each’, while ‘Sartoris and Bates [should have] three members each’. We note the comments of Rushden Town Council, but given our need to move away from the Council’s proposals for the district ward boundaries we are unable to reflect the Town Council’s proposals. Therefore we are moving away and making changes to the electoral arrangements of the parish, in order to reflect our proposals for district wards in the area, and have allocated parish councillors on the basis of the size of the electorate represented in each ward. However, we would welcome further evidence from the Town Council at Stage Three concerning the parish’s electoral arrangements.

Draft recommendation:

Rushden Town Council should comprise 20 councillors, as at present, representing six wards: Rushden Bates (returning three councillors), Rushden Hayden (returning four councillors), Rushden Pemberton (returning five councillors), Rushden Sartoris (returning three councillors), Rushden Spencer (returning three councillors) and Rushden Spencer Park (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large maps at the back of the report.

88 The parish of Thrapston is currently served by served by 13 councillors and is unwarded. We propose changes to the electoral arrangements of the parish, in order to reflect our proposals for district wards in the area, and have allocated parish councillors on the basis of the size of electorate represented in each ward.

Draft recommendation:

Thrapston Town Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Thrapston Market (returning five councillors) and Thrapston Lakes (returning eight councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large maps at the back of the report.

5 What happens next?

89 There will now be a consultation period of 13 weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for East Northamptonshire contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 22 May 2006. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

90 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for East Northamptonshire and welcome comments from interested parties relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names and parish council electoral arrangements. In particular, we found our decisions regarding Higham Ferrers and Rushden areas called for difficult judgements between our statutory criteria. We would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

91 Express your views by writing directly to:

**Review Manager
East Northamptonshire Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

reviews@boundarycommittee.org.uk

Submissions can also be made online at
www.boundarycommittee.org.uk/our-work/ferfeedback.cfm.

92 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, the Committee now makes available for public inspection full copies of all representations it takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all Stage Three representations will be placed on deposit locally at the offices of East Northamptonshire Council, at the Committee's offices in Trevelyan House and on its website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

93 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations and consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, **whether or not** they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to The Electoral Commission, which cannot make the electoral change Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

6 Mapping

Draft recommendations for East Northamptonshire district

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for East Northamptonshire district.

Sheet 1, Map 1 illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for East Northamptonshire district, including constituent parishes.

Sheet 2, Map 2 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Thrapston town.

Sheet 3, Map 3 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Higham Ferrers, Irthlingborough and Rushden towns.

Sheet 4, Map 4 illustrates the proposed boundaries in illustrates the proposed in Higham Ferrers, Rushden and Raunds towns.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
The Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Consultation	An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Order (or electoral change Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
The Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process
Electoral equality	A measure of ensuring that every person's vote is of equal worth
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the district
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections
FER (or further electoral review)	A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last periodic electoral review conducted between 1996 and 2004
Multi-member ward	A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and will soon

	<p>be joined by the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is:</p> <p>‘an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation's benefit and by appropriate national decision and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; - access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; - wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; - established farming use is effectively maintained’
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single borough enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents
Parish council	A body elected by residents of the parish who are on the electoral register, which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries
Parish electoral arrangements	The total number of parish councillors; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by The Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the

	now-defunct Local Government Commission for England
Political management arrangements	The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision-making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories: a directly elected mayor and cabinet; a cabinet with a leader; or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the borough average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (available at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm), requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the code.

The Code of Practice applies to consultation documents published after 1 January 2001, which should reproduce the criteria, give explanations of any departures, and confirm that the criteria have otherwise been followed.

Table B1: The Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria

Criteria	Compliance/departure
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	We comply with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	We comply with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	We comply with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	We comply with this requirement.
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.	We comply with this requirement.
Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.	We comply with this requirement.
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.	We comply with this requirement.