

Post-Election Survey of Councillors and Electors 2011.

On 5 May 2011, electors in many local authorities in England went to the polls. In 8 local authorities, they were taking part in whole-council elections based on wards established by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) and in its latter days, the Boundary Committee for England. These local authorities were;

Bedford,
Central Bedfordshire,
Cheshire East,
Cheshire West and Chester,
Mansfield,
South Derbyshire,
Stoke on Trent, and
West Somerset.

The Commission was keen to discover the local impact and perception of the new electoral arrangements and so engaged 2020research to conduct post-election surveys of councillors and electors. The survey took the form of interviews conducted by telephone. Following testing of the survey questions during the preceding week the survey commenced on Monday 23 May and was completed on Tuesday 31 May.

Electors and councillors who participated in the survey were assured of confidentiality and that the identity of respondents to the survey would not be made available to the Commission. The engagement of a research company external to the Commission has ensured that confidentiality.

This report presents the results of the survey.

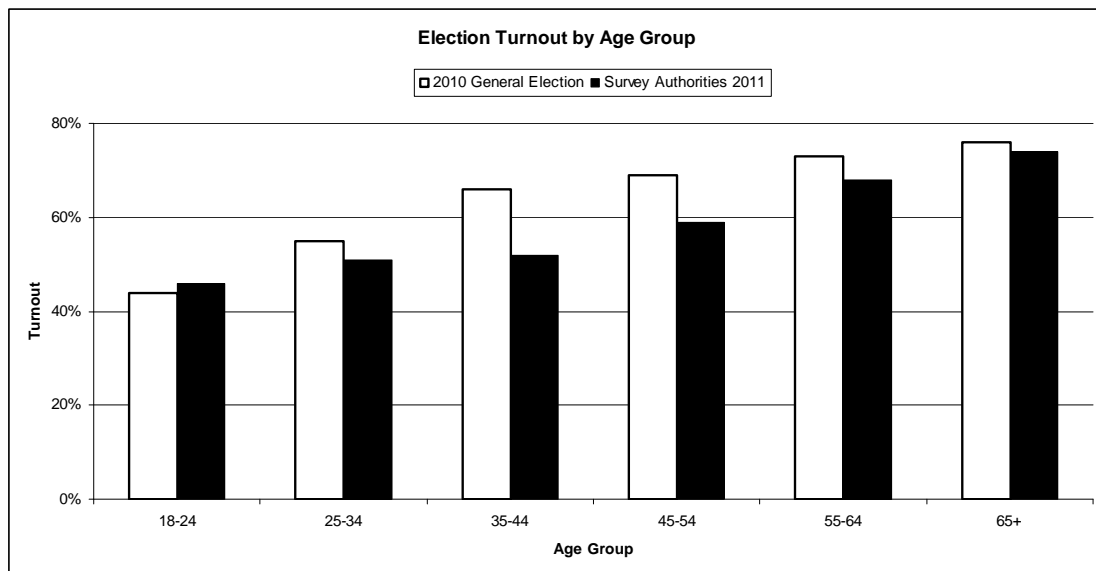
Views of Electors.

A random sample of at least 100 electors (i.e. those registered to vote) in each of the subject authorities was interviewed. In total, 807 electors took part in the survey. Age and gender profiles were similar for each of the survey areas except that in Central Bedfordshire, 39% of respondents were male compared with 47-50% in the other areas. 98% of those responding had lived in their area for more than 2 years, indicating that most respondents to the survey had substantial experience of a council elected under previous electoral arrangements. In order to complete the quota of 100 electors in each authority, a total of around 910 electors were contacted, with 11% declining to take part in the survey.

59% of those who responded to the survey said that they had voted at the elections two weeks prior to the survey, ranging from 48% in Stoke to 68% in Bedford saying that they had voted. In each of the survey areas, the percentage of survey respondents who said they had voted substantially exceeded the average ward turnout at the actual election and the turnout for the voting method referendum conducted on the same day. Survey experience

suggests that this disparity suggests a tendency of survey respondents to over-claim “doing the right thing” rather than implying that the sample method had resulted in an unusually active (electorally) mix of respondents. This tendency notwithstanding, the survey indicated confirmation of the evidence from elsewhere (e.g. 2010 general election see *IpsosMORI*), that electoral turnout is highest amongst older age groups.

Figure 1 Election Turnout by Age Group



Awareness of Changes to Ward Boundaries

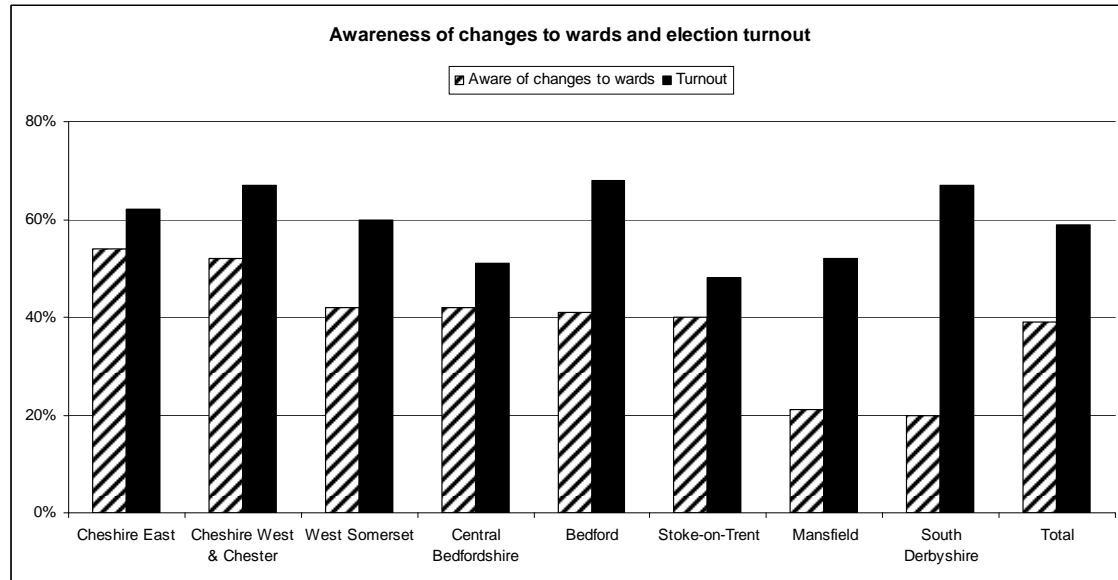
In seeking to ascertain the views of local people about the impact of changes to electoral arrangements, we first asked whether people were aware that there had been changes. Overall, 39% of respondents said that they knew that ward boundaries had changed. Awareness was greater amongst older electors, broadly reflecting the age distribution of turnout. Whilst 52% of those who were not aware that ward boundaries had changed said they had voted in May, 72% of those who did know that ward boundaries had changed said that they had voted.

The awareness of changes to wards varied from area to area, exceeding 50% in both Cheshire East and Cheshire West, whilst in Mansfield and South Derbyshire, only around 20% of respondents were aware that there had been ward changes. In the other authority areas, awareness was around the average. This pattern of awareness does not match that of turnout; this suggests that it is not propensity to vote which affects people’s awareness of change, but other factors such as the extent of dissemination of information or local media coverage which affects awareness.

Those who were aware of the changes to boundaries were asked if they thought that those changes would have an effect on the ability of their council to deal with the issues important to their area. 54% thought that the changes would not affect that ability, 30% didn’t know and only 16% (48 respondents)

thought that the changes would affect the ability of their council to tackle important issues. This is a small number on which to base an analysis of people's expectations of whether an effect on the ability of councils to tackle issues would be beneficial but, as shown below, it was only in Stoke-on-Trent that the overall impression was that, if there were any effect on council ability, it would be a positive one.

Figure 2 Awareness of Ward Changes and turnout by Authority



Although given opportunity to comment more specifically on the effect of changes to wards, few respondents did so. Five thought that smaller wards and fewer councillors (for their ward) would make it easier for councils to govern efficiently. One thought that councillors would have more time to deal with issues. Another respondent commented that there being more equal numbers of voters would make (their electoral arrangements) more fair. Two respondents commented that services had improved (although it would be difficult to attribute this to the new electoral arrangements which had only come into play a fortnight before the survey). Finally one respondent said that the new arrangements were “just better all round”.

All but one of those who thought that changes to wards would be for the better said that they had voted whilst 15 out of 18 who thought that changes would be for the worse said they had voted. Three quarters of those who thought that the changes would not have an effect of council ability claimed to have voted.

It would be an attractive conclusion to think that changes in electoral arrangements which are perceived to have a beneficial impact on a council's ability to act stimulate electoral turnout. However, the numbers of respondents in our survey are insufficient to make such an assertion with certainty.

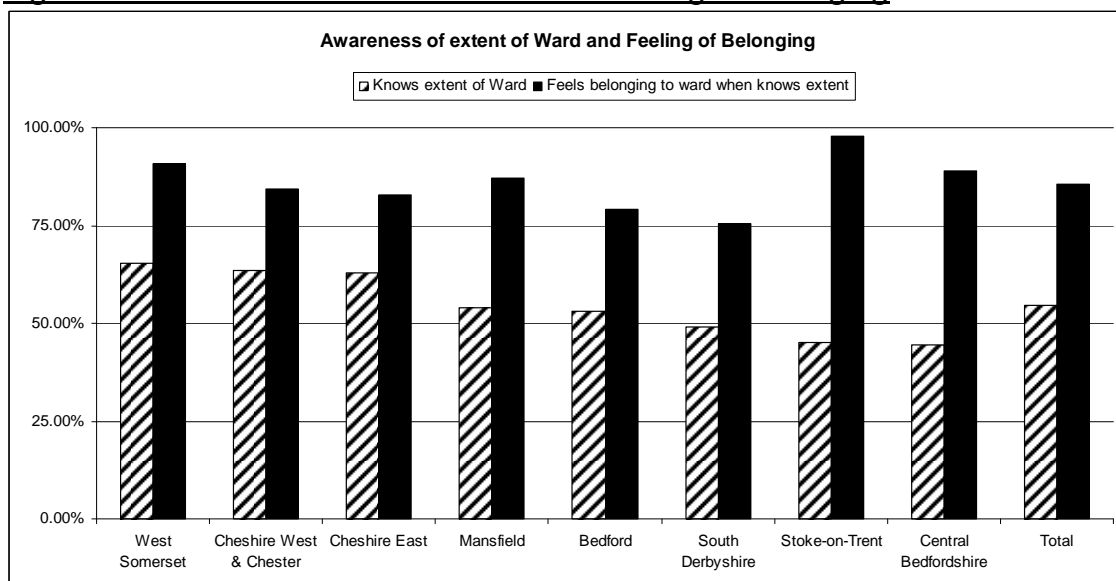
Figure 3 Expectations of impact of changes to ward boundaries
 (Number of respondents who were aware that there had been changes to ward boundaries).

	Effect of changes (respondents think that changes will affect council ability)			Changes will not affect council ability	Don't know if changes will affect council ability
	For the better	For the worse	Don't know		
Bedford	3	3	3	18	12
Central Bedfordshire	1	1	3	22	15
Cheshire East	1	4	1	29	20
Cheshire West & Chester	1	5	4	28	13
Mansfield	1	1	1	12	6
South Derbyshire	1	2		15	1
Stoke-on-Trent	5		1	21	13
West Somerset		2	4	22	13
	13	18	17	167	93

Identification with ward

55% of respondents to the survey said that they know, in broad terms, the extent of the area which their Ward covers. Meanwhile, of those that *do* know, 86% have a sense of belonging to that area. There was no clear indication that the urban, rural or mixed character of an area affects either the awareness of the extent of an elector's ward or their sense of belonging. In Stoke-on-Trent for example, only 45% of respondents said that they knew what area their ward covers, one of the lowest levels in our survey, but of those that did know, 98% said that they have a sense of belonging to that area. With no significant differences between the age or ethnic profiles of respondents in each authority, this again suggests that there are local factors in both awareness and sense of belonging.

Figure 4 Awareness of extent of Ward and feeling of belonging

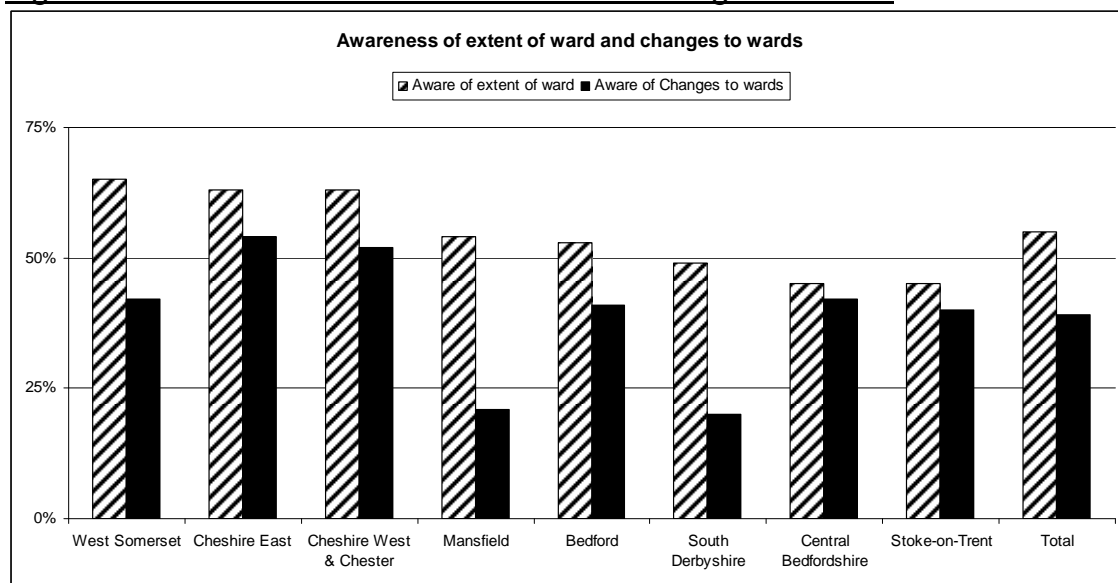


Similarly, there appears to be no clear correlation between the degree to which electors know the extent of their ward and their knowledge of ward changes resulting from electoral review.

Conclusions from survey of electors.

When the Commission reviews electoral arrangements, it does so, to the greatest of its ability, on the basis of factual evidence relating to electoral equality, the identity of communities and the convenience and effectiveness of local government. Furthermore, it endeavours to do so in a consistent manner. Electors' perceptions of the impact of a review vary, however, from area to area. This may reflect, in part, the fact that interest in electoral matters, as

Figure 5 Awareness of extent of ward and of changes to wards



reflected in local rates of turnout to vote at elections, also varies from area to area. However, it may be the case that electors' awareness of an electoral review and engagement with a review also depends on the level of controversy which is stirred by a review and by the effectiveness with which local councils and news media convey information about a review to electors.

Whilst the survey suggests that reviews do result in wards with which people can feel a sense of identity and belonging. It also suggests that most people don't have a sense that a review has a bearing on the effectiveness of their council or its ability to tackle the things that matter locally.

The views of councillors

In addition to seeking the views of electors, the post-election survey sought those of councillors elected under pre-review electoral arrangements and re-elected under the new arrangements. 50 councillors were interviewed by telephone, evenly distributed across the eight authorities included in the study. From the publication of election results on council websites it was possible to identify returning councillors. Their contact telephone numbers are published on

those websites. Interviewees were selected at random. Matching numbers of interviewees in each area meant that in Mansfield, 38% of returning councillors were interviewed whilst in the two Cheshire councils, 14% were interviewed. Only 1 councillor who was contacted declined to take part in the survey.

Eleven councillors interviewed were members of their council's executive group or cabinet. This represents 22% of the sample, whilst in total, 16% of the councils' collective membership are cabinet members.

Eleven councillors interviewed do not sit as members of a political party, four of these were from West Somerset.

Figure 6 Profile of Councillors' Survey Sample

	Total number of returning councillors	Councillors interviewed	Executive/ Cabinet Members	"Back – benchers"
Bedford	27	6	2	4
Central Bedfordshire	44	7	1	6
Cheshire East	51	7		7
Cheshire W & Chester	44	6		6
Mansfield	16	6	1	5
South Derbyshire	25	6	2	4
Stoke-on-Trent	20	6	3	3
West Somerset	15	6	2	4

For seven of the 50 councillors interviewed, there had been no change to the boundaries of the ward they represent, whilst 11 councillors were elected to represent a ward which was entirely different to that which they had previously represented.

Figure 7 Councillors' survey : Profile of interviewees' ward

	Bedford	Central Beds	Cheshire East	Cheshire West & Chester	Mansfield	South Derbys	Stoke-on-Trent	West Somerset	Total
Exactly the same area represented up to May 2011	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	3	7
Broadly the same area represented up to May 2011	2	0	0	3	2	6	3	3	19
Includes a small part of the area represented up to May 2011	1	5	3	0	2	0	2	0	13
Completely different from that represented up to May 2011	2	2	3	2	2	0	0	0	11

Whilst all those councillors from South Derbyshire who were interviewed said that their current ward was broadly similar to that which they had previously represented, they all said also that the ward they now represent is larger than

that which they had previously represented. In total however, of those who said that their current ward is different from that which they previously represented, 25 said that their new ward is smaller whilst 17 said that it is larger.

	Bedford	Central Bedfordshire	Cheshire East	Cheshire West & Chester	Mansfield	South Derbyshire	Stoke-on-Trent	West Somerset	Total
<i>Size of ward</i>									
smaller	3	4	6	3	3		5	1	25
larger	2	3		2	2	6		2	17
No difference	1		1	1	1		1	3	8
<i>Identifiability of community</i>									
more identifiable		2	5	1			3	1	12
less identifiable	3	3	1	2		4		1	14
No difference	3	2	1	3	6	2	3	4	24

Councillors feel, on the whole, that reducing the size of wards maintains or improves the identifiability of the community they represent. However in Bedford (2) and Cheshire East (1), a reduction in the size of ward produced, in the eyes of their councillor, a less identifiable community.

Figure 8 Change in the size of ward and the identifiability of community

	New ward is smaller	New ward is larger
A more identifiable community	12	
A less identifiable community	3	11
Just as identifiable as a community	10	6

Councillors were asked whether the new ward schemes had made it more or less difficult to choose a ward in which to stand for election. Although most said that the changes to boundaries had made no difference, twelve said that changes had made it harder to choose. The wards which those councillors now represent are equally likely to be larger wards as they are to be smaller wards and also equally likely to be more identifiable communities as they are to be less identifiable. For councillors who stand for election as members of a political party, the choice of ward in which to stand is not theirs alone; they must be selected by their local party organisation. Of the 39 party members interviewed, only four had been selected to stand in a ward which was not their first choice. For three of these councillors, they now represent a ward which is completely

or largely different from that which they had previously represented. This does not demonstrate, however, a reluctance of local politicians to embrace changes to ward boundaries: 16 councillors made their first choice, and were selected to stand in, wards which were wholly or largely different from that which they had previously represented.

Figure 9 Ability to choose wards in which to stand in areas of change

	Bedford	Central Bedfordshire	Cheshire East	Cheshire West & Chester	Mansfield	South Derbyshire	Stoke-on-Trent	West Somerset	Total
I found it easier to choose a ward in which to stand for election	0	1	3	2	0	0	2	0	8
I found it harder to choose a ward in which to stand for election	0	3	1	1	4	2	0	1	12
I found no difference in choosing a ward in which to stand for election	6	3	3	3	2	4	4	5	30

We asked about Councillors' expectations of the impact of ward changes on their ability to represent people in their ward and on their workload. The survey, being conducted only a fortnight after elections meant that councillors could only give their views based on expectations rather than substantial experience of working with the new electoral arrangements.

Figure 10 Councillors' expectations of future work by authority

	Bedford	Central Bedfordshire	Cheshire East	Cheshire West & Chester	Mansfield	South Derbyshire	Stoke-on-Trent	West Somerset	Total
<i>Ability to represent ward</i>									
Easier		3	4	1	3		2	1	14
harder	3	1	1	3	1	3	2	4	18
no difference	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	18
<i>Workload</i>									
more workload	3	3	1	4	4	4	4	3	26
less workload		1	2					1	4
No difference	3	3	4	2	2	2	2	2	20

Whilst around one third of respondents thought that boundary changes would make it harder to represent their ward, just over half thought that their workload would increase. However, of 26 councillors whose ward was broadly or exactly the same as the one they had previously represented 11 thought that it would

be both harder to represent their ward and that there would be an increased workload.

Only four of the councillors interviewed thought that their workload would decrease as a result of the changes to ward boundaries. Two of these were in Cheshire East, whilst Central Bedfordshire was the only other authority where those who thought their workload would increase as a result of the ward changes were fewer than half of those interviewed. Meanwhile West Somerset was the only council where more than half of its members thought that the changes to wards would make it harder for them to represent their ward.

It was possible however to look at some of the elements of changes to electoral arrangements to see whether they might impact on councillors' expectations regarding their future work.

Figure 11 Councillors' expectations of future work by change to ward size

	Ward is smaller	Ward is larger	Ward is the same size	Total
<i>Ability to represent ward</i>				
easier	13	1		14
harder	5	10	3	18
no difference	7	6	5	18
<i>Workload</i>				
more workload	10	14	2	26
less workload	4			4
No difference	11	3	6	20

Whilst a reduction in ward size led to an expectation that it will be easier to represent the ward, and leads to all expectations of reduced workload, only four people out of 25 who will serve smaller wards thought that their workload would decrease. Increasing ward size would lead to a clear expectation of more work and a tendency to expect that it will be harder to represent the ward.

Figure 12 Councillors' expectations of future work by change to perceived community identity

	Community is more identifiable	Community is less identifiable	Community is just as identifiable	Total
<i>Ability to represent ward</i>				
easier	9		5	14
harder	2	9	7	18
no difference	1	5	12	18
<i>Workload</i>				
more workload	5	11	10	26
less workload	3		1	4
No difference	4	3	13	20

Improving the extent to which wards reflect community identity is seen by councillors as a way to improve their ability to represent their ward and reduce, or at least stem an increase, in workload. This is perhaps more to be expected

than is the notion that reducing the size of a ward will lead to a greater workload.

Figure 13 Councillors' expectations of future work by change to ward type

	Change in ward type				Total
	Single-member to single-member	Multi-member to single-member	Multi-member to Multi-member	Single-member to Multi-member	
<i>Ability to represent ward</i>					
easier		9	5		14
harder	3	4	10	1	18
no difference	1	4	13		18
<i>Workload</i>					
more workload	3	9	13	1	26
less workload	2	2			4
No difference	1	6	13		20

The electoral reviews which preceded the survey resulted in some councillors who had previously stood in multi-member wards now finding themselves in a single-member ward, and vice versa. The survey does not, however, provide an easy indication of common expectations of councillors about the implications of such changes. This suggests that some submissions to the Commission from political groups and independent councillors will argue the merits of single-member wards whilst others will argue the reverse.

The survey appears to confirm however, that focus on the reflection of community identity is a valuable function of electoral review and perhaps encourages the notion that if the Commission addresses community identity, then effectiveness and convenience of local government is likely to be improved as a consequence.

Councillors were also given the opportunity to express in free form, their views about the changes to electoral arrangements. Their comments appear in Appendix 1 to this report. They are also summarised in figure 14 below.

The comments represent personal views of councillors and reflect not just the electoral review which had taken place, but also the political context in which the election was contested and local issues about selection for candidacy.

Whilst negative comments outnumbered positive ones, they do offer the Commission some useful indication of how it might in future communicate the purposes of the review and its conduct.

Figure 14 Summary of councillors' verbatim comments

	Bedford	Central Bedfordshire	Cheshire East	Cheshire West & Chester	Mansfield	South Derbyshire	Stoke-on-Trent	West Somerset	Total
Don't like boundary changes/preferred the old system	4	1	4	1	2	3	1	1	17
Boundary Commission didn't listen to my/our representation	1	1	3	0	1	3	0	1	10
All other positive comments	0	4	1	0	0	1	1	1	8
All other negative comments	2	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	7
Mixed success	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	2	6
Lack of publicity on polling stations and how to vote	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	1	5
Don't like single-member wards	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Don't like multi-member wards	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	3
It's ok/getting used to it	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Ward is now smaller and more manageable	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Now not enough councillors - population:councillor ratio	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2

Appendix 1 Post-election survey comments of councillors

	Do you have any Further Comments?
Bedford	I can't understand why there is no Kempston South - it has been split into single member wards which is silly.
Bedford	I couldn't understand the decision to change the boundaries as it means that there are great disparities between the new part and the old part.
Bedford	Well, I'd say that it's not all about the numbers - If you are in a rural area it can make things harder for the councillor because they clash in many areas.
Bedford	I really wasn't in favour of it - there are little pockets being shoved into wards on the other side of the road - it was inefficient.
Bedford	No
Bedford	The Boundary Commission have been extremely short-sighted and have failed the people I represent. They chose to ignore the voice of the people in this area.
Central Bedfordshire	I accepted them and they have made my life easier as the last ward was geographically huge and meant more travelling to get to meetings.
Central Bedfordshire	We broadly agreed with the changes although it did make life difficult for us geographically speaking. We had also reduced the council from 66 to 59 anyway, but it was a difficult election and the changes made life difficult for other people. We had to contest wards that we didn't live in and there were less seats available. We achieved it in a reasonably amicable fashion.
Central Bedfordshire	There's not a lot we can do about it as the decision won't be looked at for another 10 years; unfortunately the commission didn't listen to me. Also the area that was covered by the old ward was almost a self contained community, but the new bit feels like they belong to another ward.
Central Bedfordshire	No not really. I am just finding my feet as it is very different now.
Central Bedfordshire	I think they should have gone further as we still have too many councillors.
Central Bedfordshire	It didn't bother me - I won my seat so I must be doing something right.
Central Bedfordshire	These are the changes that were made in our area, and that we were all broadly in agreement with. I know what it's defined, and we know who is representing which parts of the town. I now have more responsibility.
Cheshire East	No, they seem to work.
Cheshire East	I think that the Boundary Commission guidelines tell them that they should keep historically established communities together and adhere to geographical features, but they have done exactly the opposite.
Cheshire East	I know that the aim was to make the wards more evenly distributed as far as numbers are concerned. By and large it has not been too bad, but I'm sure there will have been certain alterations (not in my ward) that have not been very sensible. I would need to talk to people to be sure.
Cheshire East	Some of them are barmy - it appears that natural geographical boundaries have been ignored which make parishes divided. The commission did not take enough notice of the input from the local councillors.
Cheshire East	When the people from the commission came they said they wanted strong robust boundaries, but they did not stick to that - one of mine zig-zags across a road! They did get some of the others right. Formerly there were some phenomenally large rural wards which have been reduced to multiple single-member wards which makes things much better. Before it was unitary we had

	the district councils for local issues.
Cheshire East	I think that the Boundary Commission missed out on tweaking the boundaries as there are some very illogical boundaries that could have been amended. They also need to look at the parish ward boundaries as there are discrepancies between them and the unitary authority.
Cheshire East	I thought the committee were totally insensitive to all representations made to them. They were a disgrace and totally ignored everything they were told by all councils and councillors. It won't make any difference to David Owen as he's obviously got what he wanted.
Cheshire West & Chester	I think the single member wards are an extremely good idea because people identify much better with a single councillor in their area, because it's smaller and more compact. It's also easier for the councillors to control and govern because it's a smaller area and they have total responsibility and they are in no way diluting what they are doing.
Cheshire West & Chester	It was very badly run at Cheshire West, the counting system etc. Considering we have such technological advances in counting systems it was very archaic. There were many very confused people in a very small space - it was poorly run. Generally speaking, as a councillor, a single member ward is simpler and would be much better.
Cheshire West & Chester	Nothing
Cheshire West & Chester	I don't think that the electoral commission did a good job; they made a few mistakes. They recognised the fine judgement of splitting Helsby from Frogsham; in Frogsham they will not have the benefit of a team of 3. The Boundary Commission underestimated the importance of teamwork which takes place, leaving a single member which leaves rise to difficulties. In terms of electoral outcomes and electoral fairness, multi member wards are more likely to favour parties which dominate at the time. Other political parties are under represented relative to the town. I don't think they got the boundaries. I am very unhappy, they should have had the opportunity to change the parish boundaries as well. The new parliamentary boundaries do not take account of rewarding and it's nonsense not to take account of these new wards. The people of Cheshire West and Chester have been through 3 elections.
Cheshire West & Chester	No comments
Cheshire West & Chester	I think it is regrettable that it is the people that are registered to vote and not the population; a lot of people just do not register and we represent a lot more people. There are people that came to help and they were staggered at the physical size of the ward - there are only 3 councillors when you really need 5; when I first became a councillor we used to have 6. I think we have now got to the limit, if you increase the area any larger you won't be able to do it. It was difficult to keep up with it.
Mansfield	The ward I was in was huge but now it's a lot smaller. Based on this I hope it will work well, I'll let you know in four years time; fingers crossed things will work out.
Mansfield	The fact that I thought it was wrong - we did a plan to make 5 wards which would have made it simpler and easier, but it was rejected.
Mansfield	Because it was an independent run council, the changing of the wards affected the results back to Labour control. For me personally I think it was the wrong

time. It affected the results in such a way that when we were elected in 2003, (the independent in 2002), it was classed as a fluke. When we were elected in 2003 we have been very successful in the financial situation. In 2003 financial figures were dangerously low. Now our reserves for losing this election were over 3.8 million, and the reason Labour got in is because they voted on national issues not local issues.

Mansfield	No comments
Mansfield	If you look at county boundaries it splits between south and east, there is a community which is split down the middle.
Mansfield	I believe you should have looked at the boundaries differently, because now in my area I have to travel to 2 parts which are not in walking distance; now it take me 2 days to cover my ward rather than 1 like before.
South Derbyshire	I think it's roughly 2000 votes per councillor which I think is about right; if anything the wards could be made bigger. There is very little case work, and it is not very often that I get presented with problems by the public, so in order to cut costs ward sizes could be increased.
South Derbyshire	I thought it was done quite fairly, and I was quite happy with the outcome. The Boundary Commission acted upon our views that were put forward.
South Derbyshire	The Boundary Commission didn't listen to my representation, and they have left me now with a ward in which I still represent too many people. Geographically it's not good, it's formed a 'U' shaped ward and it doesn't work. The Boundary Commission said if they had to come back in 5 years they would have failed, and so they will have to come back because they made a huge miscalculation; my average is already over the set amount.
South Derbyshire	I was sad that when this took place that the communities were not really given their input compared with the mathematics. It did not take into account the scarcity of my ward (many widespread villages), so within the rural areas it was all down to the maths making the numbers add up.
South Derbyshire	The outcome was the best out of some difficult decisions in accommodating area growth, however we're already over the population to councillor ratio. The population growth up to 2013 and beyond 2013 will probably increase the ratio again.
South Derbyshire	We don't believe that the Boundary Commission took notice of the comments we made as local representatives. We have been put together in an area with another ward in between. We have been given a ward that has no relevance to us and it is on the other side of the area, which should have gone into Hatton rather than us, just to satisfy the number criteria. It should really just stand alone and we didn't receive any feedback as to why. We should have liked the Boundary Commission to talk to us face to face and explain why our ward was a special case, we now have to attend all the other Parish Councils on top of everything else.
Stoke-on-Trent	My personal opinion is that I would have been happier with the old system (3 member wards), but my second suggestion would be that if there has to changes I would prefer 2 member wards across the region.
Stoke-on-Trent	There is a lot of confusion with the multi member wards - it's not necessarily the lack of communication from the council but maybe a lack of understanding.
Stoke-on-Trent	I think what we're most grieved about is they aren't all the same number member wards (uniform), it creates confusion. Under the old system everybody had 1 vote and the councillors were up every third year, but this time round it's every 4 years and it's confusing because electors have to choose 2 or more councillors (they're not all single member wards).

Stoke-on-Trent	As well as having the boundary changes we've gone down to mostly single member wards - we have 37 wards which are mostly single member. The instructions left from the Boundary Committee to the local council were not clear enough - we had people voting at the wrong polling stations.
Stoke-on-Trent	I think it has made it easier for the Labour Party in Stoke-on-Trent to get more seats.
Stoke-on-Trent	In a 2 member ward it wasn't made clear to people that they needed to vote for more than one person so people only voted for one person.
West Somerset	The whole thing appeared to be driven by bureaucrats in London who did not seem to appreciate the subtle variations between areas of large rural communities.
West Somerset	In this election there was a lot of confusion over the poing stations, many people went to the wrong polling station. This may be because the local council did not publicise the changes well enough. By and large the change was good, but they added on a little bit that really has no connection to the ward - it was a weakness.
West Somerset	The change of councils was ok - we have now got 14 new councillors. The leader has been sensible, in that he has also shared out his committee seats.
West Somerset	My own ward has not changed, because being a sparsely populated area. A lot of councillors have a lot of areas to cover/represent within small parishes - urban is easier than rural.
West Somerset	In our own locality by reducing the rural wards it is difficult for whoever that ward member is to operate well. It's got a number of people and large distances to travel. In my own town I think there are too many members, it's a third of our whole district that of Minehead. On Exmoor you have huge great areas of countryside with not many people, they would have gone 10 miles and covered 20 houses, where as here you would cover 500 houses.
West Somerset	I have a massive area for a single member to cover. I would have liked to retain the size of ward I had before. My workload is almost full time which is not what it's meant to be. There is virtually no mobile signal or internet in my area, communication is very difficult because the area is massive. Hopefully we can get the internet out there with the governments money.