

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for South Holland in Lincolnshire

Further electoral review

November 2005

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 South Holland 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. As a result of the poor levels of electoral inequality that existed in 2003, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to undertake an electoral review of South Holland on 2 June 2004.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing electoral arrangements seven of the 22 wards have variances of more than 10% from the average. This is expected to worsen by 2009, with nine wards having variances of more than 10% from the district average.

Every review is conducted in four stages:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	17 May 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	9 August 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	29 November 2005	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	7 March 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Submissions received

During Stage One we received 10 submissions. South Holland District Council and Councillor Walls both put forward proposals for the whole district. Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas and Long Sutton parish councils requested the retention of the existing electoral arrangements. Gosberton Parish Council requested that it be placed in a single ward. Lutton and Holbeach parish councils supported the Council's proposals.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

The Council is predicting electorate growth of 5% over the next five years. This will be spread across the district, but significant developments in Spalding and Holbeach towns. The Committee considers that these are the best estimates currently available.

Council size

We received two proposals on council size. The Council proposed a reduction of one member to 37, while Councillor Walls proposed a reduction of 14 members to 24. On

the balance of the evidence we were not persuaded to adopt such a large reduction at this time and are therefore adopting the Council's proposal for a 37 member council.

General analysis

We propose adopting a mixture of 18 one-, two- and three-member wards. In Spalding town we propose adopting the Council's proposals subject to a number of amendments to improve electoral equality. In the east of the district we propose a minor amendment to the Council's proposals to improve electoral equality in its Long Sutton and Sutton Bridge wards. In the rural west area, in the light of poor levels of electoral equality and limited community identity evidence, we propose moving away from the Council's proposals and creating a number of three-member wards. We propose creating three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas; Donington, Quadring & Gosberton; and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on our draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for South Holland 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 6 March 2006. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for South Holland and welcome comments from interested parties. In particular, we found our decisions regarding Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards to be a difficult judgement 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	Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas	3	Parishes of Crowland and Deeping St Nicholas
2	Donington, Quadring & Gosberton	3	Parishes of Donington, Gosberton and Quadring
3	Fleet	1	Parish of Fleet
4	Gedney	1	Parish of Gedney
5	Holbeach Hurn	1	The existing Hurn parish ward of Holbeach parish
6	Holbeach Town	3	The proposed Town parish ward of Holbeach parish
7	Long Sutton	3	Parishes of Long Sutton, Lutton and Tydd St Mary
8	Moulton, Weston & Cowbit	3	Parishes of Cowbit, Moulton and Weston
9	Pinchbeck & Surfleet	3	Parishes of Pinchbeck and Surfleet
10	Spalding Castle	1	Parts of the existing Spalding Castle and Spalding St John's wards
11	Spalding Monks House	2	Part of the existing Spalding Monks House and Spalding Wygate wards
12	Spalding St John's	2	Part of the existing Spalding Castle, Spalding Monks House, Spalding St John's and Spalding Wygate wards
13	Spalding St Mary's	2	Parts of the existing Spalding St Mary's, Spalding St Paul's and Spalding St John's wards
14	Spalding St Paul's	2	Parts of the existing Spalding St Mary's and Spalding St Paul's wards
15	Spalding Wygate	2	Part of the existing Spalding Castle and Spalding Wygate wards
16	Sutton Bridge	2	Parishes of Sutton Bridge and Little Sutton
17	The Saints	1	Parishes of Gedney Hill, Sutton St Edmund and Sutton St James
18	Whaplode & Holbeach St John's	2	Parish of Whaplode and the proposed St John's parish ward of Holbeach parish

Notes:

1. The whole of the borough is parished except for the town of Spalding.
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 South Holland 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	Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas	3	4,609	1,536	-13	4,751	1,584	-15
2	Donington, Quadring & Gosberton	3	5,625	1,875	6	5,818	1,939	4
3	Fleet	1	1,734	1,734	-2	1,778	1,778	-5
4	Gedney	1	1,830	1,830	3	1,862	1,862	0
5	Holbeach Hurn	1	1,754	1,754	-1	1,791	1,791	-4
6	Holbeach Town	3	5,677	1,892	7	6,154	2,051	10
7	Long Sutton	3	5,715	1,905	7	6,029	2,010	8
8	Moulton, Weston & Cowbit	3	5,233	1,744	-2	5,358	1,786	-4
9	Pinchbeck & Surfleet	3	5,321	1,774	0	5,379	1,793	-4
10	Spalding Castle	1	1,546	1,546	-13	1,798	1,798	-4
11	Spalding Monks House	2	3,677	1,839	4	3,873	1,937	4

Table 2: Draft recommendations for South Holland District

12	Spalding St John's	2	3,624	1,812	2	3,790	1,3790	1
13	Spalding St Mary's	2	3,678	1,839	4	3,876	1,938	4
14	Spalding St Paul's	2	3,679	1,840	4	3,836	1,918	3
15	Spalding Wygate	2	3,173	1,587	-10	3,915	1,958	5
16	Sutton Bridge	2	3,362	1,681	-5	3,627	1,814	-3
17	The Saints	1	1,877	1,877	6	1,977	1,977	6
18	Whaplode & Holbeach St John's	2	3,457	1,729	-2	3,521	1,761	-6
Totals		37	65,571	-	-	69,133	-	-
Averages		-	-	1,772	-	-	1,868	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by South Holland District 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 South Holland, 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 South Holland. South Holland'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 21 September 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 framework¹. 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 South Holland 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 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

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

any parish and town councils in the district. We do not in these reviews consider changes to the external boundaries of areas.

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 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	17 May 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	9 August 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	29 November 2005	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	7 March 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

15 Stage One began on 17 May 2005, when we wrote to South Holland District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Lincolnshire Police Authority, 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 South Holland District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 8 August 2005.

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 29 November 2005 and will end on 6 March 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 South Holland is a predominantly rural district, located in the south eastern corner of Lincolnshire. It mostly comprises Fenland and fertile farming land. It is parished, with the exception of its main urban settlement of Spalding.

22 Under the existing electoral arrangements seven of the 22 wards have variances of more than 10% from the average. This is expected to worsen by 2009, with nine wards having variances of more than 10% from the district average. Of particular concern are Long Sutton and Whaplode wards, where the variances are greater than was anticipated at the time of the PER. We note that Deeping St Nicholas ward was predicted to have a significant variance from the average, but that the variance of this ward is in fact now below that which was projected.

23 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.

24 South Holland comprises 22 parishes and one parish meeting, but the Spalding town area is unparished. Spalding comprises 30% of the district's total electorate.

25 The electorate of the district is 65,571 (December 2004). The Council presently has 38 members who are elected from 22 wards, seven of which are relatively urban in Spalding and Holbeach towns and the remainder predominantly rural. They comprise 10 single-member wards, eight two-member wards and four three-member wards.

26 At present each councillor represents an average of 1,726 electors, which the Council forecasts will increase to 1,726 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained.

27 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 borough average in percentage terms. The borough average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough, 65,571, by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, currently 38. Therefore the average number of electors per councillor is currently 1,819. In Whaplode ward, currently represented by one councillor, there are currently 2,081 electors, therefore the councillor represents 21% more electors than the current district average.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in South Holland

	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	Crowland	2	3,202	1,601	-7	3,307	1,654	-9
2	Deeping St Nicholas	1	1,407	1,407	-18	1,444	1,444	-21
3	Donington	2	3,225	1,613	-7	3,378	1,689	-7
4	Fleet	1	1,734	1,734	0	1,778	1,778	-2
5	Gedney	1	1,830	1,830	6	1,862	1,862	2
6	Gosberton Village	1	1,568	1,568	-9	1,598	1,598	-12
7	Holbeach Hurn	1	1,754	1,754	2	1,791	1,791	-2
8	Holbeach St John's	1	1,531	1,531	-11	1,565	1,565	-14
9	Holbeach Town	3	5,522	1,841	7	5,990	1,997	10
10	Long Sutton	3	5,821	1,940	12	6,135	2,045	12
11	Pinchbeck	3	4,230	1,410	-18	4,273	1,424	-22
12	Spalding Castle	1	1,794	1,794	4	2,034	2,034	12
13	Spalding Monks House	2	3,485	1,743	1	3,653	1,827	0
14	Spalding St John's	2	3,994	1,997	16	4,242	2,121	17

15	Spalding St Mary's	2	3,143	1,572	-9	3,281	1,641	-10
16	Spalding St Paul's	2	3,315	1,658	-4	3,462	1,731	-5
17	Spalding Wygate	2	3,646	1,823	6	4,416	2,208	21
18	Surfleet	1	1,923	1,923	11	1,948	1,948	7
19	Sutton Bridge	2	3,256	1,628	-6	3,521	1,761	-3
20	The Saints	1	1,877	1,877	9	1,977	1,977	9
21	Weston & Moulton	3	5,233	1,744	1	5,358	1,786	-2
22	Whaplode	1	2,081	2,081	21	2,120	2,120	17
Totals		38	65,571	-	-	69,133	-	-
Averages		-	-	1,726	-	-	1,819	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by South Holland District 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 Pinchbeck ward there are 18% too few electors, while Whaplode ward has 21% too many electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Submissions received

28 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 South Holland District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

29 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 10 representations during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from the Council and Councillor Walls, all 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.

South Holland District Council

30 The Council proposed a council of 37 members, one fewer than at present, serving 20 wards, two less than at present. It proposed to broadly retain the existing ward pattern across the district. However, it proposed amendments to the Spalding town wards and amendments to the rural Holbeach area and rural Pinchbeck, Gosberton and Surfleet areas.

District councillors

31 Councillor Walls proposed a reduction of 14 members to 24. He put forward strong arguments for this reduction, focusing on its impact on the political management structure and the role of technology in assisting members in their functions. As a consequence of his reduced ward size, Councillor Walls proposed a complete reconfiguration of the existing ward pattern. His proposals would result in a mixture of 16 single-, two- and three-member wards.

32 Councillor Worth requested that the Council's proposed Holbeach Hurn ward be renamed Holbeach Marsh ward.

Parish councils

33 We received submissions from seven parish councils. Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas and Long Sutton parish councils requested the retention of the existing electoral arrangements, but offered very limited community identity arguments. Gosberton Parish Council requested that it be placed in a single ward.

34 Lutton Parish Council expressed support for the Council's proposals and also queried the Council's electorate forecast for Long Sutton ward. Holbeach Parish Council put forward proposals for the parish. These were identical to those proposed by South Holland District Council.

35 Gedney Parish Council stated that it had 'no comments to make' about the review.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

36 Before finalising our recommendations on the electoral arrangements for South Holland 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 Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards required difficult judgements between our statutory criteria. This was due to the lack of evidence received from local interested parties during Stage One 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.

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

- 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.

38 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.

39 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.

40 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.

41 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

42 As part of the previous review of South Holland, the Borough Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 7% 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 5% from 65,571 in 2004 to 69,133 by 2009.

43 We noted the comments of Lutton Parish Council querying the electorate forecasts for Long Sutton parish and forwarded them to South Holland District Council. The Council confirmed that it had in fact underestimated its projections for this ward and stated that there would be an additional 12 electors by 2009.

44 We accept the Council's minor adjustment to its electorate projections. The Council put forward reasonable evidence for these projections and we are satisfied that it has provided the best estimates available. We acknowledge that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the Borough 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

45 South Holland District Council presently has 38 members. We received two alternative proposals for council size. The Council proposed a reduction of one to 37 members, while Councillor Walls proposed a reduction of 14 to 24.

46 We considered that the Council put forward relatively limited evidence for its proposed council size and therefore requested that it submit additional evidence. We asked it to provide additional evidence of the time that members, executive and non-executive spend on committees. In addition to this, we asked it to expand on how a council size of 37 members would affect the representational role of councillors.

47 The Council outlined its adoption of a Leader and Cabinet style executive in May 2001. In June 2005 it increased the size of the cabinet to the maximum of 10 members, arguing that 'experience had shown that the position of Cabinet member was quite demanding and time consuming, particularly as the duties were in addition to those of ward member and committee member'. The Council cited findings in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's report, *Evaluating Local Governance: New Constitutions & Ethics*. It stated 'Key findings were [...] that the role of an executive councillor can be very demanding and effectively a full time commitment'. It added, 'the role of non-executive councillor appears to also involve a considerable amount of time'. It acknowledged that there is a variation in the workload of members, but that if it is too time consuming and ineffective it is unlikely to attract many candidates.

48 In its additional information the Council provided evidence of the how councillors use their time, based on evidence provided to the 'Independent Remuneration Panel'. This found that members spent on average 12 hours per week on council work, but acknowledged that this varies greatly. A more recent study found that members spent on average 15 hours a week on Council business, although the Council acknowledged that the response rate to this research was less than 50%. The tasks that members undertake range from reading (agendas/reports), attending

meetings (both council meetings and meetings on outside bodies), serving the community (ward surgeries), communications (letters, phone calls) and civic and ceremonial duties.

49 The Council also outlined the frequency of council, cabinet and committee meetings and stated that Scrutiny Panels appoint Task Groups, which 'are fairly time consuming'. It also argued that the impact of the new Licensing Act is hard to assess at present. It stated that the 'Council currently appoints 101 representatives to 55 Outside Bodies', but added 'a review by the [Performance Monitoring] Panel is likely to result in a reduction of the number of appointments made'.

50 Finally, the Council discussed the methodology for choosing council size as part of this review. Its Cross Party Electoral Area Review Group considered the current operation of the council; the current demands on members time, and the time commitment necessary for members to effectively perform the role of councillor; known future events/changes that would have an impact; and likely public reaction to various options available. On the basis of these it 'considered that the Council currently operated well'. It considered a reduction, acknowledging that 'savings would of course be likely in terms of allowances and support costs and this could perhaps be met with public support'. However, in light of the time that members have to spend on council business (identified above) it stated 'this is a big commitment and if new people were to be attracted to local government by standing for councillor the required commitment did not need to be increased'. In addition to this, its decision to increase the cabinet meant a reduction in the number of non-executive members who perform the Overview and Scrutiny function.

51 It stated that 'a [significant] reduction in the number of members available to perform the overview and scrutiny functions was not considered to be acceptable[...]. However, in looking at the detailed proposals and in attempting to establish a structure that ensured equality of representation, a reduction of one was felt to be justified and workable without adversely affecting the operation of the Council or impacting on the work of councillors'.

52 Councillor Walls argued that members have a representative role; educational role, advocacy role and scrutiny role. He stated that 'the key to a individual councillor's success [...] rests on the "Span of Contact" a councillor can reasonably be expected to have with his constituents'. He outlined the detail of these roles and stressed their importance, adding that 'District Councillors need to be active in parish governance'. However, he stated that 'private transport, modern electronic communication technology have tended to diminish the frequency with which groups meet and subsequent demands on members time. [...] Equally electronic communication already has even more potential for providing constituents with information about the Council's decisions [...] The Council produces newsletters for general distribution or targeted on specific groups of residents'.

53 He also argued that the councillors role in 'securing redress of grievance for their constituents' would reduce when the Council fulfilled its 'commitment to invest in its "customer services" system'. He argued that a reduction in members would 'release resources to provide the level of support that members need to be effective'.

54 In addition to this Councillor Walls continued to stress the importance of the representative role and also the balance between workload and family pressures and the need to attract candidates. However, he argued against full-time, paid councillors,

arguing that they would 'erode further not enhance the credibility integrity or public confidence of local government'.

55 While Councillor Walls provided some good and innovative evidence for a reduction in council size, we did not consider he dealt sufficiently with how the Council would perform its executive and non-executive functions. We therefore requested additional information.

56 In his additional evidence, Councillor Walls questioned the rationale behind the Council's decision to increase the size of the executive, arguing that it had functioned 'with no observable manifestation of inefficiency or effectiveness' with either six or seven members in preceding years.

57 He argued that the Council has 'established internal procedures to reduce the number of planning applications referred to by the Development Control Committee for determination'. He added that further changes that are under consideration could further reduce the number of members required to serve on this committee.

58 He also questioned the attendance and necessity to retain the size of some of the existing Overview and Scrutiny Panels and Task Groups. He stated 'in my judgement there is no reason why a smaller Council could not handle the Regulatory and Scrutiny and Miscellaneous roles efficiently and effectively. In reality they do so already'. He also highlighted, as the Council did, the fact that the Performance Panel is likely to reduce the number of appointments of members to outside bodies.

59 He argued that 'the Attendance record would show that there is a disproportionate distribution of this work among members. Some members with work and career commitments find it difficult to attend day time meetings'. He stated that 'With 24 members and an executive of five or six members there would be 16 or 17 non executive members to carry out all the remaining functions', adding that 'the anticipated work load could be accommodated in the nominal 12 hours spent on Council duties which the Independent Remuneration Panel has recognised as the expected time commitment that can reasonably be expected of an elected member [...] a reduced number of Councillors would release resources to supplement proper funding for non executive member support'.

60 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note that the Council argued that the recent increase in cabinet size reflected the fact that it considers this to be a demanding and time-consuming role. This was contradicted by the evidence put forward by Councillor Walls. He strongly argued that the level of attendance at council meetings and on scrutiny panels suggests that the Council could function with fewer members.

61 In addition to this Councillor Walls contradicted the Council's assertion that the representative function of the members is time consuming. We note his comments about increased use of technology and concur that there is some argument that these may lead to a reduction in the time that members spend on certain tasks. In addition to this, Councillor Walls' cites the development of improved 'customer services' as a way of releasing time and funds to increase the time and efficiency of members. However, despite this, Councillor Walls's acknowledged that the representational role continues to be an important part of the job and that councillor workload should be balanced against their other commitments. In this respect, we are not convinced by Councillors Walls's argument that the increased use of

technology would enable members to continue carrying out this function despite a reduction in council size. We also note his comments about improved 'customer services', but consider there to be too little evidence of what this actually comprises and even less evidence of how and if this would actually free up member's time.

62 While there is clearly an argument to suggest that the Council's executive and scrutiny function could possibly be carried out by fewer members, this must be balanced against the Council's argument that the impact on workload of the new Licensing Act has yet to be assessed. In addition to this, we remain unconvinced that a reduced council would be able to carry out its representational role. Although Councillor Walls provides some potentially compelling evidence to suggest that aspects of members' representational role have become easier and will continue to become easier, we are not convinced that this warrants such a large reduction in council size at this time. It may be that in the future things will have changed sufficiently to warrant a re-examination of the current situation.

63 We consider that Councillor Walls provided some novel and thought provoking arguments and highlighted a number of issues that could be valid if the issue of council size is revisited at some time in the future. However, there is no evidence of public consultation or public support for such a radical departure from the existing council size. When balanced against the Council's proposal and evidence for a 37-member council we do not feel there is sufficient evidence to support this proposal. Given that Councillor Walls's proposals were based on a significantly different council size we are unable to give specific consideration to his proposed warding arrangements. We consider that a council of 37 members would enable the Council to continue its executive and scrutiny role and would allow members to perform their representational role.

64 Having rejected Councillor Walls's arguments we gave further consideration to the Council's proposals. During our considerations, and while exploring options to address a number of high variances in the west of the district, we noticed that while a council of 37 members allows the town and surrounding areas to be given the correct allocation of councillors, a council size of 36 could actually secure an even better allocation in the rural area.

65 We therefore examined a number of options based on a council of size of 36 (both schemes, based on 37 and 36 members, are discussed in detail below). However, we note that the adoption of a council size of 36 would force us to move significantly away from the Council's proposals in the west of the district. In addition to this, we were unable to find any alternative warding pattern that would avoid the need to divide a number of parishes between wards. Although the Council failed to supply strong evidence of communities, we note that where possible it has sought to avoid dividing parishes, arguing that on the whole they reflect communities. Therefore, on balance, we are not persuaded that a further reduction in council size, while dividing parishes between wards, would provide sensible electoral arrangements. We therefore propose adopting the Council's proposals for a council of 37-members.

Electoral equality

66 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.

67 The Council proposed a number of high variances in its proposals. Its Deeping St Nicholas, Pinchbeck and Crowland wards would have 23% fewer, 14% more and 12% fewer electors than the district average by 2009. It explored a number of options to improve these variances, but concluded that these did not reflect community identities. However, in light of the limited community identity evidence provided, and the high electoral variances, we re-examined the Council's alternative options and also considered a number of our own. The Council also put forward a number of high variances in the Spalding town area. Its Spalding Monk's House, Spalding St John's, Spalding St Paul's and Spalding Wygate wards would have 7% more, 8% fewer, 10% more and 8% fewer electors than the district average by 2009. In light of the very limited community identity evidence provided we have sought to improve these variances.

68 Under our proposals we would create a Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward with 15% fewer electors than the district average by 2009. While we acknowledge that this is a high variance, overall it enables us to secure an improvement in electoral equality compared with the Council's proposals in the west of the district. In addition, it enables us to adopt the Council's proposed council size of 37 members and avoid the unnecessary division of parishes between wards.

69 The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough, 65,571, by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 37 under our draft proposals. Therefore the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 1,772.

General analysis

70 The Council put forward a single scheme for the whole district. However, a number of its proposed wards have high electoral variances. It did explore a number of options to improve these variances, but argued that the alternatives did not reflect local communities. However, it provided very limited evidence for why its alternatives did not and more particularly why its favoured options did, best reflect the statutory criteria. We therefore revisited a number of the options that it rejected and examined a number of our own.

71 In seeking to address the electoral variances in the Council's proposed Crowland and Deeping St Nicholas wards, and in an alternative two-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward that we considered, we examined the option of creating a rural three-member ward combining Deeping St Nicholas, Crowland and Cowbit parishes (which would have a variance of 2% by 2009). We considered that this ward covered a number of relatively well-linked and similar rural villages. However, we noted that this proposal would have a knock-on effect on the Weston, Moulton, Whaplode and Holbeach parish areas, which as a result would be significantly over-represented. If Cowbit were removed from this area, the area would still have five councillors, rather than its correct allocation of four. This effectively means that, while the Council had not got the allocation of councillors in the urban and rural areas wrong, a better allocation could be achieved by reducing the council size further to 36 members.

72 As a result we considered that it might be possible to utilise a council of 36 members, reducing the number of councillors for this area by one.

73 We therefore explored a number of options for this area based on an allocation of four councillors (and a reduction in overall council size to 36). We noted that it was not possible to secure good electoral equality without dividing a number of parishes between wards, albeit using existing parish wards.

74 We note that a 36-member option secures good levels of electoral equality. However, we were concerned that it forced us to move radically away from the Council's proposals and also required a further reduction in council size. In addition, to this, we have some concerns about the unnecessary division of parishes between district wards. Therefore, on balance, although we consider that this alternative provides good electoral arrangements, we are not persuaded to adopt it. A discussion of our electoral arrangements for this area can be found on pages 30–33.

75 In the remainder of the district, we propose adopting the Council's arrangements, subject to a number of minor amendments to improve electoral equality.

Warding arrangements

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

- a Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Gosberton Village, Pinchbeck, Surfleet, Weston & Moulton and Whaplode wards (pages 30–33)
- b Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach St John's, Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge, The Saints wards (pages 33–35)
- c Spalding Castle, Spalding Monks House, Spalding St John's, Spalding St Mary's, Spalding St Paul's and Spalding Wygate wards (pages 35–37)

77 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2 (pages 9–11), and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Gosberton Village, Pinchbeck, Surfleet, Weston & Moulton and Whaplode wards

78 Under the existing arrangements Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Gosberton Village, Pinchbeck, Surfleet, Weston & Moulton and Whaplode 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
Crowland	Crowland parish	2
Deeping St Nicholas	Deeping St Nicholas parish	1
Donington	Parishes of Donington and Quadring	2
Gosberton Village	Village parish ward of Gosberton parish	1
Pinchbeck	Pinchbeck parish	3
Surfleet	Surfleet parish and Riseigate parish ward of Gosberton parish	1
Weston & Moulton	Cowbit, Moulton and Weston parishes	3
Whaplode	Saracens Head, St Catherines and Village parish wards of Whaplode parish	1

79 At Stage One, in the west of the district the Council put forward proposals for a two-member Crowland ward comprising Crowland parish (which would have 12% fewer electors than the district average by 2009). It acknowledged that this ward would contain too few electors. It also acknowledged that its proposed single-member Deeping St Nicholas ward (which would have 23% fewer electors than the district average by 2009) would contain too few electors. Its Deeping St Nicholas ward would comprise Deeping St Nicholas parish. It stated ‘Deeping St Nicholas is a large, sparsely populated ward [...] which is subtly different in landscape and settlement pattern from much of the rest of the district’. It also cited its high degree of deprivation under the ‘Overall Index of Multiple Deprivation’. Its Pinchbeck ward would have identical boundaries to the existing ward, but would be represented by two councillors rather than three. With this revision it would have 14% more electors than the district average. The Council stated that ‘the eastern part of the ward is very urbanised, which means that the higher elector:ratio is acceptable’.

80 The Council also proposed the retention of the existing two-member Donington ward, comprising Donington and Quadring parishes, but renaming it Donington & Quadring ward. It argued that the electoral variance is less than 10% from the average, adding that ‘the two parishes have some shared community identity and there are no obvious changes’. It proposed a two-member Gosberton & Surfleet ward comprising Gosberton and Surfleet parishes. This would have 5% fewer electors than the district average. It argued that this ward would secure good electoral equality and

'include the whole of Gosberton parish within a single electoral ward and therefore strengthen the community identity of Gosberton'.

81 The Council proposed the retention of the existing Weston & Moulton ward, comprising Cowbit, Moulton and Weston parishes. This would have 4% fewer electors than the average. The Council stated that 'no alternative options have been considered since the variation falls within the Commission's [sic] statistical criteria'. It proposed calling this ward Moulton, Weston & Cowbit. It proposed the creation of a Whaplode & Holbeach St John's ward, comprising Whaplode parish and Holbeach St John's parish ward of Holbeach parish. It also proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Holbeach St Johns and Holbeach Town parish wards of Holbeach parish to transfer 155 electors to Holbeach Town parish ward. It stated that this 'would have the advantage of bringing the whole of Whaplode parish within a single electoral ward and would therefore strengthen the community identity of Whaplode', adding that 'it is considered that there are strong community links between the communities to warrant bringing them together into one ward in terms of church, school and shopping'.

82 The Council did consider an option to improve the electoral equality of these wards. It explored an option of combining Crowland and Deeping St Nicholas wards into a three-member ward. The resulting ward would have 15% fewer electors than the district average. However, it rejected this, arguing that 'this option is not attractive in terms of community identity [...] or statistically', adding that it 'would force an artificial marriage between two wards which do not share any community identity'.

83 It also explored another option to improve the electoral equality of its proposed Deeping St Nicholas and Pinchbeck wards by combining them into a three-member ward. The resulting ward would have 2% more electors than the district average. The Council stated that 'whilst this option would appear to be attractive from a statistical point of view, it is totally unattractive in terms of representation and geographic issues', adding that 'the two areas do not share any community identity'. It added that this would be a large rural ward, stating that 'almost 17% of the area of the entire district [would be] represented by 8% of the members on the Council'.

84 Crowland Parish Council argued against a reduction in council size contending that this would make it harder to represent a rural district. Deeping St Nicholas Parish Council expressed support for the existing electoral arrangements, but offered no evidence for why they should be retained. Gosberton Parish Council stated that it has two parish wards that are currently in separate wards, and 'it would be easier for the electorate to understand if we just had one district councillor for Gosberton parish'.

85 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note the Council's proposed wards and note that its Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas and Pinchbeck wards would all have electoral variances of over 10% by 2009 (12% fewer, 23% fewer and 14% more electors than the district average, respectively). We do not consider that the Council put forward any compelling evidence for why these high variances should be retained. It mentioned communities, but failed to elaborate on what the specific links or differences between them are. We therefore decided to explore a number of options, including those that the Council rejected in its own submission.

86 As stated above, our chief concerns were the variances of the Council's Deeping St Nicholas, Crowland, Pinchbeck and Donington & Quadring wards. We considered

combining Deeping St Nicholas and Pinchbeck wards to create a three-member Deeping St Nicholas & Pinchbeck ward which would have 2% more electors than the average. However, this would leave Crowland ward with 12% fewer electors than the district average. In addition to this, we note that Deeping St Nicholas has marginally better road links to Crowland ward than to Pinchbeck ward.

87 We therefore decided to revisit the Council's proposal to combine Crowland and Deeping St Nicholas wards to create a three-member ward which would have 15% fewer electors than the district average. While this would leave Pinchbeck ward with 14% more electors than the average, we noted that this problem could be addressed by combining Pinchbeck ward with Surfleet parish from the Council's proposed Gosberton & Surfleet ward to create a three-member Pinchbeck & Surfleet ward (which would have 7% fewer electors than the district average by 2009). In addition, it would then be possible to improve the electoral equality of the Council's proposed Donington & Quadring ward by combining it with Gosberton parish to create a three-member Donington, Quadring & Gosberton ward (with 4% more electors than the district average by 2009).

88 We acknowledge that these proposals would leave the new Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward with reasonably poor electoral equality. We therefore considered transferring part of Spalding town to this ward or creating parish wards, but did not consider that transferring an area of the district's main urban centre to a rural ward would reflect local communities. We therefore rejected this option.

89 We also considered addressing the high electoral variance of a Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward by creating a rural three-member ward combining Deeping St Nicholas, Crowland and Cowbit parishes (which would have 2% more electors than the district average by 2009). This ward would cover a number of relatively well-linked and similar rural villages. However, we note that this has a knock-on effect to the Weston, Moulton, Whaplode and Holbeach parish areas, which as a result would have too many councillors. Without Cowbit parish, this area would only be entitled to four members, rather than the five that it would have under a 37-member council. Effectively, while the Council did not get the allocation of councillors between the urban and rural areas wrong, a better allocation could be achieved by reducing the council size further to 36 members.

90 We therefore considered a number of options based on a council size of 36 members, allocating the Weston, Moulton, Whaplode and Holbeach area four members. We considered a ward combining Weston parish, Seas End and Village parish wards of Moulton parish and Saracens Head parish ward of Whaplode parish. This would be a two member ward and have 3% more electors than the average. Although this ward divides parishes between wards, we note that Moulton Seas End and Moulton villages are linked by the B1357 and that Moulton Seas End has good road links to Saracen's Head. In addition, we considered the creation of a two-member ward combining Chapel parish ward of Moulton parish, Drove, St Catherine's and Village parish wards of Whaplode parish and St John's parish ward of Holbeach parish. Although the parish wards in this ward would have road links, these are not as good as for our proposed Weston, North Moulton & Saracen's Head ward. On the other hand, the resulting ward would have good electoral equality, with 3% more electors than the district average.

91 However, as discussed in the 'General Analysis' section above (page 28), we concluded that the knock on effects in the Weston, Moulton, Whaplode and Holbeach

parish areas would be too great. We did not consider that the improvements in electoral equality would be sufficient justification for a proposal that would further reduce the council size beyond that proposed by the Council and would additionally divide parishes between wards.

92 On balance, we propose adopting a three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward. We also propose adopting three-member Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards. We propose adopting the Council's Moulton, Weston & Cowbit and Whaplode & Holbeach St John's wards without amendment.

93 We acknowledge that our proposed Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward would have poor electoral equality, but we do not consider it possible to address this without reducing the council size further to 36 members or without the division of parishes between wards. In addition, Deeping St Nicholas is located between Spalding and the edge of the district and this limits the options. However, given the lack of compelling community identity evidence to justify the high variances under the Council's proposals, we have had to consider alternative options to improve these poor levels of electoral equality. Our proposals for this area secure an improvement in electoral equality over those put forward by the Council.

94 We also acknowledge that there may be some opposition to the creation of rural three-member wards; however, we do not consider that the Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards cover particularly large rural areas, certainly not significantly larger than other wards in the district that will be covered by one councillor, and we note that they have reasonable links.

95 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9–11) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Quadring & Gosberton, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach Town, Moulton, Weston & Cowbit and Whaplode & Holbeach St John's wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1, Map 3, Map 4, Map 5 and Map 6 accompanying this report.

Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach St John's, Holbeach Town, Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge and The Saints wards

96 Under the existing arrangements Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach St John's, Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge and The Saints 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
Fleet	Fleet parish	1
Gedney	Gedney parish	1
Holbeach Hurn	Hurn parish ward of Holbeach parish	1
Holbeach St John's	St John's parish ward of Holbeach parish and Drove parish ward of Whaplode parish	1
Holbeach Town	Town ward of Holbeach parish	1
Long Sutton	Little Sutton, Long Sutton, Lutton and Tydd St Mary parishes	3
Sutton Bridge	Sutton Bridge parish	2
The Saints	Gedney Hill, Sutton St James and Sutton St Edmund parishes	1

97 In the east of the district the Council proposed retaining the existing single-member Fleet and Gedney wards. These would have 5% fewer and 4% fewer electors than the district average by 2009, respectively. It also proposed retaining Holbeach Hurn, which would have an electoral variance equal to the district average. It did not put forward any community identity evidence, arguing that these wards already secure good electoral equality. It also proposed retaining the existing Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge and The Saints wards. These would have 9% more, 6% fewer and 6% more electors than the district average by 2009. It offered no evidence for this beyond stating that the variances 'fall within the Commission's statistical criteria'. The Council did consider transferring Little Sutton parish to Sutton Bridge ward, which would leave Long Sutton ward with 8% more electors and Sutton Bridge with 3% fewer electors than the district average by 2009. However, it stated that 'statistically, this option would be more attractive but Little Sutton has no affinity with Sutton Bridge'. It therefore rejected this option.

98 As stated earlier, it also proposed a modification to the boundary between Holbeach St John's and Holbeach Town parish wards. This would result in a modified three-member Holbeach Town ward which would have 10% more electors than the district average. It stated that 'the boundaries with Holbeach St John's [parish] ward take [in]to account community identities and the wishes of Holbeach Parish Council', adding this 'would provide a more logical and convenient ward boundary. There is no other acceptable option which addresses this modest statistical imbalance'.

99 Long Sutton Parish Council requested the retention of the existing electoral arrangements. Lutton Parish Council expressed support for the Council's proposals. Holbeach Parish Council submitted proposals for its parish arrangements that were identical to the Council's proposed district warding arrangements. Councillor Worth requested that Holbeach Hurn ward be renamed Holbeach Marsh ward, arguing that 'Hurn' only represents one of the villages in the area and that 'Marsh' would be more representative.

100 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note that the majority of the Council's proposed wards in this area secure good levels of electoral equality.

101 However, we note that its Holbeach Town ward has 10% more electors than the average. We have examined this to see if there is any way of addressing this high variance. However, we have concluded that we are unable to remove any electors without breaching the strong boundaries that the Council has used and mixing urban electors with those in the surrounding rural area. Given that this is already a three-member ward there is no way of combining it with surrounding rural areas. We have also considered Councillor Worth's request to rename Holbeach Hurn ward, but he has provided no evidence that this proposal would better reflect the proposed ward. We therefore propose adopting the Council's proposed ward without amendment.

102 We also have some concerns about the relatively high opposing electoral variances in the Council's Long Sutton and Sutton Bridge wards. We note that the Council considered transferring Little Sutton parish to Sutton Bridge to improve the electoral equality of its proposed ward. While we note that it asserted that these areas do not have 'affinity', it provided no evidence for this. Therefore, in light of the improvements in electoral equality that this secures, we propose adopting this amendment as part of our draft recommendations.

103 In the remainder of the area, although the Council only provided very limited community identity evidence, we propose adopting its proposed Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn and The Saints wards. We note that these wards avoid the warding of parishes and also secure good levels of electoral equality. Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9–11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach St John's, Holbeach Town, Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge and The Saints wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1, Map 3, Map 4, Map 5 and Map 6 accompanying this report.

Spalding Castle, Spalding Monks House, Spalding St John's, Spalding St Mary's, Spalding St Paul's and Spalding Wygate wards

104 All of these wards are unparished. 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 were to remain in place.

105 In the Spalding town area the Council put forward a revised configuration of the existing wards. Its Spalding St Paul's, Spalding St Mary's, Spalding St John's, Spalding Monks House and Spalding Wygate wards would have 7% more, 8% fewer, 3% fewer, 10% more and 8% more electors than the district average by 2009, respectively. Its Spalding Castle ward would have an electoral variance equal to the district average by 2009.

106 The Council offered limited community identity evidence. It stated that 'Several options have been considered but the preferred option is the retention of six wards. The internal boundaries of these wards largely follow physical features, e.g. the River Welland, railway lines and main roads. As such features create natural community

boundaries it is considered important to retain them wherever possible. The proposals are to retain the existing ward names which have an identity with the areas'.

107 We have given careful consideration to the Council's proposals and note that it opted to retain a number of high variances. Although the Council has produced wards with variances of less than 10%, any variance either side of the district average still requires justification. Of particular concern were the opposing electoral variances of its proposed Spalding St Paul's (with 10% more electors than the district average by 2009) and Spalding St Mary's wards (with 3% fewer electors than the district average by 2009). In addition, all except its Spalding Castle ward retained electoral variances of 7% or more from the average by 2009.

108 We do not consider that the Council has provided sufficient evidence to justify these levels of electoral inequality. We note that it argues that it has sought to utilise significant boundaries for its wards. However, in a number of places it moves away from these boundaries, so while we concur that strong boundaries can be useful, the Council has not persuaded us that they cannot be breached in certain places. For example, at one point the Council's Spalding Castle ward boundary runs along the railway line in the north, but moves away from this in the south. We have therefore explored a number of options aimed at improving electoral equality between wards, while also trying to utilise reasonable boundaries.

109 As stated above, we were particularly concerned by the opposing variances between the Council's proposed Spalding St Paul's and Spalding St Mary's wards. We note that for the most part the Council has sought to separate these wards from the remainder of the town by the River Welland, except for a small area to the south and west of London Road and the railway line. We would concur that this is a strong boundary. However, we see less justification for its boundary between these two wards, particularly given the levels of electoral equality that result. We also note that in utilising these boundaries it has isolated the 65 electors on Birch Grove from the remainder in Spalding St Paul's ward. We therefore propose transferring these electors to Spalding St Mary's ward. In addition, we propose transferring 192 electors from Grange Drive, Beechfield Gardens and Beechfield to Spalding St Mary's ward. While we acknowledge that this boundary is not as strong as the Council's, it secures an improvement in electoral equality. Under our proposals Spalding St Paul's ward would have 3% more electors than the average by 2009 and Spalding St Mary's ward would have 4% more.

110 We also propose a number of amendments to address the electoral variances in the remainder of Spalding. We propose transferring 514 electors to the south of Pennygate and east of the rear of Carrington Road from the Council's Spalding Monk's House ward to its Spalding St John's ward. We also propose moving the boundary between Spalding Castle and Spalding Wygate wards to the railway line. We consider that this provides a strong boundary and reflects communities as it provides the electors in Jubilee Close and Britannia Gardens to the remainder of their ward. As a result we also propose transferring 233 electors from Spalding Castle to Spalding Wygate and 44 electors to Spalding St John's. To compensate for the removal of electors from Spalding Castle ward we propose transferring 199 electors to the east of the Crescent and Vine Street from the Council's Spalding St John's ward to its Spalding Castle ward. Finally, we propose transferring 379 electors to the rear of the north of Wygate and Betjeman Close from its Spalding Wygate ward to Spalding Monks House ward.

111 Where possible, we have sought to utilise strong boundaries. However, given the lack of community identity evidence we have decided to move away from the Council’s proposals. Our proposed wards would secure significantly improved electoral equality. Spalding Castle, Spalding St Paul’s, Spalding St Mary’s, Spalding St John’s, Spalding Monks House and Spalding Wygate wards would have 4% fewer, 4% more, 1% more, 4% more, 3% more and 5% more electors than the district average by 2009, respectively.

112 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9–11) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Spalding Castle, Spalding St Paul’s, Spalding St Mary’s, Spalding St John’s, Spalding Monks House and Spalding Wygate wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

113 Table 7 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 7: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Draft recommendations	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
Number of councillors	38	38	37	37
Number of wards	22	22	18	18
Average number of electors per councillor	1,726	1,819	1,772	1,868
Number of wards with a variance of more than 10% from the average	7	9	2	1
Number of wards with a variance of more than 20% from the average	1	3	0	0

114 As shown in Table 7, our draft recommendations for South Holland District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from seven to two. By 2009 only one ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

Draft recommendation
 South Holland District Council should comprise 37 councillors serving 18 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

115 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.

116 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 borough 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.

117 During Stage One we received proposals for revised parish council electoral arrangements from Holbeach Parish Council.

118 The parish of Holbeach is currently divided into three parish wards, Hurn, St John's and Town. In agreement with the District Council, Holbeach Parish Council proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between St John's and Town parish wards. This is designed to better reflect communities and secure improved warding arrangements. These minor amendments do not affect the number of councillors allocated to each parish ward, and Hurn parish ward would continue to be served by five members, St John's by three and Town ward by 10.

119 We propose endorsing the Council's proposals for ward and parish ward boundaries in this area as part of our draft recommendations.

Draft recommendation:

Holbeach Parish Council should comprise 18 parish councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Hurn (returning five councillors), St John's (returning three councillors), Town (returning 10 councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect those on sheets, 3, 4, 5 and 6 in the back of this report.

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

5 What happens next?

120 There will now be a consultation period of 14 weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for South Holland contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 6 March 2006. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

121 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for South Holland 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 Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards to be a difficult judgement between our statutory criteria. In addition to this, the lack of any community identity evidence caused us to move away from the Council's proposals in Spalding. 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.

122 Express your views by writing directly to:

**Review Manager
South Holland 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

123 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 South Holland District 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.

124 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 South Holland district:

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for South Holland district.

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

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

Sheet 3, Map 3 illustrates the proposed Holbeach parish.

Sheet 4, Map 4 illustrates the proposed Holbeach parish.

Sheet 5, Map 5 illustrates the proposed Holbeach parish.

Sheet 6, Map 6 illustrates the proposed Holbeach parish.

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 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 <http://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.