

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Solihull

October 2002

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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. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to The Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 no. 3692). The Order also transferred to The Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. 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.

SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of the electoral arrangements for Solihull on 4 December 2001. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us to complete the work of the LGCE.

- **This report summarises the submissions we received during the first stage of the review, and makes draft recommendations for change.**

We found that the current arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Solihull:

- **in 10 of the 17 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the borough and five wards vary by more than 20% from the average;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 11 wards and by more than 20% in five wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 96-97) are that:

- **Solihull Borough Council should have 51 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 17 wards, as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in no change in the total amount of wards, and only two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each borough councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- **In all of the proposed wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in no ward expected to vary by more than 7% from the average for the borough in 2006.**

Recommendations are also made for changes to parish and town council electoral arrangements which provide for:

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Bickenhill, Fordbridge, Hockley Heath and Kingshurst;**
- **a boundary amendment between Balsall East and Balsall West parish wards.**

This report sets out our draft recommendations on which comments are invited.

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 22 October 2002. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission which will be responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 16 December 2002:

**Team Leader
Solihull Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Large map reference
1	Bickenhill	3	The parishes of Balsall, Bickenhill and Hampton in Arden; the Hall parish ward of Chelmsley Wood parish	2, 3, 4 & 5
2	Castle Bromwich	3	<i>Unchanged</i> ; the parish of Castle Bromwich	1
3	Chelmsley Wood	3	Part of Chelmsley Wood parish; the proposed Fordbridge East parish ward of Fordbridge parish	1
4	Dorridge & Hockley Heath	3	Part of Knowle ward; part of Packwood ward; the proposed Hockley Heath Village parish ward of Hockley Heath parish	4
5	Elmdon	3	Part of Elmdon ward; part of Silhill ward	2
6	Knowle	3	Part of Knowle ward; part of Meriden ward; the proposed Balsall West parish ward of Balsall parish	2, 4 & 5
7	Lyndon	3	Part of Elmdon ward; part of Lyndon ward; part of Olton ward	2
8	Meriden & Berkswell	3	Part of Meriden ward	3 & 5
9	Olton	3	Part of Olton ward; part of Lyndon ward; part of Shirley East ward	2
10	Packwood	3	Part of Packwood ward; part of Shirley South ward	4
11	River Cole	3	The proposed Fordbridge West parish ward of Fordbridge parish; the proposed Kingshurst South parish ward of Kingshurst parish	1
12	St Alphege	3	Part of St Alphege ward; part of Shirley South ward; part of Silhill ward	2 & 4
13	Shirley East	3	Part of Shirley East ward; part of St Alphege ward	2 & 4
14	Shirley South	3	Part of Shirley South ward; part of Shirley East ward; part of St Alphege ward	4
15	Shirley West	3	<i>Unchanged</i> ; Shirley West ward	2 & 4
16	Silhill	3	Part of St Alphege ward; part of Silhill ward	2
17	Smith's Wood	3	Smith's Wood ward; the proposed Kingshurst North parish ward of Kingshurst parish	1

Notes: 1 The western urban area is the only unparished part of the borough.

2 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2 and the large maps.

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Solihull

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Bickenhill	3	9,100	3,033	0	9,342	3,114	2
2	Castle Bromwich	3	9,411	3,137	4	9,231	3,077	1
3	Chelmsley Wood	3	8,647	2,882	-5	8,759	2,920	-4
4	Dorridge & Hockley Heath	3	8,425	2,808	-7	8,493	2,831	-7
5	Elmdon	3	9,928	3,309	10	9,746	3,249	6
6	Knowle	3	8,478	2,826	-6	8,551	2,850	-7
7	Lyndon	3	9,788	3,263	8	9,831	3,277	7
8	Meriden & Berkswell	3	9,030	3,010	0	9,283	3,094	1
9	Olton	3	9,289	3,096	3	9,414	3,138	3
10	Packwood	3	8,704	2,901	-4	9,706	3,235	6
11	River Cole	3	9,013	3,004	-1	8,825	2,942	-4
12	St Alphege	3	8,915	2,972	-2	8,899	2,966	-3
13	Shirley East	3	9,525	3,175	5	9,614	3,205	5
14	Shirley South	3	9,036	3,012	0	8,985	2,995	-2
15	Shirley West	3	9,172	3,057	1	9,050	3,017	-1
16	Silhill	3	8,800	2,933	-3	9,170	3,057	0
17	Smith's Wood	3	8,795	2,932	-3	8,699	2,900	-5
	Totals	51	154,056	-	-	155,598	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,021	-	-	3,051	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Solihull Borough 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 borough. 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 proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Solihull, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the seven metropolitan boroughs in the West Midlands as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. The programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Solihull. Solihull's last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1977 (Report no. 246).

3 In carrying out these metropolitan reviews we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 no. 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - (c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Solihull was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fifth edition published in October 2001). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 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 parish and town councils in the borough.

6 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the borough as a whole. 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.

7 We are not prescriptive on council size. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction or no change, should be supported by evidence and argumentation. Given the stage now reached in the introduction of new political management structures under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, it is important that whatever council size interested parties may propose to us they can demonstrate that their proposals have been fully thought through, and have been developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structure. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 there is no limit on the number of councillors which can be returned from each metropolitan borough ward. However, the figure must be divisible by three. In practice, all metropolitan borough wards currently return three councillors. Where our recommendation is for multi-member wards, 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.

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to us
Two	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to The Electoral Commission

10 Stage One began on 4 December 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Solihull Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified West Midlands Police Authority, the Local Government Association, West Midlands Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the borough, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, Members of the European Parliament for the West Midlands Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Solihull Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 8 April 2002.

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

12 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 22 October 2002 and will end on 16 December 2002, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on 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.**

13 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 it to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

14 Solihull is a metropolitan authority covering 17,832 hectares with a population of 205,600. It is situated to the south-east of Birmingham in the Midlands. Its central location at the hub of good road and rail communications makes the district an attractive one for prestige office development. Solihull has also become well known as the home of the world famous Land Rover. Included in the district are Birmingham Airport and the National Exhibition Centre.

15 The borough contains 12 parishes, but Solihull town itself is unparished. Solihull town comprises 50% of the borough's total electorate.

16 The electorate of the borough is 154,056 (February 2001). The Council presently has 51 members who are elected from 17 wards, 12 of which are relatively urban; the remainder being predominantly rural. All wards are three-member wards.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 3,021 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 3,051 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 10 of the 17 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average, four wards by more than 20% and three wards by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Shirley South ward where each councillor represents 45% more electors than the borough average.

18 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the borough average in percentage terms. In the text which follows, this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

Map 1: Existing wards in Solihull

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Bickenhill	3	10,512	3,504	16	10,654	3,551	16
2	Castle Bromwich	3	9,411	3,137	4	9,231	3,077	1
3	Chelmsley Wood	3	7,458	2,486	-18	7,553	2,518	-17
4	Elmdon	3	7,963	2,654	-12	7,881	2,627	-14
5	Fordbridge	3	5,975	1,992	-34	5,896	1,965	-36
6	Kingshurst	3	5,557	1,852	-39	5,438	1,813	-41
7	Knowle	3	8,833	2,944	-3	8,912	2,971	-3
8	Lyndon	3	7,772	2,591	-14	7,667	2,556	-16
9	Meriden	3	9,550	3,183	5	9,804	3,268	7
10	Olton	3	9,339	3,113	3	9,539	3,180	4
11	Packwood	3	11,591	3,864	28	12,551	4,184	37
12	Shirley East	3	9,168	3,056	1	9,257	3,086	1
13	Shirley South	3	13,155	4,385	45	12,945	4,315	41
14	Shirley West	3	9,172	3,057	1	9,050	3,017	-1
15	Silhill	3	9,961	3,320	10	10,553	3,518	15
16	Smith's Wood	3	7,465	2,488	-18	7,396	2,465	-19
17	St Alphege	3	11,174	3,725	23	11,271	3,757	23
	Totals	51	154,056	-	-	155,598	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,021	-	-	3,051	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Solihull Borough 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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Shirley South ward were relatively under-represented by 45%, while electors in Kingshurst ward were relatively over-represented by 39%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

19 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to the LGCE giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Solihull Borough Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

20 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the Borough Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. The LGCE received 199 representations during Stage One, including a borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council.

Solihull Borough Council

21 The Borough Council proposed a council of 51 members, as at present, serving 17 wards. A council size of 51 was recommended by the Electoral Review Working Party to the Council's Strategic Committee and the Borough Council based its consultation and final submission on this council size.

22 The Borough Council consulted on three different options before putting forward Option Three as its final submission. This provided for a new warding arrangement across the borough, with two wards retaining their existing boundaries. It considered that this option divides the distinct areas of the urban north, urban west and rural area into the correct number of wards and utilises the available natural boundaries in those areas. It achieves good levels of electoral equality with no ward varying from the borough average by more than 7% by 2006. It also considered Option Three to "strike the right balance for the key ward of Bickenhill which continues to link the north and south of the borough", a point the Council regarded as being of high importance.

Parish and town councils

23 Representations were received from two parish councils. Hockley Heath Parish Council objected to the Borough Council's proposed wards 13 and 15. The Parish Council also gave consideration to possible parish warding arrangements should the Borough Council's proposals be accepted and provided a map illustrating its proposed parish warding arrangement, giving each of the four main settlements within the parish its own distinctive parish ward. Balsall Parish Council expressed concern both at the limited time for consultation and for a parish ward of the parish being placed in a separate borough ward.

Other representations

24 A further 196 representations were received from residents associations, organisations and local residents. Hockley Heath Residents Association objected to any separation from settlements within Hockley Heath parish and opposed the Borough Council's proposals for its area. Tidbury Green Residents Association objected to the Borough Council's proposals for its area, on which it was consulted, and provided an alternative arrangement for the southern area of the borough.

25 Dickens Heath Residents Association stated that although it would wish to be considered a rural village and not associated with the urban Shirley area there is some justification for the proposed warding which would give Dickens Heath its own identity. Dorridge & District Residents Association agreed to the proposal to reduce the existing Packwood ward and supported the Borough Council's Options Two & Three for this area.

26 We received 189 representations from local residents objecting to the Borough Council's proposed wards 13 and 15 on the basis that they contravene our *Guidance*. There was also

objection to the Borough Council's proposed ward names that had been consulted on and suggestions made for an alternative for the parish.

27 One local Councillor opposed the Council's proposal for Meriden ward and requested it be left intact. Alternatively, if this was not possible he then requested that Temple Balsall remain in Meriden ward as it is an integral part of the community. One local resident proposed parish warding changes in Bickenhill parish. One local resident opposed the Borough Council's proposals in the south of the borough stating that the proposals failed to meet the stated objectives in this area. He also provided an outline to an alternative warding arrangement in order to support the fact that the Borough Council's proposals may not be the best way forward.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

28 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Solihull and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

29 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Solihull 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 referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). 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”.

30 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 identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

31 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum.

32 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, 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 must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate forecasts

33 Since 1975 there has been a 10% increase in the electorate of Solihull borough. The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting a minimal increase in the electorate from 154,056 to 155,598 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be spread throughout the borough. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

34 We know 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.

Council size

35 Solihull Borough Council presently has 51 members. The Borough Council proposed a council of 51 members which provided for the correct allocation of councillors in the distinct urban north, urban west and rural areas of the borough. The Electoral Review Working Party considered the role of councillors under the new executive arrangements, Leader and

Cabinet Model, and highlighted the boards, committees and working groups on which councillors will serve before recommending to the Council's Strategic Committee that the Council required 51 members to function effectively. In particular, the Working Party highlighted the Task and Finish Groups appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Boards' and also outlined members' non-executive functions and their active role in representing the Council on external bodies and in relation to partnership arrangements being established under the Local Strategic Partnership.

36 The Working Party outlined the major initiatives the Council will be undertaking which require substantive member involvement. It also carried out a consultation exercise in relation to council size which revealed no public view on council size, although there appeared to be no case for an increase.

37 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 51 members.

Electoral arrangements

38 After careful consideration of all the evidence received at Stage One we consider that the Borough Council's proposals would represent a better balance between the statutory criteria than the current arrangements and we are content to endorse these proposals substantially. We consider that the Borough Council's proposals would provide the best reflection of community identities and interests across the borough by using easily identifiable boundaries and respecting natural communities. However, we have made a number of minor boundary amendments across the borough to tie the boundary to better ground detail, or to group similar communities in single wards, and we also propose our own warding arrangements for the south of the borough.

39 In the urban north we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals substantially, subject to one minor boundary amendment and adopting the name River Cole ward for the Council's proposed Ward 3. In the urban west of the borough we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals with the exception of proposing our own arrangements in the southern area and making four minor boundary amendments in the north of this area. In the remaining rural area of the borough we are proposing to adopt the Borough Council's proposals substantially, subject to two boundary amendments. We are also proposing three of our own ward names in this area.

40 We noted the outline borough-wide proposal provided by a local resident and considered it to have merit. We acknowledge the fact that it was not intended to be a detailed counter-proposal but presented to support the suggestion that the Council's proposals may not be the best way forward. We endeavoured to investigate this outline proposal but found that it would have made it difficult to utilise good boundaries and obtain good levels of electoral equality while respecting natural communities in the urban west area. We also considered it difficult to pursue this outline proposal in the south of the borough as it would have created a warding arrangement that, in our opinion, would not have facilitated effective and convenient local government for Dorridge and Knowle areas. The proposal would also result in a poor level of electoral equality for Bickenhill ward which is integral, due to its central position, to a good warding arrangement across the borough. Each Borough Council consultation option and the draft recommendations supported the fact that an urban area must be included in Bickenhill ward to obtain a suitable electoral variance, and on the basis of community identity we considered that urban area to best be included from the urban north. As a result of this it did not enable us to consider the local resident's outlined proposal for the urban north.

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

Urban north

- (a) Castle Bromwich, Kingshurst and Smith's Wood wards;
- (b) Chelmsley Wood and Fordbridge wards;

Urban west

- (c) Elmdon, Lyndon, Olton and Silhill wards;
- (d) St Alphege, Shirley East, Shirley South and Shirley West wards;

Rural area

- (e) Knowle and Packwood wards;
- (f) Bickenhill and Meriden wards.

42 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Castle Bromwich, Kingshurst and Smith's Wood wards

43 The existing wards of Castle Bromwich, Kingshurst and Smith's Wood cover the urban north area of the borough and each ward is represented by three members. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the three wards varies from the borough average by 4%, 39% and 18% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Castle Bromwich ward while deteriorating slightly in Kingshurst and Smith's Wood wards to vary from the borough average by 1%, 41% and 19% respectively by 2006.

44 The Borough Council proposed that this area be represented by two wards, with the proposed Castle Bromwich and Smith's Wood wards being represented by three councillors each. Its proposed Smith's Wood ward would contain the existing Smith's Wood and would also contain those properties south of Chester Road and north of Silver Birch Road, Marston Drive and Gilson Way, formerly in Kingshurst ward. The Borough Council also proposed retaining the existing Castle Bromwich ward.

45 Under the Borough Council's proposals for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in Castle Bromwich and Smith's Wood wards by 4% and 4% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Castle Bromwich ward and to deteriorate slightly in Smith's Wood ward to vary by 1% and 6% by 2006.

46 We received an outline proposal for the borough from a local resident which proposed extending the ward area in the urban north southward towards Marston Green as in the Borough Council's Option Two, on which it consulted, then redrawing the boundaries to give four new wards for the urban north.

47 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals subject to one minor boundary modification. We propose to amend the boundary between the proposed Smith's Wood and River Cole wards so that it would run to the rear of properties on the south side of Silver Birch Road, as discussed later. We consider the Council's proposals in the remainder of this area to utilise good boundaries, such as Lanchester Way and Windward Way, achieving good levels of electoral equality while respecting natural communities, such as retaining the distinctive area of Castle Bromwich parish in a ward of its own. We note the outline proposal for the urban north by a local resident but found that upon closer investigation it resulted in a knock-on effect across

the borough with the inclusion of an urban area with the largely rural part of Bickenhill ward south of the A45. We considered overall that the Borough Council's proposal best satisfies the statutory criteria in this area.

48 Under our draft recommendations for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in Castle Bromwich and Smith's Wood wards by 4% and 3% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Castle Bromwich ward and to deteriorate slightly in Smith's Wood ward to vary by 1% and 5% by 2006. Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

Chelmsley Wood and Fordbridge wards

49 The existing wards of Chelmsley Wood and Fordbridge cover the south of the urban north area of the borough and each ward is represented by three members. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the two wards varies from the borough average by 18% and 34% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Chelmsley Wood ward while deteriorating slightly in Fordbridge ward to vary from the borough average by 17% and 36% respectively by 2006.

50 The Borough Council proposed that this area be represented by two wards, with the proposed Chelmsley Wood ward and Ward 3 being represented by three councillors each. The Council's proposed ward directly south of the proposed Smith's Wood ward was unnamed by the Council and will therefore be referred to as Ward 3. The proposed Ward 3 would include Kingshurst parish apart from those all those properties north of Silver Birch Road, Marston Drive and Gilson Way, which would be included in the proposed Smith's Wood ward. The proposed Ward 3 would also include Fordbridge parish apart from those properties east of the River Cole which would be included in the proposed Chelmsley Wood ward. The Borough Council's proposed Chelmsley Wood ward would contain the existing Chelmsley Wood ward and also part of Fordbridge parish as outlined earlier.

51 Under the Borough Council's proposals for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in Chelmsley Wood ward and Ward 3 by 5% and 1% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Chelmsley Wood ward and to deteriorate slightly in Ward 3 to vary by 4% and 3% by 2006.

52 We received an outline proposal for the borough from a local resident which proposed a new warding arrangement for the urban north area as discussed earlier.

53 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals subject to one minor boundary modification and naming the Borough Council's proposed Ward 3, River Cole ward as we consider this to best reflect the area. We propose amending the boundary between the proposed Smith's Wood and River Cole wards so that it would run to the rear of properties on the south side of Silver Birch Road, grouping all those properties on Silver Birch Road in a single ward in the interests of community identity. We consider the Council's proposals in the remainder of this area to utilise good boundaries, such as Kingshurst Brook, achieving good levels of electoral equality while respecting natural communities such as including those properties both sides of Cook Lane in a ward with the urban area to its south.

54 We note the fact that the proposed River Cole ward is bisected by the River Cole and we would not normally propose or adopt a ward of this nature but due to the geographical and borough boundary constraints in this area, allied to the need to achieve good levels of electoral equality, we consider the proposed River Cole ward justified in this case. It was also

noted that crossing points exist across the River Cole which would facilitate effective and convenient local government. Given the overall constraints of the area we consider that this arrangement best satisfies the statutory criteria. We note the outline proposal by a local resident and consider it to have merit but did not pursue as discussed earlier.

55 Under our draft recommendations for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in Chelmsley Wood and River Cole wards by 5% and 1% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Chelmsley Wood ward and to deteriorate slightly in River Cole ward to vary by 4% and 4% by 2006. Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

Elmdon, Lyndon, Olton and Silhill wards

56 The existing wards of Elmdon, Lyndon, Olton and Silhill cover the north of the urban west area of the borough and each ward is represented by three members. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the four wards varies from the borough average by 12%, 14%, 3% and 10% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate in all wards to vary from the borough average by 14%, 16%, 4% and 15% respectively by 2006.

57 The Borough Council proposed that this area be represented by four wards, with the proposed Elmdon, Lyndon, Olton and Silhill wards being represented by three councillors each. The Borough Council's proposed Lyndon ward would contain the existing Lyndon ward and would also contain those properties west of Hobs Moat Road, to the north of the Grand Union Canal and east and south of Castle Lane, formerly in Elmdon ward. Its proposed Elmdon ward would contain the existing Elmdon ward apart from those properties transferred to the proposed Lyndon ward, as mentioned earlier. The proposed ward would also contain the area north of the Grand Union Canal, formerly in Silhill ward, and the urban area east of Damson Lane, formerly in Bickenhill ward.

58 The Borough Council's proposed Silhill ward would contain the existing Silhill ward apart from those properties transferred to the proposed Elmdon ward as previously mentioned. It would also exclude the area to the east of Damson Parkway, to the rear of properties on Pinfold Road and to the east of the Solihull bypass, formerly in Silhill ward, which would be transferred to the proposed Bickenhill ward. The proposed Silhill ward would include those properties south of Warwick Road, north of Streetsbrook Road and west of Lode Lane, formerly in St Alphege ward. The Council proposed retaining Olton ward on its existing boundaries.

59 Under the Borough Council's proposals for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in Elmdon, Lyndon, Olton and Silhill wards by 10%, 7%, 1% and 1% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Elmdon ward and to deteriorate slightly in Olton and Silhill wards to vary by 6%, 2% and 2% by 2006. The electoral variance for Lyndon ward is expected to remain constant over the next five years.

60 We received an outline proposal for the borough from a local resident which proposed, for the urban west area, redrawing the eastern boundary to include the development at Elmdon Heath as proposed by the Borough Council. The boundary should then follow the line of the Solihull bypass as far as Junction 5 of the M42 before following the M42 southbound until it meets with the boundary of the existing Packwood ward. He also proposed redrawing the boundaries within the urban area to give nine wards rather than eight as at present.

61 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals in this area, subject to four boundary amendments to the

proposed Lyndon, Olton and Silhill wards. We propose that the proposed Olton ward's southern boundary should follow the rear of properties on the south side of Streetsbrook Road, north-west of Robin Hood Cemetery and its south-eastern boundary, shared with the proposed Silhill ward, should run to the rear of properties on the south side of Dove House Lane and Berkswell Close, east of Heaton Lane. We propose that the boundary between the proposed Lyndon and Olton ward should follow the rear of properties on the south side of Pierce Avenue and to the rear of properties on the east side of Richmond Road. All the outlined boundary amendments would be in the interests of community identity as they group similar communities in single wards and facilitate effective and convenient local government by including areas in wards into which they have access. We propose adopting the Borough Council's proposed Elmdon ward without modification.

62 We note the outline proposal provided by the local resident and consider it to have merit but we consider the Borough Council's and our own proposal to best satisfy the statutory criteria in the urban west area, as it utilised good boundaries such as Hobs Moat Road and the Grand Union Canal. It would also be difficult to include the development at Elmdon Heath within the urban west warding arrangement if we were to adopt the local resident's previously outlined approach to the urban north.

63 Under our draft recommendations for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in Elmdon, Lyndon, Olton and Silhill wards by 10%, 8%, 3% and 3% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Elmdon, Lyndon and Silhill wards to vary by 6%, 7% and equal to the borough average by 2006. The electoral variance for Olton ward is expected to remain constant over the next five years. Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

St Alphege, Shirley East, Shirley South and Shirley West wards

64 The existing wards of St Alphege, Shirley East, Shirley South and Shirley West cover the southern area of the urban west of the borough and each ward is represented by three members. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the four wards varies from the borough average by 23%, 1%, 45% and 1% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Shirley South ward to vary from the borough average by 41% by 2006. The electoral variances for the existing St Alphege, Shirley East and Shirley West wards are expected to remain constant over the next five years.

65 The Borough Council proposed that this area be represented by four wards, with the proposed St Alphege, Shirley East, Ward 14 and Shirley West wards being represented by three councillors each. The Borough Council's proposed St Alphege ward would include the existing St Alphege ward apart from that area which would be transferred to the proposed Silhill ward, as previously mentioned, and it would exclude those properties bounded by Dingle Lane, Whitefields Road, Widney Lane and Blossomfield Road, which would be transferred to the proposed Ward 14. Its proposed St Alphege ward would include an area north of Widney Lane, formerly in Shirley South ward.

66 The Borough Council's proposed Ward 14 would include all of the existing Shirley South ward to the east of Tamworth Lane, with the exclusion of an area north of Widney Lane to be transferred to the proposed St Alphege ward and the addition of an area north of Widney Lane, formerly in St Alphege ward, as previously mentioned. The Council proposed retaining Shirley East and Shirley West wards on their existing boundaries.

67 Under the Borough Council's proposals for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in St Alphege, Shirley East, Shirley West and Ward 14 wards by 1%, 1%, 1% and 2% respectively. This level of electoral equality

is projected to improve over the next five years in St Alphege ward and Ward 14 with both wards equalling the borough average by 2006. The electoral variances for the proposed Shirley East and Shirley West wards are expected to remain constant over the next five years.

68 We received an outline proposal for the borough from a local resident which proposed a new warding arrangement for the urban west area as discussed earlier.

69 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we propose adopting our own proposals in this area, apart from adopting the existing Shirley West ward as proposed by the Borough Council and adopting the name Shirley South ward as we consider it to best reflect the area. Our proposed Shirley East ward would be based largely on the Borough Council's proposed ward less the urban area south of Union Road and Longmore Road, which would be included in the proposed Shirley South ward. Our proposed Shirley East ward would also include an area east of Stratford Road, which was to be included in the Borough Council's proposed St Alphege ward.

70 This new boundary between the proposed St Alphege and Shirley East wards would follow the rear of properties on Westwood Grove, run to the rear of properties on the east side of Cambridge Avenue and follow the rear of properties on Heathcote Avenue and Calverdon Close before running along the western side of Sharmans Cross Junior School until it reached Sharmans Cross Road. From here the proposed boundary would follow the rear of the properties on the eastern side of Woodlea Drive before joining the proposed Olton ward boundary on Streetsbrook Road. Our proposed St Alphege ward would also be based on the Borough Council's proposed St Alphege ward with the previously mentioned boundary amendment between it and the proposed Shirley East ward and a further boundary amendment which would include the urban area both sides of Widney Lane in the proposed St Alphege ward.

71 We consider our proposed warding arrangement in southern urban Solihull to best satisfy the statutory criteria as it groups similar communities, such as both sides of Widney Lane, in a single ward and it also utilises strong boundaries in the area such as Union Road. We also consider our proposals to offer a better alternative than that provided by the Borough Council as it facilitates a more favourable mix of urban and rural in the south of the borough which is discussed later. We note the outline proposal provided by a local resident but consider our proposals to best satisfy the statutory criteria as it utilises good boundaries such as the railway line and Warwick Road while achieving good levels of electoral equality. Also, upon investigating the outline proposals we do not consider these would be easily achieved.

72 Under our draft recommendations for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in St Alphege, Shirley East, Shirley South and Shirley West wards by 2%, 5%, equal to the average and 1% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate slightly in St Alphege and Shirley South wards to vary by 3% and 2% by 2006. The electoral variances for the proposed Shirley East and Shirley West wards are expected to remain constant over the next five years. Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Knowle and Packwood wards

73 The existing wards of Knowle and Packwood cover the south rural area of the borough and each ward is represented by three members. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the two wards varies from the borough average by 3% and 28% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate in Packwood ward to vary from the borough average by 37% by 2006. The electoral variance for the existing Knowle ward is expected to remain constant over the next five years.

74 The Borough Council proposed that this area be represented by three wards, with the proposed Knowle ward, Ward 13 and Ward 15 being represented by three councillors each. The Borough Council's proposed Knowle ward would contain the existing Knowle ward with the exception of an area which would be transferred to the proposed Ward 15, as mentioned later. Its eastern boundary was also be moved to contain an area west of Fen End Road, formerly in Meriden ward.

75 The Borough Council's proposed Ward 13 would contain that part of Hockley Heath parish to the west of the M42. In addition, the proposed ward would include an urban area of Solihull bounded by Haslucks Green Road, Burman Road, Bills Lane, School Road, Stratford Road and Tamworth Lane, formerly in Shirley South ward. Its proposed Ward 15 would contain the remainder of Hockley Heath parish to the east of the M42 and also the remainder of the existing Packwood ward, which is bounded in the east by Widney Manor Road, Widney Road, Knowle Wood Road and Blue Lake Road. In addition, the proposed Ward 15 would contain an area north of Widney Road formerly in Knowle ward, and the new boundary would follow Smiths Lane and run to the rear of properties west of Tilehouse Green Lane before joining the existing boundary.

76 Under the Borough Council's proposals for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in Knowle ward, Ward 13 and Ward 15 by 4%, 5% and 7% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate slightly in Knowle ward to vary by 5% by 2006. The electoral variances for the proposed Ward 13 and Ward 15 are expected to remain constant over the next five years.

77 Hockley Heath Parish Council stated that the Borough Council's proposals for its area did not take local circumstances into account, nor did it reflect the identities and interests of local communities. It was the Parish Council's view that the Borough Council's proposed Ward 13 and Ward 15 would not meet our statutory criteria. The Parish Council also expressed concern at the possibility of Hockley Heath village being separated from the rest of the parish. Hockley Heath Residents Association objected to the Borough Council's proposals for its area. Tidbury Green Residents Association objected to the Borough Council's proposals for its area and suggested that Tidbury Green, Dickens Heath and Cheswick Green form a ward with Hockley Heath and the area of Dorridge south of the railway line known as Bentley Heath.

78 Dickens Heath Residents Association considered themselves to be a rural village and not connected to urban Shirley and stated that should the Borough Council's proposal be accepted they would request a parish review from the Borough Council with a view to warding Dickens Heath in order to establish a new parish council for the area. Dorridge & District Residents Association supported the Borough Council's Option Two or Three as they reduced the size of the current Packwood ward.

79 We received 189 representations from local residents which objected to the Borough Council's proposed Wards 13 and 15 on the grounds that they contravened the statutory criteria outlined in our *Guidance*. These submissions also requested that 2,000 electors be added to the west of Hockley Heath parish to make a viable number to form a ward. A local resident suggested that there may be a substantial population increase by 2011 but we are unable to consider any projections beyond 2006.

80 We received an outline proposal for the borough from a local resident which proposed four wards for the remaining rural area. This proposal included a new Knowle ward centred on the main areas of population in Dorridge and Knowle. It also included a new Packwood ward that would involve the redrawing of the north-eastern boundary to account for the revised Dorridge/Knowle ward and also move it further to the north-east to obtain the requisite number of electors, and a new Bickenhill ward that involved the redrawing of its

boundaries to account for the urban north and urban west changes, as discussed earlier, and a redrawing of its southeastern boundary to account for the new Dorridge/Knowle ward. This outline proposal proposed no change to the existing Meriden ward.

81 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposed Knowle ward and proposed Ward 15 subject to two boundary amendments. We are also proposing our own arrangement for the remainder of the south of the borough. We propose amending the proposed Knowle ward's eastern boundary to facilitate the inclusion of Temple Balsall hamlet in the proposed Meriden & Berkswell ward, as outlined later. We propose amending the Council's proposed Ward 15 boundary to include properties on the rear of Smiths Lane and the first two properties on Lady Byron Lane in order to group these properties in a single ward in the interests of community identity. As the Borough Council has not provided a name for this proposed ward we are proposing to name it Dorridge & Hockley Heath ward as we consider this to best reflect the area.

82 We are proposing our own ward for the remainder of this southern area and are proposing to name it Packwood ward as the Borough Council did not provide a ward name for this area during Stage One. Our proposed ward would contain the parish of Hockley Heath less that part of the parish to the east of the motorway which would be included in the proposed Dorridge & Hockley Heath ward. Our proposed ward would also contain the entire Monkspath urban area north-east of Stratford Road and east of Highlands Road.

83 We have noted the volume of opposition to the Borough Council's proposal for Hockley Heath parish and the argumentation supplied. As a result of the objections, we endeavoured to investigate other warding arrangements for this area and we consider our proposal for this southern area to best satisfy the statutory criteria as it groups similar communities in single wards and utilises good boundaries, such as the M42. We understand that our proposal groups an urban area with the largely rural Hockley Heath parish but consider this urban area to have more in common with Hockley Heath parish than that of Shirley, as proposed by the Borough Council. We investigated the possibilities of including Hockley Heath parish in a ward of its own but this resulted in a poor electoral variance of over 20%. We also investigated the possibility of attaching part of Dorridge to the parish of Hockley Heath as proposed by Tidbury Green Residents Association, but found that the resultant knock-on effect involved a redrawing of boundaries across the borough and we were unable to consider this southern area in isolation.

84 We also note the outline proposal for the rural area provided by a local resident and considered it to have merit. Our draft recommendations are similar to the resident's outlined Bickenhill and Meriden wards but we considered our recommendations in the south of the borough to better satisfy the statutory criteria. This was due to the resident's outlined Packwood ward being geographically unwieldy, which we considered would not provide effective and convenient local government.

85 Under our draft recommendations for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in Dorridge & Hockley Heath, Knowle and Packwood wards by 7%, 6% and 4% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate slightly in Knowle and Packwood wards to vary by 6% and 7% by 2006. The electoral variance for the proposed Dorridge & Hockley Heath ward is expected to remain constant over the next five years. Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Bickenhill and Meriden wards

86 The existing wards of Bickenhill and Meriden cover the east rural area of the borough and each ward is represented by three members. Under the current arrangements of a 51-

member council, the number of electors per councillor in the two wards varies from the borough average by 16% and 5% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate slightly in Meriden ward, to vary from the borough average by 7% by 2006. The electoral variance for the existing Bickenhill ward is expected to remain constant over the next five years.

87 The Borough Council proposed that this area be represented by two wards, with the proposed Bickenhill and Meriden wards being represented by three councillors each. The Borough Council's proposed Bickenhill ward would include the existing Bickenhill ward with the exception of the urban area east of Damson Lane, which would be transferred to the proposed Elmdon ward. The proposed Meriden ward would contain the existing Meriden ward with the exception of an area in the south-west of the existing ward being transferred to the proposed Knowle ward. The new Meriden ward south-west boundary would follow Fen End Road.

88 Under the Borough Council's proposals for a 51-member council, the electoral variance in Bickenhill and Meriden wards would be equal to the average and varying by 2% respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Meriden ward and to deteriorate slightly in Bickenhill ward to vary by 1% and 2% by 2006.

89 Balsall Parish Council expressed concern at the limited time for consultation and also at the Borough Council's proposal to place one of its parish wards in a separate borough ward from the rest of the parish. One local resident proposed parish council changes which are discussed later. A local councillor for the existing Meriden ward requested that Meriden ward remain intact but if this was not possible then requested that the Hamlet of Temple Balsall remain in Meriden ward as it is an integral part of the community.

90 We received an outline proposal for the borough from a local resident which proposed four wards for the remaining rural area, as discussed earlier. The outline proposal proposed no change to the existing Meriden ward and proposed a new Bickenhill ward to account for changes to the urban north and Knowle area.

91 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals in this area, subject to one boundary amendment. We propose that the proposed Meriden & Berkswell ward boundary should run along Kenilworth Road, Temple Lane, Chadwick Lane, Old Green Lane and Oldwich Lane West rather than Fen End Road so that it would include Temple Balsall hamlet in the proposed Meriden & Berkswell ward, in the interests of community identity as proposed by a local councillor. We propose adopting the ward name Meriden & Berkswell as we consider it to best reflect the major composite parts of the ward. We consider the Council's proposed Bickenhill ward to best satisfy the statutory criteria, as it would group similar communities within a single ward such as the urban area north of the A45, while achieving a good level of electoral equality.

92 The proposed Bickenhill ward facilitates a good warding arrangement across the borough due to its central position. We consider the transfer of properties east of Damson Lane, from the existing Bickenhill ward, into the proposed Elmdon ward, as proposed by the Borough Council would promote community identity as its community focus would be the urban western area rather than the largely rural Bickenhill ward. We also concur with the Council's statement that Bickenhill ward is integral to any warding arrangement across the borough, and agree that the proposed Bickenhill ward would best satisfy the statutory criteria in this central area of the borough.

93 We note the local resident's outline proposal for this area and consider it similar to our draft recommendations. However, we feel that our proposals best satisfy the statutory criteria as they achieve a good level of electoral equality in the proposed Bickenhill ward and this proposed ward, due to its central position, facilitates a good warding arrangement across the borough.

94 Under our draft recommendations for a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average in Bickenhill and Meriden & Berkswell wards by both wards being equal to the borough average. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate slightly in Bickenhill and Meriden & Berkswell wards to vary by 2% and 1% by 2006. Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Electoral cycle

95 Under section 7(3) of the Local Government Act 1972, all Metropolitan boroughs have a system of elections by thirds.

Conclusions

96 Having considered all the evidence and representations received during the initial stage of the review, we propose that:

- a council of 51 members should be retained;
- there should be 17 wards;
- the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in no change in the total number of wards, and only two wards should retain their existing boundaries.

97 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following areas:

- we propose our own warding arrangement for the south of the borough, creating new Shirley South, Packwood, St Alphege and Shirley East wards;
- we propose our own boundary between the proposed Knowle and Meriden & Berkswell wards;
- we propose minor boundary amendments between the proposed Smith's Wood and River Cole wards, Lyndon and Olton wards, Olton and Silhill wards, Olton and St Alphege wards and Olton and Shirley East wards in order to group similar communities in single wards in the interest of community identity;
- we propose no change to the wards of Castle Bromwich and Shirley West;
- we are proposing five ward names as we consider these to best reflect the area represented.

98 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will effect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2001 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2006.

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	51	51	51	51
Number of wards	17	17	17	17
Average number of electors per councillor	3,021	3,021	3,051	3,051
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	10	0	11	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	5	0	5	0

99 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Solihull Borough Council would result in no wards with an electoral variance of more than 10%. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 7%.

Draft recommendation

Solihull Borough Council should comprise 51 councillors serving 17 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large maps.

Parish and town council electoral arrangements

100 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Balsall, Bickenhill, Fordbridge, Kingshurst and Hockley Heath to reflect the proposed borough wards.

101 The parish of Balsall is currently served by 12 councillors representing two wards: Balsall East returning 10 parish councillors and Balsall West returning two parish councillors. As a result of changes to borough wards in the area it is proposed that an amended Balsall West parish ward be included in the proposed Knowle borough ward. This change affects the eastern boundary of Balsall West parish ward, as indicated on the large map, but does not affect the distribution of parish councillors.

Draft recommendation

Balsall Parish Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Balsall East parish ward (returning 10 councillors) and Balsall West parish ward (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map.

102 The parish of Bickenhill is currently served by 12 councillors representing four wards: Bickenhill ward returning two parish councillors, Black Firs ward returning two parish councillors, Marston Green ward returning six parish councillors and Merstone ward returning two parish councillors.

103 During Stage One we received one representation from a local resident which provided for new parish councillor distribution in order to provide equality at parish level. This proposal provided for four parish wards, as at present, with Bickenhill ward returning one parish councillor, Black Fir ward returning one parish councillor, Marston Green ward returning six parish councillors and Merstone ward returning four parish councillors.

104 Having considered the representation received at Stage One we consider it to have merit, however, on the basis that we do not wish to reduce existing two-member parish wards to single-member wards we consider it more beneficial to add an additional two parish councillors to Merstone parish ward in order to address the existing parish councillor:electorate imbalances. Therefore, we propose that Bickenhill Parish Council should comprise 14 councillors, two more than at present, representing four wards: Bickenhill ward returning two parish councillors, Black Firs ward returning two parish councillors, Marston Green ward returning six parish councillors and Merstone ward returning four parish councillors.

Draft recommendation

Bickenhill Parish Council should comprise 14 councillors, two more than at present, representing four wards: Bickenhill ward returning two parish councillors, Black Firs ward returning two parish councillors, Marston Green ward returning six parish councillors and Merstone ward returning four parish councillors. The existing parish ward boundaries would remain unchanged.

105 The parish of Fordbridge is currently represented by 14 parish councillors and is divided into three parish wards. Bennetts Well ward returning six parish councillors, Cole ward returning three parish councillors and Hatchford ward returning five parish councillors.

106 As a result of new borough warding arrangements in this area, changes are proposed to the parish warding arrangements for Fordbridge parish. The new arrangements would provide for 14 parish councillors, as at present, representing two parish wards: Fordbridge East ward returning four parish councillors and Fordbridge West ward returning 10 parish councillors. Fordbridge East parish ward would be included in the proposed Chelmsley Wood ward and Fordbridge West parish ward would be included in the proposed River Cole ward.

Draft recommendation

Fordbridge Parish Council should comprise 14 parish councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Fordbridge East ward returning four parish councillors and Fordbridge West ward returning 10 parish councillors. The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map.

107 The parish of Hockley Heath is currently represented by 13 parish councillors and is unwarded. During Stage One we received one representation from Hockley Heath Parish Council proposing new warding arrangements for the parish should the Borough Council's proposed wards be adopted in the area. The Parish Council's proposals provided for Hockley Heath Parish Council being represented by four parish wards with Cheswick Green parish ward returning four councillors, Dickens Heath parish ward returning four councillors, Hockley Heath Village parish ward returning three councillors and Tidbury Green parish ward returning two councillors.

108 Although we have not adopted the Borough Council's scheme at borough level for this area we found it necessary to ward the parish based on the Parish Council's justification of

giving each distinctive settlement its own identity. We decided to adopt the Parish Council's parish warding proposals for this area in full, with some minor boundary amendments to tie the boundary to better ground detail. The proposed Cheswick Green parish ward, Dickens Heath parish ward and Tidbury Green parish ward would be included in the proposed Packwood borough ward and the proposed Hockley Heath Village parish ward would be included in the proposed Dorridge & Hockley Heath ward.

Draft recommendation

Hockley Heath Parish Council should comprise 13 parish councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Cheswick Green parish ward returning four councillors, Dickens Heath parish ward returning four councillors, Hockley Heath Village parish ward returning three councillors and Tidbury Green parish ward returning two councillors. The parish ward boundaries should reflect those indicated on the large map.

109 The parish of Kingshurst is currently represented by 12 parish councillors and is divided into four parish wards: Bacon's End ward returning two parish councillors, Cook's Lane ward returning two parish councillors, Woodlands ward returning three parish councillors and Yorkswood ward returning five parish councillors.

110 As a result of new borough warding arrangements in this area new parish warding arrangements are being proposed for Kingshurst parish. The new arrangements would provide for 12 parish councillors, as at present, representing two parish wards: Kingshurst North parish ward returning four parish councillors and Kingshurst South parish ward returning eight parish councillors. Kingshurst North parish ward would be included in the proposed Smith's Wood ward and Kingshurst South parish ward would be included in the proposed River Cole ward.

Draft recommendation

Kingshurst Parish Council should comprise 12 parish councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Kingshurst North parish ward returning four councillors and Kingshurst South parish ward returning eight councillors. The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map.

Map 2: Draft recommendations for Solihull

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

111 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Solihull contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 16 December 2002. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

112 Express your views by writing directly to us:

Team Leader
Solihull Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

113 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to 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 Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft recommendations for Solihull: Detailed mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Solihull area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on the large maps.

The **five large maps** illustrate the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Solihull.

Map A1: Draft recommendations for Solihull: Key map

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.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 consult on draft recommendations for a minimum of eight weeks, but may extend the period if consultations take place over holiday periods.
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.