

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Oxfordshire County Council

January 2004

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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:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE
Robin Gray
Joan Jones CBE
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 the number of councillors elected to the council, division boundaries and division names.

Summary

We began a review of the electoral arrangements for Oxfordshire County Council on 4 February 2003.

- **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 Oxfordshire County Council:

- **In 42 of the 70 divisions, each of which are currently represented by a single councillor, the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the county and 16 divisions vary by more than 20%.**
- **by 2007 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 49 divisions and by more than 20% in 19 divisions.**

Our main proposals for Oxfordshire County Council's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and Paragraphs 141–142) are:

- **Oxfordshire County Council should have 74 councillors, four more than at present, representing 56 divisions;**
- **as the divisions are based on district wards, which have themselves been changed as a result of recent district reviews, the boundaries of all divisions will be subject to change.**

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

- **In 45 of the proposed 56 divisions, the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further with the number of electors per councillor in 49 divisions expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average for the County by 2007.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parish of Banbury.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 13 January 2004. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in 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 the local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also decide when any changes will come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 8 March 2004.

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

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

	Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Constituent district and city wards
Cherwell			
1	Banbury East	2	Banbury Calthorpe; Banbury Grimsbury & Castle; part of Banbury Easington
2	Banbury Hardwick	1	Banbury Hardwick; part of Banbury Neithrop
3	Banbury Neithrop	1	Part Banbury Easington; part of Banbury Neithrop
4	Banbury Ruscote	1	Banbury Ruscote
5	Bicester	3	Bicester East, Bicester North, Bicester Town, Bicester West
6	Bicester South	1	Ambrosden & Chesterton; Bicester South
7	Bloxham	1	Adderbury; Bloxham & Bodicote
8	Deddington	1	Deddington; Hook Norton; part of The Astons & Heyfords (the parishes of Duns Tew; Fritwell; Middle Aston; North Aston; Somerton; Souldern and Steeple Aston)
9	Kidlington & Yarnton	2	Kidlington North; Kidlington South; Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton
10	Otmoor & Kirtlington	1	Kirtlington; Otmoor; part of The Astons & Heyfords (the parishes of Lower Heyford and Upper Heyford)
11	Ploughley	1	Caversfield; Fringford; Launton
12	Wroxton	1	Cropredy; Sibford; Wroxton
Oxford City			
13	Barton & Churchill	2	Barton & Sandhills; Churchill; Quarry & Risinghurst
14	Cowley & Littlemore	2	Cowley; Littlemore; Rose Hill & Iffley
15	East Oxford	2	Cowley Marsh; St Clement's; St Mary's
16	Headington & Marston	2	Headington; Headington Hill & Northway; Marston
17	Isis	2	Hinksey Park; Iffley Fields; Jericho & Osney
18	Leys & Lye	2	Blackbird Leys; Lye Valley; Northfield Brook
19	North Oxford	2	Carfax; Holywell; North
20	Summertown & Wolvercote	2	St Margaret's; Summertown; Wolvercote
South Oxfordshire			
21	Benson	1	Benson; Crowmarsh
22	Chalgrove	1	Chalgrove; Garsington; Great Milton
23	Didcot Ladygrove	1	Didcot Ladygrove
24	Didcot South	2	Didcot All Saints; Didcot Northbourne; Didcot Park
25	Dorchester & Berinsfield	1	Berinsfield; Sandford

	Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Constituent district and city wards
26	Goring	1	Goring; Woodcote
27	Henley North & Chilterns	1	Chiltern Woods; Henley North
28	Henley South	1	Henley South; part of Shiplake (the parishes of Harpsden and Shiplake)
29	Moreton	1	Hagbourne; part of Brightwell (the parishes of Long Wittenham and Little Wittenham); part of Cholsey & Wallingford South (the parishes of Cholsey and Mouldsford)
30	Sonning Common	1	Sonning Common; part of Shiplake (the parishes of Binfield Heath, Eye & Dunsden, Kidmore End, Mapledurham)
31	Thame & Chinnor	2	Chinnor; Thame North; Thame South; part of Aston Rowant (the parish of Towersey)
32	Wallingford	1	Wallingford North; part Cholsey & Wallingford South (South parish ward of Wallingford parish); part Brightwell (the parish of Brightwell cum Sotwell)
33	Watlington	1	Watlington; part of Aston Rowant (the parishes of Aston Rowant, Crowell, Sydenham and Tetsworth)
34	Wheatley	1	Forest Hill & Holton; Wheatley
Vale of White Horse			
35	Abingdon East	2	Abingdon Abbey & Barton; Abingdon Dunmore; Abingdon Northcourt; Abingdon Peachcroft
36	Abingdon West	2	Abingdon Caldecott; Abingdon Fitzharris; Abingdon Ock Meadow; Drayton
37	Faringdon	1	Faringdon & The Coxwells
38	Grove & Wantage	2	Grove; Wantage Charlton; Wantage Segsbury
39	Hanneys & Hendreds	1	Hanneys; Hendreds; part of Marcham & Shippon (the parish of Marcham)
40	Kingston Bagpuize	1	Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor; Longworth; Stanford
41	North Hinksey & Wytham	1	North Hinksey & Wytham; part of Appleton & Cumnor (Farmoor parish ward and Dean Court parish ward of Cumnor parish)
42	Radley	1	Kennington & South Hinksey; Radley; part of Sunningwell & Wootton (the parish of Sunningwell)
43	Shrivenham	1	Craven; Greendown; Shrivenham
44	Sutton Courtenay & Harwell	1	Blewbury & Upton; Harwell; Sutton Courtenay & Appleford
45	Wootton	1	Part of Appleton & Cumnor (the parish of Appleton with Eaton and Village parish ward of Cumnor parish); part of Marcham & Shippon (Shippon parish ward of St Helen Without parish); part of Sunningwell & Wootton (the parishes of Besselsleigh and Wootton, and Dry Sandford parish ward of St Helen Without parish)
West Oxfordshire			
46	Bampton	1	Alvescot & Filkins; Bampton & Clanfield; Ducklington
47	Burford & Carterton North East	1	Brize Norton & Shilton; Burford; Carterton North East

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Constituent district and city wards
48 Carterton South West	1	Carterton South; Carterton North West
49 Charlbury	1	Charlbury & Finstock; Chadlington & Churchill; part of Stonesfield & Tackley (the parishes of Combe and Stonesfield); part of Kingham, Rollright & Enstone (the parish of Kingham)
50 Chipping Norton	1	Chipping Norton; part of Kingham, Rollright & Enstone (the parishes of Chastleton, Cornwell, Over Norton, Rollright, Salford)
51 Eynsham	1	Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt; part of Eynsham & Cassington (the parishes of Eynsham and South Leigh)
52 Hanborough	1	Freeland & Hanborough; North Leigh; part of Eynsham & Cassington (the parish of Cassington); part Woodstock & Bladon (the parish of Bladon)
53 Witney East	1	Witney East, Witney North
54 Witney West	2	Witney Central; Witney South, Witney West
55 Woodstock	1	The Bartons; part of Stonesfield & Tackley (the parishes of Glympton, Kiddington with Asterleigh, Rousham, Tackley and Wootton); part of Kingham, Rollright & Enstone (the parishes of Enstone, Great Tew, Heythrop, Little Tew and Swerford); part of Woodstock & Bladon (the parishes of Blenheim and Woodstock)
56 Wychwood	1	Ascott & Shipton; Hailey, Minster Lovell & Leafield; Milton under Wychwood

Notes:

1. *The constituent district wards are those resulting from the electoral reviews of the Oxfordshire districts which were completed in 2001. Where whole district wards do not form the building blocks, constituent parishes and parish wards are listed.*
2. *Sheet 1 inserted at the back of the report illustrates the proposed divisions outlined above and the maps on Sheet 2 illustrate some of the proposed boundaries in more detail.*

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Oxfordshire County Council

	Division name (By district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Cherwell								
1	Banbury East	2	13,109	6,555	4	14,228	7,114	9
2	Banbury Hardwick	1	5,872	5,872	-7	6,976	6,976	7
3	Banbury Neithrop	1	6,489	6,489	3	6,656	6,656	2
4	Banbury Ruscote	1	5,856	5,856	-7	5,821	5,821	-11
5	Bicester	3	18,518	6,173	-2	19,391	6,464	-1
6	Bicester South	1	5,614	5,614	-11	6,409	6,409	-2
7	Bloxham	1	6,794	6,794	8	6,970	6,970	7
8	Deddington	1	6,580	6,580	5	6,770	6,770	4
9	Kidlington & Yarnton	2	14,238	7,119	13	14,445	7,223	11
10	Otmoor & Kirtlington	1	5,398	5,398	-14	5,512	5,512	-15
11	Ploughley	1	5,743	5,743	-9	6,185	6,185	-5
12	Wroxton	1	6,356	6,356	1	6,581	6,581	1
Oxford City								
13	Barton & Churchill	2	13,028	6,514	4	13,109	6,555	1
14	Cowley & Littlemore	2	12,783	6,392	2	12,977	6,489	0
15	East Oxford	2	12,796	6,398	2	13,358	6,679	3
16	Headington & Marston	2	12,125	6,063	-4	12,385	6,193	-5
17	Isis	2	13,229	6,615	5	13,362	6,681	3
18	Leys & Lye	2	12,748	6,374	1	12,642	6,321	-3
19	North Oxford	2	12,500	6,250	-1	12,910	6,455	-1
20	Summertown & Wolvercote	2	12,753	6,377	1	13,121	6,561	1
South Oxfordshire								
21	Benson	1	5,965	5,965	-5	5,968	5,968	-8
22	Chalgrove	1	6,484	6,484	3	6,429	6,429	-1
23	Didcot Ladygrove	1	5,518	5,518	-12	5,863	5,863	-10
24	Didcot South	2	12,484	6,242	-1	13,207	6,604	1
25	Dorchester & Berinsfield	1	6,443	6,443	2	6,436	6,436	-1
26	Goring	1	6,539	6,539	4	6,525	6,525	0
27	Henley North & Chilterns	1	6,299	6,299	0	6,465	6,465	-1
28	Henley South	1	6,105	6,105	-3	6,103	6,103	-6
29	Moreton	1	5,933	5,933	-6	6,140	6,140	-6
30	Sonning Common	1	6,382	6,382	1	6,426	6,426	-1
31	Thame & Chinnor	2	13,593	6,797	8	13,713	6,857	5

	Division name (By district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
32	Wallingford	1	6,529	6,529	4	6,814	6,814	5
33	Watlington	1	5,733	5,733	-9	5,912	5,912	-9
34	Wheatley	1	6,593	6,593	5	6,634	6,634	2
Vale of White Horse								
35	Abingdon East	2	14,321	7,161	14	14,427	7,214	11
36	Abingdon West	2	11,786	5,893	-6	12,689	6,345	-3
37	Faringdon	1	5,557	5,557	-12	5,854	5,854	-10
38	Grove & Wantage	2	13,775	6,888	10	14,190	7,095	9
39	Hanneys & Hendreds	1	6,336	6,336	1	6,418	6,418	-1
40	Kingston Bagpuize	1	5,294	5,294	-16	5,954	5,954	-9
41	North Hinksey & Wytham	1	6,265	6,265	0	6,521	6,521	0
42	Radley	1	6,205	6,205	-1	6,300	6,300	-3
43	Shrivenham	1	7,195	7,195	14	7,202	7,202	11
44	Sutton Courtenay & Harwell	1	6,763	6,763	8	6,926	6,926	6
45	Wootton	1	6,134	6,134	-2	6,151	6,151	-5
West Oxfordshire								
46	Bampton	1	5,769	5,769	-8	5,903	5,903	-9
47	Burford & Carterton North East	1	4,978	4,978	-21	6,644	6,644	2
48	Carterton South West	1	6,259	6,259	0	6,185	6,185	-5
49	Charlbury	1	6,770	6,770	8	6,958	6,958	7
50	Chipping Norton	1	5,727	5,727	-9	5,987	5,987	-8
51	Eynsham	1	6,984	6,984	11	7,128	7,128	10
52	Hanborough	1	5,980	5,980	-5	6,016	6,016	-8
53	Witney East	1	6,640	6,640	6	7,805	7,805	20
54	Witney West	2	10,488	5,244	-17	10,572	5,286	-19
55	Woodstock	1	6,688	6,688	6	6,875	6,875	6
56	Wychwood	1	6,281	6,281	0	6,459	6,459	-1
Totals		74	465,324	-	-	481,607	-	-
Averages		-		6,288	-	-	6,508	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Oxfordshire County Council's submission.

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 county. 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 county of Oxfordshire, on which we are now consulting. Our review of the county is part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. This programme started in 1996 and is expected to finish in 2004.

2 In carrying out these county 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:
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - achieve equality of representation;
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972;
- 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.

3 Details of the legislation under which we work are set out in The Electoral Commission's *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reports* (published by the EC in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of electoral divisions. In each two-tier county, our approach is first to complete the PERs of all the constituent districts and, when the Orders for the resulting changes in those areas have been made, then to commence a PER of the county council's electoral arrangements. Orders were made for the new electoral arrangements in the districts and boroughs in Oxfordshire in December 2001 and we are now embarking on our county review in this area.

5 Prior to the commencement of Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000, each county council division could only return one member. This restraint has now been removed by section 89 of the 2000 Act, and we may now recommend the creation of multi-member county divisions. In areas where we are unable to identify single-member divisions that are coterminous with ward boundaries and provide acceptable levels of electoral equality we will consider recommending multi-member divisions if they provide a better balance between these two factors. However, we do not expect to recommend large numbers of multi-member divisions other than, perhaps, in the more urban areas of a county.

6 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 sets out the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements*. These statutory rules state that each division should be wholly contained within a single district and that division boundaries should not split unwarded parishes or parish wards.

7 In the *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been created locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local people are normally in a better position to judge what council size and division configurations are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while also reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.

8 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the local authority as a whole. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral

imbalance of over 10% in any division 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 Similarly, we will seek to ensure that each district area within the county is allocated the correct number of county councillors with respect to the district's proportion of the county's electorate.

10 The *Rules* provide that, in considering county council electoral arrangements, we should have regard to the boundaries of district wards. We attach considerable importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of divisions and wards. The term 'coterminosity' is used throughout the report and refers to situations where the boundaries of county electoral divisions and district wards are the same, that is to say where county divisions comprise either one or more whole district wards.

11 We recognise, however, that it is unlikely to be possible to achieve absolute coterminosity throughout a county area while also providing for the optimum level of electoral equality. In this respect, county reviews are different from those of districts. We will seek to achieve the best available balance between electoral equality and coterminosity, taking into account the statutory criteria. While the proportion of electoral divisions that will be coterminous with the boundaries of district wards is likely to vary between counties, we would normally expect coterminosity to be achieved in a significant majority of divisions. The average level of coterminosity secured under our final recommendations for the first eleven counties that we have reviewed (excluding the Isle of Wight) is 70%. We would normally expect to recommend levels of coterminosity of around 60% to 80%.

12 Where coterminosity is not possible in parished areas, and a district ward is to be split between electoral divisions, we would normally expect this to be achieved without dividing (or further dividing) a parish between divisions. There are likely to be exceptions to this, however, particularly where larger parishes are involved.

13 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.

14 A further area of difference between county and district reviews is that we must recognise that it will not be possible to avoid the creation of some county divisions which contain diverse communities, for example, combining rural and urban areas. We have generally sought to avoid this in district reviews in order to reflect the identities and interests of local communities. Some existing county council electoral divisions comprise a number of distinct communities, which is inevitable given the larger number of electors represented by each councillor, and we would expect that similar situations would continue under our recommendations in seeking the best balance between coterminosity and the statutory criteria.

15 As a part of this review we may also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the county. However, we made some

recommendations for new parish electoral arrangements as part of our district reviews. We therefore expect to put forward such recommendations during county reviews only on an exceptional basis. In any event, we are *not* able to review administrative boundaries *between* local authorities or parishes, or consider the establishment of new parish areas as part of this review.

The review of Oxfordshire County Council

16 We completed the reviews of the four district councils and one city council in Oxfordshire in August 2001 and Orders for the new electoral arrangements have since been made. This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Oxfordshire County Council. The last such review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in June 1982 (Report No. 428).

17 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

18 Stage One began on 4 February 2003, when we wrote to Oxfordshire County Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified the city council and the four district councils in the county, Thames Valley Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Oxfordshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the county, Members of Parliament with constituencies in the county, Members of the European Parliament for the South East Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Oxfordshire County Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of submissions (the end of Stage One) was 2 June 2003.

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

20 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 13 January 2004 and will end on 8 March 2004, 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.**

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

Equal opportunities

22 In preparing this report the Team has had regard to the general duty under section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 to promote racial equality and to the approach set out in BCFE (03) 35, *Race Relations Legislation*, which the Committee considered and agreed at its meeting on 9 April 2003.

2 Current electoral arrangements

23 The county of Oxfordshire comprises Oxford City and the four districts of Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire is located between Britain's two biggest industrial markets, London and Birmingham. The university city of Oxford is widely recognised as an architectural centre and is renowned for its academic excellence. The county also plays a key role in international publishing, biotechnology and car manufacturing.

24 The electorate of the county is 465,324 (December 2002). By 2007 this is forecast to increase by 3% to 481,607. The council presently has 70 members with one member elected from each division.

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

26 At present, each councillor represents an average of 6,647 electors, which the County Council forecasts will increase to 6,880 by the year 2007 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration over the last two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 42 of the 70 divisions varies by more than 10% from the county average, and in 16 divisions by more than 20%. The worst imbalance is in Bicester North division where the councillor represents 147% more electors than the county average.

27 As detailed previously, in considering the County Council's electoral arrangements, we must have regard to the boundaries of district wards. Following the completion of the reviews of district warding arrangements in Oxfordshire, we are therefore faced with a new starting point for considering electoral divisions. Our proposals for county divisions will be based on the new district wards as opposed to those which existed prior to the recent reviews. In view of the effect of these new district wards and changes in the electorate over the past twenty years, which have resulted in electoral imbalances across the county, changes to most if not all of the existing county electoral divisions are inevitable.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements

	Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Variance from average %
Cherwell						
1	Banbury Easington	1	6,720	1	6,953	1
2	Banbury Grimsbury	1	7,787	17	8,550	24
3	Banbury Hardwick	1	5,221	-21	5,431	-21
4	Banbury Neithrop	1	5,659	-15	5,941	-14
5	Banbury Ruscote	1	5,747	-14	5,714	-17
6	Bicester North	1	16,429	147	17,460	154
7	Bicester South	1	4,274	-36	4,505	-35
8	Bloxham	1	6,303	-5	6,456	-6
9	Deddington	1	7,845	18	8,054	17
10	Kidlington North	1	6,211	-7	6,208	-10
11	Kidlington South	1	5,387	-19	5,373	-22
12	Ploughley	1	10,022	51	10,897	58
13	Wroxton	1	6,556	-1	7,681	12
14	Yarnton & Otmoor	1	6,406	-4	6,721	-2
Oxford City						
15	Blackbird Leys	1	8,061	21	7,945	15
16	Headington	1	6,292	-5	6,487	-6
17	Iffley	1	5,867	-12	5,984	-13
18	Littlemore	1	5,374	-19	5,451	-21
19	New Marston	1	4,727	-29	4,688	-32
20	Old Marston	1	4,928	-26	4,979	-28
21	Oxford Central	1	6,384	-4	6,336	-8
22	Oxford Cherwell	1	5,221	-21	5,277	-23
23	Oxford East	1	6,051	-9	6,324	-8
24	Oxford North	1	5,668	-15	5,595	-19
25	Oxford South	1	6,400	-4	6,607	-4
26	Oxford West	1	6,123	-8	6,579	-4
27	Quarry	1	5,751	-13	5,816	-15
28	St Clements	1	7,821	18	7,948	16
29	Temple Cowley	1	5,603	-16	5,739	-17
30	Wolvercote	1	5,752	-13	6,099	-11
31	Wood Farm	1	5,939	-11	6,010	-13
South Oxfordshire						
32	Benson	1	6,221	-6	6,227	-9
33	Chalgrove	1	6,115	-8	6,081	-12
34	Chinnor	1	5,932	-11	5,944	-14
35	Didcot Manor	1	11,786	77	13,006	89
36	Didcot Mereland	1	5,703	-14	5,570	-19
37	Dorchester	1	6,072	-9	6,051	-12
38	Goring	1	6,171	-7	6,153	-11

	Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Variance from average %
39	Henley North	1	5,171	-22	5,326	-23
40	Henley South	1	6,514	-2	6,512	-5
41	Moreton	1	6,446	-3	6,634	-4
42	Sonning Common	1	6,068	-9	6,110	-11
43	Thame	1	8,673	30	8,779	28
44	Wallingford	1	6,529	-2	6,814	-1
45	Watlington	1	5,866	-12	6,061	-12
46	Wheatley	1	7,333	10	7,367	7
Vale of White Horse						
47	Abingdon Central	1	10,453	57	10,783	57
48	Abingdon North	1	7,879	19	7,851	14
49	Abingdon South	1	5,962	-10	6,530	-5
50	Cumnor	1	7,285	10	7,594	10
51	Drayton	1	6,112	-8	6,314	-8
52	Faringdon	1	7,678	16	8,056	17
53	Grove	1	5,942	-11	6,090	-11
54	Hinksey	1	7,126	7	7,255	5
55	Hormer	1	4,816	-28	4,871	-29
56	Marcham	1	5,571	-16	5,532	-20
57	Shrivenham	1	7,535	13	8,009	16
58	Wantage	1	7,616	15	7,886	15
59	Wantage Rural	1	5,656	-15	5,861	-15
West Oxfordshire						
60	Bampton	1	9,445	42	9,681	41
61	Burford	1	6,199	-7	6,340	-8
62	Carterton	1	8,150	23	9,508	38
63	Charlbury	1	6,326	-5	6,435	-6
64	Chipping Norton	1	5,813	-13	6,087	-12
65	Eynsham	1	7,167	8	8,518	24
66	Hanborough	1	5,951	-10	5,987	-13
67	Witney North	1	5,268	-21	5,168	-25
68	Witney South	1	7,296	10	7,456	8
69	Woodstock	1	5,339	-20	5,473	-20
70	Wychwood	1	5,610	-16	5,879	-15
Totals		70	465,324	-	481,607	-
Averages		-	6,647	-	6,880	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Oxfordshire County Council.

Note: Each division is represented by a single councillor, and the electorate columns denote the number of electors represented by each councillor. The 'variance from average' column shows how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies from the average for the county. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2002, electors in Bicester South division in Cherwell district were relatively over-represented by 36%, while electors in Bicester North division in Cherwell district were relatively under-represented by 147%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Submissions received

28 At the start of this review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Oxfordshire County Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

29 During this initial stage of the review, officers from The Boundary Committee visited the area and met officers and members of the County Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 30 submissions during Stage One, including a county-wide scheme from Oxfordshire County Council, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the County Council.

Oxfordshire County Council

30 The County Council proposed a council size of 74 members, four more than at present, in a uniform pattern of single-member divisions. Under the Council's proposals 14 divisions would initially have electoral variances over 10% with two over 20%. By 2007 11 divisions would have electoral variances over 10%, with none higher than 18%.

District and Borough Councils

31 West Oxfordshire District Council (the District Council) proposed a district-wide scheme which contained one minor amendment to the County Council's scheme.

Political Groups

32 We received one submission from the Labour Group on the council (the Labour Group). This supported the County Council's proposals in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts but proposed alternative arrangements in Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire. In Cherwell district, amendments were made regarding Banbury and Bicester and a uniform pattern of two-member divisions was proposed in Oxford City. In West Oxfordshire it proposed amendments to the County Council's proposals in Witney and Carterton.

Parish and Town Councils

33 We received responses from 17 parish and town councils. In the district of South Oxfordshire we received a submission from Thame Town Council which proposed two divisions coterminous with the new district council wards. Rotherfield Peppard and Rotherfield Greys parish councils stated they wished to remain in South Oxfordshire.

34 In the district of Vale of White Horse, Longworth Parish Council suggested that the proposed changes are 'arbitrary' and inconsistent'. Cumnor Parish Council proposed that the parish remain in the same division.

35 Seven parish councils in West Oxfordshire supported the proposal put forward by the District Council. Kingham Parish Council opposed being in the same division as Chipping Norton parish. Clanfield Parish Council stated it did not want to be placed in a division with part of Carterton town. Carterton Town Council opposed the District Council's proposals and supported one of the County Council's schemes outlined in its consultation process. Stanton Harcourt Parish Council stated it was satisfied with the current arrangements.

Other representations

36 We received a further ten submissions from councillors and local residents. In Oxford City there was consensus for the two-member divisions proposed by the Labour Group. Councillor Turner (member for Rose Hill & Iffley ward), Councillor Pressel (member for Jericho & Osney ward) and Councillor Karmali (member for Oxford South division), and four local residents all opposed the County Council's scheme in Oxford City as they stated it divided communities and lacked any coterminous divisions. All of the respondents supported having two-member divisions to represent the city of Oxford.

37 In Vale of White Horse we received a partial scheme for the east of the district from Councillor Cowley, parish councillor for North Hinksey parish. Another resident considered that the present arrangements were satisfactory. In West Oxfordshire District, Councillor Hayward (member for Bampton ward) stated that he supported one of the schemes outlined under the County Council's consultation process, and gave some evidence why he opposed the scheme proposed by the County Council.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

38 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Oxfordshire County Council and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed division boundaries, number of councillors and division names. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

39 As with our reviews of districts, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Oxfordshire County Council 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, and 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 division of the county’.

40 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 maintaining local ties, and to the boundaries of district wards.

41 We have discussed in Chapter One the additional parameters which apply to reviews of county council electoral arrangements and the need to have regard to the boundaries of district wards in order to achieve coterminosity. In addition, our approach is to ensure that, having reached conclusions on the appropriate number of councillors to be elected to the county council, each district council area is allocated the number of county councillors to which it is entitled.

42 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every division of a county.

43 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, especially when also seeking to achieve coterminosity in order to facilitate convenient and effective local government, so 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. Accordingly, 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 the boundaries of district wards and community identity. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be taken into account and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

44 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, 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 that are based on these issues.

Electorate forecasts

45 Since 1975 there has been a 28% increase in the electorate of Oxfordshire. The County Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2007, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 3% from 465,324 to 481,607 over the five-year period from 2002 to 2007. It expects most of the growth to be in Cherwell district. 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. Advice from the County Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to division boundaries has been obtained.

46 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered all the evidence received concerning electorate forecasts, we accept that the County Council's figures are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council size

47 As explained earlier, we now require justification for any council size proposed, whether it is an increase, decrease, or retention of the existing council size.

48 Oxfordshire County Council presently has 70 members. The County Council proposed a council of 74 members. In reaching its decision on council size, the County Council considered the implications of the new Leader and Cabinet system of political management that was implemented in November 2001. It stated that under the new arrangements the Executive of the council is having to 'address a wider agenda in developing the Council's strategic priorities and objectives, in meeting public expectations, Government targets and indicators and the inspection regime'. It provided examples of how this was being achieved; 'through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, the Public Service Agreement, the Local Strategic Partnership and the various service inspections.' The County Council has established five overview and scrutiny committees and has also 'agreed to undertake the scrutiny of health services in Oxfordshire'. It stated that under the new arrangements 'members of Scrutiny Committees are having to adopt new ways of working that are ... member, not officer led. This means that Scrutiny members are having to devote more time to the Scrutiny process as a whole.'

49 The County Council also detailed the representative role of the councillors under the new arrangements, which has placed an emphasis on partnership working. It outlined the representative roles which include 'partnerships, such as the Oxfordshire Community Partnership – the Local Strategic Partnership – and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. It also referred to joint committees and 'almost 200 outside bodies ranging from major national and regional bodies to those of a more local nature' as well as youth and community organisations and school governing bodies.

50 It referred to an increasing demand on councillors' time stating that 'a significant proportion of this was due to the increase in the general burden of community meetings, casework, paperwork and travel'. The County Council concluded that the proposed increase in council size 'is justified in view of the requirements of the new political management arrangements and the increasing demands on member time in this and their wider community/representation role.'

51 We received no other comments on council size and note that all of the schemes that we received at Stage One were based on a council size of 74. We considered that the County Council provided a good level of argumentation and evidence detailing why it should have an increase of four councillors. Therefore, 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 statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 74 members.

Electoral arrangements

52 We have carefully considered all the representations received, including the county-wide scheme from the County Council. We received district-wide schemes from the Labour Group on the Council for the City of Oxford and the districts of Cherwell and West Oxfordshire. In Cherwell district its scheme was similar to the County Council's in the rural areas but differed in the towns of Banbury and Bicester. In West Oxfordshire district the Labour Group's proposals were broadly similar to the County Council's but differed in the town of Witney. In both Cherwell and West Oxfordshire the Labour Group proposed a pattern of single-member divisions. In Oxford City the Labour Group proposed a uniform pattern of two-member divisions which was strongly supported by each of the respondents who commented on the area at Stage One.

53 The County Council undertook a consultation exercise before submitting a scheme to The Boundary Committee. The consultation document that it distributed contained alternative schemes for each district. Most of the other representations that we received were comments on the schemes detailed in the County Council's consultation document. In West Oxfordshire we received comments from parish councils who stated that they opposed the County Council's scheme and supported the proposal of the district council. However, examination of the County Council's documents revealed that these respondents were commenting on the scheme detailed in the consultation document, that was not proposed by the County Council in its final submission to us. It actually proposed a scheme that was very similar to the District Council's proposal. We have therefore noted all comments in light of this information.

54 We also received a partial scheme from Councillor Cowley, parish councillor for North Hinksey parish, who proposed five divisions in the east of the Vale of White Horse district that were all different from the divisions proposed by the County Council.

55 We have carefully considered all the representations received, including the county-wide scheme from the County Council. The County Council's proposals would improve electoral equality, compared with the existing arrangements, with the number of divisions where the number of electors would vary by more than 10% from the county average reduced from 49 to 11 by 2007. We noted that the County Council's scheme provided a level of just 30% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries.

56 As indicated above, we are adopting a council size of 74, proposed by the County Council. All schemes provided the correct allocation of councillors between districts under a council size of 74. We are proposing to adopt the Labour Group's proposal in Oxford City in its entirety, and in West Oxfordshire district we are adopting its proposals with a number of our own amendments. In Cherwell district we are adopting a combination of the County Council's and our own proposals and are amending the County Council's proposals in South Oxfordshire district. In Vale of White Horse district we are adopting Councillor Cowley's proposals in the north and using our own proposals in the remainder of the district. We were concerned that in the majority of the submissions that we received there was a lack of good evidence and argumentation supporting the proposals, especially in relation to community identities and interests across the county. We have therefore proposed divisions that provide a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity, amending locally proposed schemes in order to achieve this.

57 As stated earlier in the report, following the commencement of Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000, we may now recommend the creation of multi-member divisions. As part of our draft recommendations we are proposing a number of two-member divisions. In Oxford City we are proposing a uniform pattern of eight two-member divisions, as proposed by the Labour Group. We are also adopting seven other two-member divisions in the rest of the county. In Cherwell district we are proposing a three-member division to represent the

town of Bicester. We consider that these multi-member divisions provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than either the existing arrangements or any of the proposals we received at Stage One. Our draft recommendations provide 64% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions. Our recommendations would initially produce 11 divisions with electoral variances of over 10% with one division with an electoral variance over 20%. This is forecast to improve by 2007 with seven divisions having electoral variances over 10% and no divisions with electoral variances over 20%.

58 Our proposals would also involve re-warding Banbury parish in Cherwell district in order to facilitate a balance between electoral equality and community identity. For county division purposes, the five district areas in the county are considered in turn, as follows:

- i. Cherwell district (pages 28 - 31)
- ii. Oxford City (pages 31 - 34)
- iii. South Oxfordshire district (pages 34 - 37)
- iv. Vale of White Horse district (pages 37 - 39)
- v. West Oxfordshire district (pages 40 - 44)

59 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and on the large maps inserted at the back of this report.

Cherwell district

60 Under the current arrangements, the district of Cherwell is represented by 14 county councillors serving 14 divisions. Banbury Hardwick, Banbury Neithrop, Banbury Ruscote, Bicester South, Bloxham, Kidlington North, Kidlington South and Yarnton & Otmoor divisions are over-represented, with 21%, 15%, 14%, 36%, 5%, 7%, 19%, and 4% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (21%, 14%, 17%, 35%, 6% 10%, 22% and 2% fewer by 2007). Banbury Easington, Banbury Grimsbury, Bicester North, Deddington and Ploughley divisions are under-represented with 1%, 17%, 147%, 18% and 51% more electors than the county average (1%, 24%, 154%, 17% and 58% more by 2007). Wroxton division currently has 1% fewer electors than the county average (12% more by 2007).

61 At Stage One we received two submissions in relation to the district of Cherwell. The County Council proposed a district-wide scheme and the Labour Group on the Council made amendments to the County Council's scheme.

62 The County Council proposed that the number of county councillors representing Cherwell should increase from 14 to 16. The district contains three main towns, Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington. The County Council stated that it had attempted to propose divisions that did not comprise an urban and rural mix, which it achieved in Banbury. It proposed a Banbury Hardwick division comprising the district ward of Banbury Hardwick only. It proposed a Banbury Ruscote division comprising the district ward of Banbury Ruscote, together with the western part of the adjoining Banbury Easington district ward. It proposed a Banbury Neithrop & Castle division comprising Banbury Neithrop district ward and that part of Banbury Grimsbury & Castle district ward to the west of the railway line and the northern half of the Banbury Calthorpe district ward. It proposed a Banbury Grimsbury division comprising part of Banbury Grimsbury & Castle district ward to the east of the railway line only. It also proposed a Banbury Easington division comprising the eastern part of Banbury Easington and the southern half of Banbury Calthorpe district ward. The County Council's proposals would require the re-warding of Banbury parish as each district ward currently comprises a whole parish ward which the county proposes dividing.

63 In Bicester the County Council proposed four divisions. It proposed a Bicester North East division comprising Bicester North district ward and part of Bicester East district ward (the polling district to the south of Skimmingdish Lane). The remainder of Bicester East district ward would be joined with Bicester South district ward to form a Bicester South East

division. It also proposed a Bicester Town & Chesterton division comprising the district wards of Bicester Town and Ambrosden & Chesterton, and a Bicester West division comprising the district ward of Bicester West only.

64 The County Council proposed a Kidlington North & Yarnton division comprising the district ward of Kidlington North, and part of Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton district ward (the parishes of Yarnton and Begbroke). It proposed a Kidlington South division comprising the district ward of Kidlington South only. In the rural area of Cherwell district the County Council proposed a Wroxton division comprising the district wards of Cropredy, Sibford and Wroxton, a Bloxham division comprising the district wards of Adderbury and Bloxham & Bodicote. It proposed a Deddington division comprising the district wards of Deddington and Hook Norton and part of The Astons & The Heyfords district ward (the parishes of Duns Tew, Fritwell, Middle Aston, North Aston, Somerton, Souldern and Steeple Aston). It also proposed a Ploughley division comprising the district wards of Caversfield, Fringford and Launton and an Otmoor & Kirtlington division comprising the district wards of Otmoor and Kirtlington and part of The Astons & The Heyfords district ward (the parishes of Upper Heyford and Lower Heyford) and part of the Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton District ward (the parish of Gosford & Water Eaton).

65 Under the County Council's proposals 38% coterminosity would be secured between district ward and county division boundaries. Banbury Grimsbury, Banbury Hardwick, Bicester Town & Chesterton, Bicester West and Ploughley divisions would initially contain 17%, 29%, 3%, 10% and 9% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (10%, 14%, 2%, 14% and 5% fewer by 2007). Banbury Easington, Banbury Neithrop & Castle, Banbury Ruscote, Bloxham, Deddington, Kidlington North & Yarnton and Wroxton divisions would initially contain 12%, 16%, 15%, 8%, 5%, 9% and 1% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (13%, 17%, 12%, 7%, 4%, 8% and 1% more by 2007). Bicester North East and Bicester South East divisions would initially contain 2% and 1% fewer electors than the county average respectively (5% and 6% more by 2007). Kidlington South and Otmoor & Kirtlington divisions would initially contain 1% and 3% more electors than the county average respectively (2% fewer and equal to the county average by 2007).

66 The Labour Group on the Council proposed amendments to the County Council's scheme in order to improve coterminosity in Banbury and to 'provide a better separation between urban and rural divisions' in Bicester. In Banbury it proposed an alternative arrangement of the six urban district wards with two coterminous divisions. It proposed a Grimsbury & Castle division comprising Banbury Grimsbury & Castle district ward only and a Ruscote division comprising Banbury Ruscote district ward only. It proposed a Hardwick division comprising Banbury Hardwick district ward and part of Banbury Neithrop district ward (the polling district to the north of Ruscote Avenue). To the south it proposed a Neithrop division comprising part of Banbury Neithrop district ward (the polling districts to the south of Ruscote Avenue) and part of Banbury Easington district ward (the polling districts broadly to the north of Bloxham Road). It also proposed an Easington division comprising Banbury Calthorpe district ward and part of Banbury Easington district ward (the polling district broadly to the south of Bloxham Road).

67 In Bicester the Labour Group proposed a Bicester West division comprising Bicester West district ward only and a Bicester North division comprising Bicester North district ward and part of Caversfield district ward (the parish of Caversfield). It proposed a Bicester East division comprising Bicester East district ward and part of Bicester Town district ward (the polling district to the east of Sheep Street) and part of Launton district ward (the site of the proposed Bicester Airfield development). It proposed a Bicester South division comprising Bicester South district ward and part of Bicester Town district ward (the polling districts to the west of Sheep Street). In the area surrounding Bicester it proposed a Ploughley division comprising the district wards of Ambrosden & Chesterton, Fringford and part of Caversfield district ward (less the parish of Caversfield) and Launton district ward (less the site of the

proposed Bicester Airfield development). In Kidlington and the remaining rural areas the Labour Group proposed the same divisions as the County Council.

68 The Labour Group's proposals would require rewarding of Banbury, Bicester and Launton parishes. The Labour Group's proposals would provide 31% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries. Ruscote, Bicester West, Bicester North, Bicester East and Bicester South divisions would initially contain 7%, 10%, 13%, 7% and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (11%, 11%, 5%, 8% and 6% fewer by 2007). Grimsbury & Castle, Neithrop, Easington and Ploughley divisions would initially contain 7%, 3%, 2% and 10% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (18%, 2%, 1% and 11% more by 2007). Hardwick division would initially contain 7% more electors than the county average (7% more by 2007).

69 We received no other submissions at Stage One in relation to the district of Cherwell. We have carefully considered the representations we have received at Stage One. We note the fact that both the County Council and the Labour Group have contained Banbury within wholly urban divisions. We recognise the difficulties in proposing divisions in the town with both good electoral equality and coterminosity. This is partially due to the fact that the town is represented by six district wards, but entitled to five county councillors. However, we consider that the poor level of both coterminosity and electoral equality that the County Council's scheme provides can be improved. We note that the Labour Group's scheme provides an improved balance between the statutory criteria and we are proposing to base our recommendations on its scheme. We have improved the electoral equality in the east of Banbury by combining the Labour Group's proposed Easington and Grimsbury & Castle divisions into a two-member Banbury East division. We consider that this improved level of electoral equality provides a better balance between the statutory criteria than any of the alternatives. In the rest of Banbury we are adopting the Labour Group's proposals as we consider that they provide the best balance of the statutory criteria given the constraints of the size and distribution of the district wards. Our proposals involve the rewarding of part of Banbury parish, discussed later in this report.

70 In Bicester we have sought to improve on the proposals of both the County Council and the Labour Group. We note that, in its proposal, the County Council stated that respondents to the County Council's consultation scheme supported the Bicester Town ward being linked with Ambrosden & Chesterton district ward, but we did not consider there was sufficient evidence to support adopting a division where the centre and more established area of the town is in a different division to the rest of the town and have therefore not been persuaded to adopt its scheme. The Labour Group proposed to reward Launton parish so that the site of the proposed Bicester Airfield development would be included with the urban Bicester East ward. The development site is forecast to contain electors by 2007, but is not yet completed and we are unable to create a parish ward which does not contain any electors at this stage.

71 We considered two two-member divisions to represent the town of Bicester: in the south of the town we considered a division comprising the Bicester South, Bicester Town and Bicester East district wards and in the north of the town another two-member division would comprise Bicester North, Bicester West and part of Caversfield district ward (Caversfield parish only). This would provide a poor level of electoral equality in the surrounding rural divisions and would also provide a level of just 42% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries in the district. We consider that, in Oxfordshire, where the size and distribution of district wards has made it difficult to provide a good level of coterminosity, this is not acceptable and therefore considered whether a three-member division in Bicester would improve the balance between the statutory criteria.

72 We have noted that a three-member division would improve the level of coterminosity in the district and the county as a whole, whilst containing most of Bicester in an urban division. This three-member Bicester division comprises the district wards of Bicester East,

Bicester North, Bicester Town and Bicester West. During Stage Two, officers of the Committee visited the area and noted that these district wards appear to have strong links and considered that they should all be contained within wholly urban divisions. This Bicester division has excellent electoral equality, is coterminous and facilitates an improved level of electoral equality and coterminosity in the rest of the district. We note that in order to provide an acceptable level of electoral equality in the area, one of the Bicester district wards must be included with a district ward outside of Bicester. We also noted that Bicester South district ward is the most distinct and separate of the Bicester wards and we are therefore proposing to join it with Ambrosden & Chesterton district ward to form a Bicester South division. This would facilitate an acceptable level of coterminosity in the whole county, which, as the County Council recognised in their submission, has been difficult to achieve due to the size and distribution of the district wards. We consider that these arrangements strike the best balance between our statutory criteria in Bicester and the surrounding area.

73 We are proposing a two-member Kidlington & Yarnton division to improve coterminosity and to unite the town of Kidlington in the same division. This would be formed by combining the Kidlington North, Kidlington South, and Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton district wards. In the remainder of the district we are adopting the County Council's proposed Bloxham, Deddington, Otmoor & Kirtlington and Wroxton divisions as they provide excellent levels of both electoral equality and coterminosity. However, we are proposing one amendment to the Otmoor & Kirtlington division. We are transferring the parish of Gosford & Water Eaton into the proposed Kidlington & Yarnton division to improve coterminosity.

74 We acknowledge the problems of achieving satisfactory levels of coterminosity in Oxfordshire and in Cherwell district in particular. We consider that the multi-member divisions that we have proposed in Cherwell facilitate an improved level of coterminosity in the county as a whole. Given the constraints in Cherwell we consider that our proposals provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

75 Under a council size of 74, Cherwell district is entitled to 16 councillors. Under our draft recommendations the district will have 58% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries. Under our draft recommendations Banbury Hardwick, Banbury Ruscote, Bicester, Bicester South, Otmoor & Kirtlington and Ploughley divisions will initially contain 7%, 7%, 2%, 11%, 14% and 9% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7% more, 11% fewer, 1% fewer, 2% fewer, 15% fewer and 5% fewer by 2007). Banbury East, Banbury Neithrop, Bloxham, Deddington, Kidlington & Yarnton and Wroxton divisions will initially contain 4%, 3%, 8%, 5%, 13% and 1% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (9%, 2%, 7%, 4%, 11% and 1% more by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large maps at the back of the report.

Oxford City

76 Under the current arrangements, the city of Oxford is represented by 17 county councillors serving 17 divisions. Headington, Iffley, Littlemore, New Marston, Old Marston, Oxford Central and Oxford Cherwell divisions are over-represented, with 5%, 12%, 19%, 29%, 26%, 4% and 21% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (6%, 13%, 21%, 32%, 28%, 8% and 23% fewer by 2007). Oxford East, Oxford North, Oxford South, Oxford West, Quarry, Temple Cowley, Wolvercote and Wood Farm divisions are also over-represented with 9%, 15%, 4%, 8%, 13%, 16%, 13% and 11% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (8%, 19%, 4%, 4%, 15%, 17%, 11% and 13% fewer by 2007). Blackbird Leys and St Clements divisions are under-represented with 21% and 18% more electors than the county average (15% and 16% more by 2007).

77 At Stage One we received nine submissions in relation to the city of Oxford including city-wide schemes from the County Council and the Labour Group. The County Council proposed that the number of county councillors representing Oxford should decrease from

17 to 16 and the Labour Group proposed a scheme that reflected this proposal. As a result of the review of Oxford City, 24 two-member wards were created. The County Council noted that under these arrangements it is difficult to propose single-member divisions with good levels of both electoral equality and coterminosity. In its consultation paper it stated that it considered two-member divisions but instead decided to propose a uniform pattern of single-member divisions that each comprised one whole city ward and part of another city ward. It stated that this was preferable to two-member divisions as under its proposals '16 city wards are comprised wholly within divisions and that community links are maintained wherever possible by the way in which the other eight wards are split'.

78 In the north of the city it proposed a Wolvercote & Summertown West division comprising Wolvercote city ward and the western part of Summertown city ward, a St Margaret's & Summertown East division comprising St Margaret's city ward and the remainder of Summertown city ward. It proposed an Oxford North & Jericho division comprising North city ward and the built-up area of Jericho & Osney city ward and a Carfax & Osney division comprising Carfax city ward and the remainder of Jericho & Osney city ward.

79 In the west of the city it proposed a Holywell & Grandpont division comprising Holywell city ward and the northern part of Hinksey Park city ward, a Donnington Bridge division comprising Iffley Fields city ward and the remainder of Hinksey Park city ward. St Mary's & South Park division would comprise St Mary's city ward and the northern part of St Clement's city ward. The Cowley West division would comprise Cowley Marsh city ward and the remainder of St Clement's city ward.

80 In the south of the city it proposed a Rose Hill & Church Cowley division comprising Rose Hill & Iffley city ward and part of Cowley city ward, a Littlemore division comprising Littlemore city ward and part of Northfield Brook city ward. It proposed a Blackbird Leys division comprising Blackbird Leys city ward and the remainder of Northfield Brook city ward. It proposed a Lye Valley & Cowley East division comprising Lye Valley city ward and part of Cowley city ward.

81 In the east of the city it proposed a Churchill & Quarry division comprising Churchill city ward and part of Quarry & Risinghurst city ward, a Barton & Risinghurst division comprising Barton & Sandhills city ward and the eastern part of Quarry & Risinghurst city ward. It proposed a Marston & Headington Hill division comprising Marston city ward and the southern part of Headington Hill & Northway city ward and a Headington & Northway division comprising Headington city ward and the northern part of Headington Hill & Northway city ward.

82 Under the County Council's proposals no coterminous divisions were proposed. Barton & Risinghurst, Donnington Bridge, Littlemore, Marston & Headington Hill and Rose Hill & Church Cowley divisions would initially contain 1%, 3%, 7%, 9% and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (3%, 5%, 9%, 10% and 6% fewer by 2007). Carfax & Osney, Churchill & Quarry, Lye Valley & Cowley East, Oxford North & Jericho, St Margaret's & Summertown East and St Mary's & South Park divisions would initially contain 7%, 8%, 13%, 3%, 1% and 7% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (8%, 4%, 9%, 3%, 2% and 5% more by 2007). Blackbird Leys, Cowley West, Headington & Northway and Wolvercote & Summertown West divisions would initially contain 5% more, 3% fewer, 2% more and 1% more electors than the county average respectively (and would have electoral variances equal to the county average by 2007). Holywell & Grandpont division would initially contain 2% more electors than the county average (2% fewer by 2007).

83 The Labour Group proposed a scheme to improve on the level of coterminosity that the County Council's scheme would provide. It proposed a uniform pattern of two-member divisions across the city that would provide a level of 100% coterminosity with no division having an electoral variance over 10% from the county average.

84 In the north of the city it proposed a Summertown & Wolvercote division comprising the city wards of St Margaret's, Summertown and Wolvercote and a North Oxford division comprising the city wards of Carfax, Holywell and North. It proposed an Isis division comprising the city wards of Hinksey Park, Iffley Fields and Jericho & Osney and an East Oxford division comprising the city wards of St Mary's, St Clement's and Cowley Marsh.

85 The Labour Group proposed a Cowley & Littlemore division comprising the city wards of Rose Hill & Iffley, Littlemore and Cowley, a Leys & Lye division comprising the city wards of Blackbird Leys, Lye Valley and Northfield Brook. It proposed a Barton & Churchill division comprising the city wards of Barton & Sandhills, Churchill and Quarry & Risinghurst and a Headington & Marston division comprising the city wards of Headington, Headington Hill & Northway and Marston.

86 Under the Labour Group's proposals the city of Oxford would have 100% coterminosity between city ward and county division boundaries. Headington & Marston and North Oxford divisions would initially contain 4% and 1% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (5% and 1% fewer by 2007). Barton & Churchill, East Oxford, Isis and Summertown & Wolvercote divisions would initially contain 4%, 2%, 5% and 1% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (1%, 3%, 3% and 1% more by 2007). Cowley & Littlemore and Leys & Lye divisions would initially contain 2% and 1% more electors than the county average respectively (and would have a variance equal to the county average and 3% fewer by 2007).

87 We received seven other submissions at Stage One in relation to the city of Oxford. Two of these submissions expressed support for the proposals of the City Council. However, we did not receive a scheme from the City Council but can infer from the representations that its scheme is identical to that proposed by the Labour Group. All of these respondents opposed the County Council's proposals and supported two-member divisions as this would provide 100% coterminosity and reflect community identities and interests. Councillor Turner (member for Rose Hill & Iffley ward) stated that he supported two-member divisions, partly because of the excellent level of coterminosity that it provides. He stated that 'given the relatively concentrated population of the city, the [geographical] size of divisions is less of a consideration than the need to preserve the simplicity of coterminosity'. He also stated that coterminous divisions would reduce confusion for the electorate. He opposed a number of the County Council's proposed divisions stating that they had very poor community links. He stated that Rose Hill and Lye Valley areas, which the County Council propose linking, have nothing in common and that there was no public transport link.

88 Councillor Pressel (member for Jericho & Osney ward) supported two-member divisions in general and, in particular, the Isis division proposed by the Labour Group. She opposed the division of city wards as proposed by the County Council, as they 'cut across the area committee boundaries'. Councillor Karmali (member for the existing Oxford South division) detailed why the proposed Isis division has a strong sense of community identity. She stated that the electorate of the proposed division 'regard themselves as being part of one South Oxford community. We share the park, the South Oxford Community Centre on Lake Street, and the one health centre'. She stated that the County Council's proposals in this area linked 'very different communities together in one division' and stated that the County Council proposed linking communities with 'different population profiles and interests'. For example, she stated that the County Council proposed linking Holywell ward - 'a predominantly short-stay student population' - with parts of Hinksey Park ward characterised by 'long-term settled communities, with a mixture of families and older people and some university students'.

89 The Chair of Governors at New Hinksey primary school stated that the County Council's proposals to divide Hinksey Park ward 'will divide the local community and the effective catchment area for our school'. Three local residents also opposed the County Council's

proposals to divide the Hinksey Park ward between divisions. One resident stated that the proposals 'would split a community in South Oxford which shares similarities in history, type of housing, and mix of residents'. Another local resident stated that the residents of Hinksey Park share the park, which the County Council propose using as the boundary between divisions. The same local resident also noted that the churches around the park 'work together ecumenically'.

90 We have carefully considered the representations we have received at Stage One and propose adopting the Labour Group's scheme in its entirety. The scheme proposed by the County Council provides excellent electoral equality, with no division having an electoral variance more than 10% from the county average. However, it proposed no coterminous divisions. As stated in our Guidance, for county reviews we are looking to achieve a level of at least 60% coterminosity in the county as a whole. If we adopted the County Council's proposals in Oxford City it would be very difficult to achieve this level of coterminosity, and achieve a good balance between the statutory criteria in the rest of the county. We have therefore not been persuaded to adopt its proposals in Oxford City.

91 We note that the Labour Group's proposed Isis division has limited internal access routes as the railway line prevents direct access between Hinksey Park and Jericho & Osney city wards. We would not normally adopt a division which did not have adequate access within it. However, we received specific support for this division from Councillor Pressel, Councillor Karmali, Councillor Turner and two local residents. We did not receive any other evidence or argumentation that would enable us to identify other two-member divisions in this area that would reflect community identities and any divisions that we proposed would be based solely on electoral equality. During Stage Two officers of The Boundary Committee visited the area and noted that to go from Hinksey Park ward into Jericho & Osney ward it would be necessary to go through Carfax city ward along Park End Street and Oxpens Road. We note the railway station lies in Carfax city ward, near this route. We consider that this part of the city centre shares facilities and amenities, such as the railway station, which are common to all divisions. We consider, in the light of the support of the Labour Group's proposals, and the built-up nature of the area, that in this case uniting wards that do not have direct access routes would provide effective and convenient local government and are proposing to adopt the Labour Group's proposals without amendment.

92 Under a council size of 74, Oxford City is entitled to 16 councillors. We are adopting the Labour Group's proposals without amendment, as described above, as we consider that they provide the best balance between the statutory criteria and have received a good level of support. Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large maps at the back of the report.

South Oxfordshire district

93 Under the current arrangements, the district of South Oxfordshire is represented by 15 county councillors serving 15 divisions. Benson, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Didcot Mereland, Dorchester and Goring divisions are over-represented, with 6%, 8%, 11%, 14%, 9% and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (9%, 12%, 14%, 19%, 12% and 11% fewer by 2007). Henley North, Henley South, Moreton, Sonning Common, Wallingford and Watlington divisions are also over-represented, with 22%, 2%, 3%, 9%, 2% and 12% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (23%, 5%, 4%, 11%, 1% and 12% fewer by 2007). Didcot Manor, Thame and Wheatley divisions are under-represented with 77%, 30% and 10% more electors than the county average (89%, 28% and 7% more by 2007).

94 At Stage One we received three submissions in relation to the district of South Oxfordshire including a district-wide scheme from the County Council. The County Council proposed that the number of county councillors representing South Oxfordshire should increase from 15 to 16.

95 The County Council proposed five coterminous, largely rural divisions. It proposed a Benson division comprising the district wards of Benson and Crowmarsh; a Chalgrove division comprising the district wards of Chalgrove, Garsington and Great Milton and a Wheatley division comprising the district wards of Forest Hill & Holton and Wheatley. It proposed a Goring division comprising the district wards of Goring and Woodcote and a Dorchester & Berinsfield division comprising the district wards of Berinsfield and Sandford. It proposed a Didcot Ladygrove division comprising the district ward of Didcot Ladygrove only, a Didcot Manor division comprising the district ward of Didcot All Saints and part of Didcot Park district ward and a Didcot Mereland division comprising the district ward of Didcot Northbourne and the remainder of Didcot Park district ward.

96 The County Council proposed a Henley North & Chilterns division comprising the district wards of Henley North and Chiltern Woods and a Henley South division comprising the district wards of Henley South and part of Shiplake district ward (the parishes of Harpsden and Shiplake). It proposed a Sonning Common division comprising the district wards of Sonning Common and the remainder of Shiplake district ward (the parishes of Binfield Heath, Eye & Dunsden, Kidmore End and Mapledurham). It proposed a Wallingford division comprising the district ward of Wallingford North, part of Brightwell district ward (the parish of Brightwell cum Sotwell) and part of Cholsey & Wallingford South district ward (the south ward of Wallingford parish) and a Moreton division comprising the district ward of Hagbourne and part of Brightwell district ward (the parishes of Long Wittenham and Little Wittenham) and the remainder of Cholsey & Wallingford South district ward (the parishes of Cholsey and Moulsoford).

97 In the north of the district the County Council proposed a Thame division comprising the district ward of Thame North and part of Thame South district ward and a Thame West & Watlington division comprising the district ward of Watlington and part of Aston Rowant district ward (the parish of Tetsworth) and the remainder of Thame South district ward. It gave two options for dividing Thame South district ward between the two divisions, both of which would provide the same electoral variance. It also proposed a Chinnor division comprising the district ward of Chinnor and the remainder of Aston Rowant district ward (the parishes of Aston Rowant, Crowell, Sydenham and Towersey).

98 Under the County Council's proposals 44% coterminosity would be secured between district ward and county division boundaries. Benson, Chinnor, Didcot Ladygrove, Henley South and Moreton divisions would initially contain 5%, 6%, 12%, 3% and 6% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (8%, 9%, 10%, 6% and 6% by 2007). Didcot Mereland, Thame, Thame West & Watlington, Wallingford and Wheatley divisions would initially contain 8%, 3%, 10%, 4% and 5% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (1%, 2%, 8%, 5% and 2% more by 2007). Chalgrove, Dorchester & Berinsfield and Sonning Common divisions would initially contain 3%, 2% and 1% more electors than the county average, respectively (all would have 1% fewer by 2007). Didcot Manor, Goring and Henley North & Chilterns would initially contain 9% fewer, 4% more and equal to the county average respectively (2% more, equal to the county average and 1% fewer by 2007).

99 We received two other submissions at Stage One in relation to the district of South Oxfordshire. Rotherfield Peppard and Rotherfield Greys parish councils submitted a joint submission stating that they wanted to remain within South Oxfordshire. Thame Town Council proposed 'two County Council [divisions] on exactly the same lines as the new district council wards.'

100 We have carefully considered the representations we have received at Stage One. We note that the County Council's proposals provide an excellent level of electoral equality, with no divisions having electoral variances over 10% and we have used its scheme as the basis for our draft recommendations. However, we have sought to improve on the poor level of coterminosity that it provides and have also united Thame in one division.

101 We note the proposals of Thame Town Council who proposed that the boundaries of the new county divisions should be coterminous with the two Thame district wards. However, this would result in divisions with unacceptably high levels of electoral equality of over 30% and therefore have not been persuaded to adopt its proposals. We recognise that the size of the two Thame district wards makes it difficult to provide divisions with both good electoral equality and coterminosity. We have also been constrained in this area as Thame is on the edge of the district and consequently there are limited options for the area. We do not consider that the County Council's Thame West & Watlington division would provide the most effective and convenient local government in this area. We recognise that it will not be possible to avoid the creation of some county divisions which contain both urban and rural areas. However, we consider that its proposal to combine part of the relatively urban Thame South district ward with 13 rural parishes to the south would not reflect local communities and identities. We have therefore sought to unite Thame in one division whilst avoiding a geographically large division combining urban and rural settlements.

102 We note that uniting the two Thame district wards with any other whole ward would result in electoral variances of over 30% and we have therefore divided Aston Rowant district ward between the proposed Thame division and Watlington divisions to improve electoral equality. Our proposals in this area affect three of the County Council's proposed divisions. We are proposing a two-member Thame & Chinnor division comprising the district wards of Chinnor, Thame North, Thame South and part of Aston Rowant district ward (the parish of Towersey). We are also proposing a Watlington division comprising the district ward of Watlington and part of Aston Rowant district ward (the parishes of Aston Rowant, Crowell, Sydenham and Tetsworth). We note that the two-member division that unites Thame is not ideal, but consider that uniting Thame with the more urban Chinnor ward provides more effective and convenient local government than either the existing arrangements or the proposal by the County Council.

103 In Didcot we have improved the coterminosity of the County Council's scheme by combining its proposed Didcot Manor and Didcot Mereland divisions to form a coterminous two-member Didcot South division. We note that, as well as improving coterminosity, this division has stronger boundaries and excellent electoral equality. We considered uniting the town of Henley in one division, but to ensure a satisfactory level of electoral equality this would necessitate including a rural district ward with the town. We would not usually adopt a mixed urban and rural two-member division if there are alternative proposals that provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. We are therefore proposing to adopt the County Council's proposals in Henley, but would welcome further comments on this issue at Stage Three.

104 We note the comments of Rotherfield Peppard and Rotherfield Greys parish councils regarding their wish to remain in South Oxfordshire. However, as part of this review, The Boundary Committee has no power to recommend changes to the external, administrative boundaries of local authorities.

105 Under a council size of 74, South Oxfordshire district is entitled to 16 councillors. Under our draft recommendations the district will have 57% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries. Under our draft recommendations Benson, Didcot Ladygrove, Henley South, Moreton and Watlington divisions will initially contain 5%, 12%, 3%, 6% and 9% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (8%, 10%, 6%, 6% and 9% fewer by 2007). Thame & Chinnor, Wallingford and Wheatley divisions will initially contain 8%, 4% and 5% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (5%, 5% and 2% more by 2007). Chalgrove, Dorchester & Berinsfield and Sonning Common divisions would initially contain 3%, 2% and 1% more electors than the county average respectively (all would have 1% fewer by 2007). Didcot South would initially contain 1% fewer electors than the county average (1% more by 2007). Goring and Henley North & Chilterns would initially contain 4% more electors and equal to the county

average respectively (equal to the county average and 1% fewer by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large maps at the back of the report.

Vale of White Horse district

106 Under the current arrangements, the district of Vale of White Horse is represented by 13 county councillors serving 13 divisions. Abingdon South, Drayton, Grove, Hormer, Marcham and Wantage Rural divisions are over-represented, with 10%, 8%, 11%, 28%, 16% and 15% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (5%, 8%, 11%, 29%, 20% and 15% fewer by 2007). Abingdon Central, Abingdon North, Cumnor, Faringdon, Hinksey, Shrivenham and Wantage divisions are under-represented with 57%, 19%, 10%, 16%, 7%, 13% and 15% more electors than the county average (57%, 14%, 10%, 17%, 5%, 16% and 15% more by 2007).

107 At Stage One we received six submissions in relation to the district of Vale of White Horse, including a district-wide proposal from the County Council. The County Council proposed that the number of county councillors representing Vale of White Horse should increase from 13 to 14.

108 The County Council proposed four divisions to represent the town of Abingdon. It proposed an Abingdon Central division comprising the district ward of Abingdon Northcourt and part of Abingdon Abbey & Barton district ward, an Abingdon East division comprising the district ward of Abingdon Peachcroft and the remainder of Abingdon Abbey & Barton district ward. It also proposed an Abingdon North West division comprising the district wards of Abingdon Dunmore and Abingdon Fitzharris and an Abingdon South division comprising the district wards of Abingdon Caldecott and Abingdon Ock Meadow. It proposed a Shrivenham division comprising the district wards of Craven, Greendown and Shrivenham, and a Grove division comprising the district ward of Grove and part of Wantage Segsbury district ward. It proposed a Wantage division comprising the district ward of Wantage and the remainder of Wantage Segsbury district ward.

109 It proposed a Cumnor division comprising the district ward of Appleton & Cumnor and part of Sunningwell & Wootton district ward (the parishes of Besselsleigh and Dry Sandford parish ward of St Helen Without parish) and a Radley & Marcham division comprising the district wards of Marcham & Shippon, Radley and part of Sunningwell & Wootton district ward (the parishes of Sunningwell and Wootton). It proposed a Drayton division comprising the district wards of Drayton, Sutton Courtenay & Appleford, part of Harwell district ward (Village parish ward of Milton parish) and part of Hendreds district ward (the parish of Steventon and Heights parish ward of Milton parish). It proposed a Wantage Ridgeway division comprising the district ward of Blewbury & Upton and the remainder of Harwell district ward (the parishes of Chilton and Harwell) and the remainder of Hendreds district ward (the parishes of Ardington, East Hendred, Lockinge and West Hendred). It proposed a Hinksey division comprising the district wards of Kennington & South Hinksey and North Hinksey & Wytham. It proposed a Faringdon division comprising the district ward of Faringdon & The Coxwells and part of Longworth district ward (the parishes of Buckland, Hinton Waldrist, Littleworth, Pusey, North parish ward of Longworth parish) and a Stanford Vale division comprising the district wards of Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor, Hanneys and Stanford and the remainder of Longworth district ward (the parishes of Charney Bassett, Denchworth and Goosey).

110 Under the County Council's proposals 29% coterminosity would be secured between district ward and county division boundaries. Abingdon Central, Abingdon East, Cumnor, Drayton, Stanford Vale and Wantage Ridgeway divisions would initially contain 19%, 11%, 9%, 3%, 8% and 10% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (18%, 15%, 9%, 3%, 2% and 10% by 2007). Abingdon North West, Abingdon South, Faringdon, Grove, Hinksey, Radley & Marcham, Shrivenham and Wantage divisions would

initially contain 10%, 6%, 10%, 10%, 15%, 11%, 14% and 9% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7%, 13%, 12%, 9%, 13%, 7%, 11% and 9% more by 2007).

111 We received five other submissions at Stage One in relation to the district of Vale of White Horse. Bob Cowley, parish councillor for North Hinksey parish, submitted a partial scheme in relation to the east of the district which differed greatly from the County Council's scheme. The scheme provided a good level of electoral equality, but no coterminous divisions. He did not provide names for the proposed divisions. In the north east he proposed a division comprising the district ward of North Hinksey & Wytham and part of Appleton & Cumnor district ward (Farmoor and Dean Court parish wards of Cumnor parish) and a division comprising the district wards of Kennington & South Hinksey and Radley and part of Sunningwell & Wootton (the parish of Sunningwell). He proposed a division comprising the remainder of Sunningwell & Wootton district ward (the parishes of Besselsleigh and Wootton and Dry Sandford parish ward of St Helen Without parish), the remainder of Appleton & Cumnor district ward (the parish of Appleton with Eaton and Village parish ward of Cumnor parish) and part of Marcham & Shippon district ward (Shippon parish ward of St Helen Without parish).

112 Councillor Cowley proposed a division comprising the district wards of Drayton, Sutton Courtenay & Appleford and part of Hendreds district ward (the parish of Steventon and Heights parish ward of Milton parish) and the remainder of Marcham & Shippon district ward (the parish of Marcham) and a division comprising the district wards of Blewbury & Upton, Harwell and the remainder of Hendreds district ward (the parishes of Ardington, East Hendred, Lockinge and West Hendred). He stated that his 'proposal is a great improvement in terms of respecting the identities and common interests of the local communities'.

113 Longworth Parish Council opposed the County Council's scheme and brought attention to the potential confusion to the electorate caused by reviewing the electoral arrangements of the county. Cumnor Parish Council stated that 'spreading the parish across more than one electoral division or constituency is strongly opposed'. Sutton Courtenay Parish Council proposed that the existing arrangements be retained. A local resident proposed that the parish of Upton should remain with Blewbury under any new arrangements.

114 We have carefully considered the representations we have received at Stage One. We concur with the County Council who stated that the size and distribution of the parishes makes it difficult to create single-member divisions that reflect community identities and interests and provide a good level of electoral equality and coterminosity. However, we consider that its proposal provides a poor level of both electoral equality and coterminosity and we have not been persuaded to adopt it. We note that Councillor Cowley's proposals were not supported with any argumentation or evidence. However, we consider that his proposals provide a good level of electoral equality and facilitate a better balance between the statutory criteria in the rest of the district than the County Council's scheme. In the remainder of the district we have attempted to unite similar communities and are proposing three two-member divisions to improve coterminosity.

115 In Abingdon we are proposing two two-member divisions to improve coterminosity. We are proposing an Abingdon East division comprising the district wards of Abingdon Abbey & Barton, Abingdon Dunmore, Abingdon Northcourt and Abingdon Peachcroft and an Abingdon West division comprising the district wards of Abingdon Caldecott, Abingdon Fitzharris, Abingdon Ock Meadow and Drayton. We acknowledge that including Drayton district ward in with three Abingdon district wards is not ideal. However, the town of Abingdon is represented by seven district wards and under a council size of 74 is entitled to four county councillors. Consequently, in order to provide a reasonable level of electoral equality at least one other district ward from outside of Abingdon needs to be included with a part of Abingdon. We considered including Radley district ward in an Abingdon division but this would limit the options for the remaining divisions in the north east of the district and we

would be unable to adopt a locally proposed scheme. By including Drayton district ward in a division with three Abingdon wards we have been able to propose divisions in the rest of the district that provide a good balance between the statutory criteria.

116 We are proposing to adopt Councillor Cowley's scheme in the north east of the district as we consider that it provides excellent electoral equality whilst facilitating divisions in the rest of the district with reasonable electoral equality and coterminosity. We have proposed names for these divisions based on their constituent parts. We propose a North Hinksey & Wytham division comprising the district ward of North Hinksey & Wytham and part of Appleton & Cumnor district ward (Farmoor and Dean Court parish wards of Cumnor parish) and a Radley division comprising the district wards of Kennington & South Hinksey and Radley and part of Sunningwell & Wootton (the parish of Sunningwell). We are proposing a Wootton division comprising the remainder of Sunningwell & Wootton district ward (the parishes of Besselsleigh and Wootton and Dry Sandford parish ward of St Helen Without parish), and the remainder of Appleton & Cumnor district ward (the parish of Appleton with Eaton and Village parish ward of Cumnor parish) and part of Marcham & Shippon district ward (Shippon parish ward of St Helen Without parish).

117 Because we are including Drayton district ward in with three Abingdon wards we have been unable to adopt either the County Council's or Councillor Cowley's proposals to the south of Abingdon. We did not receive strong evidence of community identities in this area and have therefore aimed to adopt divisions which provide good levels of electoral equality and, where possible, coterminosity. We are proposing a Hanneys & Hendreds division comprising the district wards of Hanneys and Hendreds and part of Marcham & Shippon district ward (the parish of Marcham) and a Sutton Courtenay & Harwell division comprising the district wards of Blewbury & Upton, Harwell and Sutton Courtenay & Appleford.

118 We are proposing a coterminous two-member Grove & Wantage division comprising the district wards of Grove, Wantage Charlton and Wantage Segsbury. This has been formed by combining the County Council's proposed Grove and Wantage divisions. We consider that uniting Wantage in the same division would reflect community identities whilst improving the coterminosity in the district. We also note that these two relatively urban areas have excellent road links. We are proposing a coterminous Shrivenham division, identical to the one proposed by the County Council, comprising the district wards of Craven, Greendown and Shrivenham. We are adopting a Kingston Bagpuize division comprising the district wards of Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor, Longworth and Stanford. We are also proposing a coterminous Faringdon division comprising the district ward of Faringdon & The Coxwells only.

119 Under a council size of 74, Vale of White Horse district is entitled to 14 councillors. Under our draft recommendations the district will have 64% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries. Under our draft recommendations Abingdon West, Kingston Bagpuize, Faringdon, Radley and Wootton divisions will initially contain 6%, 16%, 12%, 1% and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (3%, 9%, 10%, 3% and 5% fewer by 2007). Abingdon East, Sutton Courtenay & Harwell, Grove & Wantage and Shrivenham divisions will initially contain 14%, 8%, 10% and 14% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (11%, 6%, 9% and 11% more by 2007). Hanneys & Hendreds division will initially contain 1% more electors than the county average (1% fewer by 2007). North Hinksey & Wytham division will have an electoral variance equal to the county average, both now and by 2007. Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large maps at the back of the report. We have amended the boundaries of the parish wards to tie the boundaries to ground detail.

West Oxfordshire district

120 Under the current arrangements, the district of West Oxfordshire is represented by 11 county councillors serving 11 divisions. Burford, Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Hanborough, Witney North, Woodstock and Wychwood divisions are over-represented with 7%, 5%, 13%, 10%, 21%, 20% and 16% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (8%, 6%, 12%, 13%, 25%, 20% and 15% fewer by 2007). Bampton, Carterton, Eynsham and Witney South divisions are under-represented with 42%, 23%, 8% and 10% more electors than the county average (41%, 38%, 24% and 8% more by 2007).

121 At Stage One we received 15 submissions in relation to the district of West Oxfordshire including district-wide schemes from the County Council, the Labour Group and the West Oxfordshire District Council. The County Council proposed that the number of county councillors representing West Oxfordshire should increase from 11 to 12 and the Labour Group and West Oxfordshire District Council proposed a scheme that reflected this proposal.

122 The County Council proposed to unite the five Witney district wards in three single-member divisions. In its submission it stated that 'it was originally considered that producing a coterminous option for Witney would involve including a rural district ward with one of the Witney wards'. However, following the responses it received as part of its consultation exercise the County Council stated that it had submitted the scheme that was proposed in its consultation process by West Oxfordshire District Council and the County Council Conservative Group. It proposed a Witney North East division comprising the district ward of Witney North and the northern part of Witney East district ward and a Witney South East division comprising the district ward of Witney South and the southern part of Witney East district ward. It also proposed a coterminous Witney North West division comprising the district wards of Witney Central and Witney West.

123 In the north of the district the County Council proposed a Chipping Norton division comprising the district ward of Chipping Norton and part of Kingham, Rollright & Enstone district ward (the parishes of Chastleton, Cornwell, Over Norton, Rollright and Salford) and a Woodstock division comprising the district ward of The Bartons, part of Stonesfield & Tackley district ward (the parishes of Glympton, Kiddington with Asterleigh, Rousham, Tackley and Wootton), part of Kingham, Rollright & Enstone district ward (the parishes of Enstone, Great Tew, Heythrop, Little Tew and Swerford) and part of Woodstock & Bladon district ward (the parishes of Blenheim and Woodstock). It proposed a Charlbury division comprising the district wards of Chadlington & Churchill, Charlbury & Finstock, the remainder of Kingham, Rollright & Enstone district ward (the parish of Kingham) and the remainder of Stonesfield & Tackley district ward (the parishes of Combe and Stonesfield).

124 The County Council proposed a Wychwood division comprising the district wards of Ascott & Shipton, Hailey, Minster Lovell & Leafield and Milton under Wychwood and a Hanborough division comprising the district wards of Freeland & Hanborough, North Leigh, part of Eynsham & Cassington district ward (the parish of Cassington) and the remainder of Woodstock & Bladon district ward (Bladon parish). It proposed an Eynsham division comprising the remainder of Eynsham & Cassington district ward (the parishes of Eynsham and South Leigh) and part of Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt district ward (the parishes of Hardwick-with-Yelford, Northmoor, Standlake and Stanton Harcourt). It proposed a Burford & Ducklington division comprising the district wards of Alvescot & Filkins, Brize Norton & Shilton, Burford and Ducklington and a Carterton South & Bampton division comprising the district wards of Bampton & Clanfield, Carterton South and the remainder of Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt district ward (the parish of Aston, Cote, Shifford and Chimney) and a Carterton North division comprising the district wards of Carterton North East and Carterton North West.

125 Under the County Council's proposals 33% coterminosity would be secured between district ward and county division boundaries. Burford & Ducklington, Chipping Norton, Eynsham, Hanborough, Witney North East, Witney North West and Witney South East divisions would initially contain 5%, 9%, 4%, 5%, 22%, 5% and 1% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (6%, 8%, 6%, 8%, 6%, 6% and 5% by 2007). Carterton South & Bampton, Charlbury and Woodstock divisions would initially contain 9%, 8% and 6% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (6%, 7% and 6% more by 2007). Carterton North division would initially contain 19% fewer electors than the county average (3% more by 2007). Wychwood division would initially have an electoral variance equal to the county average (1% fewer electors by 2007).

126 West Oxfordshire District Council proposed a scheme that was very similar to the County Council's proposal. The District Council's scheme only differed in relation to which division the parish of Kingham should be included. The District Council proposed taking the parish out of the County Council's proposed Charlbury division and including it in the proposed Chipping Norton division. This proposal would provide the same level of electoral equality and coterminosity across the district as the County Council's scheme.

127 The Labour Group proposed a district-wide scheme that was the same as the County Council's proposals in the north and east of the district. However, it proposed alternative arrangements in Witney and in Carterton. In Witney, the Labour Group also proposed to unite the five district wards in three single-member divisions but used different boundaries to achieve this, resulting in three non-coterminous divisions. It proposed a Witney East division comprising the district ward of Witney East and the southern part of Witney North district ward. It proposed a Witney Central division comprising the district ward of Witney Central, the remainder of Witney North district ward and the eastern part of Witney South district ward. It also proposed a Witney West division comprising the district ward of Witney West and the remainder of Witney South district ward.

128 In Carterton, and the rural wards surrounding it, the Labour Group proposed three alternative divisions to those proposed by the County Council and the District Council. It proposed a Carterton South West division comprising the district wards of Carterton South and Carterton North West and a Burford & Carterton North East division comprising the district wards of Brize Norton & Shilton, Burford and Carterton North East. It also proposed a Bampton division comprising the district wards of Alvescot & Filkins, Bampton & Clanfield, Ducklington and part of Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt district ward (the parish of Aston, Cote, Shifford & Chimney).

129 The Labour Group did not provide strong evidence or argumentation in support of its submission but noted that in both Witney and Carterton 'the [County] Council proposes a division effectively separated into two disconnected halves by a physical barrier. In the case of the proposed Witney South-East division, the barrier is the River Windrush. In the case of the proposed Carterton South & Bampton division, it is the Brize Norton Airfield'. It stated that its own proposals were 'designed to achieve fully connected divisions [in Witney and Carterton]'. Under the Labour Group's proposals 25% coterminosity would be secured between district ward and county division boundaries. The level of electoral equality would be similar to that proposed by the County Council, with no division having an electoral variance over 10% by 2007.

130 We received 12 other submissions at Stage One in relation to the district of West Oxfordshire. Some of these stated that they opposed the County Council's proposals. However, it is clear that it is the scheme that the County Council outlined in its consultation that is opposed in these submissions and not the actual scheme put forward by the County Council. We have therefore taken this information into account when formulating our proposals.

131 Councillor Hayward (member for Bampton ward) opposed the scheme put forward by the County Council and supported the 'preferred' scheme outlined in the County Council's consultation document in the rural areas and Carterton. In Witney he supported a 'non-preferred' option outlined in the County Council's consultation document that included combining Witney South district ward with Ducklington district ward. Councillor Hayward also noted who had also supported these options as part of the County Council's consultation process. He gave a limited amount of evidence in support of his proposals but in general opposed the poor levels of coterminosity proposed by the County Council. In the rural east of the district he opposed the County Council's proposed Hanborough division where it proposed Cassington and Bladon parish remain in the same division as each other. He proposed that Cassington parish should be united in a division with the rest of the Eynsham & Cassington district ward and that Bladon parish should be united with the rest of the Woodstock & Bladon district ward. He stated that a large area comprising fields and a river divides Bladon and Cassington and that they 'both look to their respective larger villages for their cultural, shopping and school connections'. Clanfield Parish Council supported Councillor Hayward's proposals. It specified that it did not wish to be placed in a division with Carterton South, noting that the Brize Norton Airfield creates a 'large physical boundary' between the areas.

132 Carterton Town Council supported the scheme outlined in the County Council's consultation document, which comprised a Carterton division containing the district wards of Carterton North East and Carterton North West and a division encircling this, containing Alvescot & Filkins, Brize Norton & Shilton and Carterton South. It gave no supporting evidence for its proposal. Alvescot Parish Council supported the proposals of the West Oxfordshire District Council as this did not involve including any part of the more urban Carterton district wards with Alvescot. Hanborough, North Leigh and Freeland parish councils all supported the proposals of West Oxfordshire District Council, which proposed to retain the existing arrangements. These parish councils did not provide detailed argumentation or evidence to support their proposals. Hanborough Parish Council stated that the parish had more in common with Bladon, but that Woodstock parish is 'a more urban community'. Freeland Parish Council noted the good road links within the proposed division.

133 Stonesfield and Enstone parish councils supported the proposals of the West Oxfordshire District Council. Enstone Parish Council stated that it had 'attempted to avoid where possible urban/rural mixes [and that the District Council's proposals] have the merit of maintaining a reasonable level ... of numerical equality whilst preserving a high degree of local connections and identity'. Charlbury Town Council also supported the proposals of the West Oxfordshire District Council, particularly in relation to Charlbury division. Kingham Parish Council opposed West Oxfordshire District Council's proposals, stating that it did not wish to be in the same division as Chipping Norton, as it considered that Chipping Norton 'does not have the same rural interests as the local villages'. It stated that it would prefer the parish 'to be linked with other rural villages even if this means the ward covers a larger geographical area'. Stanton Harcourt Parish Council stated that it 'would wish as far as is possible to stay with the existing arrangements'.

134 We have carefully considered the representations we have received at Stage One. We note that the County Council's proposals were submitted after a period of consultation. In its submission it recognised that its preferred option, outlined in its consultation document, achieved a higher level of coterminosity than the District Council's scheme but had received mixed responses 'due to the groupings of the wards and the breaking of some existing community links'. We welcome the fact that the scheme has been consulted on and have taken this into account when formulating our proposals. In Witney we note that the County Council submitted a scheme that kept the Witney district wards in three Witney divisions as this received local support. We have, however, looked to improve the coterminosity in the town. We have not been persuaded to adopt a division that combined any of the Witney wards with a more rural district ward, as proposed by Councillor Hayward.

135 We note the poor levels of coterminosity in the district and county as a whole and are improving the level of coterminosity in Witney as we consider that improving coterminosity in the rest of the district would divide divisions that were proposed and supported locally and would also have poor electoral equality. As noted by the respondents at Stage One the River Windrush divides the town from north to south in such a way that makes it difficult to propose divisions that have good coterminosity, electoral equality and provide internal access links within the divisions. We would not normally adopt a scheme that has no internal access links without significant argumentation and local support and have therefore been constrained, as there are no road links between Witney East and Witney South district wards. We note that the River Windrush provides a strong boundary and that, in its submission, the County Council considered uniting the Witney East and Witney North wards, to the east of a river in a single-member division. We are proposing to adopt this Witney East division and to the west of the River Windrush are proposing to adopt a two-member Witney West division comprising the district wards of Witney Central, Witney South and Witney West. We note that both these divisions have relatively high levels of electoral inequality. However, we consider that the River Windrush provides a strong boundary between divisions. By using this as a boundary we have been able to create two divisions, each with excellent access links and a strong sense of community identity. We consider that these divisions strike the best balance between the statutory criteria given the evidence received.

136 We also considered adopting a three-member division comprising the five Witney district wards. We note that this would provide a coterminous division with very good electoral equality and we welcome comments on this alternative division at Stage Three.

137 In the rest of the district we are adopting the Labour Group's scheme, with one amendment. We consider that it provides divisions with better internal access links in Carterton than the proposals of the County Council or West Oxfordshire District Council. The size of the three district wards means that at least one of the Carterton district wards will have to be included with a rural district ward. We recognise, like Councillor Hayward, that 'there does not seem an alternative to joining part of Carterton to a rural area that would please anyone'. We have not been persuaded to adopt the proposals of the County Council and West Oxfordshire District Council which link Carterton South district ward with Bampton & Clanfield district ward as the Brize Norton Airfield forms a physical barrier between the two wards; to go from Carterton South to Bampton & Clanfield it would be necessary to go through either Brize Norton or Alvescot, which we do not consider provides effective and convenient local government, especially as there are feasible alternative proposals for the area. Therefore we are adopting the Labour Group's proposed Burford & Carterton North East coterminous division as this links Carterton North East ward with Brize Norton district ward which have good access links. We note that Councillor Hayward also supported an alternative Carterton division that would have adequate access links. However, as stated before, because we are not adopting his proposals in Witney it is difficult to adopt his proposals in the rest of the district due to the knock-on effect on surrounding divisions.

138 We are adopting the Labour Group's proposals in the area surrounding Carterton. We are adopting its proposed Carterton South West division comprising the district wards of Carterton North West and Carterton South. We are also adopting its proposed Bampton division with one amendment. We are proposing to transfer Aston, Cote, Shifford & Chimney parish out of the proposed Bampton division and are including it in the proposed Eynsham division to improve coterminosity of the Bampton division.

139 We note Carterton Town Council's proposals for an alternative arrangement of divisions around Carterton but note that it provides no evidence in support of its submission. We have not been persuaded that its proposals provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than that of the Labour Group. We also note Councillor Hayward's comments regarding the proposed Hanborough division. However, given the support that the Hanborough division received from Hanborough, North Leigh and Freeland parish

councils we have not been persuaded to move away from our proposals in this area. We note the comments of Kingham Parish Council and, as outlined in the Labour Group's proposals, are including Kingham parish in the Charlbury division and are not transferring it to a division with Chipping Norton.

140 Under a council size of 74, West Oxfordshire district is entitled to 12 councillors. Under our draft recommendations the district will have 55% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries. Under our draft recommendations Bampton, Chipping Norton, Hanborough and Witney West divisions will initially contain 8%, 9%, 5% and 17% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (9%, 8%, 8% and 19% fewer by 2007). Charlbury, Eynsham, Witney East and Woodstock divisions will initially contain 8%, 11%, 6% and 6% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7%, 10%, 20% and 6% more by 2007). Burford & Carterton North East division would initially contain 21% fewer electors than the county average (2% more by 2007). Carterton South West and Wychwood divisions would both initially have an electoral variance equal to the county average (5% and 1% fewer electors than the county average, respectively by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large maps at the back of the report.

Conclusions

141 Having considered all the evidence and submissions received during the first stage of the review, we propose:

- there should be an increase in council size from 70 to 74;
- the boundaries of all divisions will be subject to change as the divisions are based on district wards which have themselves changed as a result of the district reviews.

142 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the County Council's and the Labour Group's proposals, but propose to depart from them in some areas to improve coterminosity and the reflection of community identities:

- in Cherwell district we propose adopting the County Council's proposals in most of the rural areas. However, we are also proposing a two-member division in Banbury based on the proposals of the Labour Group, a two-member division in Kidlington and a three-member division in Bicester to improve the level of coterminosity.
- in Oxford City we propose adopting the Labour Group's proposals without amendment.
- in South Oxfordshire district we propose adopting the County Council's proposals with a number of amendments. We propose to unite Thame in a two-member division and are also proposing a two-member division in Didcot to improve coterminosity.
- in Vale of White Horse district we propose adopting part of the scheme put forward by a parish councillor. In the remainder of the district we are proposing our own scheme including three two-member divisions to improve coterminosity.
- in West Oxfordshire district we propose adopting the Labour Group's scheme with a number of amendments including a two-member division in Witney and the transfer of one parish to improve coterminosity.

143 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2002 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2007.

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2002 Electorate		2007 Forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	70	74	70	74
Number of divisions	70	56	70	56
Average number of electors per councillor	6,647	6,288	6,880	6,508
Number of divisions with a variance more than 10% from the average	42	11	49	7
Number of divisions with a variance more than 20% from the average	16	1	19	0

144 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Oxfordshire County Council would result in a reduction in the number of divisions with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 42 to 11. By 2007 only seven divisions are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average.

Draft recommendation

Oxfordshire County Council should comprise 74 councillors serving 56 divisions, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps inside the back cover.

Town council electoral arrangements

145 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 states that if a parish is to be divided between different county divisions it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single division of the county. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parish of Banbury to reflect the proposed county divisions in those areas.

146 The parish of Banbury is currently served by 22 councillors representing six wards: Easington, Grimsbury & Castle, Hardwick and Ruscote parish wards (returning four councillors each); and Calthorpe and Neithrop parish wards (returning three councillors each). In order to reflect our proposed county divisions in the area, we are proposing to replace the existing Neithrop parish ward with a Neithrop North parish ward and a Neithrop South parish ward, represented by one and two parish councillor(s), respectively. We are also proposing to replace the existing Easington parish ward with an Easington North parish ward and an Easington South parish ward, each represented by two parish councillors.

Draft recommendation

Banbury Town Council should comprise 22 councillors, as at present, representing eight wards: Grimsbury & Castle, Hardwick and Ruscote parish wards (returning four councillors each); Calthorpe parish ward (returning three councillors); Easington North, Easington South and Neithrop South parish wards (returning two councillors each), and Neithrop North parish ward (returning one councillor). The parish ward boundaries are illustrated on Sheet 2, Map One, inserted at the back of this report.

5 What happens next?

147 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Oxfordshire County Council contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 8 March 2004. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the County Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

148 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

149 In the light of responses 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 Oxfordshire County Council: Detailed mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed division boundaries for the Oxfordshire County Council:

Sheet 1 of 2 inserted at the back of this report illustrates in outline form the proposed divisions for Oxfordshire County Council, including constituent district wards and parishes.

Sheet 2 of 2 inserted at the back of this report includes the following maps:

Map 1 illustrates the proposed electoral divisions in Banbury in Cherwell district;

Map 2 illustrates the boundary between the proposed North Hinksey & Wytham and Wootton divisions in Vale of White Horse district.

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, <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 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.