

Draft recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements for  
South Staffordshire

*May 2000*

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations to the Government on whether there should be changes to the structure of local government, the boundaries of individual local authority areas, and their electoral arrangements.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)  
Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)  
Kru Desai  
Peter Brokenshire  
Pamela Gordon  
Robin Gray  
Robert Hughes CBE

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

We are statutorily required to review periodically the electoral arrangements – such as the number of councillors representing electors in each area and the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions – of every principal local authority in England. In broad terms our objective is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, and the number of councillors and ward names. We can also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish councils in the district.

This report sets out the Commission's draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of South Staffordshire.

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A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for the Penkridge area is inserted inside the back cover of this report.



## SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for South Staffordshire on 28 September 1999.

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

We found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in South Staffordshire:

- **in 16 of the 26 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and three wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 electoral equality is expected to be largely unchanged, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 14 wards and by more than 20 per cent in three wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 82-83 are that:

- **South Staffordshire District Council should have 49 councillors, one less than at present;**
- **there should be 25 wards, instead of 26 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 19 of the existing wards should be modified and seven wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **whole council elections should continue to take place every four years.**

These draft recommendations seek to ensure that the number of electors represented by each district councillor is as nearly as possible the same, having regard to local circumstances.

- **In 23 of the proposed 25 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to remain constant with the number of electors per councillor in 23 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2004.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Bilbrook, Penkridge, Perton and Wombourne;**
- **revised warding arrangements for the parishes of Cheslyn Hay, Codsall, Kinver and Great Wyrley;**
- **an increase in the number of councillors serving Huntington Parish Council;**
- **a redistribution of councillors for the parish of Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 9 May 2000. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. 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 and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 3 July 2000:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
1	Bilbrook	2	Bilbrook ward (part –East and West wards of Bilbrook parish as proposed)	Maps 2 and A4
2	Bishopswood & Lapley	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Blymhill & Weston-Under-Lizard parish; Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston parish and Bishopswood ward of Brewood parish)	Map 2
3	Brewood & Coven	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Brewood, Coven and Coven Heath wards of Brewood parish)	Map 2
4	Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon	2	Cheslyn Hay ward (part – Littlewood ward and Pinfold ward (part) of Cheslyn Hay parish); Shareshill ward (part – Saredon parish)	Maps 2 and A6
5	Cheslyn Hay South	2	Cheslyn Hay ward (part – South ward of Cheslyn Hay parish; Pinfold ward (part) of Cheslyn Hay parish)	Maps 2 and A6
6	Codsall North	2	Codsall North ward (part – North ward (part) of Codsall parish)	Maps 2 and A5
7	Codsall South West	2	Codsall South ward (South ward of Codsall parish); Codsall North ward (part – Codsall North ward of Codsall parish (part); Bilbrook ward (part – Lane Green ward of Bilbrook parish as proposed)	Maps 2, A4 and A5
8	Essington	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Essington parish)	Map 2
9	Featherstone & Shareshill	2	Featherstone ward (Featherstone and Hilton parishes); Shareshill ward (part – Shareshill parish)	Map 2
10	Great Wyrley Landywood	2	Great Landywood ward (part – Landywood ward (part) of Great Wyrley parish)	Maps 2 and A6
11	Great Wyrley Town	3	Great Wyrley Town ward (North and Town wards of Great Wyrley parish); Great Wyrley Landywood ward (part – Landywood ward (part) of Great Wyrley parish)	Maps 2 and A6
12	Himley & Swindon	1	<i>Unchanged</i> Swindon ward (Himley and Swindon parishes)	Map 2
13	Huntington & Hatherton	2	Huntington ward (Huntington parish); Shareshill ward (part–Hatherton parish)	Map 2
14	Kinver	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Kinver parish)	Maps 2 and A7
15	Pattingham & Patshull	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Pattingham & Patshull parish)	Map 2

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
16	Penkridge North East & Acton Trussell	2	Acton Trussell ward (Acton Trussell & Bednall, Coppenhall, Dunston and Teddesley Hay parishes); Penkridge North East ward (North East ward of Penkridge parish); Penkridge South East ward (part – South East ward (part) of Penkridge parish)	Large map
17	Penkridge South East	2	Penkridge South East ward (part – Central ward (part) and South East ward (part) of Penkridge parish); Penkridge West ward (part – Gailey ward of Penkridge parish)	Large map
18	Penkridge West	1	Penkridge South East ward (part – Central ward (part) of Penkridge parish); Penkridge West ward (part – West ward of Penkridge parish)	Large map
19	Perton Central	3	Perton Central ward (Lakeside ward of Perton parish); Perton Dippons ward (part–Dippons ward (part) of Perton parish)	Maps 2 and A3
20	Perton Dippons	1	Perton Dippons ward (part – Kingswood & Trescott ward and Dippons ward (part) of Perton parish)	Maps 2 and A3
21	Perton East	1	Perton Dippons ward (part – Dippons ward (part) of Perton parish)	Maps 2 and A3
22	Trysull & Seisdon	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Bobbington, Enville and Trysull & Seisdon parishes)	Map 2
23	Wombourne North & Lower Penn	3	Lower Penn ward (Lower Penn parish); Wombourne North ward (North ward of Wombourne parish)	Map 2
24	Wombourne South East	2	Wombourne South East ward (South East ward of Wombourne parish); Wombourne South West ward (part – South West ward (part) of Wombourne parish)	Maps 2 and A2
25	Wombourne South West	2	Wombourne South West ward (part – South West ward (part) of Wombourne parish)	Maps 2 and A2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

2 Map 2, Appendix A and the large map in the back of the report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for South Staffordshire

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Bilbrook	2	3,118	1,559	-9	3,253	1,627	-10
2	Bishopswood & Lapley	2	3,354	1,677	-2	3,544	1,772	-2
3	Brewood & Coven	3	5,250	1,750	3	5,750	1,917	6
4	Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon	2	3,065	1,533	-10	3,459	1,730	-4
5	Cheslyn Hay South	2	3,283	1,642	-4	3,400	1,700	-6
6	Codsall North	2	3,224	1,612	-5	3,681	1,841	2
7	Codsall South West	2	3,483	1,742	2	3,547	1,774	-2
8	Essington	2	3,768	1,884	11	3,847	1,924	6
9	Featherstone & Shareshill	2	3,616	1,808	6	3,911	1,956	8
10	Great Wyrley Landywood	2	3,646	1,823	7	3,662	1,831	1
11	Great Wyrley Town	3	5,092	1,697	0	5,372	1,791	-1
12	Himley & Swindon	1	1,709	1,709	0	1,806	1,806	0
13	Huntington & Hatherton	2	3,170	1,585	-7	3,489	1,745	-3
14	Kinver	3	5,673	1,891	11	6,016	2,005	11
15	Pattingham & Patshull	1	1,862	1,862	9	2,052	2,052	14
16	Penkridge North East & Acton Trussell	2	3,130	1,565	-8	3,418	1,709	-5
17	Penkridge South East	2	3,208	1,604	-6	3,500	1,750	-3
18	Penkridge West	1	1,771	1,771	4	1,833	1,833	1
19	Perton Central	3	5,177	1,726	1	5,282	1,761	-3
20	Perton Dippons	1	1,555	1,555	-9	1,627	1,627	-10
21	Perton East	1	1,702	1,702	0	1,774	1,774	-2
22	Trysull & Seisdon	1	1,705	1,705	0	1,810	1,810	0

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Wombourne North & Lower Penn	3	4,971	1,657	-3	5,348	1,783	-1
24 Wombourne South East	2	3,337	1,669	-2	3,461	1,731	-4
25 Wombourne South West	2	3,652	1,826	7	3,692	1,846	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>83,521</b>	–	–	<b>88,534</b>	–	–
<b>Averages</b>	–	–	<b>1,705</b>	–	–	<b>1,807</b>	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on South Staffordshire District Council's submission.

Notes: 1. The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2. There is a small anomaly in the electorate figures supplied between the total electorate data for 1999 shown in figures 2 and 4.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of South Staffordshire on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the eight districts in Staffordshire and the City of Stoke-on-Trent as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of South Staffordshire. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State November 1987 (Report No. 543). The electoral arrangements of Staffordshire County Council were last reviewed in July 1980 (Report No. 386). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements shortly after completion of the district reviews to enable orders to be made by the Secretary of State in time for the 2005 county elections.

3 In undertaking these reviews, we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, ie the need to:
  - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
  - (b) secure effective and convenient local government;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (see Appendix C).

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the District Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish councils in the district.

5 We also have regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999). This sets out our approach to the reviews.

6 In our *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been prepared locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local interests are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while allowing proper reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

7 The broad objective of PERs is then to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. For example, we will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the general assumption that the existing council size already secures effective and convenient local government in that district but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. 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 a district’s electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a district council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other districts.

9 The review is in four stages (Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Stages of the Review*

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Description</b>
One	Submission of proposals to the Commission
Two	The Commission’s analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Secretary of State

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, ie in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities.

11 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Staffordshire districts, that until any direction is received from the Secretary of State, the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State’s intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals are now being taken forward in a Local Government Bill published in December 1999 and are currently being considered by Parliament.

12 Stage One began on 28 September 1999, when we wrote to South Staffordshire District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Staffordshire Parish Councils Association, parish councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district and the Members of the European Parliament for the West

Midlands Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 10 January 2000.

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

14 Stage Three began on 9 May 2000 and will end on 3 July 2000. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations 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 our draft recommendations.**

15 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to move away from them in any areas, and submit final recommendations to the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to make representations to the Secretary of State. It will then be for him to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Secretary of State accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, he will make an order. The Secretary of State will determine when any changes come into effect.



## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 The district of South Staffordshire is situated to the west and north of the West Midlands conurbation and covers an area of approximately 50,000 hectares. The district stretches from the boundary with Stafford in the north to Worcestershire in the south. Much of the district comprises good agricultural land and covers a large part of the West Midlands Green Belt. The main areas of residential development include Codsall, Great Wyrley, Penkridge and Wombourne. The district is entirely parished and contains 29 parishes which form 27 parish councils.

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

18 The electorate of the district is 83,548 (February 1999). The Council presently has 50 members who are elected from 26 wards. Six of the wards are each represented by three councillors, 12 are each represented by two councillors and eight are single-member wards. The whole council is elected every four years.

19 The last periodic electoral review took place in 1987 since when modifications have been made to the district's boundaries with the neighbouring boroughs of Wolverhampton and Dudley. Since the review in 1987, the electorate of the Huntington, Perton and Cheslyn Hay areas has increased, while the electorate for the Lower Penn area has declined, due to boundary changes.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,671 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,771 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 16 of the 26 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, and in three wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Lower Penn ward where the councillor represents 51 per cent fewer electors than the district average.

*Map 1: Existing Wards in South Staffordshire*

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Acton Trussell	1	1,360	1,360	-19	1,500	1,500	-15
2	Bilbrook	2	3,514	1,757	5	3,648	1,824	3
3	Bishopwood & Lapley	2	3,354	1,677	0	3,544	1,772	0
4	Brewood & Coven	3	5,250	1,750	5	5,750	1,917	8
5	Cheslyn Hay	3	5,772	1,924	15	6,219	2,073	17
6	Codsall North	2	3,414	1,707	2	3,855	1,928	9
7	Codsall South	2	2,920	1,460	-13	2,978	1,489	-16
8	Essington	2	3,768	1,884	13	3,847	1,924	9
9	Featherstone	2	2,991	1,496	-11	3,221	1,611	-9
10	Great Wyrley Landywood	2	3,793	1,897	13	3,810	1,905	8
11	Great Wyrley Town	3	4,945	1,648	-1	5,224	1,741	-2
12	Huntington	2	2,704	1,352	-19	2,960	1,480	-16
13	Kinver	3	5,673	1,891	13	6,016	2,005	13
14	Lower Penn	1	825	825	-51	837	837	-53
15	Pattingham & Patshull	1	1,862	1,862	11	2,052	2,052	16
16	Penkridge North East	1	1,675	1,675	0	1,823	1,823	3
17	Penkridge South East	2	3,655	1,828	9	3,940	1,970	11
18	Penkridge West	1	1,419	1,419	-15	1,488	1,488	-16
19	Perton Central	3	4,303	1,434	-14	4,418	1,473	-17
20	Perton Dippons	2	4,132	2,066	24	4,265	2,133	20

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (1999)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>	<b>Electorate (2004)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
21	Shareshill	1	1,667	1,667	0	1,859	1,859	5
22	Swindon	1	1,709	1,709	2	1,806	1,806	2
23	Trysull & Seisdon	1	1,705	1,705	2	1,810	1,810	2
24	Wombourne North	2	4,146	2,073	24	4,511	2,256	27
25	Wombourne South East	2	2,684	1,342	-20	2,802	1,401	-21
26	Wombourne South West	3	4,308	1,436	-14	4,351	1,450	-18
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>83,548</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>88,534</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,671</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,771</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by South Staffordshire District Council.

Notes: 1. The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1999, electors in Lower Penn ward were relatively over-represented by 51 per cent, while electors in Perton Dippons ward were relatively under-represented by 24 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2. There is a small anomaly in the electorate figures supplied between the total electorate data for 1999 shown in figures 2 and 4.

### 3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

21 At the start of the review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for South Staffordshire District Council and its constituent parish councils.

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met with officers and members from the District Council. We are most grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received eight representations during Stage One, including a district-wide scheme from the District Council, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

#### **South Staffordshire District Council**

23 The District Council proposed a council of 49 members, one fewer than at present, serving 24 wards, compared to the existing 26. It proposed five three-member wards, 15 two-member wards and four single-member wards. Under the District Council's proposals, 10 wards would remain unchanged, with one having a proposed new ward name.

24 The District Council's scheme would achieve improved levels of electoral equality for the district as a whole, resulting in the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average in 20 of the proposed 24 wards. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve further with all but two of the proposed 24 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district by 2004. The Council's proposals are summarised in Appendix B.

25 The Council, as part of its submission, also enclosed copies of letters it had received from residents and parish councils during its consultation on its proposals.

#### **Parish Councils**

26 We received representations direct from three parish councils in the district. Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston Parish Council broadly supported the District Council's proposals, specifically to retain the existing Bishopswood & Lapley ward. Kinver Parish Council also supported the District Council's preferred option to retain the existing Kinver ward. Hatherton, Saredon and Shareshill parish councils put forward a joint submission arguing for the retention of the existing Shareshill ward, which would result in the three parishes continuing to be contained within the same ward.

#### **Other Representations**

27 We received a further four representations. Councillor Hood argued that Shareshill ward should be retained, and that the small parishes that make up the ward have more links with each other than with neighbouring larger settlements. One local resident and a parish councillor commented on the Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston area, arguing that the representation on the parish council for Wheaton Aston parish ward should be increased, while one resident proposed a reduction and a redistribution of parish councillors together with a ward name change.



## 4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

28 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for South Staffordshire is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

29 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. We must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

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

31 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. We consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, the objective 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 start from the standpoint of electoral equality, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. We will require particular justification for schemes which result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent and over should arise only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

### **Electorate Forecasts**

32 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 6 per cent from 83,548 to 88,534 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the growth to be in Brewood & Coven, Cheslyn Hay and Codsall North wards. The Council has 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.

33 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the District Council’s figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

## **Council Size**

34 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates convenient and effective local government, although we are willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

35 South Staffordshire District Council presently has 50 members. The District Council proposed a council of 49 members. This proposal was supported by Kinver and Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston parish councils.

36 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 49 members.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

37 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council's proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we have concluded that we should base our recommendations on the District Council's scheme. We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. However, to improve electoral equality further and having regard to local community identities and interests, we have decided to move away from the District Council's proposals in five areas. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Kinver, Trysull & Seisdon and Swindon wards;
- (b) Lower Penn, Wombourne North, Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards;
- (c) Pattingham & Patshull, Perton Central and Perton Dippons wards;
- (d) Bilbrook, Bishopswood & Lapley, Brewood & Coven, Codsall North and Codsall South wards;
- (e) Featherstone, Huntington and Shareshill wards;
- (f) Cheslyn Hay, Essington, Great Wyrley Landywood and Great Wyrley Town wards;
- (g) Acton Trussell, Penkridge North East, Penkridge South East and Penkridge West wards.

38 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

## **Kinver, Swindon and Trysull & Seisdon wards**

39 The existing wards of Kinver, Swindon and Trysull & Seisdon are situated in the south of the district, adjoining Shropshire, Worcestershire and the West Midlands. Kinver ward is currently represented by three councillors and is coterminous with Kinver parish, Swindon ward is currently represented by a single councillor and contains the parishes of Himley and Swindon, and Trysull & Seisdon ward, which is also currently represented by a single councillor, comprises the parishes of Bobbington, Enville and Trysull & Seisdon. Under current arrangements, Kinver, Swindon and Trysull & Seisdon wards contain 13 per cent, 2 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor respectively than the district average. This level of electoral equality is predicted to remain unchanged over the next five years.

40 At Stage One the District Council proposed retaining the existing warding arrangements for the wards of Kinver, Swindon and Trysull & Seisdon but proposed that Swindon ward be renamed Himley & Swindon to better reflect its constituent parish councils. Under the District Council's proposals for a council size of 49, the number of electors per councillor in Kinver ward would vary from the district average by 11 per cent. Himley & Swindon and Trysull & Seisdon wards would both have equal to the average number of electors per councillor. This level of electoral equality would remain constant over the next five years. The District Council recognised that, under its proposals, Kinver ward would continue to have an electoral variance in excess of 10 per cent from the district average. However, it argued that there is strong justification for retaining the existing ward as "Kinver is a self contained village in the extreme south of the district bordering the West Midlands Region and Worcestershire. It has no strong ties with the two bordering district wards of Swindon and Trysull & Seisdon".

41 We received one other representation in relation to this area, from Kinver Parish Council, which supported the District Council's proposals. Three other submissions were received as part of the Council's own consultation exercise. Himley Parish Council, Swindon Parish Council and Trysull & Seisdon Parish Council each supported the retention of the current warding arrangements for their areas.

42 We consider that the District Council's proposals for Swindon and Trysull & Seisdon wards provide reasonable levels of electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria, and are content to endorse them as part of our draft recommendations. We also propose, for the purposes of consultation, endorsing the proposed name of Himley & Swindon, but would welcome further evidence on this proposed ward name at Stage Three. In relation to Kinver ward, we note the limitations on the options to improve electoral equality due to its geographical location and conclude that there is exceptional justification for a variance of 11 per cent from the district average in this case. We therefore propose retaining the existing warding arrangements for Kinver ward as part of our draft recommendations.

43 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Himley & Swindon and Trysull & Seisdon wards would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor both now and in 2004. Kinver ward would have 11 per cent more electors per councillor than the average both now and in 2004.

## **Lower Penn, Wombourne North, Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards**

44 The existing wards of Lower Penn, Wombourne North, Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West are situated in the south-east of the borough adjoining the West Midlands. Lower Penn is currently represented by a single councillor, Wombourne North and Wombourne South East are each represented by two councillors and Wombourne South West ward is represented by three councillors. Lower Penn ward is coterminous with Lower Penn parish, Wombourne North ward comprises North ward of Wombourne parish, Wombourne South East ward comprises South East ward of Wombourne parish and Wombourne South West ward comprises South West ward of Wombourne parish. Under the current arrangements, there is a relatively poor level of electoral equality; Lower Penn ward contains 51 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. This is largely due to the modification of the district boundary with Wolverhampton which occurred in the early 1990s. Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards contain 20 per cent and 14 per cent fewer electors than the district average respectively, while Wombourne North ward contains 24 per cent more than the average. This level of electoral inequality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

45 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the existing Lower Penn ward with the existing Wombourne North ward to form a new three-member Wombourne North and Lower Penn ward. It also proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards. Under its proposal, Park Avenue, Wombourne Park, Sytch Lane and part of Common Road would be transferred from Wombourne South East ward to Wombourne South West ward. The revised Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards would each be represented by two councillors.

46 Under the District Council's proposals, the number of electors per councillor in Wombourne North and Lower Penn, Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards would vary from the district average by 3 per cent, 6 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years, with variances from the district average of 1 per cent, 8 per cent and 6 per cent respectively by 2004.

47 Two other submissions were received as part of the council's own consultation exercise. Lower Penn Parish Council agreed that Lower Penn should be retained "as an individual and separate parish and to strongly oppose any boundary changes that may be proposed." Wombourne Parish Council argued that "the most logical step would be to combine Lower Penn with the North ward of Wombourne parish for district warding purposes," and that the new ward be named Wombourne North & Lower Penn.

48 We note that the District Council's proposals for this area would provide for improved levels of electoral equality, and we consider that they reasonably reflect community ties. We consider that, largely as a result of boundary changes with Wolverhampton, Lower Penn ward has a high level of electoral inequality which should be addressed as part of this review. We considered combining a smaller area of Wombourne with Lower Penn in order to retain a single-member ward, but were unable to find a suitable boundary for such a ward. We therefore propose, as part

of our draft recommendations, to put forward the District Council's proposals for this area. We do, however, propose a minor boundary modification between the proposed Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards in order to improve electoral equality. We propose that the boundary between the two wards should follow the rear of properties on Common Road, which would result in the whole of Common Road being contained in Wombourne South East ward.

49 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Wombourne North & Lower Penn, Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards would vary from the district average by 3 per cent, 2 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to marginally improve over the next five years, with variances of 1 per cent, 4 per cent and 2 per cent respectively by 2004. Our proposals are illustrated in Map 2 and Map A2 in Appendix A.

### **Pattingham & Patshull, Perton Central and Perton Dippons wards**

50 The existing wards of Pattingham & Patshull, Perton Central and Perton Dippons are situated in the centre of the district. Pattingham & Patshull ward is currently represented by a single councillor, Perton Central ward is represented by three councillors and Perton Dippons ward is represented by two councillors. Pattingham & Patshull ward is coterminous with Pattingham & Patshull parish. Perton Central ward comprises Lakeside ward of Perton parish, with Dippons and Kingswood & Trescott wards of Perton parish forming Perton Dippons ward. Under current arrangements, Pattingham & Patshull and Perton Dippons wards contain 11 per cent and 24 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, while Perton Central ward contains 14 per cent fewer than the average. This level of electoral inequality is projected to deteriorate marginally over the next five years.

51 At Stage One, the District Council proposed retaining the existing warding arrangements for Pattingham & Patshull ward, arguing that it is geographically isolated from the rest of the district and contains two villages with strong community links. The District Council proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Perton Central and Perton Dippons ward, resulting in the transfer of the area bounded by The Parkway from Perton Dippons ward to Perton Central ward. This would result in a revised three-member Perton Central ward and a two-member Perton Dippons ward.

52 Under the District Council's proposals, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Pattingham & Patshull, Perton Central and Perton Dippons wards would vary from the district average by 9 per cent, 1 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is predicted to deteriorate over the next five years with Pattingham & Patshull, Perton Central and Perton Dippons wards varying from the district average by 14 per cent, 3 per cent and 6 per cent respectively by 2004.

53 As part of the District Council's own consultation exercise, Perton Parish Council supported the council's proposal for Perton.

54 We consider that the District Council's proposals for this area go some way to addressing the high levels of electoral inequality which currently exist. We note the specific geographical circumstances of Pattingham & Patshull ward, being a sparse rural area surrounded by the county

of Shropshire on three sides. It also has little affinity with the neighbouring Perton area, increasing the limitations on improving electoral equality while continuing to reflect community identities and interests. On balance, therefore, we are content to endorse the District Council's proposals for Pattingham & Patshull ward. We are also content to put forward the District Council's proposed Perton Central ward as part of our draft recommendations. We consider that the proposed ward would have strong, clear boundaries and would have a reasonable level of electoral equality. We propose, however, dividing the District Council's proposed Perton Dippons ward into two wards, in order to better reflect the identities and interests of local communities. We note that its proposed ward completely surrounds Perton Central ward and combines a significant rural area to the west of Perton itself, with urban development on the fringe of Wolverhampton and to the east of Perton Central ward. We propose instead creating a new single-member Perton East ward which would be predominantly urban, and a single-member Perton Dippons ward, containing the rural Kingswood & Trescott area and adjacent northern part of Perton.

55 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Pattingham & Patshull, Perton Central, Perton Dippons and Perton East wards would vary from the district average by 9 per cent, 1 per cent, 9 per cent and equal to the average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate marginally over the next five years with variances of 14 per cent, 3 per cent, 10 per cent and 2 per cent respectively by 2004. Our proposals are illustrated in Map 2 and Map A3 in Appendix A.

### **Bilbrook, Bishopswood & Lapley, Brewood & Coven, Codsall North and Codsall South wards**

56 The existing wards of Bilbrook, Bishopswood & Lapley, Brewood & Coven, Codsall North and Codsall South wards are situated in the centre and north-west of the district. Four of the five wards are currently represented by two councillors, while Brewood & Coven is represented by three councillors. Bilbrook ward is coterminous with Bilbrook parish; Bishopswood & Lapley ward comprises Blymhill & Weston-Under-Lizard and Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston parishes as well as Bishopswood ward of Brewood parish. Brewood & Coven ward comprises the remainder of Brewood parish. Codsall North ward comprises North ward of Codsall parish, with the remainder of Codsall parish, South ward, forming Codsall South ward. Under current arrangements, Bilbrook, Brewood & Coven and Codsall North wards contain 5 per cent, 5 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, while Codsall South ward contains 13 per cent fewer than average. Bishopswood & Lapley ward currently contains equal to the average number of electors per councillor. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

57 At Stage One, the District Council proposed retaining the existing warding arrangements for Bishopswood & Lapley and Brewood & Coven wards. It proposed that the existing Bilbrook ward should be largely retained, but with the Lane Green area combined with the Codsall Wood area from Codsall North ward and the current Codsall South ward to form a new two-member Codsall South West ward. The remainder of Codsall North ward would form a revised two-member Codsall North ward.

58 Under the District Council's proposals, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Bilbrook, Bishopswood & Lapley, Brewood & Coven, Codsall North and Codsall South West wards, would vary from the district average by 9 per cent, 2 per cent, 3 per cent, 5 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

59 We received two other representations in relation to this area. Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston Parish Council supported the District Council in relation to Bishopswood & Lapley ward. A local resident suggested that Bishopswood & Lapley ward would be better named Wheaton Aston ward.

60 As part of the District Council's own consultation exercise, Bilbrook Parish Council opposed any change to the existing ward. Codsall Parish Council supported the District Council's proposal to combine part of Bilbrook with Codsall, but opposed the transfer of the Codsall Wood area from Codsall North ward to a new Codsall South West ward. It argued that this area is divided from the remainder of the proposed ward by the railway line, and this boundary should be respected. Brewood Parish Council proposed alternative warding arrangements for the north-west of the district. It proposed six councillors for the area rather than five, resulting in a council size of 50. It proposed that Bishopswood parish ward should be transferred from Bishopswood & Lapley ward and be combined with Brewood parish ward to form a new Brewood & Bishop's Wood ward. The remainder of the current Brewood & Coven ward, Coven and Coven Heath parish wards, would form a new Coven & Coven Heath ward. Each ward would be represented by two councillors. Under its proposals. Brewood & Bishop's Wood ward, Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston ward and Coven & Coven Heath ward would contain 6 per cent, 18 per cent and 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively by 2004, based on a council size of 50.

61 We consider that the District Council's proposals for this area achieve reasonable levels of electoral equality, addressing the inequality which exists under the current electoral arrangements. We have considered the proposal submitted by Brewood Parish Council to the District Council. We are not persuaded that we should put forward a warding arrangement for this area which would provide worse electoral equality than the current arrangements. In relation to Bilbrook and Codsall, we recognise there is a need to combine part of Bilbrook ward with Codsall ward in order to improve electoral equality. While we recognise the concerns of Codsall Parish Council regarding the transfer of the Codsall Wood area from Codsall North ward, we propose putting this forward for consultation as it would provide for improved levels of electoral equality. We therefore propose endorsing the District Council's proposals for this area but would welcome the views of local residents and interested parties at Stage Three. In relation to ward names, we have not been persuaded to change the name of Bishopswood & Lapley ward to Wheaton Aston ward, but would again welcome further views on this issue.

62 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Bilbrook, Bishopswood & Lapley, Brewood & Coven, Codsall North and Codsall South West wards would vary from the district average by 9 per cent, 2 per cent, 3 per cent, 5 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

## **Featherstone, Huntington and Shareshill wards**

63 The existing wards of Featherstone, Huntington and Sharehill are situated in the eastern part of the district. Featherstone ward is currently represented by two councillors and comprises Featherstone and Hilton parishes. Huntington ward is also represented by two councillors and is coterminous with Huntington parish. Shareshill ward is represented by a single councillor and contains the parishes of Hatherton, Saredon and Shareshill. Under existing arrangements, Featherstone and Huntington wards contain 11 per cent and 19 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively, while Shareshill ward has equal to the average. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

64 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining Shareshill parish, from the existing Shareshill ward, with Featherstone ward to create a new two-member Featherstone & Shareshill ward. It proposed that Saredon parish, from the existing Shareshill ward, should be combined with Pinfold and Littlewood wards of Cheslyn Hay parish (currently in Cheslyn Hay ward) to create a new two-member Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon ward. It proposed that the remainder of Shareshill ward, Hatherton parish, should be combined with the existing Huntington ward to create a new two-member Huntington & Hatherton ward.

65 Under the District Council's proposals, the number of electors per councillor in Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon, Featherstone & Shareshill and Huntington & Hatherton wards would vary from the district average by 10 per cent, 6 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve marginally over the next five years.

66 We received two further submissions in relation to this area. Hatherton, Saredon and Shareshill parish councils submitted a joint submission opposing the District Council's proposals for this area, which would result in dividing them between three wards. They argued that the existing warding arrangements for Shareshill ward should be retained and that future housing development in Featherstone and Cheslyn Hay would "distort the electoral estimates" in the Council's scheme. Councillor Hood argued that Shareshill ward "is still a model for the representation of a group of small parishes". He also stated that there are strong community and economic links within the existing ward.

67 As part of the District Council's own consultation exercise, Featherstone Parish Council requested no change to the existing ward.

68 We recognise that there is a degree of support for retaining the existing Shareshill ward. We also note that the current Shareshill ward achieves a reasonable level of electoral equality. However, this ward cannot be considered in isolation from the surrounding wards of Cheslyn Hay and Huntington, where the current arrangements provide a poor level of electoral equality. We consider that the high level of electoral inequality in the area should be addressed, and are content that the District Council's proposals for this area achieve reasonable levels of electoral equality while having regard for the statutory criteria. We therefore propose endorsing them as part of our draft recommendations, subject to a minor boundary modification to the proposed Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon ward, which is detailed below.

69 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon, Featherstone & Shareshill and Huntington & Hatherton wards would vary from the district average by 10 per cent, 6 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

### **Cheslyn Hay, Essington, Great Wyrley Landywood and Great Wyrley Town wards**

70 The existing wards of Cheslyn Hay, Essington, Great Wyrley Landywood and Great Wyrley Town are situated in the east of the district. Essington and Great Wyrley Landywood wards are each represented by two councillors, while Cheslyn Hay and Great Wyrley Town wards are each represented by three councillors. Cheslyn Hay ward is coterminous with Cheslyn Hay parish while Essington ward is coterminous with Essington parish. Great Wyrley Landywood comprises Landywood ward of Great Wyrley parish. North and Town wards of Great Wyrley parish form Great Wyrley Town ward. Under current arrangements Cheslyn Hay, Essington and Great Wyrley Landywood wards contain 15 per cent, 13 per cent and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, while Great Wyrley Town ward contains 1 per cent fewer than average. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve marginally over the next five years.

71 At Stage One, the District Council proposed retaining the existing Essington, Great Wyrley Landywood and Great Wyrley Town wards. It proposed that Littlewood and Pinfold wards of Cheslyn parish, from the existing Cheslyn Hay ward, should be combined with Saredon parish, from the existing Shareshill ward, to create a new two-member Cheslyn Hay North and Saredon ward. The remainder of the existing Cheslyn Hay ward, South ward of Cheslyn Hay parish, would form a new two-member Cheslyn Hay South ward.

72 Under the District Council's proposals, Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon, Cheslyn Hay South and Great Wyrley Town wards would have 10 per cent, 4 per cent and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (and 4 per cent, 6 per cent and 4 per cent fewer by 2004). Great Wyrley Landywood and Essington wards would both have 11 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 5 per cent and 6 per cent more than the average respectively by 2004.

73 As part of the District Council's own consultation exercise on its proposals, Great Wyrley Parish Council supported the Council's proposals, as they would provide no change to their existing arrangements. Cheslyn Hay Parish Council requested a further district councillor for the village.

74 We consider that the District Council's proposals for this area provide for acceptable levels of electoral equality while having regard to statutory criteria. In addition, we note that they would provide for an additional councillor for the Cheslyn Hay area, albeit on different boundaries. We are therefore content to adopt these proposals subject to two minor modifications. Firstly, in order to provide a clearer boundary, we propose a modification to the boundary between the proposed Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon and Cheslyn Hay South wards, to follow the boundary of the cemetery and Wolverhampton Road. This change would affect no electors. Secondly, we propose

a modification between the existing Great Wyrley Landywood and Great Wyrley Town wards. We propose that the boundary should follow Bentons Lane and incorporate the whole of New Street, Forest Way and parts of Walsall Road, Hilton Lane, and Gorsey Lane in a revised Great Wyrley Town ward. We consider that this would provide for a more clearly identifiable boundary while achieving improved levels of electoral equality for both wards.

75 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon and Cheslyn Hay South wards, would have 10 per cent and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent and 6 per cent fewer by 2004). Essington and Great Wyrley Landywood wards would have 11 per cent and 7 per cent more electors per councillor (6 per cent and 1 per cent more by 2004). Great Wyrley Town ward would have equal to the average now, and 1 per cent fewer by 2004.

### **Acton Trussell, Penkrige North East, Penkrige South East and Penkrige West wards**

76 The existing wards of Acton Trussell, Penkrige North East, Penkrige South East and Penkrige West are situated in the north-east of the district. Acton Trussell, Penkrige North East and Penkrige West wards are each currently represented by a single councillor, while Penkrige South East ward is represented by two councillors. Acton Trussell contains the parishes of Acton Trussell & Bednall, Coppenhall, Dunston and Teddesley Hay. Penkrige North East ward contains North East ward of Penkrige parish; Penkrige South East ward contains Central and South East wards of Penkrige parish and the remainder of Penkrige parish, Gailey and West wards form Penkrige West ward. Under current arrangements, Acton Trussell and Penkrige West wards contain 19 per cent and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively, while Penkrige North East and Penkrige South East wards contain equal to the average and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

77 At Stage One, the District Council proposed retaining the existing Penkrige North East ward. It proposed combining the existing Acton Trussell ward with the existing Penkrige West ward and part of the existing Penkrige South East ward in a new two-member Penkrige West & Acton Trussell. The remainder of Penkrige South East ward would form a revised two-member Penkrige South East ward.

78 Under the District Council's proposals, Penkrige North East, Penkrige South East and Penkrige West & Acton Trussell wards would have 2 per cent, 8 per cent and 3 per cent fewer electors than the district average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to 1 per cent more, 6 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer than average respectively by 2004.

79 We consider that the District Council's proposals for this area achieve reasonable levels of electoral equality, but we are not persuaded that these proposals adequately reflect the identities and interests of the local community. The Council's proposed Penkrige West & Acton Trussell ward in particular would combine a large area to the west of the town with rural parishes to the north and east of the town. We therefore propose significant changes to the District Council's

proposed Penkrige North East, Penkrige South East and Penkrige West & Acton Trussell wards, in order to better reflect the identities and interests of the local communities in this area. We propose creating a new two-member Penkrige North East & Acton Trussell ward, combining the existing Acton Trussell and Penkrige North East wards, together with part of Penkrige South East ward, to the east of the M6 motorway, as we consider this part of Penkrige is closer geographically to the rural area covered by Acton Trussell ward. The existing Penkrige West ward, less Gailey parish ward, would be combined with the Vale Gardens area to the east of the Wolverhampton Road (as proposed by the Council) to form a revised single-member Penkrige West ward. We also propose a revised two-member Penkrige South East ward, combining the remainder of the existing Penkrige South East ward with Gailey parish ward from Penkrige West ward. We consider that our proposals would provide for reasonable levels of electoral equality, while meeting the statutory criteria. We recognise that these proposals are different from those proposed locally, and therefore particularly welcome views of local residents and interested parties at Stage Three.

80 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Penkrige North East & Acton Trussell ward, Penkrige South East and Penkrige West wards would vary from the district average by 8 per cent, 6 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to 5 per cent, 3 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. These proposals are illustrated in Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

## **Electoral Cycle**

81 We received one representation in relation to the District Council's electoral cycle. The District Council proposed the retention of whole council elections every four years. In view of this, we propose no change to the current electoral cycle.

## **Conclusions**

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

- there should be a reduction in council size from 50 to 49;
- there should be 25 wards, one fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 19 of the existing wards should be modified;
- whole council elections should continue to be held every four years.

83 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the District Council's proposals, but propose departing from them in the following areas:

- In Perton we propose dividing the District Council's proposed two-member Perton Dippons ward into two single-member wards, Perton Dippons and Perton East;

- we propose significant change for the Penkridge area resulting in the creation of a new Penkridge North East & Acton Trussell ward and revised Penkridge South East and Penkridge West wards;
- we propose a minor modification to the boundary between the District Council's proposed Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards, incorporating the whole of Common Road in Wombourne South East ward;
- we propose a minor modification to the boundary between the existing Great Wyrley Landywood and Great Wyrley Town wards to provide a more clearly identifiable boundary and improved levels of electoral equality;
- we propose a minor modification between the proposed Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon and Cheslyn Hay South wards to provide a more clearly identifiable boundary. This change would involve no electors.

84 Figure 5 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 electorate figures and with forecast electorates for the year 2004.

*Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements*

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	50	49	50	49
Number of wards	26	25	26	25
Average number of electors per councillor	1,671	1,705	1,771	1,807
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	16	2	14	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	3	0	3	0

85 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for South Staffordshire District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 16 to two. By 2004 only two wards are forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

**Draft Recommendation**

South Staffordshire District Council should comprise 49 councillors serving 25 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. Whole council elections should continue to be held every four years.

**Parish Council Electoral Arrangements**

86 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Bilbrook, Cheslyn Hay, Codsall, Great Wyrley, Perton, Penkridge and Wombourne to reflect the proposed district wards.

87 The parish of Bilbrook is currently served by 13 councillors and is not warded. As part of its submission, the District Council proposed that the parish be divided into three wards, Lane Green (to be served by one councillor), East (to be served by seven councillors) and West (to be served by five councillors). The Council argued that the area covered by the new Lane Green ward between Wolverhampton Road and the railway line should be added to a new Codsall South West ward for district warding purposes in order to improve electoral equality in this area. We understand that Bilbrook Parish Council, in its letter to the District Council, stated that it was opposed to being warded and to the division of the parish between two district wards.

88 While we note the concerns of Bilbrook parish, we also recognise the need to modify the warding arrangements in order to deal with the high levels of electoral inequality which currently exist in this area, and it is therefore unavoidable that Bilbrook parish be warded. We therefore propose adopting this proposal as part of our draft recommendations. However, we would particularly welcome the views of interested parties and local residents at Stage Three.

**Draft Recommendation**

Bilbrook Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Lane Green (returning one councillor), East (returning seven councillors) and West (returning five councillors). Lane Green parish ward would form part of a new Codsall South West ward. East and West wards would together form a revised Bilbrook ward. These proposals are illustrated on Map A4 in Appendix A.

89 The parish of Cheslyn Hay is currently served by 15 councillors representing three wards: Littlewood (returning five councillors), Pinfold (returning two councillors) and South (returning eight councillors). As part of our draft recommendations, we propose a minor modification to the

boundary (affecting no electors), between Pinfold and South parish wards to align this with the proposed district ward boundary. Littlewood ward would remain unchanged.

**Draft Recommendation**  
Cheslyn Hay Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Littlewood (returning five councillor), Pinfold (returning two councillors) and South (returning eight councillors). The revised parish ward boundaries between Pinfold and South wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated on Map A6 in Appendix A.

90 The parish of Codsall is currently served by 15 councillors representing North ward (returning eight councillors) and South ward (returning seven councillors). For district warding purposes, the District Council proposed that the Codsall Wood area should be transferred from Codsall North ward to a new Codsall South West ward. As a result, it also proposed that the Codsall Wood area should be transferred from North parish ward to South parish ward. The revised North ward would return eight parish councillors and the revised South ward would return seven parish councils, as at present.

91 During the District Council’s own consultation exercise, Codsall Parish Council opposed this proposal, arguing that it does not satisfactorily reflect the identities and interests of the local community.

92 While we note the concerns raised by Codsall Parish Council we are, for the purposes of consultation, putting forward the District Council’s proposals for this area, due to the improved levels of electoral equality it achieves. However, we welcome further comments from interested parties and local residents at Stage Three.

**Draft Recommendation**  
Codsall Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: North parish ward (returning eight councillors) and South parish ward (returning seven councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated on Map A5 in Appendix A.

93 The parish of Great Wyrley is currently served by 15 councillors representing three wards: Landywood (returning six councillors), North (returning two councillors) and Town (returning seven councillors). As part of our draft recommendations, we propose modifying the boundary between Great Wyrley Landywood and Great Wyrley Town district wards in order to improve electoral equality. As a result, we propose amending the parish ward boundaries in this area.

**Draft Recommendation**

Great Wyrley Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Landywood (returning six councillors), North (returning two councillors) and Town (returning seven councillors). The boundary between Landywood and Town parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated on Map A6 in Appendix A. North parish ward would remain unchanged.

94 The parish of Perton is currently represented by 15 councillors and is divided into three wards: Dippons (returning seven parish councillors), Lakeside (returning seven parish councillors) and Kingswood & Trescott (returning a single parish councillor). For district warding purposes, we propose modifying the boundary between the existing Dippons and Lakeside wards to follow The Parkway as proposed by the District Council. We also propose dividing Dippons ward into two new wards, a revised Dippons ward and a new East ward, in order to better reflect community ties. Under our proposals, Kingswood & Trescott parish ward would remain unchanged.

95 As part of the District Council’s own consultation exercise, Perton Parish Council supported the Council’s proposals.

**Draft Recommendation**

Perton Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Dippons (returning two councillors), East, (returning three councillors), Lakeside (returning nine councillors) and Kingswood & Trescott (returning a single councillor). Kingswood & Trescott ward would remain unchanged. The boundary between the revised Dippons, East and Lakeside parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated on Map A3 in Appendix A.

96 The parish of Penkrige is currently represented by 15 councillors and is divided into five wards: Central (returning four councillors), Gailey (returning a single councillor), North East (returning four councillors), South East (returning three councillors) and West (returning three councillors). For district warding purposes, we propose combining Penkrige North East ward, part of Penkrige South East ward and Acton Trussell ward in a new Penkrige North East & Acton Trussell ward. In addition, we propose that the boundary between Penkrige South East and Penkrige West wards should be modified. As a result, we propose a number of changes to parish warding. Under our proposal, part of Central parish ward would be combined with the existing West parish ward. The remainder of Central parish ward would be combined with South East parish ward, less the area being transferred to North East parish ward. Gailey parish ward would remain unchanged.

97 At Stage One, we received no proposals on parish warding and have departed from the District Council’s proposals in our draft recommendations. We would, therefore, particularly welcome views of local residents and interested parties at Stage Three.

**Draft Recommendation**  
Penkrige Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Gailey ward (returning a single councillor), North East ward (returning four councillors), South East ward (returning six councillors) and West ward (returning four councillors). Gailey ward would remain unchanged. The boundary between the revised West and South East parish wards and North East and South East parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

98 The parish of Wombourne is currently represented by 15 councillors and is divided into three wards: North (returning five councillors), South East (returning four councillors) and South West (returning six councillors). For district warding purposes, we propose modifying the boundary between South East and South West wards, while North ward would remain unchanged.

99 As part of the District Council’s own consultation exercise on its proposals, Wombourne Parish Council largely supported its proposals.

**Draft Recommendation**  
Wombourne Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: North ward (returning six councillors), South East ward (returning four councillors) and South West ward (returning five councillors). North ward would remain unchanged, while the boundary between South East and South West parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated on Map A2 in Appendix A.

100 Kinver Parish Council is currently represented by 15 councillors and is divided into three wards: Dunsley ward (returning four councillors), Potters Cross ward (returning seven councillors) and Stourton ward (returning four councillors). In agreement with the District Council, Kinver Parish Council proposed that the boundary between the existing Dunsley and Potters Cross wards should be modified in order to correct administrative anomalies associated with new buildings in the village.

101 Our proposed district warding arrangements would not result in change to this area and we are content to put forward the Parish Council’s proposal for consultation.

**Draft Recommendation**

The boundary between Dunsley and Potters Cross wards of Kinver Parish Council should be modified in order to provide a clearer boundary. This boundary modification is illustrated on Map A7 in Appendix A.

102 The parish of Huntington is currently divided into two parish wards, Chase and Littleton. In agreement with the District Council, Huntington Parish Council proposed that Chase parish ward should be served by six councillors, instead of the current four, and that Littleton parish ward should be served by seven members, as at present, thereby increasing the total number of councillors on the Parish Council from 11 to 13.

103 We are content to put forward the Parish Council's proposal for consultation, but would welcome further views at Stage Three.

**Draft Recommendation**

Huntington Parish Council should comprise 13 parish councillors, instead of 11 as at present. Chase parish ward should return six councillors and Littleton parish ward should return seven councillors.

104 Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston Parish Council is currently represented by 11 councillors and is divided into three parish wards: Lapley ward (represented by two councillors), Stretton ward (represented by two councillors) and Wheaton Aston ward (represented by seven councillors). In order to address the electoral inequality which currently exists within the parish, it proposed that the number of parish councillors for Wheaton Aston ward be increased from seven to nine, thereby increasing the number of councillors for the parish from 11 to 13. Under its proposal, Lapley and Stretton wards would continue to be represented by two councillors. The District Council noted that Wheaton Aston has 1,864 electors, while Lapley has 226 and Stretton 107. As a result, it argued that this proposal would continue to over-represent Lapley and Stretton wards. It stated that "it would therefore seem difficult to justify the Parish Council's case".

105 We received three further representations in relation to this issue. Councillor Timson, a parish councillor for the area, and one resident proposed that the total number of councillors for the parish should remain unchanged, but be distributed so that Lapley and Stretton would each have one councillor and Wheaton Aston would have nine councillors. Councillor Timson argued that Wheaton Aston is "substantially under-represented" under the current arrangements. A further local resident proposed that Wheaton Aston be represented by five councillors and Lapley and Stretton parish wards should be jointly represented by a single councillor.

106 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have not been persuaded to increase or reduce the number of councillors for the parish. However, we recognise that the Wheaton Aston area is significantly under-represented under the current arrangements and we

consider that this should be addressed. We also note the current over-representation that exists within Lapley and Stretton wards. We therefore propose adopting Councillor Timson’s proposals for this area, which we consider achieves improved electoral equality within the parish. We would particularly welcome the views of residents and interested parties on this proposal at Stage Three.

**Draft Recommendation**  
Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston Parish Council should comprise 11 parish councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Lapley (returning one councillor), Stretton (returning one councillor) and Wheaton Aston (returning nine councillors).

107 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the district.

**Draft Recommendation**  
For parish councils, whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that of the District Council.

**108 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for South Staffordshire and welcome comments from the District Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names and parish council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.**

*Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for South Staffordshire*



## 5 NEXT STEPS

109 We are putting forward draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for South Staffordshire. Now it is up to the people of the area. We will take fully into account all representations received by 3 July 2000. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the District Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

110 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager  
South Staffordshire Review  
Local Government Commission for England  
Dolphyn Court  
10/11 Great Turnstile  
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142  
E-mail: [reviews@lgce.gov.uk](mailto:reviews@lgce.gov.uk)  
[www.lgce.gov.uk](http://www.lgce.gov.uk)

111 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Secretary of State, who cannot make an order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after he receives them.



## APPENDIX A

### **Draft Recommendations for South Staffordshire: Detailed Mapping**

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the South Staffordshire area.

**Map A1** illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in Maps A2 to A7 and the large map at the back of the report.

**Map A2** illustrates the proposed boundary between Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards.

**Map A3** illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for the Perton area.

**Map A4** illustrates the proposed parish warding arrangements for Bilbrook parish, and the proposed boundary between Bilbrook and Codsall South West wards.

**Map A5** illustrates the proposed boundary between Codsall North and Codsall South West wards.

**Map A6** illustrates the proposed boundaries of the new Cheslyn Hay South ward and the proposed boundary between Great Wyrley Landywood and Great Wyrley Town wards.

**Map A7** illustrates revised parish warding arrangements for Kinver parish.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for the Penkridge area.

*Map A1: Draft Recommendations for South Staffordshire: Key Map*

*Map A2: Proposed boundary between Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West wards*

*Map A3: Proposed warding arrangements for the Perton area*

*Map A4: Proposed boundary between Bilbrook and Codsall South West wards*

*Map A5: Proposed boundary between Codsall North and Codsall South West wards*

*Map A6: Proposed ward boundaries for the Cheslyn Hay and Great Wyrley area*

*Map A7: Revised parish warding arrangements for Kinver parish*

## APPENDIX B

### South Staffordshire District Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the District Council only in 10 wards, where the Council's proposals were as follows:

*Figure B1: South Staffordshire District Council's Proposal: Constituent Areas*

<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>
Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon	2	Cheslyn Hay ward (part – Littlewood ward and Pinfold ward of Cheslyn Hay parish); Shareshill ward (part–Saredon parish)
Cheslyn Hay South	2	Cheslyn Hay ward (part – South ward of Cheslyn Hay parish)
Great Wyrley Landywood	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Landywood ward of Great Wyrley parish)
Great Wyrley Town	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (North and Town wards of Great Wyrley parish)
Penkridge North East	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (North East ward of Penkridge parish)
Penkridge South East	2	Penkridge South East ward (part – Central ward (part) and South East ward of Penkridge parish)
Penkridge West & Acton Trussell	2	Penkridge South East ward (part – Central ward (part) of Penkridge parish); Penkridge West ward (Gailey and West wards of Penkridge parish); Acton Trussell ward (Acton Trussell & Bednall, Coppenhall, Dunston and Teddesley Hay parishes)
Perton Dippons	2	Perton Dippons ward (part – Kingswood & Trescott ward and Dippons ward (part) of Perton parish)
Wombourne South East	2	Wombourne South East ward (South East ward of Wombourne parish); Wombourne South West ward (part – South West ward (part) of Wombourne parish)
Wombourne South West	2	Wombourne South West ward (part – South West ward (part) of Wombourne parish)

Figure B2: South Staffordshire District Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Cheslyn Hay North & Saredon	2	3,065	1,533	-10	3,459	1,730	-4
Cheslyn Hay South	2	3,283	1,642	-4	3,400	1,700	-6
Great Wyrley Landywood	2	3,793	1,897	11	3,810	1,905	5
Great Wyrley Town	3	4,945	1,648	-3	5,224	1,741	-4
Penkridge North East	1	1,675	1,675	-2	1,823	1,823	1
Penkridge South East	2	3,134	1,567	-8	3,393	1,697	-6
Penkridge West & Acton Trussell	2	3,300	1,650	-3	3,535	1,768	-2
Perton Dippons	2	3,257	1,629	-4	3,401	1,701	-6
Wombourne South East	2	3,211	1,606	-6	3,334	1,667	-8
Wombourne South West	2	3,778	1,889	11	3,819	1,910	6

Source: Electorate figures are based on South Staffordshire District 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 district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

## APPENDIX C

### The Statutory Provisions

#### Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

1 Section 13(2) of the Local Government Act 1992 places a duty on the Commission to undertake periodic electoral reviews of each principal local authority area in England, and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. Section 13(3) provides that, so far as reasonably practicable, the first such review of any area should be undertaken not less than 10 years, and not more than 15 years, after this Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), submitted an initial electoral review report on the county within which that area, or the larger part of the area, was located. This timetable applies to districts within shire and metropolitan counties, although not to South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear<sup>1</sup>. Nor does the timetable apply to London Districts; the 1992 Act is silent on the timing of periodic electoral reviews in Greater London. Nevertheless, these areas will be included in the Commission's review programme. The Commission has no power to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London.

2 Under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, the Commission is required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for any changes to the electoral arrangements within the areas of English principal authorities as appear desirable to it, having regard to the need to:

- (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (b) secure effective and convenient local government.

3 In reporting to the Secretary of State, the Commission may make recommendations for such changes to electoral arrangements as are specified in section 14(4) of the 1992 Act. In relation to principal authorities, these are:

- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
- the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards or divisions);
- the number of councillors to be elected for each electoral area, and the years in which they are to be elected; and
- the name of any electoral area.

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish

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<sup>1</sup> The Local Government Boundary Commission did not submit reports on the counties of South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear.

or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

- the number of councillors;
- the need for parish wards;
- the number and boundaries of any such wards;
- the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward or, in the case of a common parish, for each parish; and
- the name of any such ward.

5 In conducting the review, section 27 of the 1992 Act requires the Commission to comply, so far as is practicable, with the rules given in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 for the conduct of electoral reviews.

#### **Local Government Act 1972: Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements**

6 By virtue of section 27 of the Local Government Act 1992, in undertaking a review of electoral arrangements the Commission is required to comply so far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. For ease of reference, those provisions of Schedule 11 which are relevant to this review are set out below.

7 In relation to shire districts:

Having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the district likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration (by the Secretary of State or the Commission):

- (a) the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors to be elected shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward in the district;
- (b) in a district every ward of a parish council shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district;
- (c) in a district every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district.

8 The Schedule also provides that, subject to (a)–(c) above, regard should be had to:

- (d) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(e) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

9 The Schedule provides that, in considering whether a parish should be divided into wards, regard shall be had to whether:

(f) the number or distribution of electors in the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and

(g) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

10 Where it is decided to divide any such parish into parish wards, in considering the size and boundaries of the wards and fixing the number of parish councillors to be elected for each ward, regard shall be had to:

(h) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration;

(i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(j) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

11 Where it is decided not to divide the parish into parish wards, in fixing the number of councillors to be elected for each parish regard shall be had to the number and distribution of electors of the parish and any change which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the fixing of the number of parish councillors.