

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Dudley

October 2002

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WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to The Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No. 3692). The Order also transferred to The Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

SUMMARY

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

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

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

- **in seven of the 24 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the borough and four wards vary by more than 20% from the average;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in eight wards and by more than 20% in three wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 98-99) are that:

- **Dudley Borough Council should have 72 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 24 wards, as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, and one ward should retain its existing boundaries.**

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

- **In all of the proposed wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 6% from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 6% from the average for the borough in 2006.**

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

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

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

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

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Large map reference
1	Amblecote	3	part of Amblecote ward; part of Brierley Hill ward; part of Wordsley ward	3
2	Belle Vale	3	part of Belle Vale & Hasbury ward; part of Quarry Bank & Cradley ward	4
3	Brierley Hill	3	part of Amblecote ward; part of Brierley Hill ward; part of Brockmoor & Pensnett ward; part of Wordsley ward	3
4	Brockmoor & Pensnett	3	part of Brierley Hill ward; part of Brockmoor & Pensnett ward; part of Kingswinford North & Wall Heath ward; part of Netherton & Woodside ward; part of St James's ward	1 and 3
5	Castle & Priory	3	part of Castle & Priory ward; part of Coseley East ward; part of Gornal ward; part of St James's ward	1 and 2
6	Coseley East	3	part of Coseley East ward; part of Coseley West ward	1 and 2
7	Cradley & Foxcote	3	part of Hayley Green ward; part of Lye & Wollescote ward; part of Quarry Bank & Cradley ward	3 and 4
8	Gornal	3	part of Brockmoor & Pensnett ward; part of Gornal ward; part of Sedgley ward	1
9	Halesowen North	3	Halesowen North ward; part of Belle Vale & Hasbury ward	4
10	Halesowen South	3	Halesowen South ward; part of Belle Vale & Hasbury ward; part of Hayley Green ward	4
11	Hayley Green & Hasbury	3	part of Belle Vale & Hasbury ward; part of Hayley Green ward	4
12	Kingswinford North & Wall Heath	3	part of Kingswinford North & Wall Heath ward	1 and 3
13	Kingswinford South	3	Kingswinford South ward; part of Wordsley ward	1 and 3
14	Lye & Wollescote	3	part of Amblecote ward; part of Lye & Wollescote ward; part of Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward; part of Quarry Bank and Cradley ward	3
15	Netherton & Woodside	3	part of Brockmoor & Pensnett ward; part of Netherton & Woodside ward; part of St Andrews ward	1,2,3 and 4
16	Norton	3	<i>Unchanged</i> : Norton ward	3
17	Pedmore & Stourbridge East	3	part of Lye & Wollescote ward; part of Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward	3
18	Quarry Bank	3	part of Quarry Bank & Cradley ward; part of St Andrews ward	3 and 4
19	Roseville & Woodsetton	3	part of Coseley West ward; part of Castle & Priory ward; part of Gornal ward; part of Sedgley ward	1 and 2
20	Sedgley	3	part of Coseley West ward; part of Sedgley ward	1
21	St James's	3	part of Brockmoor & Pensnett ward; part of Castle & Priory ward; part of Gornal ward; part of St James's ward; part of St Thomas's ward	1 and 2

22	St Thomas's	3	part of Netherton & Woodside ward; part of St Thomas's ward	2 and 4
23	Wollaston & Stourbridge Town	3	Wollaston & Stourbridge West ward; part of Amblecote ward; part of Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward	3
24	Wordsley	3	part of Wordsley ward	3

Notes:

- 1) *The whole borough is unparished.*
- 2) *The proposed wards above are illustrated on Map 2, Map A1 and the large maps.*
- 3) *We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.*

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Dudley

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Amblecote	3	10,495	3,498	6	10,650	3,550	4
2	Belle Vale	3	9,547	3,182	-4	10,176	3,392	0
3	Brierley Hill	3	9,364	3,121	-6	10,631	3,544	4
4	Brockmoor & Pensnett	3	9,786	3,262	-2	10,137	3,379	-1
5	Castle & Priory	3	9,952	3,317	0	10,345	3,448	1
6	Coseley East	3	9,447	3,149	-5	9,712	3,237	-5
7	Cradley & Foxcote	3	9,609	3,203	-3	9,761	3,254	-4
8	Gornal	3	10,515	3,505	6	10,622	3,541	4
9	Halesowen North	3	9,672	3,224	-3	9,737	3,246	-5
10	Halesowen South	3	10,139	3,380	2	9,703	3,234	-5
11	Hayley Green & Hasbury	3	9,419	3,140	-5	9,727	3,242	-5
12	Kingswinford North & Wall Heath	3	10,330	3,443	4	10,364	3,455	2
13	Kingswinford South	3	10,516	3,505	6	10,524	3,508	3
14	Lye & Wollescote	3	9,577	3,192	-4	9,781	3,260	-4
15	Netherton & Woodside	3	10,335	3,445	4	10,791	3,597	6
16	Norton	3	9,771	3,257	-2	9,696	3,232	-5
17	Pedmore & Stourbridge East	3	9,775	3,258	-2	10,089	3,363	-1
18	Quarry Bank	3	9,535	3,178	-4	10,133	3,378	-1
19	Roseville & Woodsetton	3	10,062	3,354	1	10,233	3,411	0
20	Sedgley	3	10,113	3,371	2	10,072	3,357	-1
21	St James's	3	10,130	3,377	2	10,677	3,559	5
22	St Thomas's	3	10,137	3,379	2	10,335	3,445	1
23	Wollaston & Stourbridge Town	3	10,493	3,498	5	10,504	3,501	3
24	Wordsley	3	9,986	3,329	0	10,490	3,497	3
	Totals	72	238,705	-	-	244,890	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,315	-	-	3,401	-

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Dudley, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the seven metropolitan boroughs in the West Midlands as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. The programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Dudley. Dudley's last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in May 1979 (Report no. 336).

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

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

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

5 Our task is to make recommendations to The Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish councils in the borough.

6 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the borough as a whole. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

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

8 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 there is no limit on the number of councillors which can be returned from each metropolitan borough ward. However, the figure must be divisible by three. In practice, all metropolitan borough wards currently return three councillors. Where our recommendation is for multi-member wards, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very

exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

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

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

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

12 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 22 October 2002 and will end on 16 December 2002, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

13 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to modify them, and submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. It will then be for it to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

14 Although the borough of Dudley is predominantly urban it also boasts a network of many parks and open spaces along with five designated Nature Reserves. There are 19 Conservation Areas and more than 260 statutory protected buildings covering a history spanning over 900 years. The borough is entirely unparished.

15 The electorate of the borough is 238,705 (December 2001). The Council presently has 72 members who are elected from 24 wards, the majority of which are relatively urban. All wards are three-member wards.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 3,315 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 3,401 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in seven of the 24 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average, in four wards by more than 20% and in three wards by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Amblecote ward where each of the councillors represents 50% more electors than the borough average.

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 borough average in percentage terms. In the text which follows this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

Map 1: Existing wards in Dudley

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements

	Ward name	Number of Councillors	Electorate 2001	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate 2006	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Amblecote	3	14,895	4,965	50	15,228	5,076	49
2	Belle Vale & Hasbury	3	9,521	3,174	-4	9,897	3,299	-3
3	Brierley Hill	3	7,225	2,408	-27	8,901	2,967	-13
4	Brockmoor & Pensnett	3	10,451	3,484	5	10,497	3,499	3
5	Castle & Priory	3	8,192	2,731	-18	8,618	2,873	-16
6	Coseley East	3	9,278	3,093	-7	9,549	3,183	-6
7	Coseley West	3	9,182	3,061	-8	9,190	3,063	-10
8	Gornal	3	14,075	4,692	42	14,147	4,716	39
9	Halesowen North	3	9,472	3,157	-5	9,640	3,213	-6
10	Halesowen South	3	9,917	3,306	0	10,003	3,334	-2
11	Hayley Green	3	9,030	3,010	-9	8,927	2,976	-13
12	Kingswinford North & Wall Heath	3	10,418	3,473	5	10,365	3,455	2
13	Kingswinford South	3	10,004	3,335	1	10,012	3,337	-2
14	Lye & Wollescote	3	9,275	3,092	-7	9,202	3,067	-10
15	Netherton & Woodside	3	6,784	2,261	-32	6,926	2,309	-32
16	Norton	3	9,771	3,257	-2	9,772	3,257	-4
17	Pedmore & Stourbridge East	3	10,200	3,400	3	10,454	3,485	2
18	Quarry Bank & Cradley	3	11,417	3,806	15	11,967	3,989	17
19	Sedgley	3	9,949	3,316	0	9,984	3,328	-2
20	St Andrews	3	9,413	3,138	-5	9,866	3,289	-3
21	St James's	3	9,433	3,144	-5	10,101	3,367	-1

22	St Thomas's	3	9,432	3,144	-5	9,714	3,238	-5
23	Wollaston & Stourbridge West	3	9,649	3,216	-3	9,716	3,239	-5
24	Wordsley	3	11,722	3,907	18	12,214	4,071	20
Totals		72	238,705	-	-	244,890	-	-
Averages		-	-	3,315	-	-	3,401	-

Source: *Electorate figures are based on information provided by Dudley Borough Council.*

Note: *The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Netherton & Woodside ward were relatively over-represented by 32%, while electors in Amblecote ward were relatively under-represented by 50%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.*

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

18 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to the LGCE giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Dudley Borough Council.

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

Dudley Borough Council

20 The Borough Council proposed retaining the existing council size of 72 and put forward a scheme of 24 three-member wards mainly based on the existing warding arrangements. The scheme would provide excellent electoral equality with the electoral variance in no ward varying by more than 5% from the borough average by 2006.

21 The submission also included alternative options for various areas of the borough put forward by the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats respectively. However, no figures or argumentation were received for any of these proposed amendments.

Member of Parliament

22 Sylvia Heal, MP for Halesowen and Rowley Regis, commented on a draft version of the Council's scheme. She proposed amendments to the Council's draft scheme in the Halesowen South, Belle Vale & Hasbury, Hayley Green and Cradley areas. She supported the Council's proposed Halesowen North ward.

Other representations

23 A further three representations were received from a borough councillor, West Midlands Police and a local resident. Councillor Burt, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, included comments received from councillors, MP's and officers during the consultation process on the Council's draft scheme. Chief Superintendent Cole of the West Midland Police stated that 'the more coterminous that boundaries are between police areas, wards and constituencies then the less barriers that there are placed in the way of partnership working' and commented that 'this can only be to the long-term benefit of our local communities.' A local resident hoped that 'the Commission will ensure that the ward boundaries respect the ancient parish boundary between Oldswinford and Halesowen' and that 'the ancient boundary between the Counties of Worcester and Stafford (namely the River Stour) is also respected.' He also stated that 'the new arrangements warding Dudley Borough should conform to those of these ancient and distinct communities.'

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

25 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Dudley is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended): the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'.

26 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

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

28 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate forecasts

29 Since 1975 there has been an 8.5% increase in the electorate of Dudley borough. The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 2.6% from 238,705 to 244,890 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Brierley Hill ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Quarry Bank & Cradley, St James's and Wordsley wards. 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 Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

30 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult. Having considered the Borough Council's figures, we accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council size

31 Dudley Borough Council presently has 72 members. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed retaining the existing council size. In the Borough Council's submission it argued that the nature of the councillors' role had changed over the last couple of years and would continue to change over the next five years. The Council stated that 'there was all party consensus on the proposal that the number of councillors for Dudley MBC should remain at 72' but several of its initial arguments related to factors such as population change, regeneration projects and comparisons with other boroughs, none of which we consider as grounds for justifying a particular council size. We did not consider that its original submission provided enough detailed argumentation for the retention of the existing council size and therefore asked the Borough Council to provide more evidence and argumentation as to why a council of 72 members would provide the best local governance for Dudley borough.

32 In its reply the Borough Council stated that 'the move to a Cabinet system has in particular created a number of changes which impact on member roles, not just for the Councillors serving as Executive Members but also for the backbenchers.' It explained that each member of the Cabinet assumes a service portfolio and 'in many cases this is associated with Councillors being engaged on an almost full time basis on Cabinet issues.' It also stated that 'the additional responsibilities of posts such as Leader of the Council, and indeed Leader of the Opposition are placing greater demands on those members, who in turn need greater support from other councillors.'

33 The Council considered that 'the impact of designating 10 councillors to form the Executive is to increase the workload for backbenchers in the regulatory functions of the authority' as 'the work of Committees such as Development Control, Licensing and Safety, Disciplinary and Grievance, has to be undertaken without any members of the Executive.' It went on to state that 'reducing the numbers of backbenchers while simultaneously experiencing this increase in workload appears to us to be unreasonable.'

34 The Council also considered the changes surrounding its Select Committees and noted that the number of members on each committee has already fallen from around 18 to around 10. The Council considered reducing the number of members on each committee further but 'given the volume of the work for Select Committees, the Council does not feel it realistic to consider reducing the numbers of members further.' It considered that this would 'present difficulties in building up a pool of Members with expertise on the issues involved, and undermine the balance which needs to be struck between holding smaller sized meetings to promote debate and ensuring that it remains large enough to adequately reflect the diversity of opinion and experience among elected members.' The Council also highlighted the broader representational role of councillors pointing to the growth of partnership activity involving councillors. Examples of this type of work included 'the involvement of members in the six thematic partnerships implementing our Community Plan, including Crime and Disorder, Lifelong Learning Partnership, Health Improvement, Local Agenda 21, etc.'

35 The Council considered that 'far from reducing the number of meetings that elected members are required to attend, the new arrangements open up new opportunities that have increased the potential workload of elected councillors.' It also stated that 'it is not just the growing volume of work that is evident, it is the increasing demands on the knowledge and skills that is an issue.' One aspect was the need for greater training for elected members and the Council stated that 'the member training and development programme has been revised to accommodate additional training on matters such as business excellence, partnership work, ICT, chairing and conducting public meetings.'

36 Having looked at the evidence and argumentation provided, the size and distribution of the electorate and the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the fact that

the Council's proposal received cross-party support, we conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 72 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 based our recommendations on the Borough 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 secure more identifiable boundaries while having regard to local community identities and interests, we have decided to move away from the Borough Council's proposals in several areas. In the south of the borough we are proposing a reconfiguration of the proposed warding pattern for the existing Lye & Wollescote, Pedmore & Stourbridge East and Quarry Bank & Cradley wards as we consider that the Council's proposal for this area does not provide the best reflection of community interests and does not provide for effective and convenient local government. We are also proposing a number of amendments in other parts of the borough to provide a better balance between the statutory criteria.

38 The Dudley South Operational Command Unit of the West Midlands Police considered that 'in broad terms the more coterminous that boundaries are between police areas, wards and constituencies then the less barriers that there are placed in the way of partnership working' and that 'this can only be to the long-term benefit of our local communities.' It did not, however, put forward any specific proposals for individual wards.

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

- a) Belle Vale & Hasbury, Halesowen North, Halesowen South and Hayley Green wards;
- b) Amblecote, Lye & Wollescote and Quarry Bank & Cradley wards;
- c) Norton, Pedmore & Stourbridge East and Wollaston & Stourbridge West wards;
- d) Brierley Hill, Brockmoor & Pensnett, Kingswinford North & Wall Heath, Kingswinford South and Wordsley wards;
- e) Netherton & Woodside, St Andrews, St James's and St Thomas's wards;
- f) Castle & Priory, Coseley East, Coseley West, Gornal and Sedgley wards.

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

Belle Vale & Hasbury, Halesowen North, Halesowen South and Hayley Green wards

41 These four wards are situated in the extreme south-east of the borough and are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor in Belle Vale & Hasbury, Halesowen North and Hayley Green wards is 4%, 5% and 9% below the borough average respectively (3%, 6% and 13% below by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Halesowen South ward is equal to the borough average (2% below by 2006).

42 The Borough Council put forward a warding arrangement largely based on the existing three-member wards in this area with amendments to provide a better level of electoral equality. It proposed a revised Halesowen North ward with a western boundary using Coombs Road and Dudley Road. A revised Halesowen South ward would retain its existing boundaries with the exception of minor amendments to the north-western and western boundaries. In the north-west, the proposed boundary would be amended to run west along Church Lane and in a

generally south-west direction along Queensway to rejoin the existing boundary at Hagley Road. In the west the proposed boundary would be amended to run west along Belbroughton Road before running south between 36 and 38 Belbroughton Road and then down Hindlip Close before rejoining the existing boundary at Quarry Lane.

43 The Council also proposed a modified Belle Vale ward with amendments to the southern and western boundaries of the existing ward. The proposed amendment to the southern boundary with the proposed Halesowen South ward is described above and a revised western boundary with the proposed Hayley Green & Hasbury ward would be amended to run behind houses 24-64 to the north of Albrighton Road and houses 33-39 to the east of Bassnage Road before returning to the existing boundary. The Council's proposed boundary would also be modified to run to the east of all the houses on Bournes Hill and Bournes Close before running south down the centre of Witley Avenue to include all the houses to the east of Witley Avenue in a revised Hayley Green & Hasbury ward. The boundary would then follow the existing boundary between Hayley Green and Quarry Bank & Cradley wards before running north-east along Highfield Road and turning north to the west of 159 Highfield Crescent. The proposed boundary would then run north along Banner Street and east along Overend Road to the borough boundary.

44 Under the Council's proposals a revised Hayley Green ward would have an amended eastern boundary with the proposed Belle Vale ward as described above and an amended northern boundary with the proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward and would be renamed Hayley Green & Hasbury ward. The proposed northern boundary would be amended to run down the centre of Meres Road before running to the north of the houses on Clent View Road, Havergal Walk and Broadstone Avenue and then running generally south to meet the borough boundary.

45 Sylvia Heal MP made a number of comments based on the Council's draft consultation scheme. Regarding Halesowen North, she stated that she 'had no objections to the Council's draft suggestions for this ward, as the changes are minimal and entirely logical for this ward'. Commenting on the proposed Halesowen South ward she welcomed 'the consolidation of all of the town centre into Halesowen South ward and further suggested the proposed kink in the western border along Blackberry Lane and Summer Hill be further extended to run along the Hagley Road which is a more obvious natural boundary'. She welcomed the proposal to incorporate the Fatherless Barn area into Belle Vale and Hasbury from Hayley Green ward and also proposed a further amendment to the north-western boundary of the existing Belle Vale & Hasbury ward. She did not support the proposed southern boundary around Slims Gate, arguing that it severed community links. She commented that the northern boundary for the proposed Hayley Green ward was 'also very arbitrary and should more logically be located along Windsor Road in order to avoid splitting the natural community around the Loughton Road area'. Finally she welcomed the proposal for a new Cradley ward but was concerned that 'the area around Foxcote was somewhat of an "add-on" attempt to equate numbers without taking account of the established community groupings.'

46 Councillor Burt submitted information that had been gathered during the consultation process but which had not been included in the Council's submission. In this submission Councillor Burston states that he is unhappy with the proposal to separate the Fatherless Barn estate from Hayley Green by putting it into Belle Vale & Hasbury. He proposed including this area in the new Cradley ward 'to which it fits naturally by way of geography and affinity'.

47 A local resident hoped that 'the Committee will ensure that the ward boundaries respect the ancient parish boundary between Oldswinford and Halesowen'. The resident stated that 'the Black Country consists of a lot of villages and small towns that have coalesced' and considered that while 'these areas often lost any administrative independence long ago...that does not mean that they have lost their individual identities and distinctiveness.' The resident hoped that 'the new arrangements warding Dudley Borough should conform to those of these ancient and distinct communities.'

48 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we have decided to adopt the Council's proposals in this area without modification as we consider that these proposals offer the best balance between the statutory criteria. We looked carefully at the proposals put forward by Sylvia Heal MP and found that the Council, as part of their final submission, had adopted the majority of her comments. For reasons of electoral equality, however, and in light of the warding scheme we have adopted elsewhere, we were not able to adopt her proposals to move electors in the Broadstone Avenue and Havergal Walk area into a revised Belle Vale ward. We carefully considered Councillor Burston's comments and the views put forward by the local resident but were not persuaded that their proposals would provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

49 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Belle Vale, Halesowen North and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards would be 4%, 3% and 5% below the borough average respectively (equal to the borough average, 5% and 5% below the borough average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Halesowen South ward would be 2% above the borough average (5% below by 2006). Our proposed wards are illustrated on Map 2, Map A1 and the large maps.

Amblecote, Lye & Wollescote and Quarry Bank & Cradley wards

50 These three wards are situated in the south of the borough and are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor in Amblecote and Quarry Bank & Cradley wards is 50% and 15% above the borough average respectively (49% and 17% above by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Lye & Wollescote ward is 7% below the borough average (10% below by 2006).

51 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member ward pattern for this area. Under its proposals a revised Amblecote ward would retain the majority of its existing northern boundary with the proposed Brierley Hill ward, apart from an amendment to follow Delph Road and Brettell Lane rather than the Stourbridge Canal. The western boundary with the proposed Wollaston & Stourbridge Town ward would follow the Stourbridge Canal rather than the River Stour. An amended southern boundary with the proposed Lye & Wollescote ward would run east along Mill Race Lane, Pennine Way and Penfields Road before running north along Bredon Road. The proposed boundary would then run to the west and north of the properties on Armstrong Close before running north along the railway line and then east to the south of the properties on Vicarage Road to join Hillfields Road. The proposed boundary would then run along Hillfields Road, Stamford Road and Amblecote Road before running south-east along Acres Road and then to the south of the properties on Margaret Close before running down the centre of Brandon Way to Thorns Road where it would rejoin the existing boundary.

52 The Council also proposed a revised Lye & Wollescote ward with a revised northern boundary with the proposed Amblecote ward as described above. The eastern boundary with the proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward would run along Thorns Road, the railway line and then behind the properties to the east of Hayes Lane. It would then run east along Gibbs Road and then to the east of the properties on Apollo Road and Seymour Road before reaching Oldnall Road. Oldnall Road, Brook Holloway and Wollescote Road would form the southern boundary of the proposed Lye & Wollescote ward. The western boundary with the proposed Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward would follow St John's Street and Birmingham Street in an easterly direction before running along the railway line in a westerly direction. It would then run along New Farm Road and Pedmore Road before running to the south of the properties on Longfield Road and Spring Street and then south to the southern boundary on Wollescote Road.

53 The Council also proposed a new Cradley & Foxcote ward which, for its eastern boundary, would have the revised boundaries with the proposed Belle Vale and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards described earlier. The western boundary of the proposed ward would use the revised

boundary with Lye & Wollescote ward for the most part but in the south-west of the proposed ward, the boundary with the proposed Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward would run along Wollescote Road and then south to the west of the properties on Walker Avenue. The proposed boundary would then run west to the north of the properties on Gauden Road before running south along Pedmore Lane to the borough boundary. The northern boundary with the proposed Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward would run along Park Walk, to the north of the properties on Alexander Hill and along Bower Lane before turning north-east and running along the River Stour to the borough boundary.

54 As part of the Council's submission the Labour Party proposed an alternative southern boundary to the proposed Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward affecting the northern boundary of the proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward. It proposed transferring the southern area of Quarry Bank from the proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward into a revised Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward. It did not, however, submit any figures or argumentation in support of this modification.

55 Also as part of the Council submission, the Liberal Democrats put forward an alternative warding pattern for the Amblecote area and this is discussed in more detail in a later section.

56 Sylvia Heal MP welcomed the proposal for a new Cradley ward but considered that 'there is no consistency between the two areas brought together i.e Cradley and Foxcote.' She also stated that 'in addition, the open ground around the Foxcote Farm provides a very large and obvious natural boundary, which divides these two communities.'

57 Councillor Burt submitted information that had been gathered during the consultation process but had not been included in the Council's submission. In this submission Ian Pearson, MP for Dudley South, states that he 'strongly believes new ward arrangements should be based around established communities' and that 'the old Amblecote ward should form the basis of new proposals.' Also as part of this submission the Chief Planning and Leisure Officer of Dudley Borough Council stated that the proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward 'does not seem to follow any continuous urban structure and is almost artificial in its nature' while Councillor Burt commented that the proposal for Cradley 'takes from different communities but it is difficult to see how to improve'.

58 A local resident stated that the 'two communities [Wollescote and Cradley] are separated by half a mile or so of fields' that was 'designated as a green wedge, whose object is to prevent Halesowen and Stourbridge from coalescing'. The resident considered that it would be 'particularly inappropriate for the new warding arrangements to bring together what Planning Policy over many years has been trying to keep apart'.

59 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we are basing our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals in this area which reflect the views of Ian Pearson MP. We are, however, proposing several amendments to provide what we consider to be a better balance between electoral equality and the recognition of community interests and identity. We are proposing an amendment to the western boundary of the Council's proposed Amblecote ward to include all electors in the Richardson Drive estate in Amblecote ward as we consider that this would provide a better recognition of community identity.

60 We are also proposing amendments to the Council's proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward as we do not consider that the proposed ward would provide a good reflection of community identity. We agree with the Chief Planning and Leisure Officer that the proposed ward seems to be almost artificial in its nature and we are therefore proposing an amended Cradley & Foxcote ward. We note Sylvia Heal's comments regarding the differences between the Cradley and Foxcote areas but, for reasons of electoral equality and in light of the warding pattern that we have adopted in other areas, it has been necessary to place parts of these areas in the same ward. We are proposing to transfer all the electors in the Hob Garden Road and Queensway estate from the proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward into an amended Pedmore & Stourbridge

East ward as discussed below. Our proposed boundary would run south from Wollescote Road to the west of the properties on Hilltop and Wassell Road before reaching the borough boundary. We are also proposing an amendment to transfer electors in the Springfield Avenue and Careless Green area from the proposed Lye & Wollescote ward into an amended Cradley & Foxcote ward as we consider that this would provide a better reflection of community identity and would provide a more logical warding pattern. Our proposed boundary would run north along Springfield Avenue, east along Belmont Road, to the west of the properties on Hill Bank, north along Bank Street and Park Street. It would then run north to the west of the properties to the north of Park Street and the south of Brook Street before running east along Brook Street and then north along Bald's Lane to rejoin the Council's proposed boundary. We are also proposing an amendment to the north-western part of the Council's proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward, again to provide a better reflection of community identity. We are moving the southern part of Quarry Bank from the proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward into an amended Quarry Bank ward, as discussed below, to reunite the whole of the Quarry Bank area in a single ward. Our proposed western boundary for the amended Cradley & Foxcote ward would follow the River Stour and Hayes Lane before rejoining the Council's proposed boundary at the railway line.

61 Finally, in light of our proposed amendments to the Council's proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward, we are proposing amendments to the Council's proposed Lye & Wollescote ward to improve levels of electoral equality. We propose amending the southern boundary of the proposed Lye & Wollescote ward to run along Junction Road and we also propose transferring all electors in Barn Close and Martley Drive from the proposed Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward into an amended Lye & Wollescote ward. In the rest of this area we are content to endorse the Council's proposals as we consider that they would provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

62 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Cradley & Foxcote and Lye & Wollescote wards would be 3% and 4% below the borough average respectively (4% and 4% below by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Amblecote ward would be 6% above the borough average (4% above by 2006). Our proposed wards are illustrated on Map 2, Map A1 and the large maps.

Norton, Pedmore & Stourbridge East and Wollaston & Stourbridge West wards

63 These three wards are situated in the south-west of the borough and are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor in Norton and Wollaston & Stourbridge West wards is 2% and 3% below the borough average respectively (4% and 5% below by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward is 3% above the borough average (2% above by 2006).

64 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member ward pattern in this area largely based upon the existing arrangements. A revised Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward would share its northern and eastern boundaries with the proposed Cradley & Foxcote and Lye & Wollescote wards as described earlier. A revised western boundary with the proposed Norton and Wollaston & Stourbridge Town wards would run south from Birmingham Street along the railway line, then along Parkfield Road and Church Street before running west from the junction of Church Street and Junction Road to Hagley Road. The proposed boundary would then run south along the centre of Hagley Road to rejoin the existing boundary.

65 The Council proposed retaining the existing Norton ward with just one minor amendment to move the properties to the west of Charles Road and Swan Street from Wollaston & Stourbridge West ward into the revised Norton ward.

66 The Council proposed a new Wollaston & Stourbridge Town ward largely based on the existing Wollaston & Stourbridge West ward. The southern boundary of this ward would be the

same as the existing boundary between Wollaston & Stourbridge Town and Norton wards with the one minor amendment described earlier. The eastern and northern boundary would follow Hagley Road, Church Street, Parkfield Road, the railway line, Birmingham Street, St John's Road, Canal Street, Stourbridge canal, Audnam Brook and the River Stour before reaching the borough boundary which would form the western boundary.

67 Having carefully considered all of the representations received at Stage One we are basing our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals but are putting forward amendments to provide what we consider to be a better balance between the statutory criteria. We propose amending the proposed Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward to provide a better reflection of community identity and interests. The amendments to the northern boundary with the Council's proposed Lye & Wollescote ward and to the western boundary with the Council's proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward are described in the previous section.

68 We are proposing a minor amendment to the Council's proposed Norton ward to provide a better reflection of community identity. This is to retain the existing ward boundary rather than use Charles Road as a boundary. We are also proposing an amendment to the Council's proposed Wollaston & Stourbridge Town ward to move the Richardson Drive estate from the proposed Wollaston & Stourbridge Town ward into a revised Amblecote ward as discussed in the previous section. We are content to endorse the Council's proposals for the rest of this area as we consider that they provide a good balance between the statutory criteria.

69 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Norton and Pedmore & Stourbridge East wards would be 2% below the borough average in both wards initially (5% and 1% below by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Wollaston & Stourbridge Town ward would be 5% above the borough average (3% above by 2006). Our proposed wards are illustrated on Map 2, Map A1 and the large maps.

Brierley Hill, Brockmoor & Pensnett, Kingswinford North & Wall Heath, Kingswinford South and Wordsley wards

70 These five wards are all situated in the centre and west of the borough and are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor in Brockmoor & Pensnett, Kingswinford North & Wall Heath, Kingswinford South and Wordsley wards is 5%, 5%, 1% and 18% above the borough average respectively (3% above, 2% above, 2% below and 20% above by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Brierley Hill ward is 27% below the borough average (13% below by 2006).

71 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member warding pattern in this area largely based on the existing arrangements. A revised Brierley Hill ward would have a slightly amended southern boundary following Delph Road and Brettell Lane rather than the Stourbridge Canal. The eastern boundary of the proposed ward would follow Merry Hill and Pedmore Road. The northern boundary would follow Dudley Canal, Waterfront Way, the railway line, Moor Street, Stourbridge Canal, Brierley Hill Road, Bracken Park Gardens and Stourbridge Canal. The western boundary of the proposed ward would follow the River Stour, Audnam Brook and the Stourbridge Canal.

72 The Council proposed a slightly revised Wordsley ward with an amendment to the boundary with the proposed Brierley Hill ward as described earlier. The remainder of the ward would remain unchanged. The Council proposed retaining the existing Kingswinford South ward and the majority of the existing Kingswinford North & Wall Heath ward. The only amendment to the latter ward would be to amend the eastern boundary to run south from the borough boundary, west along Oak Lane, south to Stallings Lane, west along Stallings Lane and then south to the west of the Pensnett Trading Estate to the existing boundary at Dudley Road.

73 The Council also proposed an amended Brockmoor & Pensnett ward largely based on the existing ward. A slightly amended southern boundary would run along Moor Street. The proposed eastern boundary would run north along the railway line and Dudley Road before running to the west of Holly Street and 192-284 Dudley Road. It would then run west along Pensnett Road before rejoining the existing boundary running west along High Street. The proposed northern boundary would run westwards along a track to rejoin the existing boundary at the dismantled railway line transferring the area to the south of the track currently in Sedgley ward into the proposed Gornal ward. The proposed western boundary with the revised Kingswinford North & Wall Heath ward is described earlier and the remainder of the boundary would follow the existing boundary.

74 As part of the Council submission the Liberal Democrats put forward an alternative warding arrangement for the proposed Amblecote and Brierley Hill wards. It proposed a new ward containing those parts of the Council's proposed Amblecote and Brierley Hill wards to the east of the railway line and to the west of Thorns Road, Merry Hill and Pedmore Road. The remainder of the Council's proposed Amblecote and Brierley Hill wards would form another new ward. No figures or argumentation were received for this proposal.

75 Councillor Burt submitted information that had been gathered during the consultation process but had not been included in the Council's submission. Ian Pearson MP considered that the existing Brierley Hill ward should form the basis for new proposals and that the Pensnett Trading Estate should be part of Brockmoor & Pensnett ward. He also proposed amending the boundary between Kingswinford North and Kingswinford South wards to follow the High Street and Summerhill on the grounds that this would remove the existing Cross Street and Summer Street kink in the boundary. The Chief Planning & Leisure Officer stated that he was 'pleased to see the creation of the revamped Brierley Hill ward, which reflects the new proposals for the emerging town centre' although Councillor Burt stated that the Chief Planning & Leisure Officer's comments related to the original draft mapping which showed the Liberal Democrats proposals in this area. Councillor Burt proposed retaining the existing name of Kingswinford North & Wall Heath ward and opposed Ian Pearson's proposal to run the boundary between Kingswinford North & Wall Heath and Kingswinford South wards along Summerhill and the High Street, arguing that it would 'split the town and skew the number of electors adversely'.

76 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, we are basing our proposals for this area on the Council's scheme but are proposing three amendments to provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. We are proposing retaining the existing boundary between Brierley Hill and Wordsley wards in the Brierley Hill Road area as we consider that the existing boundary of the Stourbridge Canal already provides a strong and easily identifiable boundary and we did not receive sufficient evidence to support the proposal to move away from this boundary. In the south of the proposed Brockmoor & Pensnett ward we are proposing to move the western boundary to run along the dismantled railway line until it reaches Moor Street. This would transfer those electors in the Foxsdale Drive and Leys Crescent area from Brockmoor & Pensnett ward into an amended Brierley Hill ward and would, we consider, provide a strong and easily identifiable boundary. Finally, we are proposing an amendment to the boundary between Wordsley and Kingswinford South to provide an improved level of electoral equality in light of our proposals in the south of Wordsley ward. In the west of the ward we are proposing that the boundary run south down Cot Lane and then west along Lawnswood Road to the borough boundary, to transfer all the electors in the Lawnswood Avenue and Middleway Avenue area from Wordsley ward into Kingswinford South ward. In the remainder of this area we are content to endorse the Council's proposals as we consider that they provide a good balance between the statutory criteria. We considered the Liberal Democrats' proposals for the Amblecote and Brierley Hill area but, given the lack of evidence and argumentation for these proposals and the support for the Council's proposals, we were not minded to adopt the Liberal Democrats' proposed wards. The Council's submission and the draft recommendations reflect the comments of Ian Pearson MP regarding Pensnett Trading Estate forming part of Brockmoor & Pensnett ward, but we do not propose amending the

boundary between Kingswinford North & Wall Heath and Kingswinford South wards as this would adversely affect electoral equality. We support the proposal of the Council and Councillor Burt to retain the existing name of Kingswinford North & Wall Heath ward as we consider that this would provide a good reflection of community identity.

77 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Brierley Hill and Brockmoor & Pensnett wards would be 6% and 2% below the borough average respectively (4% above and 1% below by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Kingswinford North & Wall Heath, Kingswinford South and Wordsley wards would be 4% above, 6% above and equal to the borough average respectively (2%, 3% and 3% above by 2006). Our proposed wards are illustrated on Map 2, Map A1 and the large maps.

Netherton & Woodside, St Andrews, St James's and St Thomas's wards

78 These four wards are all situated in the east of the borough and are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor in Netherton & Woodside, St Andrews, St James's and St Thomas's wards is 32%, 5%, 5% and 5% below the borough average respectively (32%, 3%, 1% and 5% below by 2006).

79 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member ward pattern in this area. A new Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward would comprise the majority of the existing St Andrews ward as well as the northern part of the existing Quarry Bank & Cradley ward. The western boundary of this new ward with the proposed Brierley Hill and Amblecote wards would be formed by Merry Hill and Pedmore Road, while the southern boundary with the proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward would follow Park Walk and Park Road before running to the north of the properties on Alexander Hill. It would then run along Bower Lane before heading north-east along the River Stour to reach the borough boundary. The northern boundary of this proposed ward with the proposed Netherton & Woodside ward would follow Halesowen Road, the Dudley Canal, Cradley Road, Marriott Road, Walker Street and Hockley Lane. It would then run to the west of 56-138 Hockley Road before running west to the Dudley Canal, north along Highbridge Road and then west along Blackbrook Road and the Dudley Canal to Pedmore Road.

80 The Council also proposed a revised Netherton & Woodside ward largely based on the existing ward. The southern boundary of this proposed ward would be the boundary with the new Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward as described earlier. The eastern boundary would be formed by the borough boundary and a dismantled railway line before running to the north of the properties on Ryan Place and to the north of 89 New Road. The boundary would then run north-west along Cinder Bank, Blowers Green Road and Aston Road. The northern boundary with the proposed St James's ward would follow the existing boundary while the western boundary would be the eastern boundary of the proposed Brockmoor & Pensnett ward described earlier.

81 The Council proposed an amended St Thomas's ward that would share its southern boundary with the revised Netherton & Woodside ward as described earlier. The eastern boundary of this proposed ward would be the borough boundary, while the northern boundary with the proposed Castle & Priory ward would be the same as the existing boundary with the amendment that it would run down Birmingham Street, Porters Field and King Street rather than along the High Street.

82 Finally, the Council proposed a revised St James's ward. The southern boundary of this ward would be formed by the boundaries with the proposed St Thomas's, Netherton & Woodside and Brockmoor & Pensnett wards as described earlier. The western boundary with the proposed Gornal ward would follow the existing boundary until the junction with Himley Road where it would run west along Himley Road before turning north along Grosvenor Road South and Grosvenor Road. The northern boundary with the proposed Castle & Priory ward would be formed by Dibdale Road West, Milking Bank, Dibdale Road, Salop Street, The Parade, St James's Road, Ednam Road and The Broadway.

83 As part of the Council's submission, the Labour Party proposed a number of amendments to the Council's proposals. It proposed an amendment to the southern boundary of the proposed Netherton & Woodside ward to include all of the properties in the Hockley Lane and Yew Tree Hills area in the amended Netherton & Woodside ward. It also proposed an amendment to the northern boundary of the proposed Netherton & Woodside ward to include all of the properties in the Tanfield Road area of Blowers Green in an amended St Thomas's ward. It also put forward an amendment to the boundary between the proposed St James's and Castle & Priory wards to include an area in the east of the proposed St James's ward in a revised Castle & Priory ward. It did not provide any figures or argumentation for any of these proposals.

84 Also as part of the Council's submission the Liberal Democrats put forward an amendment to transfer electors in the north-west of the Council's proposed St James's ward into a revised Gornal ward. It did not provide any figures or argumentation for any of these proposals.

85 Councillor Burt submitted information that had been gathered during the consultation process but had not been included in the Council's submission. Councillor Whitehouse considered that 'the real Netherton should exclude the Harts Hill end, stopping short at Peartree Lane; and in the south ought to contain down as far as Saltwell's Road/Coppice Lane & Bumble Hole.' Councillor Burt considered that the area 'bordered by The Broadway and Priory Road should remain in St James's as it currently exists to maintain clear ward status for Castle & Priory as a priority area in terms of investment and inclusion strategies.' He also proposed moving half of Milking Bank into Gornal ward.

86 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One we are basing our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals in this area. However, we are proposing three amendments to the Council's scheme which we consider would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. The first of these is in the proposed Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward and comes as a result of our amendment to unite the whole of Quarry Bank in a single Quarry Bank ward, as discussed above. In light of this amendment and to improve electoral equality, we are proposing to amend the northern boundary of the proposed ward. As put forward by the Labour Party, we propose amending the southern boundary of the proposed Netherton & Woodside ward to transfer all electors in the Hockley Lane and Yew Tree Hills area from the proposed Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward into an amended Netherton & Woodside ward. We consider that this amendment would provide a better reflection of community identity and would provide for more effective and convenient local government than the Council's proposals in this area. We also propose transferring all the electors in the Farm Road, Lodge Crescent and Blackbrook Close area from the proposed Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward to an amended Netherton & Woodside ward. Our proposed boundary would run south along Highbridge Road, to the south of the properties on Blackbrook Close, west along Highbridge Road and then to the south and east of the Enterprise Trading Estate before rejoining the Council's proposed boundary on Pedmore Road.

87 In the north of the proposed Netherton & Woodside ward we propose two amendments to provide strong and easily identifiable boundaries and to improve electoral equality in the light of our proposals in the south of the ward. In the New Road area we propose retaining the existing boundary rather than adopting the Council's proposed boundary, as we consider that the existing boundary is a strong one. As put forward by the Labour Party, we also propose an amendment to transfer all the electors in the Tanfield Road area of Blowers Green from the proposed Netherton & Woodside ward into an amended St Thomas's ward running the boundary along the railway line, to the west of the properties on Blowers Green Crescent, Park Head Road, Park Head Crescent and Aston Road to Stourbridge Road. We did not consider that the other proposals of the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and Councillors Burt and Whitehouse would best reflect the statutory criteria and therefore in the remainder of the area we are content to endorse the Council's proposals as we consider that they provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

88 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Netherton & Woodside, St James's and St Thomas's wards would be 4%, 2% and 2% above the borough average respectively (6%, 5% and 1% above by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Quarry Bank ward would be 4% below the borough average (1% below by 2006). Our proposed wards are illustrated on Map 2, Map A1 and the large maps.

Castle & Priory, Coseley East, Coseley West, Gornal and Sedgley wards

89 These five wards are all situated in the north of the borough and are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor in Castle & Priory, Coseley East and Coseley West wards is 18%, 7% and 8% below the borough average respectively (16%, 6% and 10% below by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Gornal and Sedgley wards is 42% above and equal to the borough average respectively (39% above and 2% below the borough average by 2006).

90 At Stage One the Borough Council put forward a revised three-member ward pattern for this area. It proposed a significantly amended Castle & Priory ward with a southern boundary with the proposed St James's ward, as described earlier. The western boundary with the proposed Gornal and Roseville & Woodsetton wards would be formed by Deepdale Lane, Jew's Lane, Kent Street, Blackthorne Road and Sycamore Green. The northern boundary with the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton and Coseley East wards would follow the existing boundary with one amendment where the proposed boundary would move 797-823a Birmingham New Road, 1-19 Sedgley Road, 66-73 Sedgley Road West and all the properties on Benbeck Grove from the existing Castle & Priory ward into an amended Coseley East ward. This revised Coseley East ward would retain its existing boundaries with two exceptions, the one detailed above, and an amendment to the southern boundary with the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward to run along King Street and Bond Street rather than Caddick Street. The Council also proposed a new Roseville & Woodsetton ward, the eastern boundary of which would be the existing boundary between Coseley East and Coseley West ward with the one minor amendment to run along King Street and Bond Street as described above. The southern boundary would, for the most part, comprise the existing boundary between Castle & Priory and Coseley West wards with the only amendments as described earlier. The western boundary with the proposed Gornal and Sedgley wards would run to the west of the properties on Round House Road, and Hermit Street before running along Holloway Street, Vale Street, Ridgeway, to the west and north of the properties on Viewfield Crescent before running along Dudley Road. The northern boundary with the proposed Coseley East and Sedgley wards would follow Gate Street, Tipton Road, Setton Drive and Turls Hill Road.

91 The Council proposed a revised Sedgley ward with the borough boundary serving as its western and northern boundaries. The southern boundary would be the northern boundary of the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward, as described earlier, but would also follow Clifton Street in the east, and in the south-west would follow Moden Hill before running to the west of the properties on Botany Drive and then west to the borough boundary.

92 Finally, the Council proposed a revised Gornal ward with boundaries abutting the proposed Sedgley, Roseville & Woodsetton, Castle & Priory, St James's and Brockmoor & Pensnett wards as described earlier.

93 As part of the Council's submission, the Labour Party proposed a number of amendments to the Council's proposals in this area. It proposed an amendment to the southern boundary of the proposed Coseley East ward to include the properties in the Sedgley Road West area in an amended Castle & Priory ward. It also proposed transferring electors in the south-west of the proposed Castle & Priory ward into a revised St James's ward and largely retaining the existing Sedgley ward. The Labour Party also proposed transferring an area in the south-west of the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward to become part of a revised Gornal ward. Finally it

proposed transferring Rock Road and properties to the west of Clifton Street from the proposed Sedgley ward into an amended Coseley East ward. It did not provide any figures or argumentation for these proposals.

94 Also as part of the Council's submission, the Liberal Democrats proposed a number of amendments to the Council's proposals in this area. They proposed retaining the majority of the existing boundary between Castle & Priory and St James's wards and between Castle & Priory and Gornal wards. It also proposed transferring an area in the north-east of the Council's proposed Gornal ward into a revised Roseville & Woodsetton ward. It did not provide any figures or argumentation for these proposals.

95 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, we are basing our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals with four amendments to provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. As put forward by the Labour Party and to provide a better reflection of community identity, we propose amending the southern boundary of the Council's proposed Coseley East ward to transfer all properties on Sedgley Road West from the proposed Coseley East ward to an amended Castle & Priory ward. Again to provide a better reflection of community identity, in the north-west of the proposed Coseley East ward we propose transferring all the electors on Rock Road from the proposed Sedgley ward into an amended Coseley East ward. We also propose an amended boundary between the proposed Castle & Priory and Roseville & Woodsetton wards to improve electoral equality. Our proposed boundary would run to the north of the properties on Hillside Road before running west on Maple Green, to the north of 11 and 44 Elm Green, to the south of the properties on Parkes Hall Road and then along Sycamore Green and Blackthorne Road to rejoin the Council's proposed boundary. Finally we propose an amendment to the Council's proposed Sedgley ward to provide a better reflection of community identity. We propose that the south-eastern boundary of Sedgley ward should run to the west of the properties on Moden Hill, Snowdon Rise and Ridgway before rejoining the Council's proposed boundary. In the remainder of this area we are content to endorse the Council's proposals as we consider that they provide a good balance between the statutory criteria. We did not consider that the alternative proposals put forward by the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than those of the Council.

96 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Castle & Priory, Gornal, Roseville & Woodsetton and Sedgley wards would be equal to, 6% above, 1% above and 2% above the borough average respectively (1% above, 4% above, equal to and 1% below the borough average by 2006). Our proposed wards are illustrated on Map 2, Map A1 and the large maps.

Electoral cycle

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

Conclusions

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

- a council of 72 members should be retained;
- there should be 24 wards;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, and one ward should retain its existing boundaries.

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

- in the southern area we propose a reconfiguration of the proposed Cradley & Foxcote, Lye & Wollescote and Pedmore & Stourbridge East wards;
- we also propose amendments to the Council's proposed Amblecote, Brierley Hill, Brockmore & Pensnett, Castle & Priory, Coseley East, Hayley Green & Hasbury, Kingswinford South, Netherton & Woodside, Norton, Quarry Bank, Roseville & Woodsetton, Sedgley, St Thomas's, Wollaston & Stourbridge Town and Wordsley wards;
- there should be no change to Norton ward.

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

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 Electorate		2006 Electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	72	72	72	72
Number of wards	24	24	24	24
Average number of electors per councillor	3,315	3,315	3,401	3,401
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	7	0	8	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	4	0	3	0

101 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Dudley Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from seven to none. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 6%.

Draft recommendation

Dudley Borough Council should comprise 72 councillors serving 24 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Map 2: Draft recommendations for Dudley

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

103 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

104 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, ***whether or not*** they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to The Electoral Commission, which cannot make the Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft recommendations for Dudley: Detailed mapping

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

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

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

Map A1: Draft recommendations for Dudley: Key map

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

The Code of Practice applies to consultation documents published after 1 January 2001, which should reproduce the criteria, give explanations of any departures, and confirm that the criteria have otherwise been followed.

Table B1: 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.