

Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Dudley

Report to The Electoral Commission

May 2003

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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 CBE
Ann M. Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

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

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Dudley.

Summary

We began a review of Dudley's electoral arrangements on 4 December 2001. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 22 October 2002, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation. We now submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations that we received during consultation on our draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.**

We found that the existing 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%.**
- **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 final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 136–137) 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 24 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 6% from the borough average both initially and by 2006.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to The Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 24 June 2003. The information in the representations will be available for public access once the Order has been made.

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Table 1: Final 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 & Cradley South	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 & Cradley ward	3
15	Netherton, Woodside & St Andrews	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 & Dudley Wood	3	part of Quarry Bank & Cradley ward; part of St Andrews ward	3 and 4
19	Sedgley	3	part of Coseley West ward; part of Sedgley ward	1 and 2
20	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

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Large map reference
21	St Thomas's	3	part of Netherton & Woodside ward; part of St Thomas's ward	2 and 4
22	Upper Gornal & Woodsetton	3	Part of Coseley West ward; part of Castle & Priory ward; part of Gornal ward; part of Sedgley ward	1 and 2
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 wards in the above table 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: Final 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	10,447	3,482	5	10,602	3,534	4
2 Belle Vale	3	9,547	3,182	-4	10,176	3,392	0
3 Brierley Hill	3	9,412	3,137	-5	10,679	3,560	5
4 Brockmoor & Pensnett	3	9,792	3,264	-2	10,143	3,381	-1
5 Castle & Priory	3	9,952	3,317	0	10,345	3,448	1
6 Coseley East	3	9,496	3,165	-5	9,761	3,254	-4
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	10,056	3,352	1	9,620	3,207	-6
11 Hayley Green & Cradley South	3	9,502	3,167	-4	9,810	3,270	-4
12 Kingswinford North & Wall Heath	3	10,330	3,443	4	10,364	3,455	2
13 Kingswinford South	3	10,510	3,503	6	10,518	3,506	3
14 Lye & Wollescote	3	9,577	3,192	-4	9,781	3,260	-4
15 Netherton, Woodside & St Andrews	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 & Dudley Wood	3	9,535	3,178	-4	10,133	3,378	-1
19 Sedgley	3	10,064	3,355	1	10,023	3,341	-2
20 St James's	3	10,130	3,377	2	10,677	3,559	5
21 St Thomas's	3	10,137	3,379	2	10,335	3,445	1
22 Upper Gornal & Woodsetton	3	10,062	3,354	1	10,233	3,411	0
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	-

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 final recommendations for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Dudley. 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 undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which reported to the Secretary of State in May 1979 (Report No. 336).

3 In making final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

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

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 Periodic Electoral Reviews*. This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 Our task is to make recommendations 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, so 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, or that changes should be made to the size of the 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 to 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 lead to an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

9 This review was in four stages. 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, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the borough, the 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 the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 8 April 2002. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

10 Stage Three began on 22 October 2002 with the publication of the report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Dudley*, and ended on 16 December 2002. During this period comments were sought from the public and any other interested parties on the preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four the draft recommendations were reconsidered in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations.

2 Current electoral arrangements

11 Dudley is situated in the West Midlands and is surrounded by the authorities of South Staffordshire to the west, Wolverhampton to the north, Sandwell and Birmingham to the east and Bromsgrove to the south. 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.

12 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.

13 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.

14 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 3: 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 significantly under-represented by 50%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Draft recommendations

15 During Stage One five representations were received, including a borough-wide scheme from Dudley Borough Council. We also received representations from a local MP, a borough councillor, West Midlands Police and a local resident. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Dudley*.

16 Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's proposals, which achieved a significant improvement in electoral equality. However, to improve electoral equality further and secure more identifiable boundaries while having regard to local community identities and interests, we decided to move away from the Borough Council's proposals in several areas. We proposed that:

- Dudley Borough Council should be served by 72 councillors, as at present, representing 24 wards;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, while one ward should retain its existing boundaries.

Draft recommendation

Dudley Borough Council should comprise 72 councillors, serving 24 wards.

17 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in all of the 24 wards varying by no more than 6% from the borough average, both initially and by 2006.

4 Responses to consultation

18 During the consultation on the draft recommendations report, 186 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Dudley Borough Council.

Dudley Borough Council

19 The Borough Council generally supported the draft recommendations but proposed a number of amendments generally relating to the location of polling stations. It also proposed that the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward be renamed Upper Gornal & Woodsetton ward.

Political parties

20 We received representations from two political parties at Stage Three. Dudley South Constituency Labour Party supported the draft recommendations but proposed three amendments. Coseley West Branch Labour Party proposed that the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward be renamed Upper Gornal & Woodsetton ward.

MPs

21 Ian Pearson, MP for Dudley South, supported the draft recommendations for a council of 72 members but proposed two amendments and one ward name change. Ross Cranston, MP for Dudley North, opposed the draft recommendations for the existing Gornal ward and included a letter from a resident opposing the proposed changes.

West Midlands Police

22 Dudley South Operational Command Unit of West Midlands Police opposed the draft recommendations as they would cut across the established ward-based policing system.

Other representations

23 A further 180 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local organisations, councillors and residents.

24 Councillor Finch, member for Gornal ward, writing on behalf of Gornal Labour Party, opposed the proposals for the existing Gornal ward. He also forwarded letters from 12 residents and a petition opposing the proposals for the existing Gornal ward. Sedgley Local Historical Society opposed the name of the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward and hoped that any new name would reflect the villages of Upper Gornal and Woodsetton. Fifteen local residents also opposed the draft recommendations for the existing Gornal ward.

25 Sedgley Neighbourhood Watch Coordinators and four residents opposed the draft recommendations for the existing Sedgley ward. We also received 141 proforma letters opposing the draft recommendations which affect the existing Sedgley ward.

26 Councillors Cotterill, Forbes, Male and Sparks, members for Quarry Bank & Cradley, Hayley Green, Quarry Bank & Cradley and Quarry Bank & Cradley wards respectively, opposed the boundary between the proposed Cradley & Foxcote and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards and suggested that the proposed Hayley Green & Hasbury ward be renamed Hayley Green & Cradley South ward. A local resident also opposed the boundary between the proposed Cradley & Foxcote and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards.

27 The Wells & Manor Tenants Association and a local resident opposed the draft recommendations for the existing St Andrews ward. Eleven local residents also opposed the draft recommendation to transfer part of the existing Amblecote ward into a new Lye & Wollescote ward. A local resident opposed the proposed changes but did not specify any particular area.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

28 As described earlier, our prime objective 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), which defines 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'.

29 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 within the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

30 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.

31 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the 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 identities 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

32 Since 1975 there has been an 8.5% increase in the electorate of Dudley borough. At Stage One 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 the unitary development plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Having accepted that this is an inexact science, and having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

33 We received no comments on the Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and we remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates currently available.

Council size

34 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 could 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.

35 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’.

36 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’.

37 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.’.

38 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’. The Council concluded: ‘we firmly believe that the proposal to retain the current size of the Council is a sound and reasonable one’.

39 Having looked at the evidence and argumentation provided at Stage One, 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 concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 72 members.

40 During Stage Three we received just one representation regarding council size, from Ian Pearson MP, who stated, ‘I would like to support your draft proposal to retain a council of 72 members and that there should be 24 wards’.

41 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three and, in light of the support from Ian Pearson MP, and the lack of any opposition to our proposed council size, are endorsing our draft recommendation to retain a council of 72 members as final.

Electoral arrangements

42 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 based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's scheme. We considered 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 moved away from the Borough Council's proposals in several areas. In the south of the borough we proposed a reconfiguration of the proposed warding pattern for the existing Lye & Wollescote, Pedmore & Stourbridge East and Quarry Bank & Cradley wards as we considered that the Council's proposals for this area would not provide the best reflection of community interests and would not provide for effective and convenient local government. We also proposed a number of amendments in other parts of the borough to provide a better balance between the statutory criteria.

43 At Stage Three the Borough Council proposed a number of amendments to the draft recommendations, the majority of which were to ensure that existing polling stations remained in the wards in which they were located under the existing arrangements. However, polling districts are administrative matters to be determined by the local authority once a warding pattern has been established and we do not consider argumentation based on the existing or future position of polling stations to be persuasive in its own right. Therefore, while we have some sympathy with argumentation based on the location of polling stations, we do not consider this argumentation to be strong enough on its own to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations.

44 At Stage Three the Dudley South Operational Command Unit of the West Midlands Police commented on the draft recommendations stating that 'these proposals have significant implications for West Midlands Police and we cannot support the recommendations as currently constituted'. It continued: 'the recommendations mean that four wards would cut across the established police boundaries' stating that 'this cannot be acceptable to West Midlands Police, local councillors or local communities'. However, it did not put forward any specific proposals for individual wards and did not have regard for the poor levels of electoral equality that retaining the existing boundaries would provide. As a result we did not consider this to be strong enough evidence to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations.

45 A local resident opposed the proposed changes but did not specify any particular area and did not provide any evidence or argumentation to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations.

46 Several residents expressed concern 'over the lack of publication over the proposed change'. When publishing our draft recommendations we placed a public notice in a number of local papers, issued a press release and asked the Borough Council to make copies of the report available at their offices, in local libraries and at local information points. We also supplied the Council with posters advertising the publication of the draft recommendations and asked them to display these in local libraries and information points. We therefore consider that we took all necessary steps to publicise our draft recommendations.

47 The draft recommendations have been reviewed in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For the most part we are confirming our draft recommendations as final as we consider that they provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than either the existing arrangements or any proposals put forward at Stage

Three. However, we are proposing three amendments put forward by the Council, Ian Pearson MP and Dudley South Constituency Labour Party which we consider would provide a better reflection of community identities than our draft recommendations. We are also proposing that four of our proposed wards be renamed to better reflect their constituent parts. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- i. Belle Vale & Hasbury, Halesowen North, Halesowen South and Hayley Green wards;
- ii. Amblecote, Lye & Wollescote and Quarry Bank & Cradley wards;
- iii. Norton, Pedmore & Stourbridge East and Wollaston & Stourbridge West wards;
- iv. Brierley Hill, Brockmoor & Pensnett, Kingswinford North & Wall Heath, Kingswinford South and Wordsley wards;
- v. Netherton & Woodside, St Andrews, St James's and St Thomas's wards;
- vi. Castle & Priory, Coseley East, Coseley West, Gornal and Sedgley wards.

48 Details of our final 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

49 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).

50 At Stage One 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.

51 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 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 properties on Bournes Hill and Bournes Close before running south down the centre of Witley Avenue to include all the properties 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.

52 Under the Council's Stage One 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 properties on Clent View

Road, Havergal Walk and Broadstone Avenue and then running generally south to meet the borough boundary.

53 Sylvia Heal, MP for Halesowen & Rowley Regis, made a number of comments based on the Council's draft consultation scheme. Councillor Burt, member for Kingswinford & Wall Heath ward, submitted information that had been gathered during the consultation process but which had not been included in the Council's submission, including comments from Councillor Burston, member for Hayley Green ward, and a local resident. Another local resident hoped that 'the Committee will ensure that the ward boundaries respect the ancient parish boundary between Oldswinford and Halesowen'.

54 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we decided to adopt the Council's proposals in this area without modification as we considered that they offered 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 its 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 a better balance between the statutory criteria than the Council's proposals.

55 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).

56 At Stage Three the Council proposed four amendments in this area. It proposed retaining the existing boundary between the proposed Belle Vale and Halesowen North wards on the grounds of the location of the polling station for the existing Halesowen North ward. It stated that 'the electors living within this area [to the east of Coombs Road and Dudley Road], although only a few at present would have to travel substantially further to their new polling station at Halesbury School, Feldon Lane'. The Council went on to state that 'it would be better to retain the boundary along the Dudley canal'. It also proposed retaining the existing boundary between the proposed Belle Vale and Halesowen South wards and stated that 'The Cornbow Centre is used as a polling station for the area to the left of the ward boundary ... this has been moved into the Halesowen South ward which means due to a lack of suitable locations within the Halesowen town centre area there is not a polling station for the residents unless the ward boundary is returned to its original place'.

57 The Council proposed an amendment to the boundaries between the proposed Halesowen South and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards to unite electors on Hindlip Close in a single ward. The Council considered that 'it seems unnecessary to move the boundary line to this position as the previous boundary line fell after Inkberrow Road, which seemed a natural position for the boundary'. Finally the Council proposed an amendment to the boundary between the proposed Belle Vale and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards, again basing its arguments on the location of polling stations.

58 Councillors Cotterill, Forbes, Male and Sparks opposed the boundary between the proposed Cradley & Foxcote and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards (this argument is discussed in a later section) and suggested that the proposed Hayley Green & Hasbury ward be renamed Hayley Green & Cradley South ward. Councillors Cotterill, Forbes, Male and Sparks stated that 'we spent a long time between 1999 and 2001 trying to include the title "Cradley South" after "Hayley Green"', adding that 'this was agreed by the residents and passed by the Area Committee'. They continued, 'There is now no clear demarcation between Hayley Green and Hasbury, whereas

Fatherless Barn is completely separated from Hayley Green by green belt, farms and a wide stream; its population does not regard itself as part of Hayley Green (or even of Halesowen)', and concluded, 'we therefore suggest that the new ward be named Hayley Green and Cradley South ward'.

59 A local resident also opposed the boundary between the proposed Cradley & Foxcote and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards, and this argument is discussed later in this chapter.

60 We considered the amendments proposed by the Council at Stage Three, but the majority of them were to ensure that existing polling stations remained in the wards in which they were located under the existing arrangements. As mentioned earlier, we are of the opinion that polling districts are administrative matters to be determined by the local authority once a warding pattern has been established and we do not consider argumentation based on the existing or future position of polling stations to be persuasive in its own right. Therefore, while we have some sympathy with argumentation based on the location of polling stations, we do not consider this argumentation to be strong enough on its own to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations.

61 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for this area as final with just two amendments. The first of these is an amendment to the boundary between the proposed Halesowen South and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards put forward by the Council. The second amendment is that the proposed Hayley Green & Hasbury ward be renamed Hayley Green & Cradley South ward.

62 We consider that the Council's proposal to retain the existing boundary between the proposed Halesowen South and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards would unite electors on Hindlip Close in a single ward without unduly affecting electoral equality, and therefore we are adopting it as part of our final recommendations. We are also adopting the amendment put forward by Councillors Cotterill, Forbes, Male and Sparks as we agree that the revised name of Hayley Green & Cradley South would provide a better reflection of the constituent parts of the proposed ward.

63 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Belle Vale, Halesowen North and Hayley Green & Cradley South wards would be 4%, 3% and 4% below the borough average respectively (equal to, 5% and 4% below the borough average in 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Halesowen South ward would be 1% above the borough average (6% below by 2006).

Amblecote, Lye & Wollescote and Quarry Bank & Cradley wards

64 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).

65 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member warding 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.

66 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.

67 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.

68 As part of the Council's submission the Labour Party proposed an alternative southern boundary to the proposed Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward. Also as part of the Council submission, the Liberal Democrats put forward an alternative warding pattern for the Amblecote area. 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'. Councillor Burt submitted information that had been gathered during the consultation process but had not been included in the Council's submission, including comments from Ian Pearson MP and the Chief Planning and Leisure Officer from Dudley Borough Council. 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'.

69 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One we based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals in this area which reflected the views of Ian Pearson MP. However, we proposed several amendments to provide what we considered to be a better balance between electoral equality and the recognition of community interests and identities. We proposed 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 considered that this would provide a better recognition of community identity.

70 We also proposed amendments to the Council's proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward as we did not consider that the proposed ward would provide a good reflection of community identity. We agreed with the Chief Planning and Leisure Officer that the proposed ward seemed to be almost artificial in its nature and we therefore proposed an amended Cradley & Foxcote ward. We noted Sylvia Heal MP'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 adopted in other areas, it was necessary to place parts of these areas in the same ward. We proposed 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 later. 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 also proposed 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 considered that this would provide a better reflection of community identities 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 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 also proposed an amendment to the north-western part of the Council's proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward, again to provide a better reflection of community identities. We proposed moving the southern part of Quarry Bank from the proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward into an amended Quarry Bank ward, as discussed later, 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.

71 Finally, in light of our proposed amendments to the Council's proposed Cradley & Foxcote ward, we proposed amendments to the Council's proposed Lye & Wollescote ward to improve levels of electoral equality. We proposed amending the southern boundary of the proposed Lye & Wollescote ward to run along Junction Road, and we also proposed 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 endorsed the Council's proposals as we considered that they would provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

72 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).

73 At Stage Three the Borough Council proposed one amendment to the boundary between the proposed Cradley & Foxcote and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards. The Council stated that 'the previous boundary seemed to be logical running through the centre of Two Gates' and considered that 'it is perhaps slightly easier for the electors to attend their old polling station and not have the confusion of a change in polling station if there is no real necessity to move the boundary of the ward'. The Council's proposal would 'involve 199 electors moving from the Cradley & Foxcote ward to the Hayley Green & Hasbury ward'.

74 Eleven residents opposed the revised Amblecote and Lye & Wollescote wards, with one resident arguing that 'the two areas are totally different, are divided by a main road and a river and have no connections'. Another resident considered that 'this proposal ignores the long-standing natural boundary of the River Stour and adjacent industrial sites as well as the established communities' and that 'there is no affinity between this highly residential part of Amblecote and the industrialised section of the Lye ward'.

75 A local resident supported the Stage One submissions by Sylvia Heal MP and Councillor Burston opposing the division of the Fatherless Barn estate. The resident argued that 'there is a natural boundary between the housing estates with the Lutley Gutter and fields in between' and stated that 'traditionally and historically the people in this area have always regarded themselves as part of Cradley'. The resident considered that 'with the proposed creation of a new Cradley & Foxcote ward it would seem logical that we would be included in this ward or alternatively transferred as a whole to the Belle Vale ward'.

76 At Stage Three we considered a number of amendments but were not persuaded that the majority of them would offer a better balance between the statutory criteria than our draft

recommendations. In particular we did not consider that the proposed amendment to the boundary between the proposed Cradley & Foxcote and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards put forward by a local resident would offer a better balance between electoral equality and the recognition of community interests than the draft recommendations. This amendment would not improve electoral equality, and we did not consider that sufficient evidence had been provided as to why this amendment would better reflect communities in the area than our draft recommendations. We did not adopt this proposed amendment as part of our draft recommendations and have not been persuaded by any of the argumentation received at Stage Three to move away from our draft recommendations.

77 We note the opposition to the proposed Amblecote and Lye & Wollescote wards but did not receive any alternative proposals for this area. We consider there to be adequate road links between the areas we propose including in the proposed Lye & Wollescote ward and have not been persuaded by the evidence received at Stage Three to move away from our draft recommendations. We are unable to consider any ward in isolation, and any change that we made to the proposed Amblecote and Lye & Wollescote wards would have significant knock-on effects across the borough that we do not consider to be justified by the evidence received.

78 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage Three we are proposing to endorse our draft recommendations as final with just one change to the boundary between the proposed Amblecote and Brierley Hill wards, discussed later in this chapter.

79 Under our final 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% by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Amblecote ward would be 5% above the borough average (4% by 2006).

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

80 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).

81 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member warding 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.

82 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.

83 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.

84 Having carefully considered all of the representations received at Stage One we based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals but put forward amendments to provide what we considered to be a better balance between the statutory criteria. We proposed amending the proposed Pedmore & Stourbridge East ward to provide a better reflection of community identities 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.

85 We proposed a minor amendment to the Council's proposed Norton ward to provide a better reflection of community identities. This was to retain the existing ward boundary rather than use Charles Road as a boundary. We also proposed 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 endorsed the Council's proposals for the rest of this area as we considered that they provided a good balance between the statutory criteria.

86 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).

87 At Stage Three we received no representations regarding this area. In light of the general support for the draft recommendations from the Borough Council and the lack of opposition received to any of our proposals in this area, we are endorsing our draft recommendations as final for this area.

88 Under our final 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 initially (3% above by 2006).

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

89 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).

90 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 the Dudley Canal, Waterfront Way, the railway line, Moor Street, the Stourbridge Canal, Brierley Hill Road, Bracken Park Gardens and the Stourbridge Canal. The western boundary of the proposed ward would follow the River Stour, Audnam Brook and the Stourbridge Canal.

91 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.

92 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 the 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.

93 As part of the Council submission the Liberal Democrats put forward an alternative warding arrangement for the proposed Amblecote and Brierley Hill wards. Councillor Burt submitted information that had been gathered during the consultation process but had not been included in the Council's submission, including comments from Ian Pearson MP. Mr Pearson 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.

94 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, we based our proposals for this area on the Council's scheme but proposed three amendments to provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. We proposed retaining the existing boundary between Brierley Hill and Wordsley wards in the Brierley Hill Road area as we considered 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 proposed to move the western boundary to run along the dismantled railway line until it reaches Moor Street. This would transfer the electors in the Foxsdale Drive and Leys Crescent area from Brockmoor & Pensnett ward into an amended Brierley Hill ward and would, we considered, provide a strong and easily identifiable boundary. Finally, we proposed an amendment to the boundary between Wordsley and Kingswinford South wards 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 proposed 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 endorsed the Council's proposals as we considered that they provided 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 did not propose amending the boundary between Kingswinford North & Wall Heath and Kingswinford South wards as this would adversely affect electoral equality. We supported the proposal of the Council and Councillor Burt to retain the existing name of Kingswinford North & Wall Heath ward as we considered that this would provide a good reflection of community identity.

95 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).

96 At Stage Three the Borough Council proposed an amendment to the boundary between the proposed Brierley Hill and Brockmoor & Pensnett wards. The Council proposed returning to the existing boundary following the Stourbridge Canal, arguing that 'if this proposal [put forward as part of our draft recommendations] were to be carried through the electorate in this area would have to travel some considerable distance to the new polling station at Hawbush Primary School'. The Council also proposed an amendment to the boundary between the proposed Kingswinford North & Wall Heath and Kingswinford South wards and stated that 'the polling station for the existing polling district KK6 falls just outside the ward boundary therefore the boundary ... needs to be redrawn to the rear of the properties in Market Street (No. 59–99 odd–43 electors)'. Finally the Council proposed an amendment to the boundary between the proposed Kingswinford South and Wordsley wards. The Council proposed retaining the existing boundary between these two wards on the grounds that 'if the [draft recommendation] proposal were carried through the electors would have a lengthy journey to the nearest polling station in Kingswinford South ward – Glynne Primary School in Cot Lane'.

97 Ian Pearson MP stated that in this area he strongly supports the draft proposal, 'which is based on the scheme suggested by the Council' and that 'in my view the three amendments proposed are logical and provide a better electoral balance and [more] identifiable boundaries'. He did, however, propose two minor amendments 'which would have negligible electoral impact but would in my view be beneficial'. The first of these was to retain the existing boundary between Amblecote and Brierley Hill wards, and Mr Pearson stated that under the draft recommendations 'the Silver End Enterprise Park which covers both sides of Brettell Lane would ... be in separate wards and I do not think this is desirable'. Mr Pearson's second amendment was to include the Gibbons Industrial Park in the proposed Brockmoor & Pensnett ward. He argued that 'the draft proposals include the Pensnett Trading Estate in this ward and it would make sense if the estate the other side of the road was included in the same ward'.

98 Dudley South Constituency Labour Party proposed the same two amendments as Ian Pearson MP. It stated that 'to retain the existing canal boundary which runs near to Delph Road/Brettell Lane ... would allow the Silver End Enterprise Park which covers both sides of Brettell Lane to be retained in the Brierley Hill ward'. With regard to the proposed Brockmoor & Pensnett ward, it stated that 'the inclusion of the Pensnett Trading Estate into this ward makes sense, however, we would like to see the inclusion of the Gibbons Industrial Park into Brockmoor & Pensnett'.

99 We looked carefully at the proposal by Ian Pearson MP and the Dudley South Constituency Labour Party to include Gibbons Industrial Park in the proposed Brockmoor & Pensnett ward but did not consider that adopting this proposal would provide for a stronger and more easily identifiable boundary than the draft recommendations. The Borough Council proposed a number of amendments in this area based on the location of polling stations. However, polling districts are administrative matters to be determined by the local authority once a warding pattern has been established and we do not consider argumentation based on the existing or future position of polling stations to be persuasive in its own right. Therefore, while we have some sympathy with argumentation based on the location of polling stations, we do not consider this argumentation to be strong enough on its own to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations.

100 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage Three we propose endorsing the draft recommendations for this area as final, subject to one amendment to the boundary between the proposed Amblecote and Brierley Hill wards. As put forward by Ian Pearson MP and the Dudley South Constituency Labour Party we are proposing to retain the existing boundary between the proposed Amblecote and Brierley Hill wards. We have been persuaded by the evidence received that returning to the existing boundary in this area would

provide a better reflection of community identities and interests in the area than the draft recommendations. We also consider that the Stourbridge Canal provides a strong and easily identifiable boundary in this area and that using the canal as a boundary would unite the residential properties on Delph Road in a single ward.

101 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Brierley Hill and Brockmoor & Pensnett wards would be 5% and 2% below the borough average respectively (5% 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).

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

102 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).

103 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member warding 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.

104 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.

105 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.

106 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.

107 As part of the Council's submission, the Labour Party proposed a number of amendments to the Council's proposals. 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. Councillor Burt submitted information that had been gathered during the consultation process but had not been included in the Council's submission, including comments from Councillor Whitehouse, member for St Andrews ward.

108 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One we based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals in this area. However, we proposed three amendments to the Council's scheme which we considered would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. The first of these was in the proposed Quarry Bank & St Andrews ward and came 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 proposed to amend the northern boundary of the proposed ward. As put forward by the Labour Party, we proposed 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 considered that this amendment would provide a better reflection of community identities and would provide for more effective and convenient local government than the Council's proposals in this area. We also proposed 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.

109 In the north of the proposed Netherton & Woodside ward we proposed 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 proposed retaining the existing boundary rather than adopting the Council's proposed boundary, as we considered that the existing boundary is a strong one. As put forward by the Labour Party, we also proposed 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 endorsed the Council's proposals as we considered that they provided the best balance between the statutory criteria.

110 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).

111 At Stage Three the Borough Council proposed no amendments to this area. Ian Pearson MP considered that 'as far as the Netherton & Woodside boundaries are concerned, I am disappointed that the properties in the north of the ward ... are to be transferred to St Thomas's ward but I appreciate the electoral equality issue'. Mr Pearson stated that 'I strongly support the draft proposal, which will retain properties around Ivanhoe Street in the Netherton & Woodside ward. This community worships in Netherton and sees itself as part of it'. Mr Pearson also stated that 'I support therefore transferring the Hockley Lane and Yew Tree Hills areas and the Lodge Farm estate to the proposed Netherton & Woodside ward'.

112 Ian Pearson MP also stated that 'with some reservations I support the proposals for a Quarry Bank and St Andrews ward'. He went on to state that 'I believe that St Andrews should stay in the name of the ward to reflect continuity in the eyes of the electorate, or alternatively it could be called the Dudley Wood & Quarry Bank ward, or Quarry Bank & Saltwells'. Mr Pearson's reservations concerned the fact that 'Quarry Bank and Brierley Hill have traditionally been neighbouring communities', but he went on to say that 'they cannot be sensibly put together and I strongly support the Brierley Hill ward boundaries'. Mr Pearson concluded that 'while the proposed Quarry Bank and St Andrews ward is not ideal ... I am not aware of any alternative formulation that would better reflect local communities and meet the requirements of equality of representation'.

113 Dudley South Constituency Labour Party supported the draft recommendations but suggested that the proposed Quarry Bank ward be renamed. It stated that 'this ward is made up of two different communities and we think this should be recognised by renaming the ward Quarry Bank & Dudley Wood ward'.

114 Wells & Manor Court Tenants' Association opposed the draft recommendations for the existing St Andrews ward and stated that 'we have a good working relationship with our council representatives and we wish to remain as St Andrews ward'. A local resident also opposed the draft recommendations and stated that 'our local councillors are working hard on our behalf with our support to help improve our local community, and we wish to retain our ward name St Andrews'.

115 Having carefully considered all representations received at Stage Three we are content to confirm our draft recommendations as final with two amendments, which we consider would provide a better reflection of community identities than the draft recommendations. The first amendment would be to rename the proposed Quarry Bank ward as Quarry Bank & Dudley Wood ward, as proposed by Ian Pearson MP and the Dudley South Constituency Labour Party. We consider that this name would provide a better reflection of the communities included in our proposed ward and are content to adopt this name as part of our final recommendations. The second amendment would entail renaming our proposed Netherton & Woodside ward as Netherton, Woodside & St Andrews ward to better reflect the communities contained within the proposed ward. This amendment would reflect, to at least some extent, the desire of the Wells & Manor Court Tenants' Association and a local resident to retain an element of the existing St Andrews ward.

116 We noted the general support of Ian Pearson MP for our draft recommendations in this area and the lack of any opposition received other than to our proposals for the existing St Andrews ward. In the light of this we are content to confirm our draft recommendations as final subject to the two name changes outlined above.

117 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Netherton, Woodside & St Andrews, Quarry Bank & Dudley Wood, St James's and St Thomas's wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

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

118 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).

119 At Stage One the Borough Council put forward a revised three-member warding 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, then 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.

120 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. 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.

121 As part of the Council's submission, the Labour Party proposed a number of amendments to the Council's proposals in this area. Also as part of the Council's submission, the Liberal Democrats proposed a number of amendments to the Council's proposals in this area.

122 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, we based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals with four amendments to provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. As suggested by the Labour Party as part of its proposals and to provide a better reflection of community identities, we proposed 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 identities, in the north-west of the proposed Coseley East ward we proposed transferring all the electors on Rock Road from the proposed Sedgley ward into an amended Coseley East ward. We also proposed 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 proposed an amendment to the Council's proposed Sedgley ward to provide a better reflection of community identities. We proposed that the south-eastern boundary of Sedgley ward should run to the west of the properties on Moden Hill, Snowdon Rise and Ridgeway before rejoining the Council's proposed boundary. In the remainder of this area we endorsed the Council's proposals as we considered that they provided 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.

123 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).

124 At Stage Three the Borough Council proposed a number of amendments in this area. The Council stated that it wished to 'draw your attention to the specific suggestion that Ward No. 19 be renamed Upper Gornal & Woodsetton rather than Roseville & Woodsetton because the actual centre of Roseville falls into Ward 20, Sedgley'. The Council went on: 'your suggested name presumably arrives because the name Roseville does not pinpoint the centre of that community on the borough maps'. The Council also proposed an amendment to the boundary between the proposed Castle & Priory and St James's wards on the grounds that the draft recommendations would transfer the existing polling station for the Castle & Priory ward into an amended St James's ward. The Council considered that 'it would be better to have the [polling] station within the ward boundary and therefore move the boundary line to run along the old ward boundary line'. The Council also proposed an amendment to the boundary between the proposed Castle & Priory and Roseville & Woodsetton wards. The Council stated that 'although the existing ward boundary line has not changed it would be better to have the [polling] station within the ward boundary and therefore move the boundary line to run along the public footpath as indicated on the map'. Finally the Council proposed an amendment to the boundary between the proposed Coseley East and Sedgley wards to transfer electors on Turls Hill Road from Sedgley ward into an amended Coseley East ward. It stated that if the draft recommendations were confirmed 'this would leave the electors the option of having either to travel through the unadopted and unlit parts of Turls Hill Road to register their right to vote, or travel a fair distance around the borders of the ward to arrive at the polling station'.

125 We also received 154 representations opposing the draft recommendations for the proposed Gornal and Roseville & Woodsetton wards. Ross Cranston MP opposed the proposed Gornal ward 'on the grounds that it splits up the historic Gornal'. Mr Cranston also included a letter from a local resident opposing the change who argued: 'would it not make a lot more sense to retain Milking Bank within Gornal and retain The Straits within Sedgley, instead of the proposed removal of Milking Bank from Gornal and its replacement by The Straits'.

126 Coseley West Branch Labour Party suggested renaming Roseville & Woodsetton ward and stated that 'to reflect the inclusion of the large community based in Upper Gornal the new ward should be called "Upper Gornal & Woodsetton"'. It considered that 'the name of Roseville is not currently used by local residents to describe any part of the present ward and the new boundary and the present boundary coincide at the point where Roseville is adjacent to the ward'.

127 Councillor Finch stated that 'I am writing on behalf of Gornal Labour Party, and on behalf of many who live in Upper and Lower Gornal, to express our grave concerns at the proposed boundary changes,' arguing that 'these changes would wrench Upper Gornal from the heart of its rightful community within Gornal and place it in Coseley'. Councillor Finch particularly opposed the division of Upper and Lower Gornal and considered that 'to break up such a solid community merely to fit in with a numerical formula is quite outrageous'. He continued that 'we accept that the Gornal ward has grown too large in recent years and that voting numbers have to be evened out throughout the borough'. He did not object to the transfer of Milking Bank to St James's ward but stated that 'we strongly feel that the area of Upper Gornal should remain within the Gornal ward'. He included four options which he considered would 'allow Gornal people to remain, where they have always been, in one social, political and geographical community'. He also included a letter from a local resident opposing the proposed changes. Councillor Finch wrote to us again during Stage Three including letters from 12 residents and a petition opposing the draft recommendations for the existing ward of Gornal.

128 Sedgley Local History Society commented on the name of the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward and stated that 'Upper Gornal is a well-defined local community covered by the new ward and should be included in the name'. It added that 'the Society hopes any new name recalls the traditional villages of Woodsetton and Upper Gornal – names still used by today's residents'. We received letters from two further residents opposing the proposed changes to the existing Gornal ward.

129 Sedgley Neighbourhood Watch Coordinators opposed the proposed change to the existing Sedgley ward on the grounds that it would disrupt the local policing beats and would mean the 'reorganisation of present watches as some will be split'. We received letters from five local residents opposing the proposed changes to the existing Sedgley ward. One resident opposed the proposed changes on the grounds that residents in the area of the existing Sedgley ward to be transferred into a revised Roseville & Woodsetton ward would have to travel a considerable distance to their polling station. Another resident argued that 'the desire of the Council to dispense with mobile polling stations is simply not a good enough reason to effectively disenfranchise local people who know and admire their local representatives'. The resident continued that 'while having great regard for the residents of Roseville and Woodsetton there is no synergy between that area of the borough and this area'. Another resident argued that 'we get into Sedgley within a few minutes, [but] Roseville and Woodsetton are fifteen minutes away'. Two residents opposed the proposed changes to the existing Sedgley ward and considered that 'Roseville and Woodsetton are located at least 2 miles from my property and is in no way connected directly to the area in which I reside'. These residents continued: 'If the recommendations are carried out I would be effectively electing a representative for the local council who would not reflect the concerns of the community in which I live, shop and carry out my local business'.

130 In addition to these representations we also received 141 pro-forma letters opposing the proposed changes to the existing Sedgley ward. The letters argued that 'my property is amongst the nearest in the ward to Sedgley Town centre only literally a five minute walk whereas the majority of properties within the proposed Sedgley ward are a much greater distance away and would in some cases involve a ten minute drive'. The letter continued that 'to get to the proposed polling station in the Roseville & Woodsetton ward would entail crossing an extremely busy main road and a 20 minute walk'. These residents considered that 'since the Roseville and Woodsetton area is in no way connected with the area in which I reside I fail to see why this recommendation has been made', and conclude: 'I reside in this area because I am proud and enjoy being part of the "Sedgley" community and strongly object to your proposals'.

131 We considered the amendments proposed by the Council at Stage Three but the argumentation for the majority of these amendments concerned the location of polling stations and, as mentioned earlier, we are of the opinion that polling districts are administrative matters to be determined by the local authority once a warding pattern has been established and we do not consider argumentation based on the existing or future position of polling stations to be persuasive in its own right. Therefore, while we have some sympathy with argumentation based on the location of polling stations, we do not consider this argumentation to be strong enough on its own to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations.

132 We note the opposition to our proposals for a new Roseville & Woodsetton ward, especially regarding the splitting of the Gornals and the transfer of certain areas from the existing Sedgley ward into the new Roseville & Woodsetton ward. However, we have not been persuaded by the evidence and argumentation received that moving away from our draft recommendations would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. The two areas that we received most opposition from (Upper Gornal and the area to the west of Dudley Road currently contained in the existing Sedgley ward which we propose transferring to an amended Upper Gornal & Woodsetton ward) both contain significant numbers of electors and retaining these areas in their existing wards would lead to a significant deterioration in electoral equality which we do not consider justified by the evidence received at Stage Three. Retaining the Upper

Gornal and Ruiton area in our proposed Gornal ward would give an electoral variance of 32% above the borough average by 2006. Retaining the area to the west of Dudley Road currently contained in the existing Sedgley ward in our proposed Sedgley ward would lead to an electoral variance of 5% above the borough average by 2006 (as opposed to 1% below the borough average under the draft recommendations). We are unable to consider any area in isolation and, as seen above, retaining these two areas in their existing wards would result in significantly worse levels of electoral equality. The warding pattern that we adopted in this area at Stage One was locally generated and, in looking at any possible amendments, we are constrained by the need to recommend a uniform pattern of three-member wards. Although we looked carefully at the alternatives proposed by Councillor Finch at Stage Three which were based on largely retaining the existing Gornal ward, none of these considered the knock-on effects across the borough of a significant change to our proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward. We also considered the proposal of a resident to retain Milking Bank within Gornal and retain The Straits within Sedgley. However, we consider that The Straits shares more links with properties in the proposed Gornal ward than with those in the proposed Sedgley ward and again this proposal would have a significant impact across the rest of the borough. We do not, therefore, propose adopting any of these amendments as part of our final recommendations.

133 Having carefully considered all representations received at Stage Three regarding this area we are endorsing our draft recommendations as final, with two amendments. The first of these is an amendment to the boundary between the proposed Coseley East and Sedgley wards which would include all the electors on Turls Hill Road in an amended Coseley East ward, as proposed by the Council. We have been persuaded by the evidence that residents in this area have better transport links with residents of the proposed Coseley East ward rather than residents of the proposed Sedgley ward. To reach the rest of the proposed Sedgley ward without travelling through a different ward, residents of Turls Hill Road would have to travel along an unmade road, and we do not consider that this unmade road provides a good link between residents of Turls Hill Road and residents in the remainder of the proposed Sedgley ward. The proposed amendment would have a minimal impact on electoral equality and would provide for more effective and convenient local government. Our second amendment is that the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward be renamed Upper Gornal & Woodsetton ward. As part of our draft recommendations we adopted the name Roseville & Woodsetton proposed by the Council as part of its Stage One submission. However, at Stage Three the Council itself suggested that the proposed Roseville & Woodsetton ward be renamed Upper Gornal & Woodsetton ward. This amendment was also put forward by Coseley West Labour Party and Sedgley Local History Society, and we share the opinion that this amended name provides a better reflection of the communities contained in the proposed ward.

134 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Castle & Priory, Gornal, Sedgley and Upper Gornal & Woodsetton wards would be equal to, 6%, 1% and 1% above the borough average respectively (1% above, 4% above, 2% below and equal to the borough average by 2006).

Electoral cycle

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

Conclusions

136 Having carefully considered all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse those draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- We are proposing three amendments to the boundaries between the proposed Amblecote and Brierley Hill wards, the proposed Halesowen South and Hayley Green & Hasbury wards and the proposed Coseley East and Sedgley wards.
- We are also proposing that the proposed Hayley Green & Hasbury, Netherton & Woodside, Quarry Bank and Roseville & Woodsetton wards be renamed Hayley Green & Cradley South, Netherton, Woodside & St Andrews, Quarry Bank & Dudley Wood and Upper Gornal & Woodsetton respectively to reflect local opinions.

137 We conclude that, in Dudley:

- a council of 72 members should be retained;
- there should be 24 wards, as at present;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified.

138 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final 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 of more than 10% from the average	7	0	8	0
Number of wards with a variance of more than 20% from the average	4	0	3	0

139 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from seven to none, with no wards varying by more than 20% from the borough average. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 6%. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the statutory criteria.

Final 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: Final recommendations for Dudley

6 What happens next?

140 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Dudley and submitted our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3692).

141 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 24 June 2003, and The Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representations made to them by that date. They particularly welcome any comments on the first draft of the Order, which will implement the new arrangements.

142 All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

**The Secretary
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Fax: 020 7271 0667

**Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk
(This address should only be used for this purpose).**

Appendix A

Final recommendations for Dudley: Detailed Mapping

The following map illustrates our proposed ward boundaries for Dudley.

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 proposed warding arrangements for Dudley.

Map A1: Final recommendations for Dudley: key map

Appendix B

Guide to interpreting the first draft of the electoral change Order

Preamble

This describes the process by which the Order will be made, and under which powers. Text in square brackets will be removed if The Electoral Commission decide not to modify the Final Recommendations.

Citation and commencement

This defines the name of the Order and sets the dates on which it will come into force.

Interpretation

This defines terms that are used in the Order.

Wards of the borough of Dudley

This abolishes the existing wards, and defines the names and areas of the new wards, in conjunction with the map and the schedule.

Elections of the council of the borough of Dudley

This sets the date on which a whole council election will be held to implement the new wards, and the dates on which councillors will retire.

Maps

This requires Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council to make a print of the map available for public inspection.

Electoral registers

This requires Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council to adapt the electoral register to reflect the new wards.

Revocation

This revokes the Order that defines the existing wards, with the exception of the article that established the system of election by thirds.

Explanatory Note

This explains the purpose of each article. Text in square brackets will be removed if The Electoral Commission decide not to modify the Final Recommendations.

Appendix C

First draft of the electoral change Order for Dudley

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

2003 No.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT, ENGLAND

The Borough of Dudley (Electoral Changes) Order 2003

Made - - - - *2003*

Coming into force in accordance with article 1(2)

Whereas the Boundary Committee for England(**a**), acting pursuant to section 15(4) of the Local Government Act 1992(**b**), has submitted to the Electoral Commission(**c**) recommendations dated May 2003 on its review of the borough(**d**) of Dudley:

And whereas the Electoral Commission have decided to give effect [with modifications] to those recommendations:

And whereas a period of not less than six weeks has expired since the receipt of those recommendations:

Now, therefore, the Electoral Commission, in exercise of the powers conferred on them by sections 17(**e**) and 26(**f**) of the Local Government Act 1992, and of all other powers enabling them in that behalf, hereby make the following Order:

Citation and commencement

- 1.—(1) This Order may be cited as the Borough of Dudley (Electoral Changes) Order 2003.
- (2) This Order shall come into force –
 - (a) for the purpose of proceedings preliminary or relating to any election to be held on 6th May 2004, on 15th October 2003;

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- (a) The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, established by the Electoral Commission in accordance with section 14 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (c. 41). The Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (S.I. 2001/3962) transferred to the Electoral Commission the functions of the Local Government Commission for England.
- (b) 1992 c.19. This section has been amended by S.I. 2001/3962.
- (c) The Electoral Commission was established by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (c. 41). The functions of the Secretary of State, under sections 13 to 15 and 17 of the Local Government Act 1992, to the extent that they relate to electoral changes within the meaning of that Act, were transferred with modifications to the Electoral Commission on 1st April 2002 (S.I. 2001/3962).
- (d) The metropolitan district of Dudley has the status of a borough.
- (e) This section has been amended by S.I. 2001/3962 and also otherwise in ways not relevant to this Order.
- (f) This section has been amended by S.I. 2001/3962.

- (b) for all other purposes, on 6th May 2004.

Interpretation

2. In this Order –

“borough” means the borough of Dudley;

“existing”, in relation to a ward, means the ward as it exists on the date this Order is made; and

any reference to the map is a reference to the map marked “Map referred to in the Borough of Dudley (Electoral Changes) Order 2003”, of which prints are available for inspection at –

- (a) the principal office of the Electoral Commission; and
- (b) the offices of Dudley Borough Council.

Wards of the borough of Dudley

3.—(1) The existing wards of the borough(a) shall be abolished.

- (2) The borough shall be divided into twenty-four wards which shall bear the names set out in the Schedule.
- (3) Each ward shall comprise the area designated on the map by reference to the name of the ward and demarcated by red lines; and the number of councillors to be elected for each ward shall be three.
- (4) Where a boundary is shown on the map as running along a road, railway line, footway, watercourse or similar geographical feature, it shall be treated as running along the centre line of the feature.

Elections of the council of the borough of Dudley

4.—(1) Elections of all councillors for all wards of the borough shall be held simultaneously on the ordinary day of election of councillors in 2004(b)(c).

- (2) The councillors holding office for any ward of the borough immediately before 10th May 2004 shall retire on that date and the newly elected councillors for those wards shall come into office on that date.
- (3) Of the councillors elected in 2004 one shall retire in 2006, one in 2007 and one in 2008.
- (4) Of the councillors elected in 2004 –
 - (a) the first to retire shall, subject to paragraphs (6) and (7), be the councillor elected by the smallest number of votes; and
 - (b) the second to retire shall, subject to those paragraphs, be the councillor elected by the next smallest number of votes.
- (5) In the case of an equality of votes between any persons elected which makes it uncertain which of them is to retire in any year, the person to retire in that year shall be determined by lot.
- (6) If an election of councillors for any ward is not contested, the person to retire in each year shall be determined by lot.
- (7) Where under this article any question is to be determined by lot, the lot shall be drawn at the next practicable meeting of the council after the question has arisen and the drawing shall be conducted under the direction of the person presiding at the meeting.

(a) See the Borough of Dudley (Electoral Arrangements) Order 1980 (S.I. 1980/447).

(b) Article 4 provides for a single election of all the councillors and for reversion to the system of election by thirds, as established by articles 8 and 9(7) of S.I. 1980/447.

(c) For the ordinary day of election of councillors of local government areas, see section 37 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (c.2), amended by section 18(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1985 (c.50) and section 17 of, and paragraphs 1 and 5 of Schedule 3 to, the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (c.29).

Maps

5. Dudley Borough Council shall make a print of the map marked “Map referred to in the Borough of Dudley (Electoral Changes) Order 2003” available for inspection at its offices by any member of the public at any reasonable time.

Electoral registers

6. The Electoral Registration Officer(a) for the borough shall make such rearrangement of, or adaptation of, the register of local government electors as may be necessary for the purposes of, and in consequence of, this Order.

Revocation

7. The Borough of Dudley (Electoral Arrangements) Order 1980(b) is revoked, save for articles 8 and 9(7).

Signed by the members of the Electoral Commission

Date

Pamela Gordon
Commissioner

Date

Glyn Mathias
Commissioner

Date

Neil McIntosh
Commissioner

Date

Karamjit Singh
Commissioner

Date

Sam Younger
Commissioner

Date

Graham Zellick
Commissioner

(a) As to electoral registration officers and the register of local government electors, *see* sections 8 to 13 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (c.2).
(b) S.I. 1980/447.

SCHEDULE

article 3

NAMES OF WARDS

Amblecote	Kingswinford South
Belle Vale	Lye and Wollescote
Brierley Hill	Netherton, Woodside and St Andrews
Brockmoor and Pensnett	Norton
Castle and Priory	Pedmore and Stourbridge East
Coseley East	Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood
Cradley and Foxcote	St James's
Gornal	St Thomas's
Halesowen North	Sedgley
Halesowen South	Upper Gornal and Woodsetton
Hayley Green and Cradley South	Wollaston and Stourbridge Town
Kingswinford North and Wall Heath	Wordsley

EXPLANATORY NOTE

(This note is not part of the Order)

This Order gives effect, [with modifications], to recommendations by the Boundary Committee for England, a committee of the Electoral Commission, for electoral changes in the borough of Dudley.

The modifications are *indicate the modifications*.

The changes have effect in relation to local government elections to be held on and after 6th May 2004.

Article 3 abolishes the existing wards of the borough and provides for the creation of 24 new wards. That article and the Schedule also make provision for the names and areas of, and numbers of councillors for, the new wards.

Article 4 makes provision for a whole council election in 2004 and for reversion to the established system of election by thirds in subsequent years.

Article 6 obliges the Electoral Registration Officer to make any necessary amendments to the electoral register to reflect the new electoral arrangements.

Article 7 revokes the Borough of Dudley (Electoral Arrangements) Order 1980, with the exception of articles 8 and 9(7).

The areas of the new borough wards are demarcated on the map described in article 2. Prints of the map may be inspected at all reasonable times at the offices of Dudley Borough Council and at the principal office of the Electoral Commission at Trevelyan House, Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2HW.