

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wansbeck in Northumberland

Further electoral review

January 2006

Translations and other formats

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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. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by The Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)

Robin Gray

Joan Jones CBE

Ann M. Kelly

Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

When conducting reviews 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.

Executive summary

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A Further Electoral Review of Wansbeck is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. This review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. As a result of the poor levels of electoral inequality that existed in 2004, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to undertake an electoral review of Wansbeck district on 12 May 2005.

Current electoral arrangements

The last review of Wansbeck was concluded in 1997. It was conducted by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE). Under the existing arrangements, nine wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average. The development that was anticipated in the five-year period that occurred between 1996 and 2001, which were the dates the LGCE was using when undertaking its review, was overestimated across the district, and less development was undertaken than expected. This has resulted in over half of the wards in the district having electoral variances of more or less than 10% than the district average.

Every review is conducted in four stages:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	21 June 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 September 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	17 January 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	11 April 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Submissions received

We received three relevant submissions during Stage One. We received district-wide schemes from the District Council and the Wansbeck Liberal Democrats. We also received proposals for a new ward in the town of Ashington from a local resident.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

The electorate of Wansbeck is forecast to increase by approximately 5% by 2009. We are satisfied that the District Council's forecasts currently provide the most accurate estimation of the 2009 electorate of Wansbeck. Growth is expected in the five wards of Bothal, Central, Colledge, Hirst and Seaton wards.

Council size

We received two different council size proposals during Stage One. The District Council proposed a council of 46 members, an increase of one, and the Liberal Democrats proposed a council of 26 members, a decrease of 19. We did not consider that the Liberal Democrats had sufficiently justified their proposed council size. We considered that the District Council had argued why the existing council size worked effectively. However, we did not agree with its justification for an increase based on allocation as, in fact, councillor allocation was better under the existing council size of 45. We therefore propose to retain the existing council size of 45.

General analysis

We propose adopting a combination of the District Council's scheme along with some of our own amendments in order to improve electoral equality. These amendments are based on the existing wards in the district. We are proposing 18 new wards, nine two-member and nine three-member. We have sought to form wards that secure good levels of electoral equality. In the absence of any community identity evidence we have focused on achieving good electoral equality, the only measurable criterion we have to work to.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on our draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Wansbeck contained in the report. We welcome views from all parts of the community and believe that the more feedback we receive, based on clear evidence, the better informed we will be in forming our final recommendations. We will take into account all submissions received by 10 April 2006. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Wansbeck and welcome comments from interested parties. In general, we found our decisions difficult due to the lack of community identity argument and evidence of effective and convenient local government. We have therefore sought to achieve the best levels of electoral equality in the absence of any evidence reflecting the other two criteria, and would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

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This report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Ashington Central	3	Part of Central ward and part of Bothal ward
2	Bedlington Central	3	(Unchanged) Bedlington Central ward
3	Bedlington East	3	Part of Bedlington East ward
4	Bedlington North	2	Part of Bedlington West ward
5	Bedlington South	2	Part of Bedlington West ward
6	Bothal North	2	Part of Bothal ward
7	Bothal South	2	Part of Bothal ward and part of Haydon ward
8	Choppington	2	Part of Choppington ward; part of Guide Post ward and part of Stakeford ward
9	College	3	College ward; part of Haydon ward and part of Seaton ward
10	Guide Post	3	Part of Guide Post ward and part of Stakeford ward
11	Haydon	3	Part of Haydon ward and part of Central ward
12	Hirst	2	Part of Hirst ward
13	Newbiggin East	2	Part of Newbiggin East ward
14	Newbiggin West	2	Newbiggin West ward and part of Newbiggin East ward
15	Park	3	Park ward; part of Hirst ward and part of Central ward
16	Seaton	3	Part of Seaton ward and part of Hirst ward
17	Sleekburn	3	Part of Sleekburn ward and part of Bedlington East ward
18	Stakeford	2	Part of Stakeford ward and part of Sleekburn ward

Notes:

1. The whole district is unparished.
2. The maps accompanying this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.
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, but are listed in this table.

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Wansbeck district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Ashington Central	3	2,655	885	-16	3,401	1,134	2
2	Bedlington Central	3	3,349	1,116	6	3,349	1,116	1
3	Bedlington East	3	3,256	1,085	3	3,256	1,085	-2
4	Bedlington North	2	2,118	1,059	0	2,118	1,059	-4
5	Bedlington South	2	2,227	1,114	5	2,227	1,114	1
6	Bothal North	2	1,890	945	-10	2,266	1,133	2
7	Bothal South	2	2,159	1,080	2	2,159	1,080	-3
8	Choppington	2	2,178	1,089	3	2,178	1,089	-2
9	College	3	2,960	987	-7	3,336	1,112	0
10	Guide Post	3	3,268	1,089	3	3,268	1,089	-2
11	Haydon	3	3,264	1,088	3	3,264	1,088	-2
12	Hirst	2	1,969	985	-7	2,291	1,146	3

Table 2 (cont.): Draft recommendations for Wansbeck district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
13	Newbiggin East	2	2,325	1,163	10	2,325	1,163	5
14	Newbiggin West	2	2,339	1,170	11	2,339	1,170	6
15	Park	3	3,318	1,106	5	3,318	1,106	0
16	Seaton	3	2,836	945	-10	3,358	1,119	1
17	Sleekburn	3	3,179	1,060	0	3,179	1,060	-4
18	Stakeford	2	2,208	1,104	5	2,208	1,104	0
	Totals	45	47,498	-	-	49,840	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,056	-	-	1,108	-

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

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

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our draft proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of Wansbeck, on which we are now consulting.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 The Electoral Commission agreed that The Boundary Committee should make on-going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a periodic electoral review (PER) has elapsed. More specifically, it was agreed that there should be a closer scrutiny where either:

- 30% of wards in an authority had electoral variances of over 10% from the average; or
- any single ward had a variance of more than 30% from the average.

3 The intention of such scrutiny was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances, to consider likely future trends, and to assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Wansbeck. Wansbeck's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in March 1997. An electoral change Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 21 September 1998 and the first elections on the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out our work, The Boundary Committee has to work within a statutory framework.¹ This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
- secure effective and convenient local government; and
- achieve equality of representation.

In addition we are required to work within Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of Wansbeck is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (published by The Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review and will be helpful in both understanding the approach taken by The Boundary Committee for England and in informing comments interested groups and individuals may wish to make about our recommendations.

7 Our task is to make recommendations to The Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole, i.e. that all councillors in the local

¹ As set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962).

authority represent similar numbers of electors. 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.

9 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a 'vote of equal weight' when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as near as is possible, the same across a district. In practice, each councillor cannot represent exactly the same number of electors given geographic and other constraints, including the make up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identity and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive about council size and acknowledge that there are valid reasons for variations between local authorities. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction, or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. Indeed, we believe that consideration of the appropriate council size is the starting point for our reviews and whatever size of council is proposed to us should be developed and argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure.

11 As indicated in its *Guidance*, The Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just by addressing any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's optimum political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government and that there is evidence for this.

12 In addition, we do not accept that an increase or decrease in the electorate of the authority should automatically result in a consequent increase or decrease in the number of councillors. Similarly, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of neighbouring or similarly sized authorities; the circumstances of one authority may be very different from that of another. We will seek to ensure that our recommended council size recognises all the factors and achieves a good allocation of councillors across the district.

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	21 June 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 September 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	17 January 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	11 April 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

15 Stage One began on 21 June 2005, when we wrote to Wansbeck District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Northumberland Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, Members of the European Parliament for the North East Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Wansbeck District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 12 September 2005.

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

17 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 17 January 2006 and will end on 10 April 2006, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation about them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

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

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report The Boundary Committee has had regard to:

- The general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and
 - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Broads

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by section 97 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

2 Current electoral arrangements

21 The district of Wansbeck covers an area of 6,891 hectares, and is located on the south-east coast of Northumberland. The district has seen a transformation in its industrial infrastructure since the decline of the coal-mining industry, and is now focused around three large industrial estates. The district has high unemployment and low economic activity, however, it also boasts areas of natural beauty (along the coastline) and award-winning country parks.

22 This further electoral review of Wansbeck is being undertaken as under the 2004 district electorate figures 56% of wards had electoral variances of over 10% and one ward has an electoral variance of more than 30% from the district average. As a result of the further research undertaken into the continuing levels of electoral inequality, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee for England to undertake a review of the electoral arrangements of Wansbeck District Council on 12 May 2005.

23 The electorate of the district is 47,498 (December 2004). The District Council presently has 45 members who are elected from 16 wards. Wansbeck is entirely unparished, however the district can be divided into three distinct areas separated by the River Wansbeck and the A189. Thirteen wards are represented by three members and three wards are represented by two members.

24 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,056 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,108 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained. Due to overestimations in electorate growth during the last electoral review, the number of electors per councillor in nine of the 16 wards varies by more than 10% from the district average, two wards by more than 20% and one ward by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Bedlington West ward where the councillors represent 37% more electors than the district average.

25 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the district average in percentage terms. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district 47,498 by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, currently 45. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor is currently 1,056. In Hirst ward, currently represented by three councillors, there are currently 2,322 electors, therefore, each councillor represents, on average, 774 electors, 27% fewer than the current district average.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in Wansbeck district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Bedlington Central	3	3,349	1,116	6	3,349	1,116	1
2	Bedlington East	3	3,641	1,214	15	3,641	1,214	10
3	Bedlington West	3	4,345	1,448	37	4,345	1,448	31
4	Bothal	3	3,525	1,175	11	3,901	1,300	17
5	Central	3	2,879	960	-9	3,625	1,208	9
6	Choppington	2	2,178	1,089	3	2,178	1,089	-2
7	College	3	2,840	947	-10	3,216	1,072	-3
8	Guide Post	3	2,819	940	-11	2,819	940	-15
9	Haydon	3	3,796	1,265	20	3,796	1,265	14
10	Hirst	3	2,322	774	-27	2,644	881	-20
11	Newbiggin East	3	2,613	871	-17	2,613	871	-21

Table 4 (cont.): Existing electoral arrangements in Wansbeck district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12	Newbiggin West	2	2,051	1,026	-3	2,051	1,026	-7
13	Park	3	2,731	910	-14	2,731	910	-18
14	Seaton	3	2,956	985	-7	3,478	1,159	5
15	Sleekburn	3	3,046	1,015	-4	3,046	1,015	-8
16	Stakeford	2	2,405	1,203	14	2,405	1,203	9
	Totals	45	47,498	-	-	49,840	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,056	-	-	1,108	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Wansbeck District 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 district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2004, electors in Bedlington West ward were under-represented by 37%, while electors in Hirst ward were significantly over-represented by 27%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Submissions received

26 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Wansbeck District Council.

27 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Committee visited the area and met with officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their cooperation and assistance. We received three relevant representations during Stage One, including a district-wide scheme from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the District Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Wansbeck District Council

28 The District Council proposed a council of 46 members, one more than at present, serving 18 wards, compared to the existing 16. It proposed a combination of two- and three-member wards based on the existing ward arrangements. The District Council did not provide any community identity argument for its wards

Political groups

29 The Liberal Democrats on the District Council proposed that the council should be represented by 26 members, a reduction of 19, serving 13 wards. It proposed that these wards be coterminous with the county divisions for the district. The Liberal Democrats also considered that in the longer term the district council be abolished and 'replaced by a government of communities by communities'.

Other representations

30 One other submission was received from Mr D. Wise, a local resident, concerning the boundary between Central and Bothal wards.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

31 Before finalising our recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Wansbeck we invite views on our initial thoughts as expressed in these draft recommendations. We welcome comments from all those interested relating to the number of councillors, proposed ward boundaries and ward names. In general, we found our decisions difficult due to the lack of community identity argument and evidence of effective and convenient local government. We have therefore sought to achieve the best levels of electoral equality in the absence of any evidence reflecting the other two criteria, and would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

32 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Wansbeck is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended):

- the need to secure effective and convenient local government;
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- secure the matters in respect of equality of representation referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

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

34 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep variances to a minimum.

35 If electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate should also be taken into account and we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

36 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Electorate figures

37 As part of the previous review of Wansbeck district, the District Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 2% between 1996 and 2001. However, between 1996 and the start of this review the electorate has actually decreased by 2%. This has resulted in a knock-on effect across the district with many wards having substantially fewer or more electors per councillor than the district average.

38 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2009, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5% from 47,498 to 49,840 over the five-year period from 2004 to 2009. It expects all of the growth to be in the five wards of Bothal, Central, College, Hirst and Seaton. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to local development plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

39 We recognise that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the District Council's figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council size

40 Wansbeck District Council presently has 45 members. The District Council proposed to increase the existing council size by one to 46, arguing that 'any reduction in the current number of councillors in the area would prejudice their ability to undertake their duties of a councillor effectively'. The council justified the increase by stating that 'in order to achieve electoral equality within the guidance criteria across the remainder of the district [bearing in mind the allocation for Newbiggin by-the-Sea] then 46 councillors would be required.'

41 The District Council has adopted a Leader and Cabinet system of governance. The Cabinet is made up of a Deputy Leader and six councillors who are each assigned a portfolio. The portfolio holders are each supported by six portfolio support members and 'of the remaining 31 councillors, one accepts the responsibility for leading and coordinating the scrutiny process, and the remaining 30 are split equally between the two scrutiny commissions'. The District Council went on to discuss other committees and panels that councillors are involved in such as planning, licensing and audit, as well as 'outside bodies at national, regional and local level'. It stated that in the course of a year members will 'between them attend approximately 2,550 committee, working group and outside body meetings.' It also stated that 'most councillors conduct monthly ward surgeries [and] are available on almost a 24/7 basis for individual contact.' It also discussed the community area partnerships in the district, the meeting held for these, and how additional meetings regarding these are being introduced for the future.

42 The Wansbeck Liberal Democrats (the Liberal Democrats) proposed two options in the 'short term'; firstly, a council size of 26 members, 19 less than at present, and secondly, to divide Wansbeck district into 'six community divisions [where] elected council representatives would each represent the whole of the community for which they were elected; say five or six representatives per area partnership.' In the 'longer term' it considered that the council should 'be abolished and replaced by a government of communities by communities.' It considered that the reduction in

councillors was necessary as the cabinet system 'excludes about three-quarters of councillors from the decision-making process.' It continued that the 'reality is that over the last two and a half years over thirty councillors have played only a very small part in the process of local government.'

43 We did not consider that we had received sufficient evidence on which to decide a council size for Wansbeck. We therefore asked the District Council and Liberal Democrats to provide additional information regarding the council's functions and responsibilities and its political management structure, justifying why their proposed council sizes of 46 and 26, respectively, would provide more effective and convenient local government than any other council size. We also acknowledged the Liberal Democrats's second 'short-term' proposal for the district, however, we would not recommend wards with more than three councillors as we consider that this dilutes accountability. Also, its 'longer term' proposal is outside of the remit of this review and we are unable to take this into account when formulating our draft recommendations.

44 The Council responded to our request for additional information and gave further details of outside bodies and community partnerships, by listing them and the councillors that attend them. It considered that its submission did indicate why its proposed council size was most appropriate, however, it attempted to give further justification by discussing the deprivation of the area (all wards are in the top 20% of the Government's deprivation table) and councillors are required to be involved with a great number of issues relating to this. It considered that as the majority of members are in employment any reduction in council size would mean that councillors would find it difficult to devote time to council business.

45 The Liberal Democrats stated that for 'most councillors 90% of case work is council house related' and that this was due to decrease in 2006–7 when an independent social housing organisation will take over this work. Therefore 'the volume of casework should reduce significantly.' It continued to state that the scrutiny committees have done no scrutiny in the last year.

46 We considered that the evidence put forward provided conflicting arguments. The Liberal Democrats's argument was predominantly for the disbandment of the District Council. We also considered that its argument relied too much on housing issues not accounting for other roles that councillors undertake, given the information and figures provided by the District Council.

47 While we consider that the Council justified why the existing council size functions effectively, we were not convinced that an increase was justified as it had only been argued in terms of improving electoral equality.

48 We therefore examined the councillor allocation for Wansbeck, using the 2009 electorate forecast figures, in order to see which council size provided the best fit between the three identified areas of the district. These are Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, the Ashington area to the north of the River Wansbeck and the Bedlington area to the south of the River Wansbeck. We noted that we would be more likely to get a better allocation and therefore a better overall level of electoral equality under the existing council size of 45 rather than either of those proposed by the District Council or Liberal Democrats. Therefore, in light of the lack of compelling argument for either an increase or reduction in council size, and the fact that we considered that the District

Council justified how the existing council works effectively, we propose retaining the existing council size of 45.

49 Because we are proposing a council size of 45 members it has not been possible to incorporate the proposals of the Liberal Democrats because its scheme is based on a significantly different council size, therefore details of its proposals will not be discussed in the remainder of this report.

Electoral equality

50 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. The Electoral Commission expects The Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. Therefore, when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where inadequate justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as is possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and securing effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria.

51 In the absence of any strong community identity argument or evidence we have sought to improve electoral equality in Wansbeck. The District Council appear to have taken the approach of using the existing wards as a starting point and making amendments to these in order to improve electoral equality. Similarly, we have used the existing wards as a starting point and improved upon them as far as electoral equality is concerned. Because of the lack of strong evidence, we have looked to improve electoral equality even in those areas where the existing arrangements provide electoral variances under 10% of the district average. Therefore, we have made amendments to the existing ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality.

52 The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district 47,498 (2004 electorate) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 45 under our draft proposals. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 1,056. In 2009 the number of electors per councillor is 1,108 to take into account the forecast growth of the district.

General analysis

53 Our draft recommendations are a combination of the District Council's and our own proposals, based on the existing wards, in order to form wards that secure good levels of electoral equality and strong boundaries. We received a general lack of argument for the proposed wards. We have used the River Wansbeck and the A189

to divide the district into three distinct areas within the district, as proposed by the District Council.

54 We are recommending 18 wards in the borough; nine two-member and nine three-member wards. We have proposed small boundary amendments to all but two of the existing wards to achieve better levels of electoral equality. Although there was a lack of substantive evidence in the submissions we received, we have taken account of the issues of community identity where possible.

55 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by these proposals.

Warding arrangements

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

- a Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards (page 27)
- b College, Hirst, Park and Seaton wards (page 28)
- c Bothal, Central and Haydon wards (page 29)
- d Choppington, Guide Post, Sleekburn and Stakeford wards (page 31)
- e Bedlington Central, Bedlington East and Bedlington West wards (page 32)

57 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively), and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards

58 Under the existing arrangements Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards are unparished. Table 4 (page 18) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

59 We received two submissions regarding this area from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, as noted previously, as we are proposing a council size of 45 it has not been possible to incorporate the Liberal Democrats's proposals in our draft recommendations as these are based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 under a council size of 45 (using 2009 figures). The District Council considered the Newbiggin area to be a 'relatively self-contained community'. The area of both these wards is currently represented by five councillors. The District Council proposed to reduce this to four councillors, proposing two two-member wards, to which the area would be entitled to under its proposed council size of 46. It proposed to transfer some 288 electors from Newbiggin East ward into Newbiggin West ward, that area bounded by Front Street, Woodhorn Lane and the community sports centre. Its proposed Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards would have 7% and 8% more electors respectively, than the district average by 2009, under a council size of 46.

60 We considered the District Council's proposal, and noted that under our proposed council size of 45, this area would be entitled to four councillors as under the District Council's proposals. Its proposed wards would have 5% and 6% more electors than

the district average by 2009 under a council size of 45. We noted that its proposed wards provided the best levels of electoral equality that it was possible to achieve in the Newbiggin area, given the electorate and the fact that the A189 separates it from the rest of the district. We looked to transfer alternative areas from Newbiggin East ward into Newbiggin West ward, however we were unable to find another more identifiable area that produced as good levels of electoral equality. We therefore propose to adopt the District Council's proposed Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards. These wards would have electoral variances within 6% of the district average by 2009.

61 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

College, Hirst, Park and Seaton wards

62 Under the existing arrangements Central, College, Hirst, Park and Seaton wards are unparished. Table 4 (on page 18) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

63 We received two submissions relating to these wards from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, as noted previously, we are proposing a council size of 45 and it has therefore not been possible to incorporate the Liberal Democrats's proposals in our draft recommendations as these are based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 under a council size of 45. The District Council proposed small amendments to each of these wards in order to improve electoral equality. It proposed a three-member Seaton ward comprising the existing Seaton ward less the area south of and including St Albans Close and Belgrave Gardens. It proposed a three-member College ward comprising the existing College ward less the area to the north east of Parkside Court and Sweethope Avenue, and including that area transferred from the existing Seaton ward. It proposed a three-member Park ward comprising the existing Park ward plus that area removed from the existing College ward. It also proposed a three-member Hirst ward. This ward was based on the existing ward but also included an area from the existing Central ward. It proposed to transfer the areas to the east of Lintonville Road and North Seaton Road and north of First Avenue. Under the District Council's proposals these wards would have electoral variances within 6% of the district average.

64 Whilst we acknowledged that the District Council's proposals provided good levels of electoral equality we considered that in the absence of any community identity these could be further improved. Also these wards along with Bothal, Central and Haydon wards make up the northern area of the district separated from the rest of the district by the River Wansbeck and the A189. The District Council allocated the northern area 22 councillors under its proposed council size of 46. However, under our proposed council size of 45 members the northern area is only entitled to 21 councillors. Therefore it was not possible to adopt the District Council's scheme in this area, as the allocation of councillors would have been incorrect, so we consequently made a number of our own amendments. We propose our own three-member College and Seaton wards based on the area the District Council proposed

to transfer with one amendment. We propose transferring Salisbury Close and Winchester Close from Seaton ward into our proposed College ward, as we consider this provides better electoral equality.

65 We are proposing a two-member Hirst ward comprising the existing Hirst ward less those properties on Hawthorn Road, Rosalind Street and Beatrice Street, south of First Avenue, and also those properties east of Alexandra Road and in the Moorhouse Estate. We are also proposing to transfer the workshops at Enterprise Park so that the ward boundary no longer cuts through properties; we note that this affects no electors. We are proposing that the former two areas described be transferred from Hirst ward into our proposed three-member Park ward. This will also comprise the existing Park ward and those properties to the east of and including Sycamore Street between First Avenue and Woodhorn Road from Central ward. In each of these wards amendments have been made to the existing wards in order to provide better levels of electoral equality.

66 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for College, Hirst, Park and Seaton wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Bothal, Central and Haydon wards

67 Under the existing arrangements Bothal, Central and Haydon wards are unparished. Table 4 (on page 18) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

68 We received three submissions relating to these wards from the District Council, the Liberal Democrats's and local resident Mr Wise. However, as noted previously, we are proposing a council size of 45 and it has therefore not been possible to incorporate the Liberal Democrats proposals in our draft recommendations as these are based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 under a council size of 45. The District Council proposed to divide the existing Bothal ward into two two-member wards creating Bothal North and Bothal South wards. It proposed that the boundary between these wards follow the back of properties on Station Road to Wansbeck Road and south along Dene View and west across the fields to the district boundary. It also proposed transferring those properties to the west of Grousemoor Drive from Haydon ward into its proposed Bothal South ward. It proposed a Haydon ward which would comprise the remainder of the existing Haydon ward, and an Ashington Central ward which would comprise the remainder of the existing Central ward given the amendment discussed previously in paragraph 65. Under the District Council's proposals these wards would have electoral variances within 7% of the district average.

69 Local resident Mr Wise considered that the existing boundary between Bothal and Central wards 'does not accurately reflect local identities, traditions and interests'. He considered that the railway line that runs through the district 'forms a significant boundary [...that...] can only be crossed by road traffic in four places'. He continued that it was 'probably true to say that those on the east only cross to the west [of the railway] for a specific purpose.' Mr Wise was 'reluctant to recommend a boundary' for his proposed ward, however he said an 'easily understood' boundary would follow

Green Lane to its junction with Wansbeck Road and north along it and up to the A1068 and follow that north until it meets the railway line which would form the eastern boundary of his proposed ward. He considered that this ward should be called Bothal & Ashington West. Mr Wise did not make specific proposals for the remainder of Central ward, however it appears that this would either form a two-member ward on its own and be named Ashington Park ward or would be combined with Hirst ward, and then Park ward would be renamed Hirst Park ward.

70 We have carefully considered all the representations we received for these wards during Stage One. We acknowledged Mr Wise's proposed Bothal & Ashington West ward, and his argument for the use of the railway as a boundary. However, we did not consider that his argument was particularly compelling, given the level of electoral equality his proposed ward would return. As a one-member ward his proposed ward would have an electoral variance of 42% more than the district average, and as a two-member ward it would have a variance of 30% less than the district average. We consider that such levels of electoral inequality are unacceptable and were therefore not persuaded to adopt this proposal.

71 We considered that the District Council's proposed wards resulted in reasonable levels of electoral equality, however, we considered that these could be improved further. We were not convinced by the District Council's proposed boundary between Haydon and Bothal South wards. We were of the opinion that those properties on the east of Grousemoor Drive would be fairly isolated from the remainder of Haydon ward. We sought to transfer the properties between Grousemoor Drive and Blackclose Dean into our proposed Bothal South ward. However, this amendment resulted in poor levels of electoral equality in Haydon ward (-8%). Therefore we looked to improve this by transferring those properties south of Cavendish Terrace into our proposed Haydon ward. We considered that this was a fairly self-contained area that has good links to Haydon ward. Our proposed three-member Haydon ward would be expected to have 2% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2009.

72 Given this amendment and our amendment discussed previously in paragraph 65 between Central and Park wards, we were unable to adopt the District Council's proposed Ashington Central ward. The remainder of Central ward, given these proposed amendments, would result in a reasonable level of electoral equality; however, given the lack of community identity evidence we looked to improve this further. We considered that the Park Villas and Park View area was a fairly self-contained area of housing with a good road link into Central ward. We therefore propose to transfer this area into Central ward. This amendment would result in the remaining Central ward expected to have 2% more electors than the district average by 2009. We are proposing to name this ward Ashington Central as put forward by the District Council.

73 We considered that the District Council's proposal to divide Bothal ward along the back of properties on Station Road to make two two-member wards was appropriate and created reasonably identifiable areas. This also facilitated our amendment to Ashington Central ward. However, in order to achieve better electoral equality between Bothal North and Bothal South wards we proposed a small amendment to the District Council's proposed boundary. We propose to transfer those properties north of Wansbeck Mews from the District Council's propose Bothal South ward into its proposed Bothal North ward. We also propose moving an area of its proposed

western boundary so that properties along Dene View are in Bothal South ward. We consider this creates a stronger boundary and leaves these properties less isolated from the rest of the ward.

74 Our proposed Ashington Central, Bothal North, Bothal South and Haydon wards would have electoral variances within 3% of the district average by 2009. Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for these wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on maps 1 and 2 accompanying this report.

Choppingington, Guide Post, Sleekburn and Stakeford wards

75 Under the existing arrangements Choppingington, Guide Post, Sleekburn and Stakeford wards are unparished. Table 4 (on page 18) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

76 We received two submissions relating to these wards from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, as noted previously, we are proposing a council size of 45 and it has therefore not been possible to incorporate the Liberal Democrats's proposals in our draft recommendations as these are based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 under a council size of 45. The District Council proposed to retain the existing Choppingington ward. It proposed to transfer approximately 300 electors from Stakeford ward into Guide Post ward, those properties north of Fairway bounded by Ashington Drive. It also proposed to transfer approximately 300 electors into Sleekburn ward from Bedlington East ward, properties on Waverley Drive, Elgin Close, Bolam Place, numbers 1–24 of Waverley Avenue, numbers 10–23 of Station Road, numbers 1–31 of Pioneer Terrace and Cherry Tree Court. Under the District Council's proposals these wards would have electoral variances within 4% of the district average.

77 We carefully considered the District Council's proposals. We noted that they provided good levels of electoral equality, however we considered that in the absence of any community identity argument the levels of electoral equality could be improved upon. We considered that the area of Sleekburn known as West Sleekburn, north of the mineral railway, has stronger road links to Stakeford ward. We therefore propose to transfer this area from Sleekburn ward into Stakeford ward as part of our draft recommendations. We are proposing a further amendment to our proposed Sleekburn ward by transferring slightly more of Bedlington East ward into Sleekburn ward than the District Council proposed in order to improve electoral equality in these wards. We propose to transfer numbers 25–42 of Waverley Avenue and all of Brambling Lea into our proposed Sleekburn ward along with those properties transferred in the District Council's proposal.

78 Because of our amendment to Sleekburn ward, the transfer of West Sleekburn, we are transferring more of Stakeford ward into Guide Post ward. We propose to transfer that area as recommended by the District Council along with the area south of Fairway and west of Leander Avenue. We are also proposing to adopt the District Council's proposed Choppingington ward as we consider that it uses strong boundaries and provides good electoral equality.

79 Our proposed Choppington, Guide Post, Sleekburn and Stakeford wards would have electoral variances within 4% of the district average by 2009. Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for these wards. Our draft recommendations are shown and Map 1 and 3 accompanying this report.

Bedlington Central, Bedlington East and Bedlington West wards

80 Under the existing arrangements Bedlington Central, Bedlington East and Bedlington West are unparished. Table 4 (on page 18) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

81 We received two submissions regarding this area from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, as noted previously, as we are proposing a council size of 45 and it has therefore not been possible to incorporate its proposals in our draft recommendations as these are based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 under a council size of 45. The District Council proposed to divide Bedlington West ward into two two-member wards, named Bedlington North and Bedlington South. It proposed dividing the existing Bedlington West ward behind properties on Glebe Mews, Meadow Court and Bedlington Meadowdale County Middle School. It then proposed that the boundary run west around the back of properties north of North Ridge and north up to the district boundary. It proposed to retain the existing Bedlington Central ward and made one small amendment to the existing Bedlington East ward. It proposed to transfer approximately 300 electors into Sleekburn ward, as described previously in paragraph. The District Council did not provide any argument for its proposed wards.

82 We carefully considered the District Council's proposals. We considered that the new boundary it proposed to create between Bedlington North and Bedlington South wards created identifiable areas and provided good levels of electoral equality. We therefore proposed to adopt these wards as part of our draft recommendations. We also propose to adopt its proposed Bedlington Central and Bedlington East wards, along with our own amendment to improve electoral equality in our proposed Sleekburn ward.

83 Our proposed Bedlington Central, Bedlington East, Bedlington North and Bedlington South wards would have electoral variances within 4% of the district average by 2009. Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for these wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Maps 1 and 3 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

84 Table 5 (page 33) shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2004 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2009.

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Draft recommendations	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
Number of councillors	45	45	45	45
Number of wards	16	16	18	18
Average number of electors per councillor	1,056	1,108	1,056	1,108
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	9	7	2	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	2	2	0	0

85 As shown in Table 5 (above), our draft recommendations for Wansbeck District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from nine to two. By 2009 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 6%. We propose to retain the existing council size and are recommending a council size of 45 members.

Draft recommendation:

Wansbeck District Council should comprise 45 councillors serving 18 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively), and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

5 What happens next?

86 There will now be a consultation period of 12 weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Wansbeck contained in this report. We will take into account fully all submissions received by **10 April 2006**. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

87 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Wansbeck and welcome comments from interested parties relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names. In general, we found our decisions difficult due to the lack of community identity argument and evidence of effective and convenient local government. We have therefore sought to achieve the best levels of electoral equality in the absence of any evidence reflecting the other two criteria, and would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

88 Express your views by writing directly to:

**Review Manager
Wansbeck Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

reviews@boundarycommittee.org.uk

Submissions can also be made online at
www.boundarycommittee.org.uk/our-work/ferfeedback.cfm.

89 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, the Committee now makes available for public inspection full copies of all representations it takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all Stage Three representations will be placed on deposit locally at the offices of Wansbeck Council, at the Committee's offices in Trevelyan House and on its website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

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

6 Mapping

Draft recommendations for Wansbeck district:

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Wansbeck district.

Sheet 1, Map 1 illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Wansbeck district.

Sheet 2, Map 2 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Ashington and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea.

Sheet 3, Map 3 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Bedlington, Bedlington North, Sleekburn and Cambois.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
The Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Consultation	An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Order (or electoral change Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
The Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process
Electoral equality	A measure of ensuring that every person's vote is of equal worth
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the district
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections
FER (or Further Electoral Review)	A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last Periodic Electoral Review conducted between 1996 and 2004
Multi-member ward	A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors

National Park	<p>The twelve National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and will soon be joined by the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is:</p> <p>"an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation's benefit and by appropriate national decision and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; - access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; - wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; - established farming use is effectively maintained"
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented
PER (or Periodic Electoral Review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by The Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England
Political management arrangements	The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision-making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet; a cabinet with a leader; or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented

Variance (or electoral variance)

How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the district average

Ward

A specific area of a district, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

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

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

Table B1: The Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria

Criteria	Compliance/departure
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	We comply with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	We comply with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	We comply with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	We comply with this requirement.
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.	We comply with this requirement.
Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.	We comply with this requirement.
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.	We comply with this requirement.