

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Sandwell

October 2002

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WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

- **in three of the 24 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the borough and two 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 four wards and by more than 20% in two wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 138–139) are that:

- **Sandwell Metropolitan 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 8% from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all 24 wards expected to vary by no more than 5% from the average for the borough in 2006.**

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

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

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

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

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Large Map reference
1	Abbey	3	<i>Unchanged</i> – Abbey ward	Map 4
2	Blackheath	3	Part of Blackheath ward; part of Cradley Heath & Old Hill ward; part of Langley ward; part of Rowley ward	Map 3
3	Bristnall	3	Part of Bristnall ward; part of Langley ward	Map 4
4	Charlemont with Grove Vale	3	Part of Charlemont ward; part of Friar Park ward; part of Great Barr ward; part of Hateley Heath ward	Map 2
5	Cradley Heath & Old Hill	3	Part of Blackheath ward; part of Cradley Heath & Old Hill ward; part of Rowley ward	Map 3
6	Friar Park	3	Part of Charlemont ward; part of Friar Park ward; part of Great Barr ward; part of Wednesbury North ward	Maps 1 and 2
7	Great Barr with Yew Tree	3	Part of Great Barr ward	Map 2
8	Great Bridge	3	Part of Great Bridge ward; part of Princes End ward; part of Wednesbury South ward	Map 1
9	Greets Green & Lyng	3	Part of Great Bridge ward; Greets Green & Lyng ward	Maps 1, 2 and 4
10	Hateley Heath	3	Part of Hateley Heath ward	Maps 1 and 2
11	Langley	3	Part of Blackheath ward; part of Langley ward; part of Oldbury ward; part of Old Warley ward	Maps 3 and 4
12	Newton	3	Part of Charlemont ward; Newton ward	Map 2
13	Old Warley	3	Part of Bristnall ward; part of Old Warley ward	Map 4
14	Oldbury	3	Part of Oldbury ward; part of St Pauls ward; part of Tipton Green ward	Maps 1, 3 and 4
15	Princes End	3	Part of Princes End ward; part of Great Bridge ward; part of Tipton Green; part of Wednesbury South ward	Map 1
16	Rowley	3	Part of Blackheath ward; part of Rowley ward; part of Tividale ward	Map 3
17	St Pauls	3	Part of Oldbury ward; part of St Pauls ward	Map 4
18	Smethwick	3	Part of Bristnall ward; part of Oldbury ward; part of St Pauls ward; part of Smethwick ward; part of Soho & Victoria ward	Map 4
19	Soho & Victoria	3	Part of Smethwick ward; part of Soho & Victoria ward	Map 4

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Large Map reference
20	Tipton Green	3	Part of Princes End ward; part of Tipton Green ward	Map 1
21	Tividale	3	Part of Blackheath ward; part of Rowley ward; part of Tividale ward	Map 3
22	Wednesbury North	3	Part of Princes End ward; part of Wednesbury North ward; part of Wednesbury South ward	Map 1
23	Wednesbury South	3	Part of Friar Park ward; part of Great Bridge ward; part of Wednesbury North ward; part of Wednesbury South ward	Map 1
24	West Bromwich Central	3	Part of Charlemont ward; part of Hateley Heath ward; West Bromwich Central ward	Maps 1, 2 and 4

Notes:

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

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Sandwell

	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	Abbey	3	8,783	2,928	-2	8,581	2,860	-5
2	Blackheath	3	8,775	2,925	-2	9,038	3,013	0
3	Bristnall	3	9,003	3,001	0	9,036	3,012	0
4	Charlemont with Grove Vale	3	9,227	3,076	3	9,274	3,091	3
5	Cradley Heath & Old Hill	3	9,361	3,120	4	9,282	3,094	3
6	Friar Park	3	9,000	3,000	0	8,858	2,953	-2
7	Great Barr with Yew Tree	3	8,788	2,929	-2	8,878	2,959	-1
8	Great Bridge	3	8,516	2,839	-5	9,137	3,046	2
9	Greets Green & Lyng	3	8,694	2,898	-3	9,234	3,078	3
10	Hateley Heath	3	9,173	3,058	2	9,001	3,000	0
11	Langley	3	8,920	2,973	-1	8,891	2,964	-1
12	Newton	3	9,208	3,069	3	9,002	3,001	0
13	Old Warley	3	9,339	3,113	4	9,069	3,023	1
14	Oldbury	3	8,252	2,751	-8	8,655	2,885	-4
15	Princes End	3	9,285	3,095	3	9,061	3,020	1
16	Rowley	3	9,256	3,085	3	9,052	3,017	1
17	St Pauls	3	9,104	3,035	1	9,098	3,033	1
18	Smethwick	3	9,409	3,136	5	9,178	3,059	2
19	Soho & Victoria	3	8,566	2,855	-5	8,551	2,850	-5
20	Tipton Green	3	8,634	2,878	-4	8,827	2,942	-2
21	Tividale	3	8,833	2,944	-2	9,191	3,064	2

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 %
22 Wednesbury North	3	8,767	2,922	-2	8,768	2,923	-3
23 Wednesbury South	3	9,517	3,172	6	9,194	3,065	2
24 West Bromwich Central	3	9,090	3,030	1	9,007	3,002	0
Totals	72	215,500	-	-	215,863	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,993	-	-	2,998	-

Source: *Electorate figures are based on Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's submission.*

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Sandwell, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the seven metropolitan districts 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 Sandwell. Sandwell's last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in December 1976 (Report no. 181).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

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

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

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

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

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

14 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council comprises the central part of the West Midlands conurbation, surrounded by the metropolitan authorities of Dudley to the west and south, Birmingham to the east and south, Walsall to the north and Wolverhampton to the north-west. It comprises the six town areas of Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich, but is wholly unparished.

15 The electorate of the borough is 215,500 (December 2001). The Council presently has 72 members who are elected from 24 wards, all of which are urban in character. All wards are three-member wards.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,993 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,998 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 three of the 24 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average, and in two wards by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Soho & Victoria ward where the councillor represents 45% fewer electors than the borough average.

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

Map 1: Existing wards in Sandwell

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Abbey	3	8,783	2,928	-2	8,581	2,860	-5
2	Blackheath	3	9,207	3,069	3	9,426	3,142	5
3	Bristnall	3	9,402	3,134	5	9,347	3,116	4
4	Charlemont	3	8,995	2,998	0	9,039	3,013	0
5	Cradley Heath & Old Hill	3	9,528	3,176	6	9,449	3,150	5
6	Friar Park	3	8,394	2,798	-7	8,235	2,745	-8
7	Great Barr	3	9,897	3,299	10	9,963	3,321	11
8	Great Bridge	3	9,640	3,213	7	10,222	3,407	14
9	Greets Green & Lyng	3	7,743	2,581	-14	8,318	2,773	-8
10	Hateley Heath	3	9,260	3,087	3	9,087	3,029	1
11	Langley	3	9,566	3,189	7	9,581	3,194	7
12	Newton	3	9,202	3,067	2	8,996	2,999	0
13	Old Warley	3	8,665	2,888	-3	8,410	2,803	-6
14	Oldbury	3	8,075	2,692	-10	8,479	2,826	-6
15	Princes End	3	9,384	3,128	5	9,158	3,053	2
16	Rowley	3	9,641	3,214	7	9,451	3,150	5
17	St Pauls	3	8,299	2,766	-8	8,319	2,773	-8
18	Smethwick	3	8,523	2,841	-5	8,455	2,818	-6
19	Soho & Victoria	3	4,970	1,657	-45	4,895	1,632	-46
20	Tipton Green	3	12,093	4,031	35	12,228	4,076	36
21	Tividale	3	9,433	3,144	5	9,779	3,260	9
22	Wednesbury North	3	9,359	3,120	4	9,374	3,125	4

	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 %
23	Wednesbury South	3	9,309	3,103	4	8,994	2,998	0
24	West Bromwich Central	3	8,132	2,711	-9	8,077	2,692	-10
	Totals	72	215, 500	-	-	215, 863	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,993	-	-	2,998	-

Source: *Electorate figures are based on information provided by Sandwell Metropolitan 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 Soho & Victoria ward were relatively over-represented by 45%, while electors in Tipton Green ward were relatively under-represented by 35%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.*

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

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

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

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

20 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council ('the Borough Council') proposed to retain the existing 72-member council, serving 24 three-member wards. It proposed amendments to all but two existing wards.

21 Under the Borough Council's proposals, electoral equality would significantly improve, with no ward varying by more than 3% from the borough average by 2006.

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council Conservative Group

22 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council Conservative Group ('the Conservatives') proposed a council of 69 members, three fewer than at present, serving 23 wards. It proposed amendments to all but six existing wards.

23 Under the Conservatives' proposals, electoral equality would significantly improve, with no ward varying by more than 3% from the borough average by 2006.

Member of Parliament

24 One submission was received from a Member of Parliament. Sylvia Heal MP (Halesowen & Rowley Regis) proposed a 69-member council. Opposing the Borough Council's proposals for the south-west of the borough, she put forward alternative proposals, which would affect the existing wards of Blackheath, Cradley Heath & Old Hill, Rowley and Tividale.

Other representations

25 A further three representations were received from the local police authority, a community association, and a local resident. West Midlands Police stated that in their view there was little to be gained from significant change to the current warding pattern, as police beats were coterminous with existing wards.

26 Tipton Community Association proposed a 54-member or 72-member council based on an allocation of nine or twelve councillors to each of the six town areas that comprise Sandwell (Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich). The Association also suggested that each town area could elect an additional councillor who would serve as chairman of the Town Committee.

27 A Smethwick resident supported the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing boundary between Abbey and Old Warley wards in the south-east of the borough.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

31 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.

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

Electorate forecasts

33 Since 1975 there has been a 9.5% decline in the electorate of Sandwell borough. The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of 0.2% from 215,500 to 215,863 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Great Bridge, Greets Green & Lyng, Oldbury and Tividale wards, but also predicts a decline in the electorate of 13 wards, most notably Abbey, Newton, Old Warley, Princes End and Wednesbury South wards. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

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

Council size

35 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council presently has 72 members. In September 2001, a new leader and cabinet committee system of political management came into effect following two years of pilot arrangements.

36 The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing 72-member council. It acknowledged that the new system of political management had allowed for 'a more productive use of Members' time' and estimated that the number of meetings attended by councillors per year would fall slightly from 681 to 625 between 2000/2001 and 2001/2002, possibly as a result of the end of the pilot arrangements. However, it placed these changes in the context of an upward trend in the number of meetings per year from 373 in 1996/1997 and considered that 72 members were required for the Council to function effectively in view of its current workload.

37 The Borough Council also indicated a number of areas in which the duties of councillors were increasing, or were expected to increase in the near future. These included: the work of its nine Scrutiny Committees; the probable creation of a tenth such Committee responsible for health policy; Employment Appeals Panels; the likely transfer to the Council of the liquor licensing function; and the Town Committees. The Borough Council stated that the Town Committees, corresponding to the six town areas of Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich, are likely to have further budgetary and executive functions devolved to them in the future in addition to their existing responsibilities. Finally, it also drew the attention of the Boundary Committee to the additional responsibilities of members in quasi-judicial committees concerned with planning and licensing, the borough's Neighbourhood Strategy, the Local Strategic Partnership and regional and national bodies such as the West Midlands Local Government Association and the National Local Government Association.

38 The Conservatives proposed a council size of 69 members, a reduction of three. They agreed with the Borough Council that a significant fall in council size was undesirable, arguing that a smaller number of wards would place too great a burden on members' time and resources. The Conservatives also cited the responsibilities of members under the new arrangements on Scrutiny Committees and Town Committees, as well as their role in the implementation of the Neighbourhood Strategy. However, they provided substantive evidence based upon the allocation of committee places under a 69-member council to support their view that a small reduction in the number of councillors would not prejudice effective and convenient local government under the new management structures.

39 The Conservatives argued that this council size would reflect the decline in the population of the borough from 315,500 to 286,600 since the last review of electoral arrangements was completed in 1976. They also stated that the electoral equality provided by their proposed warding pattern would match that provided by the Borough Council's scheme, but would require less change to existing wards. Six wards would remain unchanged, as opposed to two under the Borough Council's proposals. Further, the Conservatives argued that their scheme would fractionally divide fewer communities identified by the Neighbourhood Strategy, divide fewer polling districts, generally reflect West Midlands Police Operational Command Units, and enable the existing links between borough wards and Town Committees to be retained in all but one existing ward.

40 Sylvia Heal MP supported a 69-member council, expressing her concern that 'the proposed population for Sandwell ... for 2006 will not be sufficient to support 24 wards.' Tipton Community Association proposed a 54-member or 72-member council based on an allocation of nine or twelve councillors (three or four three-member wards) to each of the six town areas that comprise Sandwell. The Association also suggested that each town area could elect an additional councillor to serve as chairman of the Town Committee.

41 We have carefully considered the representations that we have received at Stage One. As explained in our *Guidance*, we take no preconceived view as to the most appropriate council size for Sandwell, but carefully consider the evidence received and persuasive arguments in support of a particular council size.

42 We examined Tipton Community Association's proposals for a 54-member or 72-member council. However, we are required to secure equality of representation between electors and cannot base our proposals for council size on an equal distribution of borough councillors between the six town areas, which differ in the size of their electorates. There is also no provision in legislation for us to recommend that each town area elect an additional councillor to serve as chairman of the Town Committee. We could not therefore give further consideration to the Association's proposals.

43 We therefore gave consideration to the proposals by the Borough Council and the Conservatives for 72-member and 69-member councils respectively. Both would secure better levels of electoral equality than the existing arrangements and the correct allocation of councillors for each part of the borough. We note that the Borough Council and the Conservatives considered the effect on members of the new cabinet committee system of political management, arguing that it would be necessary to retain approximately the same number of councillors to ensure that they continue to carry out their duties effectively. We further noted that both respondents had taken steps to make their proposals available locally to the public at council offices and libraries.

44 However, we are not convinced that a 69-member council would better facilitate effective and convenient local government than the existing 72-member council. As outlined above, we note that the Borough Council has indicated that the workload of councillors has risen in recent years. This trend is expected to continue despite the recent reforms as more responsibilities are transferred to the council and member involvement in local communities grows. While we note the evidence provided by the Conservatives suggesting that a reduction to 69 members could be undertaken without adversely effecting the existing committee structure, we are not convinced that a reduction in council size, however small, would best meet the current and future requirements of effective governance in Sandwell.

45 Furthermore, we note that the Conservatives' case for a 69-member council was based to an extent on the view that their proposed warding pattern was superior to that of the Borough Council's. However, in determining council size we consider in the first instance the number of councillors required to best provide effective and convenient local government, rather than issues pertaining to individual wards. We also consider that no specific evidence has been provided indicating how the retention of a greater number of existing wards would best meet the statutory criteria in the affected areas of the borough. We are not obliged to have regard for existing polling district boundaries, and do not consider, as suggested by the Conservatives and Sylvia Heal MP, that the decline in the population of Sandwell since the last review of its electoral arrangements is sufficient grounds for a reduction in council size.

46 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we therefore conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 72 members.

Electoral arrangements

47 We have given careful consideration to the views received at Stage One, including borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council and the Conservatives. We note that both schemes would provide very good electoral equality and the correct allocation of councillors for each area of the borough. However, as a consequence of our decision to adopt the Borough Council's

proposed council size of 72, we were only able to give limited further consideration to the proposals from the Conservatives, which were based on a council size of 69.

48 We have based our recommendations on the Borough Council's scheme, considering on the basis of the available evidence that the proposed warding pattern would generally better achieve electoral equality, reflect community identities and interests and provide effective and convenient local government than the existing arrangements. We note that in many areas there was some agreement between the Borough Council and the Conservatives on the names and boundaries of proposed wards, despite the difference in proposed council size. We have therefore referred to this where appropriate in the following sections of this report. We further note the view of West Midlands Police that little would be gained from significant changes to the existing warding pattern, as police beats are coterminous with existing wards, but consider that the changes proposed better meet our statutory criteria.

49 However, we have decided to move away from the Borough Council's proposals in a number of areas, particularly in the south-east and south-west of the borough. Several of our amendments reflect proposals put forward by the Conservatives and Sylvia Heal MP. Although our draft recommendations would result in slightly higher electoral variances in a number of wards than the Borough Council's scheme, we consider that our proposals would provide the best overall balance between the statutory criteria across the borough as a whole.

50 In their representations both the Borough Council and the Conservatives referred to the existence of distinct communities defined under the Council's Neighbourhood Strategy. We note that in both schemes it was not always possible to avoid splitting these neighbourhoods between proposed wards. In several cases, our amendments to the Borough Council's proposals would appear to better reflect community identities and interests by uniting neighbourhoods, or by consolidating a larger part of a neighbourhood in a single ward. We acknowledge that the aim of achieving the best possible electoral equality and the requirement that metropolitan authorities be represented by a wholly uniform pattern of three-member wards are constraining factors in securing a completely accurate reflection of the communities of Sandwell.

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

- (a) Great Bridge, Greets Green & Lyng, Princes End and Tipton Green wards;
- (b) Friar Park, Hateley Heath, Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South wards;
- (c) Charlemont, Great Barr, Newton and West Bromwich Central wards;
- (d) Blackheath, Cradley Heath & Old Hill, Rowley and Tividale wards;
- (e) Bristnall, Langley, Old Warley and Oldbury wards;
- (f) Abbey, St Pauls, Smethwick and Soho & Victoria wards.

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

Great Bridge, Greets Green & Lyng, Princes End and Tipton Green wards

53 The wards of Great Bridge, Greets Green & Lyng, Princes End and Tipton Green are situated in the north and north-west of the borough. At present, Great Bridge, Princes End and Tipton Green wards together comprise the Tipton town area, while Greets Green & Lyng ward forms part of the West Bromwich town area. Tipton Green ward is currently significantly under-represented with 35% more electors per councillor than the borough average (36% more than the average by 2006). Under existing arrangements, Great Bridge ward has 7% more electors per councillor than the borough average (14% more than the average by 2006). Greets Green & Lyng and Princes End wards have 14% fewer and 5% more electors per councillor than the average respectively (8% fewer and 2% more than the average by 2006).

54 At Stage One, the Borough Council put forward a number of amendments between Great Bridge ward and the wards of Greets Green & Lyng and Wednesbury South. It proposed that a small residential estate branching from Addenbrook Way and accessed from Blakeley Wood Road be transferred from Great Bridge ward to Wednesbury South ward, considering it to have more affinity with the area to the north of the A4037 Leabrook Road. Under the Borough Council's proposals, the boundary between Great Bridge and Wednesbury South wards to the south would also be adjusted to follow the A41 Black Country New Road, affecting no electors.

55 The Borough Council also proposed to transfer an area in the south-east of Great Bridge ward to a revised Greets Green & Lyng ward. Greets Green & Lyng ward would therefore extend as far west as Cygnus Way in the north, Ryder Street, the Balls Hill Branch Canal, the B4149 Ryders Green Road, Tasker Street and Whitgreave Street in the south. It would otherwise be retained upon its existing boundaries.

56 The Borough Council proposed to address the under-representation of the existing Tipton Green ward by transferring that part of the ward to the south-east of the A461 to a revised Oldbury ward. It stated that 'the revised boundary line goes along the centre of Dudley Port and Burnt Tree which are both busy main roads ... The Temple Way Estate which is also affected by the transfer has no community ties with the remainder of the existing Tipton Green ward, being divided from it physically by a trading estate, canal and open land.' Finally, under the Borough Council's proposals, Princes End ward would be retained on its existing boundaries.

57 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Great Bridge and Greets Green & Lyng wards would have 6% and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1% and 3% more than the average by 2006). Princes End and Tipton Green wards would have 5% more and 4% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (2% more and 2% fewer than the average by 2006).

58 We received one further representation in relation to this area. The Conservatives put forward warding proposals based on a council size of 69, which substantially differed in this part of the borough from those put forward by the Borough Council. However, as a result of our recommendation to retain a 72-member council, we were only able to give these proposals limited further consideration, and it has not proved possible to accommodate any substantive part of their proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

59 We are basing our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Council's proposals, which we consider would best meet our statutory criteria based upon the available evidence. In particular, we note that the proposals would resolve the significant under-representation of Tipton Green ward and the forecast under-representation of Great Bridge ward by 2006. However, we are also putting forward a number of minor amendments that would not significantly impact upon electoral equality.

60 We consider that the proposed boundary between Great Bridge and Greets Green & Lyng wards would unite residential properties on either side of the B4149 Phoenix Street in the 'Swan Village & Carters Green' area. Further, we note that it would place all of the Greets Green community, as identified by the Borough Council's Neighbourhood Strategy, in Greets Green & Lyng ward. We also consider that the ward would retain the clearly identifiable existing boundaries of the Metro tram line to the north, the Birmingham to Wolverhampton railway line to the south and Spon Lane to the east. We have therefore decided to adopt the proposed Greets Green & Lyng ward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to a minor amendment to ensure that all properties on the B4166 Whitehall Road are included in Great Bridge ward.

61 Examining the remainder of the proposed Great Bridge ward, we note that the estate to be transferred to Wednesbury South ward is a comparatively small, new residential development. As such, we consider that it can be removed from Great Bridge ward to improve electoral

equality without significant impact upon local community identities and interests. We also consider it more practical to use the A41 Black Country New Road as the basis of a revised boundary between the wards of Great Bridge and Wednesbury South, in order to reflect the changing urban landscape of this part of the borough. We have therefore decided to adopt the proposed Great Bridge ward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to a number of boundary amendments to ensure that all properties on Powis Avenue and Toll End Road are included in Great Bridge ward. Under existing arrangements, properties at the north end of both roads are divided between Great Bridge and Princes End wards.

62 We consider that the inclusion of electors to the south-east of the A461 in a revised Oldbury ward would provide for a clearly defined ward boundary while resolving the substantial under-representation of the existing Tipton Green ward. We are however putting forward one minor amendment to include Mills Walk, currently in Princes End ward, in Tipton Green ward, to reflect road access from Newhall Street. Finally, we have also decided to adopt the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing Princes End ward, noting that electoral equality in this ward is forecast to improve further by 2006. However, in addition to the amendments described above with Great Bridge and Tipton Green wards, we also propose to include in Princes End ward all properties on the north side of the A4037 Gospel Oak Road, affecting only a small number of properties currently in Wednesbury South ward.

63 Under our draft recommendations, Great Bridge and Greets Green & Lyng wards would have 5% and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2% and 3% more than the average by 2006). Princes End and Tipton Green wards would have 3% more and 4% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (1% more and 2% fewer than the average by 2006).

Friar Park, Hateley Heath, Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South wards

64 The wards of Friar Park, Hateley Heath, Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South are situated in the north of the borough. At present, Friar Park, Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South wards together comprise the Wednesbury town area, while Hateley Heath ward forms part of the West Bromwich town area. Under existing arrangements, Friar Park and Hateley Heath wards have 7% fewer and 3% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8% fewer and 1% more than the average by 2006). Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South wards both have 4% more electors per councillor than the average (4% more than and equal to the average by 2006).

65 At Stage One, the Borough Council put forward a number of amendments to the existing Friar Park ward. It proposed that the ward include all of the existing Wednesbury North ward to the east of the north-south freight railway line, considering that this would correct the 'artificial' division of adjacent residential areas which it considered to form a single community. The Borough Council also proposed that the boundary between the wards of Friar Park and Wednesbury South follow the centre of Hydes Road instead of running behind properties on the west side of the road, to provide for a more easily identifiable boundary.

66 The Borough Council also put forward several minor changes to the existing Wednesbury North ward. In Wednesbury town centre, the boundary between Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South wards would be amended to transfer all properties situated to the east of Lower High Street and north of the railway line in Wednesbury South ward to Wednesbury North ward. Subject to the minor amendments with Friar Park and Wednesbury North wards described above, and with Princes End and Great Bridge wards discussed in the previous section, the existing Wednesbury South ward would be substantially retained. Finally, the Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Hateley Heath ward without amendment.

67 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Friar Park ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor (2% fewer than the average by 2006). Hateley Heath ward

would have 3% more electors per councillor than the average (1% more than the average by 2006). Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South wards would have 2% fewer and 6% more electors per councillor than the average respectively (3% fewer and 2% more than the average by 2006).

68 We received one further representation in relation to this area. The Conservatives put forward warding proposals based on a council size of 69, which differed in a number of respects from those put forward by the Borough Council. We note that they agreed with the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing ward names in this area. However, as a result of our recommendation to retain a 72-member council, we were only able to give these proposals limited further consideration, and it has not proved possible to accommodate any substantive part of their proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

69 We have given careful consideration to the representations which we received at Stage One, and are basing our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Council's proposals, which we consider would best meet our statutory criteria, based upon the available evidence. However, we are putting forward a number of minor amendments that would not significantly impact upon electoral equality.

70 Examining the revised Friar Park ward, we concur with the view of the Borough Council that the proposed amendments would better reflect community identities and interests by uniting all properties to the east of the freight railway line and to the north of Hydes Road in a single ward. We further consider that the revised Friar Park ward would possess coherent internal road communications and clear external boundaries in the form of the A4031 Walsall Road, the Tame Valley canal, Hydes Road and the railway line.

71 We are adopting the Borough Council's proposed Wednesbury North ward, subject to minor amendments to ensure all properties on Union Street are included in Wednesbury North ward and all properties on the Market Place are included in Wednesbury South ward. We also note that the area of Wednesbury South ward to the east of Lower High Street has clear road links to Wednesbury North ward, to which it would be transferred, and enables the use of the freight railway line as an easily identifiable ward boundary in this area.

72 We note that subject to a number of amendments the Borough Council proposed to substantially retain the existing Wednesbury South ward, including the Leabrook estate in the west of the ward. This estate is separated from other major residential areas in the east of the ward (such as Golf Links, Harvills Hawthorn, Hill Top and Millfields) by a belt of industrial and commercial development, but is adjacent to residential areas in Great Bridge and Princes End wards. While we note that the Conservatives' proposals would incorporate part of Princes End ward in a revised Wednesbury South ward, as previously discussed we are not adopting their preferred council size of 69.

73 Having visited the area we consider that the Leabrook estate is well connected to the remainder of Wednesbury South ward by the A41 Black Country New Road to the south and via Wednesbury town centre to the north. We also note that the inclusion of this area in Great Bridge or Princes End wards would lead to electoral imbalances, requiring further major boundary amendments to retain good electoral equality in this part of the borough. We have therefore decided to adopt the proposed Wednesbury South ward without further amendment.

74 Finally, we are content that the existing Hateley Heath ward would continue to provide good electoral equality while generally reflecting communities identified by the Borough Council's Neighbourhood Strategy. We note that the Conservatives' proposed Hateley Heath ward also retained the existing boundaries except in the north-east and south-west, and therefore conclude that there is a degree of consensus in this area.

75 However, we are putting forward three minor amendments in order to better reflect community identities and interests and provide for more convenient ward boundaries. First, we propose transferring Austen Walk to the proposed Charlemont with Grove Vale ward to reflect road access from Wilford Road. Second, we are also putting forward a minor amendment in this area to ensure all properties addressed to Wilford Road are included in Charlemont with Grove Vale ward. Finally, we are proposing to transfer 100-126 Church Lane (the B4149) to West Bromwich Central ward, uniting them with the nearest residential properties on the south side of the road.

76 Under our draft recommendations, Friar Park ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor (2% fewer than the average by 2006). Hateley Heath ward would have 2% more electors per councillor than the average (equal to the average by 2006). Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South wards would have 2% fewer and 6% more electors per councillor than the average respectively (3% fewer and 2% more than the average by 2006).

Charlemont, Great Barr, Newton and West Bromwich Central wards

77 The wards of Charlemont, Great Barr, Newton and West Bromwich Central are situated in the east and north-east of the borough, at present forming part of the West Bromwich town area. Newton ward and part of Charlemont and Great Barr wards are separated from the rest of the borough by the junction of the M5 and M6 motorways. Under existing arrangements, Great Barr ward has 10% more electors per councillor than the borough average (11% more than the average by 2006). Charlemont ward has equal to the average numbers of electors per councillor (1% more than the average by 2006). Newton and West Bromwich Central wards would have 2% more and 9% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (equal to the average and 10% fewer than the average by 2006).

78 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed to substantially retain the existing Great Barr ward, but with the revised name of 'Great Barr with Yew Tree', which it considered to better reflect community identities in this part of the borough. It stated that, while an area of open space separated the Great Barr and Yew Tree areas, neither was large enough to form a separate ward. However, the Borough Council put forward several boundary amendments. The part of the current ward to the south of the M5/M6 junction and broadly to the west of Red House Park, centred upon the roads of Longleat and Monksfield Avenue, would be transferred to a new Charlemont with Grove Vale ward. Further to the west, the boundary of Great Barr with Yew Tree ward would follow the M6 instead of Sandy Lane, Navigation Lane and the Tame Valley Canal, resulting in the transfer of Navigation Lane to Charlemont with Grove Vale ward. The Borough Council stated that this area 'has been accommodated at a Charlemont polling station since being built'.

79 The Borough Council proposed to substantially retain the existing Newton ward, except for the inclusion of a largely unpopulated area between the A4041 Newton Road, the Birmingham to Walsall railway line and Forge Lane, currently in Charlemont ward.

80 The new Charlemont with Grove Vale ward would be largely based upon the existing Charlemont ward, while the Borough Council considered that the revised ward name would better reflect community identities in the area. However, in addition to the amendments described above, a largely unpopulated part of the ward to the south of the A4041 Newton Road and to the east of the A4031 All Saints Way would be transferred to West Bromwich Central ward. This area would comprise residential streets directly to the east of the A4031 and part of Sandwell Valley Country Park. The Borough Council considered that electors in this area, centred upon the roads of Church Vale and Hallam Street, are divided from much of the existing Charlemont ward by the park, Churchfields High School and the A4041, and have 'closer links' with electors to the west of Hallam Street in West Bromwich Central ward. The Borough Council proposed to otherwise retain West Bromwich Central ward upon its existing boundaries.

81 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Charlemont with Grove Vale and Great Barr with Yew Tree wards would have 2% more and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2% more and 1% fewer than the average by 2006). Newton and West Bromwich Central wards would have 3% and 1% more electors per councillor than the average respectively (both equal to the average by 2006).

82 We received one further representation in relation to this area. The Conservatives put forward warding proposals based on a council size of 69, which differed in a number of respects from those put forward by the Borough Council. We note that they agreed with the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing ward names of Newton and West Bromwich Central. However, as a result of our recommendation to retain a 72-member council, we were only able to give these proposals limited further consideration, and it has not proved possible to accommodate any substantive part of their proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

83 We have given careful consideration to the representations which we received at Stage One, and are basing our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Council's proposals, which we consider would best meet our statutory criteria based upon the available evidence. However, we are putting forward a number of minor amendments that would not significantly impact upon electoral equality. Examining the proposed Great Barr with Yew Tree ward, we note that the amendments put forward would resolve its forecast under-representation, and that the Conservatives made similar proposals. We consider that the Longleat/Monksfield Avenue area is well linked to the proposed Charlemont with Grove Vale ward via the A4041 Newton Road. We concur with the Borough Council that, taking into account the position of the existing ward in the far north-east of the borough and the apparent consensus on how best to improve electoral equality, the proposed Great Barr with Yew Tree ward would best meet our statutory criteria.

84 We note that the existing Newton ward, which the Borough Council has proposed to substantially retain, currently provides good electoral equality, comprising two compact residential areas bordered by the external borough boundary to the south and east and the A4041 to the north. We further note that the Conservatives put forward a similar Newton ward under their proposals for a 69-member council. We are therefore adopting the Borough Council's proposals, subject to a minor amendment to include all properties on Forge Lane in Newton ward, rather than dividing them between Newton and West Bromwich Central wards.

85 Similarly, we are adopting the Borough Council's proposed Charlemont with Grove Vale ward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to minor amendments with Hateley Heath ward, as described in the previous section. We note that to ensure good electoral equality across the borough on a council size of 72 it is necessary for the ward to continue to be divided by the M5/M6 junction. However, we consider that the two parts of the ward are well linked by the A4041 Newton Road, Ray Hall Lane and Wigmore Lane.

86 We concur with the Borough Council that the existing boundary between Charlemont and West Bromwich Central wards divides adjacent residential properties in the Church Vale/Hallam Street area. We note that the Conservatives proposed that this area be transferred to West Bromwich Central ward. We further consider that the 'Hall End' area to the west of the A4031 All Saints Way and to the south of Heath Lane appears somewhat isolated in the proposed Charlemont with Grove Vale ward. However, in the absence of any substantive evidence in support of this view, or alternative proposals based on a 72-member council, we are not proposing to depart from the Borough Council's scheme in this area.

87 We have also decided to adopt the proposed West Bromwich Central ward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to a further minor amendment with Hateley Heath ward on Church Lane, as described in the previous section. Examining the revised West Bromwich

Central ward, we are content that it would generally be well defined by clear external boundaries such as A-roads, B-roads, and the Birmingham to Wolverhampton Metro tram line.

88 Under our draft recommendations, Charlemont with Grove Vale and Great Barr with Yew Tree wards would have 3% more and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3% more and 1% fewer than the average by 2006). Newton and West Bromwich Central wards would have 3% and 1% more electors per councillor than the average respectively (both equal to the average by 2006).

Blackheath, Cradley Heath & Old Hill, Rowley and Tividale wards

89 The wards of Blackheath, Cradley Heath & Old Hill, Rowley and Tividale are situated in the west and south-west of the borough. At present, Blackheath, Cradley Heath & Old Hill and Rowley wards together comprise the Rowley Regis town area, while Tividale ward forms part of the Oldbury town area. Under existing arrangements, Blackheath and Cradley Heath & Old Hill wards have 3% and 6% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (both 5% more than the average by 2006). Rowley and Tividale wards have 7% and 5% more electors per councillor than the average respectively (5% and 9% more than the average by 2006).

90 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed to retain all four wards subject to the following amendments. It proposed that the existing Cradley Heath & Old Hill ward be renamed 'Cradley Heath' to better reflect community identities in this area, and that part of the ward to the east of the A459 Old Hill Bypass, to the south of the A4100 Highgate Street and Garratt's Lane, and to the north of the Birmingham to Worcester railway line be transferred to a revised Blackheath ward. To the south of the railway line, it also proposed that part of Blackheath ward to the west of (and including) Hillside Avenue be included in Cradley Heath ward.

91 In addition to the changes outlined above, the Borough Council put forward further amendments to Blackheath ward. It proposed to include part of Langley ward to the east of the A4034 Oldbury Road, to the south of Boundary Avenue and west of the M5. The Borough Council also proposed to transfer the majority of the existing ward to the north of Throne Road and to the east of St Michaels Church of England High School, an area known as the Lion Farm Estate, to a revised Langley ward. However, it proposed that Anvil Drive, Birchley Park Avenue, Bristam Close and Forge Way be transferred from Blackheath ward to Tividale ward, rather than Langley ward. The Borough Council commented that these three roads comprised 'a recently built development,' which has 'no connection with the Lion Farm estate'.

92 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Rowley ward would include that part of the existing Blackheath ward to the north of Throne Road and to the west of St Michaels Church of England School (comprising parts of Throne Road and the Pineways). It would also include part of the existing Tividale ward referred to by the Borough Council as the 'Midhill Drive Estate', comprising those properties to the north of (and including) part of Newbury Lane, east of Portway Hill and west of Wallace Road.

93 The Borough Council also put forward a revised boundary between Blackheath and Rowley wards. This would run east from Moor Lane to the north of Highmoor Road, Ross Heights, Siviters Lane and Old School Drive, and then continue east on Curral Road and Church Road, transferring properties to the south of these roads and to the west of Newhall Road to the revised Blackheath ward. Further to the north and east, the Borough Council proposed to transfer Moorlands Court and St Giles Court to Blackheath ward, and Druids Avenue, Goths Close and part of Majestic Way to Rowley ward.

94 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Blackheath and Cradley Heath wards would have 2% fewer and 2% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (both 1% more than the average by 2006). Rowley and Tividale wards would have 5% more and 2%

fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (both 2% more than the average by 2006).

95 We received two further representations in relation to this area. The Conservatives put forward warding proposals based on a council size of 69, which differed in a number of respects from those put forward by the Borough Council. They proposed the retention of all the existing wards and ward names in this area, subject to a minor amendment between Oldbury and Tividale wards. However, as a result of our recommendation to retain a 72-member council we were only able to give these proposals limited further consideration.

96 Sylvia Heal MP put forward alternative proposals for the south-west of the borough based on a council size of 69, which differed from those put forward by the Conservatives and the Borough Council. She proposed the retention of all the existing ward names in this area. While as a result of our recommendation to retain a 72-member council we were only able to give these proposals limited further consideration, Sylvia Heal MP also commented upon the wards put forward by the Borough Council in this area.

97 She opposed its proposal to transfer to Blackheath ward part of the existing Cradley Heath & Old Hill ward situated to the east of the A459 Old Hill Bypass. Sylvia Heal MP considered that residents of this area identified with Cradley Heath rather than Blackheath. She further considered that the existing boundary in this area, which follows the Dudley Canal south from the A4100 Garratt's Lane/Powke Lane roundabout to Waterfall Lane, to be 'a very obvious natural boundary.' Sylvia Heal MP also proposed to retain the existing ward name of 'Cradley Heath & Old Hill,' stating that 'the loss of a specific identity for the area would not be welcomed by Old Hill residents.'

98 She further opposed the Borough Council's proposed boundary amendments between Blackheath, Langley, Rowley and Tividale wards. Sylvia Heal MP stated that residents of the Lion Farm Estate considered themselves to be Blackheath residents rather than identifying with Langley. She similarly considered that residents in the part of Langley ward to be transferred to Blackheath ward identified with Langley, forming 'a discreet local community' and that the 'very strong natural boundary' of the A4034 Oldbury Road should not be breached in this area. Finally, Sylvia Heal MP considered that the existing Rowley ward had 'very obvious natural boundaries of open land and main trunk roads.'

99 We have given careful consideration to the representations which we have received at Stage One. Generally considering on the basis of available evidence that the Borough Council's proposals would best meet the statutory criteria, we have decided to adopt them as part of our draft recommendations, subject to a number of amendments. We note that there is some disagreement as to the most appropriate boundary between the wards of Blackheath and Cradley Heath & Old Hill. Having visited the area, we do not consider that the Borough Council's proposal to move part of the boundary west from the Dudley Canal to the A459 Old Hill Bypass would best reflect community identities and interests in the Old Hill area. We note that electors living directly to the east of the A459 in the Clifton Street/Wright's Lane area are separated from the existing Blackheath ward by industrial and commercial properties. We also consider that these electors live close to the centre of Old Hill on Halesowen Road, directly to the west of the bypass.

100 We are therefore proposing that the boundary between the wards in this area continue to follow the Dudley Canal, reflecting to some extent warding proposals by the Conservatives and Sylvia Heal MP. However, we are also proposing that the boundary continue to follow the canal from Waterfall Lane to the Birmingham to Worcester railway line. This minor amendment would, in our view, provide for a clearer boundary and unite a small number of residential properties east of the Station Road/Waterfall Lane junction with those to the west.

101 To the south of the railway line we are putting forward our own revised boundary to facilitate the achievement of good electoral equality in this part of the borough. We propose that Seedhouse Court and Sherbourne Road, as well as properties on the western side of Station Road, be included in the revised Blackheath ward. As this area is the only point at which there are a significant number of adjacent residential properties on either side of the existing ward boundary between Blackheath and Cradley Heath & Old Hill, we consider that this amendment may be made without substantially impacting upon community identities and interests.

102 We have also decided to adopt Sylvia Heal MP's proposal to retain the existing ward name 'Cradley Heath & Old Hill'. We note that this was also the preferred option of the Conservatives and consider on the basis of the evidence received that this name would best reflect the composition of the ward.

103 We are putting forward further amendments between the proposed wards of Blackheath and Rowley to achieve good electoral equality, better reflect community identities and interests, and provide for effective and convenient ward boundaries. First, we propose that the boundary run east to the north of Curral Road and then proceed southwards along the B4171 Rowley Village, instead of running east to Church Lane and south between Newhall Road and Park Avenue, as under the Borough Council's proposals. Second, we propose to include Druids Avenue, Goths Close and Sandringham Drive, as well as all of Majestic Way, in Blackheath ward rather than Rowley ward, to reflect road access from Buckingham Road.

104 Finally, we also propose that the boundary between Blackheath and Rowley wards run to the south and east of Roman Way, Cambourne Road and Elmhurst Avenue, to include all roads accessed from Enfield Road and Reservoir Road in Blackheath ward. We consider that these amendments would ensure good electoral equality in both wards, while better reflecting the general distinction between those roads in this large residential area accessed from the east and north-east (generally in Blackheath ward), and those accessed from the west and north-west (generally in Rowley ward). We also note that these proposals would appear to generally reflect the boundaries of the Blackheath, Rowley and Whiteheath communities in this area, as identified by the Borough Council's Neighbourhood Strategy.

105 We note the opposition of Sylvia Heal MP to the boundary amendments between Blackheath and Langley wards, but we do not propose to depart from the Borough Council's proposals in the areas in question. We have not received any proposals based on a council size of 72 that would allow the Lion Farm Estate to be retained in Blackheath ward while providing good electoral equality, nor do we consider that we have received sufficient evidence that the Borough Council's proposals would not meet our statutory criteria. We note that the Lion Farm Estate forms a distinct community under the Borough Council's Neighbourhood Strategy, has been transferred to Langley ward as a single entity, and is well connected to the remainder of the ward by Tifford Lane and by the A4034/A4123. Similarly, we note that the area to be transferred from Langley ward to Blackheath ward stands in close proximity to Blackheath town centre, and consider that the Borough Council's proposals would better reflect community identities and interests.

106 Subject to the above amendments, we have decided to adopt the Borough Council's revised Rowley ward. On the basis of the evidence received, and taking into account the position of this ward on the edge of the borough, we consider that the proposed ward would provide the best available balance between the statutory criteria.

107 Finally, we are proposing one minor amendment to the Borough Council's proposed Tividale ward. We note that the existing ward has clear boundaries to the north and south in the form of the A4123 New Birmingham Road and the Dudley Golf Course respectively, and that these would be retained under the Borough Council's proposals. Based on the evidence received we therefore concur with the proposal to improve electoral equality by transferring the

'Midhill Drive estate' to Rowley ward. However, we propose that Brunel Drive be transferred from the current Blackheath ward to Tividale ward to reflect road access from Newbury Lane.

108 Under our draft recommendations, Blackheath and Cradley Heath & Old Hill wards would have 2% fewer and 4% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to the average and 3% more than the average by 2006). Rowley and Tividale wards would have 3% more and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (1% and 2% more than the average by 2006).

Bristnall, Langley, Old Warley and Oldbury wards

109 The wards of Bristnall, Langley, Oldbury and Old Warley are situated in the centre and south of the borough. At present, Langley, Oldbury and Old Warley wards form part of the Oldbury town area, while Bristnall ward forms part of the Smethwick town area. Under existing arrangements, Bristnall and Langley wards have 5% and 7% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4% and 7% more than the average by 2006). Old Warley and Oldbury wards have 3% and 10% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (both 6% fewer than the average by 2006).

110 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed that the part of Langley ward broadly to the south of Leahouse Road and to the east of Farm Road, Langley Road and All Angels Walk, and north of the A4123 Wolverhampton Road be transferred to a revised Bristnall ward. It also put forward several amendments between the proposed Blackheath and Langley wards, as described in the previous section. These changes would see the transfer of the Lion Farm Estate to Langley ward, and the transfer of an area in the south-west of the ward to Blackheath ward.

111 To the north and south of Langley ward, the Borough Council proposed to substantially retain its existing boundaries with Oldbury and Old Warley wards. However, Brandhall Lane and a small number of properties on the A4123 Wolverhampton Road would be transferred from Old Warley to Langley ward under its proposals, 'for the greater convenience of the electorate.' The Borough Council also proposed a minor amendment between Langley and Oldbury wards to ensure the inclusion of all residential properties on the south side of the B4182 Station Road in Langley ward.

112 In addition to the changes described above, the Borough Council also put forward the following amendments to the existing Bristnall and Old Warley wards. It proposed that the part of Bristnall ward broadly to the east of Queen's Road and to the north of (and including) William Road be included in a revised Smethwick ward. The Borough Council also proposed that an area to the south of George Road, to the east of Brandhall Road (including properties on the east side of this road), and to the west of Bleakhouse Road be transferred from Bristnall to Old Warley wards.

113 As previously discussed, under the Borough Council's proposals all of the existing Tipton Green ward to the south of the A461 would be transferred to the proposed Oldbury ward. In addition to the minor amendment with Langley ward outlined above, it proposed that all of the existing Oldbury ward to the south-east of the Birmingham to Worcester railway line would be included in a revised St Pauls ward. However, the Borough Council also proposed that the ward boundary continue to follow the railway line from Rood End Road to Mallin Road, before returning west to the existing boundary on the A457 Oldbury Road. This would result in the transfer of West End Avenue and a number of residential properties on the west side of Mallin Road from St Pauls ward to Oldbury ward.

114 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Bristnall ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor both now and in 2006. Langley ward would have 1% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average both now and in 2006. Old Warley and

Oldbury wards would have 5% more and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (2% more and 2% fewer than the average by 2006).

115 We received three further representations in relation to this area. The Conservatives put forward warding proposals based on a council size of 69, which differed in a number of respects from those put forward by the Borough Council. We note that they agreed with the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing ward names in this area. However, as a result of our recommendation to retain a 72-member council, we were only able to give these representations limited further consideration, and it has not proved possible to accommodate any substantive part of their proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

116 As discussed in the previous section, Sylvia Heal MP put forward alternative warding proposals for the south-west of the borough, also based on a council size of 69, and commented on the Borough Council's proposals in this area, opposing its revised Langley ward. As stated above, as a result of our recommendation to retain a 72-member council, we were however only able to give these representations limited further consideration. Finally, a local resident supported the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing boundary between Abbey and Old Warley wards, considering that residents of the area to the south and east of Warley Park used shops, schools and other services in the Bearwood area of Abbey ward.

117 We have given careful consideration to the representations which we have received at Stage One and are proposing to confirm the Borough Council's proposals in this area, which we consider would better meet the statutory criteria than the existing arrangements. However, we are also putting forward a number of minor amendments.

118 As discussed in the previous section, although we note Sylvia Heal MP's views, we have broadly adopted the amendments put forward by the Borough Council between the wards of Blackheath and Langley. While we note that the proposed Langley ward would continue to be divided by the M5 and the Birmingham to Worcester railway line, we consider that it would possess satisfactory internal road communications and are generally content that the boundaries put forward are clearly identifiable. However, we propose two minor amendments with Bristnall ward to ensure that all of Langley Road is included in Langley ward and to make use of a break in properties on the east side of Farm Road by including 104-140 Farm Road in Langley ward.

119 We note that the proposed Bristnall ward has been the subject of substantial boundary amendments to the east and west, in order to provide good electoral equality across the south of the borough. We are content that the revised ward would continue to possess satisfactory internal road communications and well defined external boundaries. However, we are putting forward one boundary amendment with Old Warley ward. Having visited the area, we consider that the identity and interests of electors on Brandhall Road would be better reflected if both sides of the road were included in a single ward. Accordingly, we propose to include Brandhall Road, Shire Close and The Constables in Bristnall ward. We are otherwise content that the proposed Old Warley ward would provide for improved electoral equality by 2006, and that the area to be transferred from Bristnall ward would be well connected to the rest of the ward via the A4123 Wolverhampton Road, Broadway and Queensway.

120 Examining the proposed Oldbury ward, we note that it would expand to the north-west as far as the A461 to improve electoral equality in Tipton Green ward, as discussed previously, while excluding that part of the existing Oldbury ward to the south-east of the Birmingham to Worcester railway line. We note that this area is identified under the Borough Council's Neighbourhood Strategy as 'Rood End', and consider that the railway line constitutes a more clearly defined ward boundary in this area. Further, we note that a belt of industrial and commercial development separates the Rood End area from Oldbury town centre.

121 However, we are not convinced that West End Avenue and part of Mallin Road should be included in Oldbury ward. We note that only the railway line would separate residential properties in the affected area from residential properties in the proposed St Pauls ward, whereas a small commercial area separates them from other electors in Oldbury ward. We are therefore proposing to retain the existing boundary between Oldbury and St Pauls wards in this area in order to better reflect community identities and interests, subject to minor amendments which would affect no electors.

122 Under our draft recommendations, Bristnall ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor both now and in 2006. Langley ward would have 1% fewer electors per councillor than the average both now and in 2006. Old Warley and Oldbury wards would have 4% more and 8% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (1% more and 4% fewer than the average by 2006).

Abbey, St Pauls, Smethwick and Soho & Victoria wards

123 The wards of Abbey, St Pauls, Smethwick and Soho & Victoria are situated in the south-east of the borough, at present forming part of the Smethwick town area. Soho & Victoria ward is currently significantly over-represented, with 45% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (46% fewer than the average by 2006). Under existing arrangements, Abbey ward has 2% fewer electors per councillor than the average (5% fewer than the average by 2006). St Pauls and Smethwick wards have 8% and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (8% and 6% fewer than the average by 2006).

124 At Stage One, the Borough Council put forward amendments to address the over-representation of the existing Soho & Victoria ward. First of all, the Borough Council proposed to include in a revised Soho & Victoria ward that part of Smethwick ward broadly to the west of Stanhope Road and Cheshire Road and south of the A4030 High Street and A4092 Cape Hill, except for Dale Close, Dale Street, Dawson Street and Vince Street. It proposed that these four roads be included in Abbey ward, which would otherwise be retained upon its existing boundaries.

125 Second, the Borough Council also proposed to transfer to Soho & Victoria ward a smaller part of St Pauls ward to the east of Halford's Road, north of Lewisham Road and south of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton Metro tram line. The Borough Council stated that this area, referred to as 'the Oxford Road estate', had 'been added in its entirety so that community ties will not be broken.'

126 In order to achieve good electoral equality in its revised St Pauls and Smethwick wards, the Borough Council put forward further boundary amendments. As described in the previous section, it proposed that the part of the existing Oldbury ward to the south-east of the Birmingham to Worcester railway line be included in St Pauls ward, and that the West End Avenue area be transferred from St Pauls ward to Oldbury ward. Under the Borough Council's proposals the revised Smethwick ward would also include part of Bristnall ward broadly to the east of Queen's Road and north of William Road, and part of the existing St Pauls ward to the south of the Bartleet Road estate, Hugh Road and White Road.

127 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Abbey ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor (2% fewer than the borough average in 2006). St Pauls and Smethwick wards would have 1% more and 1% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (1% fewer and 2% fewer than the average by 2006). Soho & Victoria ward would have 2% fewer electors per councillor than the average both now and in 2006.

128 We received two further representations in relation to this area. The Conservatives put forward warding proposals based on a council size of 69, which differed significantly from those put forward by the Borough Council. We note that they agreed with the Borough Council's

proposal to retain the existing ward names of Abbey and Smethwick. However, as a result of our recommendation to retain a 72-member council, we were only able to give these representations limited further consideration, and it has not proved possible to accommodate any substantive part of their proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations. As previously stated, a local resident also supported the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing boundary between Abbey and Old Warley wards.

129 We have given careful consideration to the representations which we have received at Stage One, and are basing our draft recommendations for this area to some extent on the Borough Council's proposals, which we note would resolve the significant over-representation of Soho & Victoria ward.

130 However, we are not adopting the Borough Council's proposal to transfer the 'Oxford Road estate' from St Pauls ward to Soho & Victoria ward. Having visited the area, we note that the estate comprises one part of a comparatively isolated residential area to the north of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton main line railway, adjacent to the external borough boundary and surrounded on all other sides by a large commercial area. We do not consider that it would reflect community identities and interests, or contribute towards effective and convenient local government, to divide this area between wards. We are therefore proposing that the existing boundary between St Pauls and Soho & Victoria wards be retained, proceeding from the A457 Tollhouse Way along Brasshouse Lane, the Birmingham Canal, Bridge Street North, Downing Street and Wattville Road to the external borough boundary.

131 This modification to the Borough Council's scheme would in turn require further changes to provide good electoral equality in the proposed wards in this area. We are therefore proposing that the part of the proposed St Pauls ward to the south of Basons Lane and to the south of (but not including) Holly Lane to the west of the cemetery be transferred to the proposed Smethwick ward. We note that this amendment would place a greater part of the Londonderry neighbourhood identified by the Borough Council's Neighbourhood Strategy in the proposed Smethwick ward. We therefore consider that it would better reflect community identities and interests as well as improve electoral equality.

132 To the east, we propose a further minor amendment between the proposed St Pauls and Smethwick wards to ensure all of Sabell Road is included in Smethwick ward. We note that the Conservatives also put this boundary forward, although their proposed Smethwick ward was substantially different. Finally, as discussed in the previous section, we are also proposing that West End Avenue and part of Mallin Road be retained in St Pauls ward, instead of being transferred to Oldbury ward under the Borough Council's proposals, to better reflect community identities and interests in the area.

133 We are also proposing further amendments to reduce the high electoral variance in the proposed Soho & Victoria ward, following our decision not to adopt the Borough Council's proposals in this area. First, we propose that the revised Soho & Victoria ward include Dale Close, Dale Street, Dawson Street and Vince Street, which the Borough Council proposed to transfer from the existing Smethwick ward to Abbey ward. We take the view that the existing northern boundary of Abbey ward, at the junction of the A4030 Bearwood Road and A4092 Waterloo Road, is clearer and more effective than that proposed by the Borough Council. We also note that these roads are accessed from the A4030 Bearwood Road in the proposed Soho & Victoria ward, and consider that our amendment would better reflect community identities and interests in the area.

134 Second, we propose that Soho & Victoria ward include part of the proposed Smethwick ward to the north of Watery Lane, east of Arden Road and Firs Lane, and south of Cooper's Lane, as well as all properties on the west side of Cheshire Road. We note that both sides of Cheshire Street are currently contained within a single ward (Smethwick), and that our proposals would restore this arrangement. We consider that these amendments would secure

low electoral variance in Soho & Victoria ward without substantially departing from the boundary as proposed by the Borough Council, and thereby failing to reflect community identities and interests in residential areas to the east of Cheshire Road and the A4030 High Street.

135 As a result of our amendments, we are proposing to retain the existing Abbey ward, which we note has good electoral equality both now and in 2006. Although we note that the Borough Council's proposed Abbey ward would result in a slight reduction in electoral variance, as stated above, we consider that the retention of the existing northern boundary would provide the best overall balance between our statutory criteria. Similarly, we note the local resident's comments and are content that the existing western boundary reflects community identities and interests in the area.

136 Under our draft recommendations, Abbey and St Pauls wards would have 2% fewer and 1% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5% fewer and 1% more than the average by 2006). Smethwick and Soho & Victoria wards would have 5% more and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (2% more and 5% fewer than the average by 2006).

Electoral cycle

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

- in the south-west of the borough, we propose a number of boundary amendments between the wards of Blackheath, Cradley Heath & Old Hill and Rowley, to better reflect community identities and interests in the Old Hill area while providing for good electoral equality in this part of Sandwell;
- in the south-east of the borough, we propose a number of boundary amendments between the wards of Abbey, St Pauls, Smethwick and Soho & Victoria, in order to place the 'Oxford Road estate' with adjacent residential areas in St Pauls ward while providing for good electoral equality in this part of Sandwell;
- we also propose minor boundary amendments to the following proposed wards: Bristnall; Charlemont with Grove Vale; Great Bridge; Greets Green & Lyng; Hateley Heath; Langleigh; Newton; Oldbury; Old Warley; Princes End; St Pauls; Tipton Green; Tividale; Wednesbury North; Wednesbury South; and West Bromwich Central;
- we propose to retain the existing ward name 'Cradley Heath & Old Hill'.

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

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 Electorate		2006 Electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	72	72	72	72
Number of wards	24	24	24	24
Average number of electors per councillor	2,993	2,993	2,998	2,998
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	3	0	4	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	2	0	2	0

141 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Sandwell Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from three to zero. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 5%.

Draft recommendation

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

Map 2: Draft recommendations for Sandwell

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

143 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

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

APPENDIX A

Draft recommendations for Sandwell: detailed mapping

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

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

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

Map A1: Draft recommendations for Sandwell: key map

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

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

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