

Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wansbeck in Northumberland

Further electoral review

August 2006

Translations and other formats

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What is the Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by the Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

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

Director:

Archie Gall

When conducting reviews our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names.

Executive summary

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A further electoral review of Wansbeck is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. It aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. The Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to undertake this review on 12 May 2005.

Current electoral arrangements

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

Every review is conducted in four stages:

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

Draft recommendations

During Stage One we proposed to retain the existing council size of 45. We made amendments to 14 of the districts ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality. Our draft recommendations were a combination of the District Council's and our own proposals, based on the existing wards. We received little argument for the proposed wards. We used the River Wansbeck and the A189 to divide the district into three distinct areas, as proposed by the District Council.

Responses to consultation

During Stage Three we received two submissions in relation to our draft recommendations from local residents. One resident generally supported our draft recommendations, although he did propose an alternative council size of 32. He also proposed alternative names for the wards in the Newbiggin area. Another resident proposed alternative wards in the Ashington and Bothal area, using the railway line as a boundary between the two areas.

Analysis and final recommendations

Electorate figures

The District Council initially submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2009 projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5%. We are satisfied that the District Council's forecasts currently provide the most accurate estimation of the 2009 electorate of Wansbeck. Growth is expected in the five wards of Bothal, Central, College, Hirst and Seaton.

Council size

We proposed retaining the existing council size of 45 in our draft recommendations. At Stage Three one local resident considered that the council size should be reduced to 32. However, we did not consider this was backed up with any convincing or compelling evidence. Therefore we consider that a council size of 45 would still provide the district with the best representation, and are confirming our draft recommendation for a council size of 45 as final.

General analysis

We are endorsing our draft recommendations as final throughout the district.

What happens next?

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be sent to the Electoral Commission through the contact details below. The Commission will not make an Order implementing them before 26 September 2006. The information in the representations will be available for public access once the Order has been made.

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Great Peter Street
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Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk

The contact details above should only be used for implementation purposes.

The full report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Final recommendations: summary

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

Notes:

- 1 The whole district is unparished.
- 2 The maps accompanying this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.
- 3 We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Final recommendations for Wansbeck district

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

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Wansbeck district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12	Hirst	2	1,969	985	-7	2,291	1,146	3
13	Newbiggin East	2	2,325	1,163	10	2,325	1,163	5
14	Newbiggin West	2	2,339	1,170	11	2,339	1,170	6
15	Park	3	3,318	1,106	5	3,318	1,106	0
16	Seaton	3	2,836	945	-10	3,358	1,119	1
17	Sleekburn	3	3,179	1,060	0	3,179	1,060	-4
18	Stakeford	2	2,208	1,104	5	2,208	1,104	0
	Totals	45	47,498	-	-	49,840	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,056	-	-	1,108	-

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

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

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our final recommendations for the electoral arrangements for the district of Wansbeck.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 Our task is to make recommendations to the Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We cannot consider changes to the external boundaries of either the district or of parish areas as part of this review.

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

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole, i.e. to ensure that all councillors in the local authority represent similar numbers of electors. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

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

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

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

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

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an

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

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

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

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

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

17 Stage Three began on 17 January 2006 with the publication of the report *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wansbeck in Northumberland*, and ended on 10 April 2006.

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

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report the Boundary Committee has had regard to the general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

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

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

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

2 Current electoral arrangements

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

22 The electorate of the district is 47,498 (December 2004). The Council presently has 45 members who are elected from 16 wards. There are currently 13 wards represented by three-members and three wards represented by two-members. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district by the total number of councillors representing them on the council. At present, each councillor represents a district average of 1,056 electors (47,498 divided by 45), which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,108 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained (49,840 divided by 45).

23 During the last review of Wansbeck the District Council forecast there would be an increase of 1,098 electors between 1996 and 2001. However, due to over-estimations in electorate growth and electorate movement since that time the district has seen a decrease in the electorate, resulting in a significant amount of electoral inequality between wards. To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the district average in percentage terms.

24 Data from the December 2004 electoral register showed that under these arrangements, electoral equality across the district met the criteria that the Electoral Commission agreed would warrant further investigation. The number of electors per councillor in nine of the 16 wards (56%) varies by more than 10% from the district average and in one ward by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Bedlington West ward where the councillors represent 37% more electors than the district average. Having noted that this level of electoral inequality is unlikely to improve, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to undertake a review of the electoral arrangements of Wansbeck District Council on 12 May 2005.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in Wansbeck district

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

Table 4 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in Wansbeck district

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2004, electors in Bedlington West ward were under-represented by 37%, while electors in Hirst ward were over-represented by 27%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

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

3 Draft recommendations

25 During Stage One three submissions were received, including district-wide schemes from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats on the District Council. We also received representations from a local resident, Mr Wise. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wansbeck in Northumberland*.

26 Our draft recommendations were based on the proposals of the District Council, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality. However, these proposals were not supported by strong community identity arguments. Therefore we moved away from the District Council's proposals in a number of areas to improve electoral equality further. We proposed that:

- Wansbeck District Council should be served by 45 councillors, the same as at present, representing 18 wards, two more than at present
- the boundaries of 14 of the existing wards should be modified, while two wards should retain their existing boundaries

27 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in only two of the 18 wards varying by more than 10% from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 10% from the average by 2009.

4 Responses to consultation

28 During the consultation on the draft recommendations report, two representations were received, both of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the District Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Local residents

29 Two representations were received from local residents. Mr Wise, who wrote in during Stage One of the review, proposed an alternative boundary between our proposed Ashington Central and Bothal North wards, as well as proposing a new ward named Bothal East.

30 Mr McGregor expressed his general support for our draft recommendations. He proposed alternative names for the Newbiggin wards. He considered that the three areas of Wansbeck should be represented by town or parish councils. He also considered that the Liberal Democrats' Stage One proposal for a reduced council size should be given more consideration and proposed an alternative council size of 32 members. He did, however, acknowledge that his proposal regarding the council size of Wansbeck was outside the scope of this review.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

31 We have now finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Wansbeck.

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

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

33 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'. In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing clearly identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

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

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

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

Electorate figures

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

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

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

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

Council size

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

42 The District Council has adopted a Leader and Cabinet system of governance. The Cabinet is made up of a Deputy Leader and six councillors who are each assigned a portfolio. The District Council went on to discuss other committees and panels that councillors are involved in such as planning, licensing and audit, as well as 'outside bodies at national, regional and local level'. It stated that in the course of a year members will 'between them attend approximately 2,550 committee, working group and outside body meetings'. It also stated that 'most councillors conduct monthly ward surgeries [and] are available on almost a 24/7 basis for individual contact'.

43 The Liberal Democrats proposed two options in the 'short term'. First, it proposed a council size of 26 members, 19 less than at present. It considered that the reduction in councillors was necessary as the cabinet system 'excludes about three-quarters of councillors from the decision-making process'. It continued that the 'reality is that over the last two and a half years over thirty councillors have played only a very small part in the process of local government'. Second, it proposed to divide Wansbeck district into 'six community divisions [where] elected council representatives would each represent the whole of the community for which they were elected; say five or six representatives per area partnership'. In the 'longer term' it considered that the council should 'be abolished and replaced by a government of communities by communities'.

44 We did not consider that we had received sufficient evidence on which to decide a council size for Wansbeck. We therefore asked the District Council and Liberal Democrats to provide additional information regarding the council's functions and responsibilities and its political management structure, justifying why their proposed

council sizes of 46 and 26, respectively, would provide more effective and convenient local government than any other council size. We also acknowledged the Liberal Democrats' second 'short-term' proposal for the district; however, we would not recommend wards with more than three councillors as we consider that this dilutes accountability. Also, its 'longer-term' proposal was outside the remit of this review and we were unable to take this into account when formulating our draft recommendations.

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

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

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

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

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

50 Because our draft recommendations were based on a council size of 45 members it was not possible to incorporate the proposals of the Liberal Democrats because its scheme was based on a significantly different council size. Therefore details of its proposals will not be discussed in the remainder of this report.

51 During Stage Three we received one representation relating to council size. Mr McGregor considered that a reduction in council size as proposed at Stage One by the Liberal Democrats 'was worthy of more consideration'. He considered that 'only

half of the elected members were active participants in the council meetings and committees'. He therefore proposed a council size of 32; he considered that each of the existing 16 wards should return one councillor and acknowledged that ward boundaries would need to be amended to ensure electoral equality. He also proposed that the remaining 16 councillors be elected on a 'proportional representation basis with a District wide electorate and a party list system'. He considered that the savings such a system would provide could be put towards creating parish councils. Mr McGregor acknowledged that his proposal for the council size of Wansbeck would be outside the scope of our review.

52 We acknowledge Mr McGregor's suggestions for the reduction in council size. We note, however, the limited argument put forward for his proposed council size and the lack of any argument in terms of the political management structure, roles and functions of the council. Also, as he noted in his submission, his suggestion relating to the electoral system is outside the remit of this review, and we are therefore unable to take it into consideration in the formation of our final recommendations. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendation for a council size of 45 as final.

Electoral equality

53 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. The Electoral Commission expects the Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. However, when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where no justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality, seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as is possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and securing effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria.

54 During Stage One, in the absence of any strong community identity arguments or evidence, we sought to improve electoral equality in Wansbeck. The District Council appeared to take the approach of using the existing wards as a starting point and making amendments to these in order to improve electoral equality. Similarly, we used the existing wards as a starting point and improved upon them as far as electoral equality was concerned. Because of the lack of strong evidence, we looked to improve electoral equality even in those areas where the existing arrangements provide electoral variances less than 10% of the district average. Therefore we made amendments to the existing ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality.

55 The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district 47,498 (2004 electorate), by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 45 under our final proposals. Therefore the average number of electors per councillor under our final recommendations is 1,056.

General analysis

56 Our draft recommendations were a combination of the District Council's and our own proposals, based on the existing wards, in order to form wards that secured good levels of electoral equality with strong boundaries. We received very little argument for the proposed wards. We used the River Wansbeck and the A189 to divide the district into three distinct areas, as proposed by the District Council.

57 At Stage Three Mr McGregor considered that the three main areas of Ashington, Newbiggin and Bedlington that make up Wansbeck should have representation from town or parish councils. Establishing parish councils is outside the remit of this review and the powers of the Boundary Committee. Proposals for new parishes must be made by the District Council to the Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government under section 9 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 or by a petition under section 11 of this Act. The DCLG, is responsible for establishing new parishes, and the Electoral Commission is responsible for creating the electoral arrangements for new parishes.

58 We did not receive any strong or compelling opposition to our draft recommendations at Stage Three, and in fact note that Mr McGregor generally supported them. Therefore we are recommending 18 wards in the borough: nine two-member and nine three-member wards. We have proposed small boundary amendments to all but two of the existing wards to achieve better levels of electoral equality. Although there was a lack of substantive evidence in the submissions we received, we have taken account of the issues of community identity where possible.

59 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by these proposals. We propose confirming our draft recommendations as final for Wansbeck District Council.

Warding arrangements

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

- Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards (page 30)
- College, Hirst, Park and Seaton wards (page 31)
- Bothal, Central and Haydon wards (page 32)
- Choppington, Guide Post, Sleekburn and Stakeford wards (page 34)
- Bedlington Central, Bedlington East and Bedlington West wards (page 35)

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

Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards

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

63 During Stage One we received two submissions regarding this area from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, as noted previously, as we are recommending a council size of 45 therefore it was not possible to incorporate the Liberal Democrats' proposals in our draft recommendations as it was based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 as under our proposed council size of 45 (using 2009 figures). The District Council considered the Newbiggin area to be a 'relatively self-contained community'. The District Council proposed to reduce this to four councillors, proposing two two-member wards, to which the area would be entitled under its proposed council size of 46. It proposed to transfer some 288 electors from Newbiggin East ward into Newbiggin West ward, the area bounded by Front Street, Woodhorn Lane and the community sports centre.

64 We considered the District Council's proposal, and noted that under our proposed council size of 45, this area would be entitled to four councillors as under the District Council's proposals. Its proposed wards would have 5% and 6% more electors than the district average by 2009 under a council size of 45. We noted that its proposed wards provided the best levels of electoral equality that it was possible to achieve in the Newbiggin area, given the electorate and the fact that the A189 separates it from the rest of the district. We looked to transfer alternative areas from Newbiggin East ward into Newbiggin West ward; however, we were unable to find another more identifiable area that produced as good levels of electoral equality. We therefore proposed to adopt the District Council's proposed Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards.

65 Under our draft recommendations the proposed Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards would have 5% and 6% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2009, respectively.

66 During Stage Three we received one representation relating to the Newbiggin area. Mr McGregor proposed that the wards should be renamed Newbiggin North and Newbiggin South 'as the boundary between the proposed wards in Newbiggin goes east/west'.

67 Having considered the representations received we have decided to endorse the draft recommendation for Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West wards as final. We note Mr McGregor's opinion that the wards should be renamed; we also acknowledge that this may seem more logical given the nature of the divide. However, the names in our draft recommendations were proposed by the District Council at Stage One and are also the existing ward names. Given this we do not consider that there is compelling enough evidence to encourage us to move away from our draft recommendations in this area.

68 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Newbiggin

East and Newbiggin West wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

College, Hirst, Park and Seaton wards

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

70 We received two submissions relating to these wards from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, as noted previously, we are recommending a council size of 45 and it was therefore not possible to incorporate the Liberal Democrats' proposals in our draft recommendations as these are based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 as under our proposed council size of 45 (using 2009 figures). The District Council proposed small amendments to each of these wards in order to improve electoral equality. It proposed a three-member Seaton ward comprising the existing Seaton ward less the area south of and including St Albans Close and Belgrave Gardens. It proposed a three-member College ward comprising the existing College ward less the area to the north-east of Parkside Court and Sweethope Avenue, and including that area transferred from the existing Seaton ward. It proposed a three-member Park ward comprising the existing Park ward plus the area removed from the existing College ward; it also proposed a three-member Hirst ward. This ward was based on the existing Hirst ward but also included an area from the existing Central ward; it proposed to transfer the areas to the east of Lintonville Road and North Seaton Road and north of First Avenue. Under the District Council's proposals these wards would have electoral variances within 6% of the district average.

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

72 We are proposing a two-member Hirst ward comprising the existing Hirst ward less the properties on Hawthorn Road, Rosalind Street and Beatrice Street, south of First Avenue, and also the properties east of Alexandra Road and in the Moorhouse Estate. We are also proposing to transfer the workshops at Enterprise Park so that the ward boundary no longer cuts through properties; we note that this affects no electors. We are proposing that the first two areas described be transferred from Hirst ward into our proposed three-member Park ward. This will also comprise the existing Park ward and the properties to the east of and including Sycamore Street

between First Avenue and Woodhorn Road transferred from Central ward. In each of these wards amendments have been made to the existing wards in order to provide better levels of electoral equality.

73 Under our draft recommendations the proposed College, Hirst, Park and Seaton wards would have fewer than 1%, 3% more, fewer than 1% and 1% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2009, respectively.

74 During Stage Three we did not receive any representations regarding these four wards. Therefore, in the absence of any objections we have decided to endorse the draft recommendations for College, Hirst, Park and Seaton wards as final.

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

Bothal, Central and Haydon wards

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

77 During Stage One we received three submissions relating to these wards from the District Council, the Liberal Democrats and local resident Mr Wise. However, as noted previously, we are recommending a council size of 45 and it was therefore not possible to incorporate the Liberal Democrats' proposals in our draft recommendations as these were based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 under a council size of 45. The District Council proposed to divide the existing Bothal ward into two two-member wards, creating Bothal North and Bothal South wards. It proposed that the boundary between these wards follow the back of properties on Station Road to Wansbeck Road and south along Dene View and west across the fields to the district boundary. It also proposed transferring the properties to the west of Grousemoor Drive from Haydon ward into its proposed Bothal South ward. It proposed a Haydon ward that would have comprised the remainder of the existing Haydon ward, and an Ashington Central ward that would have comprised the remainder of the existing Central ward.

78 Local resident Mr Wise contended that the existing boundary between Bothal and Central wards did 'not accurately reflect local identities, traditions and interests'. He contended that the railway line that runs through the district 'forms a significant boundary [that] can only be crossed by road traffic in four places'. He continued that it was 'probably true to say that those on the east only cross to the west [of the railway line] for a specific purpose'. Mr Wise was 'reluctant to recommend a boundary' for his proposed ward; however, he said an 'easily understood' boundary would follow Green Lane to its junction with Wansbeck Road and north along it and up to the A1068 and follow that north until it meets the railway line, which would form the eastern boundary of his proposed ward. He suggested that this ward should be called Bothal & Ashington West. Mr Wise did not make specific proposals for the remainder of Central ward; however, it appears that this would either form a two-

member ward on its own and be named Ashington Park ward or would be combined with Hirst ward, and then Park ward would be renamed Hirst Park ward.

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

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

81 Given this amendment, and our amendment discussed previously between Central and Park wards, we were unable to adopt the District Council's proposed Ashington Central ward. The remainder of the existing Central ward, given the proposed amendments, would have resulted in a reasonable level of electoral equality; however, given the lack of community identity evidence we looked to improve this further. We considered that the Park Villas and Park View area was a fairly self-contained area of housing with a good road link into Central ward. We therefore proposed to transfer this area into Central ward. We proposed to name this ward Ashington Central as put forward by the District Council.

82 We considered that the District Council's proposal to divide Bothal ward along the back of properties on Station Road to make two two-member wards was appropriate and created reasonably identifiable areas. This also facilitated our amendment to Ashington Central ward. However, in order to achieve better electoral equality between Bothal North and Bothal South wards we proposed a small amendment to the District Council's proposed boundary. We proposed to transfer those properties north of Wansbeck Mews from the District Council's proposed Bothal South ward into its proposed Bothal North ward. We also proposed moving an area of its proposed western boundary so that properties along Dene View are in Bothal South ward. We considered this would create a stronger boundary and would leave these properties less isolated from the rest of the ward.

83 Under our draft recommendations the proposed Ashington Central, Bothal North, Bothal South and Haydon wards would have 2% more, 2% more, 3% fewer and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2009, respectively.

84 During Stage Three we received one representation regarding our proposed Ashington Central and Bothal North wards from Mr Wise. He proposed an alternative boundary between our proposed Ashington Central and Bothal North wards. He suggested that the boundary should follow west along Station Road to its junction with Institute Road, to include those properties on the southern side of Station Road. He considered this would 'encompass a more definite area' and 'has the advantage of using a main road as a boundary'. Mr Wise also maintained his Stage One argument that the railway line provided an 'important local boundary' between the communities on the east and west of it. He stated that a new residents' group has formed in the existing Central ward and the railway line is the 'western limit of its area'. He considered that this supported his view for using this as a boundary for the district wards. He proposed a revised two-member Ashington Central ward using the railway line as its western boundary, and a new one- or two-member Bothal East ward comprising the remainder of Ashington Central ward along with his amended boundary between our proposed Bothal North and Ashington central wards. He considered that his proposed wards would have 'easily understood boundaries that accurately reflect local community identities and interests'.

85 We are confirming our draft recommendations for Ashington Central, Bothal North Bothal South and Haydon wards as final. We have carefully considered Mr Wise's Stage Three proposal for this area. His proposed wards would result in the councillors for Ashington Central and Bothal East wards representing 6% fewer and 18% more electors than the district average. Given the lack of compelling community identity argument and support for this proposal, along with the worse electoral equality his proposal results in, we have not been persuaded to adopt Mr Wise's proposed wards. We also acknowledge his proposed amendment between Ashington Central and Bothal North wards. However, we looked at this when formulating our draft recommendations and given the lack of community identity evidence we received we did not consider the worse electoral equality this resulted in was justified, and we remain of this opinion.

86 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Ashington Central, Bothal North, Bothal South and Haydon wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Choppington, Guide Post, Sleekburn and Stakeford wards

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

88 During Stage One we received two submissions relating to these wards from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, as noted previously, we are recommending a council size of 45 and it was therefore not possible to incorporate the Liberal Democrats' proposals in our draft recommendations as these were based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 under a council size of 45. The District Council proposed to retain the existing Choppington ward. It proposed to transfer approximately 300 electors from Stakeford ward into Guide Post ward, those properties north of Fairway bounded by Ashington Drive. It also proposed to transfer approximately 300 electors into Sleekburn ward from Bedlington East ward,

properties on Waverley Drive, Elgin Close, Bolam Place, numbers 1–24 of Waverley Avenue, numbers 10–23 of Station Road, numbers 1–31 of Pioneer Terrace and Cherry Tree Court.

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

90 Because of our amendment to Sleekburn ward, the transfer of West Sleekburn, we transferred more of Stakeford ward into Guide Post ward to improve electoral equality. We proposed to transfer the area recommended by the District Council along with the area south of Fairway and west of Leander Avenue. We also proposed to adopt the District Council's proposed Choppington ward as we considered that it uses strong boundaries and provides good electoral equality.

91 Under our draft recommendations the proposed Choppington, Guide Post, Sleekburn and Stakeford wards would have 2% fewer, 2% fewer, 4% fewer and fewer than 1% electors than the district average by 2009, respectively.

92 During Stage Three we did not receive any representations regarding these four wards. Therefore in the absence of any objections we have decided to endorse the draft recommendations for Choppington, Guide Post, Sleekburn and Stakeford wards as final.

93 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Choppington, Guide Post, Sleekburn and Stakeford wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1, Map 2 and Map 3 accompanying this report.

Bedlington Central, Bedlington East and Bedlington West wards

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

95 During Stage One we received two submissions regarding this area from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, as noted previously, we are recommending a council size of 45 and it was therefore not possible to incorporate the Liberal Democrats' proposals in our draft recommendations as these were based on a councillor:elector ratio of 1,917 rather than 1,108 under a council size of 45. The District Council proposed to divide Bedlington West ward into two two-member wards, named Bedlington North and Bedlington South. It proposed dividing the

existing Bedlington West ward behind properties on Glebe Mews, Meadow Court and Bedlington Meadowdale County Middle School. It then proposed that the boundary run west around the back of properties north of North Ridge and north up to the district boundary. It proposed to retain the existing Bedlington Central ward and made one small amendment to the existing Bedlington East ward. It proposed to transfer approximately 300 electors into Sleekburn ward, as described previously. The District Council did not provide any argument for its proposed wards.

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

97 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Bedlington Central, Bedlington East, Bedlington North and Bedlington South wards would have 1% more, 2% fewer, 4% fewer and 1% more electors than the district average by 2009, respectively.

98 During Stage Three we did not receive any representations regarding these four wards. Therefore in the absence of any objections we have decided to endorse the draft recommendations for Bedlington Central, Bedlington East, Bedlington North and Bedlington South wards as final.

99 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 10, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Bedlington Central, Bedlington East, Bedlington North and Bedlington South wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 3 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

100 Table 5 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements based on 2004 and 2009 electorate figures.

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

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

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

Final recommendation

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

6 What happens next?

102 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Wansbeck and submitted our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation.²

103 It is now up to the Electoral Commission to decide whether or not to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 26 September, and the Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representations made to them by that date.

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

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

Fax: 020 7271 0667

Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk

The contact details above should only be used for implementation purposes.

The full report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

² Under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI No. 2001/3962).

7 Mapping

Final recommendations for Wansbeck

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

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Wansbeck district.
- **Sheet 2, Map 2** illustrates the proposed boundaries in Ashington and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea.
- **Sheet 3, Map 3** illustrates the proposed boundaries in Bedlington, Bedlington North, Sleekburn and Cambois.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
The Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Consultation	An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Order (or electoral change Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
The Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process
Electoral equality	A measure of ensuring that every person's vote is of equal worth

Electoral imbalance	Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the district
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections
FER (or further electoral review)	A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last periodic electoral review conducted between 1996 and 2004
Multi-member ward	A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is: ‘An extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nations’ benefit and by appropriate national decision and action: – the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; – access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; – wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; – established farming use is effectively maintained’
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors

Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single district enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents
Parish council	A body elected by residents of the parish who are on the electoral register, which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries
Parish electoral arrangements	The total number of parish councillors; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by the Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England

Political management arrangements	The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories: a directly elected mayor and cabinet, a cabinet with a leader, or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the district average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

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

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

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

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

