

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Gateshead

February 2003

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

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

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

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

Summary

We began a review of the electoral arrangements for Gateshead on 14 May 2002.

- **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 Gateshead:

- **in nine of the 22 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% from the average;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 12 wards and by more than 20% in one ward.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 104-105) are that:

- **Gateshead Borough Council should have 66 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 22 wards, the same as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 21 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 one of the proposed 22 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10% from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to improve further with the number of electors per councillor in none of wards expected to vary by more than 7% 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 25 February 2003. 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 22 April 2003:

**Team Leader
Gateshead 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	Birtley	3	<i>unchanged</i> - Birtley ward; Birtley Central and Birtley South parish wards of Birtley parish	3
2	Bridges	3	part of Bede ward; part of Bensham ward; part of Felling ward	3
3	Blaydon	3	Blaydon ward; part of Winlaton ward	2
4	Chopwell & Rowlands Gill	3	part of Chopwell & Rowlands Gill ward	1 and 2
5	Chowdene	3	Chowdene ward; part of High Fell ward	3
6	Crawcrook & Greenside	3	part of Chopwell & Rowlands Gill; part of Crawcrook & Greenside ward; part of Ryton ward	1 and 2
7	Deckham	3	part of Deckham ward; part of Bede ward	3
8	Dunston Hill & Whickham	3	part of Dunston ward; part of Whickham North ward	2
9	Dunston & Teams	3	part of Dunston ward; part of Teams ward	2 and 3
10	Felling	3	part of Bede ward; part of Felling ward; part of Leam ward	3
11	High Fell	3	part of High Fell ward; part of Leam ward; part of Low Fell ward	3
12	Lamesley	3	Lamesley ward; part of High Fell ward; Lamesley parish; Birtley North parish ward of Birtley parish	2 and 3
13	Leam South	3	part of Deckham ward; part of Leam ward; part of Wrekendyke ward	3
14	Low Fell	3	part of Low Fell ward; part of Saltwell ward	3
15	Pelaw & Heworth	3	Pelaw & Heworth ward; part of Wrekendyke ward	3
16	Lobley Hill & Bensham	3	part of Bensham ward; part of Teams ward	2 and 3
17	Ryton	3	part of Ryton ward	1 and 2
18	Saltwell	3	part of Bensham ward; part of Saltwell ward	3
19	Wardley Leam	3	part of Wrekendyke ward	3
20	Whickham North	3	part of Whickham North ward; part of Whickham South ward	2
21	Whickham South	3	part of Whickham South ward	2
22	Winlaton	3	part of Chopwell & Rowlands Gill ward; part of Crawcrook & Greenside ward; part of Winlaton ward	1 and 2

Notes:

1. *The south east is the only parished part of the borough and comprises the two wards indicated above.*
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 Gateshead

	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	Birtley	3	6,454	2,151	-6	6,450	2,150	-6
2	Blaydon	3	7,591	2,530	10	6,932	2,311	1
3	Bridges	3	5,729	1,910	-17	6,755	2,252	-1
4	Chopwell & Rowlands Gill	3	7,391	2,464	7	7,300	2,433	7
5	Chowdene	3	7,396	2,465	7	7,213	2,404	5
6	Crawcrook & Greenside	3	6,658	2,219	-3	6,545	2,182	-4
7	Deckham	3	7,060	2,353	2	6,817	2,272	0
8	Dunston & Teams	3	6,257	2,086	-9	7,089	2,363	4
9	Dunston Hill & Whickham	3	6,983	2,328	1	6,836	2,279	0
10	Felling	3	7,016	2,339	2	6,727	2,242	-2
11	High Fell	3	6,992	2,331	2	6,712	2,237	-2
12	Lamesley	3	6,793	2,264	-1	6,767	2,256	-1
13	Leam South	3	7,100	2,367	3	6,851	2,284	0
14	Lobley Hill & Bensham	3	7,310	2,437	6	7,065	2,355	3
15	Low Fell	3	7,149	2,383	4	6,994	2,331	2
16	Pelaw & Heworth	3	6,891	2,297	0	6,737	2,246	-1
17	Ryton	3	6,497	2,166	-6	6,727	2,242	-2
18	Saltwell	3	7,056	2,352	2	6,784	2,261	-1
19	Wardley Leam	3	6,568	2,189	-5	6,728	2,243	-2
20	Whickham North	3	6,658	2,219	-3	6,670	2,223	-2
21	Whickham South	3	7,108	2,369	3	6,947	2,316	2
22	Winlaton	3	6,878	2,293	0	6,813	2,271	0
	Totals	66	151,535	-	-	150,459	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,296	-	-	2,280	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Gateshead 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 Gateshead, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the five metropolitan boroughs in Tyne & Wear 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 Gateshead. Gateshead's last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in October 1979 (Report no. 358).

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:
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Gateshead is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reviews*. This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

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

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

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

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

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

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

10 Stage One began on 14 May 2002, when we wrote to Gateshead Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Northumbria Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Durham Association of Parish and Town Councils, parish councils in the borough, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, 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 Gateshead Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 16 September 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 25 February 2003 and will end on 22 April 2003, 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 The borough of Gateshead extends 12.6 miles along the south bank of the River Tyne. The borough's economy has experienced a trend away from traditional industries towards high-tech and service companies. It has good communication links in the form of Newcastle Central Station and Newcastle Airport, both of which can be reached from Gateshead using the Metro. The borough is in the process of redeveloping the Quays area with arts and music projects and the Gateshead Millennium Bridge, which opened to the public in September 2002, providing pedestrian access to Newcastle Quayside. The borough contains only two parishes comprising the south east area.

15 The electorate of the borough is 151,535 (December 2001). The Council presently has 66 members who are elected from 22 wards, the majority of which are relatively urban. All wards are three-member wards.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,296 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will decrease to 2,280 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 nine of the 22 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average and two wards by more than 20%. The worst imbalances are in Bensham and Whickham South wards where each of the three councillors represents 25% fewer and 25% more electors than the borough average respectively.

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 Gateshead

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	Bede	3	5,659	1,886	-18	6,024	2,008	-12
2	Bensham	3	5,185	1,728	-25	5,597	1,866	-18
3	Birtley	3	6,454	2,151	-6	6,450	2,150	-6
4	Blaydon	3	6,642	2,214	-4	5,966	1,989	-13
5	Chopwell & Rowlands Gill	3	7,401	2,467	7	7,310	2,437	7
6	Chowdene	3	6,790	2,263	-1	6,635	2,212	-3
7	Crawcrook & Greenside	3	7,410	2,470	8	7,286	2,429	7
8	Deckham	3	6,170	2,057	-10	5,965	1,989	-13
9	Dunston	3	7,623	2,541	11	7,947	2,649	16
10	Felling	3	5,715	1,905	-17	5,640	1,880	-18
11	High Fell	3	6,102	2,034	-11	5,840	1,947	-15
12	Lamesley	3	6,309	2,103	-8	6,311	2,104	-8
13	Leam	3	7,567	2,522	10	7,261	2,420	6
14	Low Fell	3	7,762	2,587	13	7,592	2,531	11
15	Pelaw & Heworth	3	6,488	2,163	-6	6,337	2,112	-7
16	Ryton	3	7,265	2,422	5	7,494	2,498	10
17	Saltwell	3	6,628	2,209	-4	6,366	2,122	-7
18	Teams	3	7,432	2,477	8	7,652	2,551	12
19	Whickham North	3	8,089	2,696	17	8,014	2,671	17
20	Whickham South	3	8,593	2,864	25	8,405	2,802	23
21	Winlaton	3	6,297	2,099	-9	6,261	2,087	-8
22	Wrekendyke	3	7,954	2,651	15	8,106	2,702	19
	Totals	66	151,535	-	-	150,459	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,296	-	-	2,280	-

Source: *Electorate figures are based on information provided by Gateshead 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 Bensham ward were relatively over-represented by 25%, while electors in Whickham South ward were relatively under-represented by 25%. 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 us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Gateshead Council and its constituent parish councils.

19 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the BCFE visited the area and met officers and members from the Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received five representations during Stage One, including three borough-wide schemes from the Council, David Clelland MP and Councillor Tinnion, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the Council.

Gateshead Council

20 The Council proposed to retain the existing council size of 66 members representing 22 wards. Its scheme provided for a good level of electoral equality with no ward having an electoral variance of more than 7% by 2006.

Member of Parliament

21 David Clelland MP (Tyne Bridge) submitted a scheme to retain the existing council size of 66 members representing 22 wards. His scheme provided for a good level of electoral equality with no ward having an electoral variance of more than 7% by 2006.

Councillor Tinnion

22 Councillor Tinnion (Leam ward) put forward a scheme to retain the existing council size of 66 members representing 22 wards. His scheme provided for a good level of electoral equality with no ward having an electoral variance of more than 5% by 2006.

Other representations

23 A further two representations were received from a local borough councillor and a local resident. Councillor Brain (Blaydon ward) submitted his support for the Council's proposals. A local resident opposed the Council's proposals for the Dunston area. David Clelland MP forwarded 124 proforma letters opposing the Council's proposals for the Dunston area.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

Electorate forecasts

29 The Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting a decrease in the electorate of approximately 1% from 151,535 to 150,459 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the decline within the current Blaydon, Leam and High Fell wards. However, the Council expects there to be growth in the existing Bede, Bensham and Dunston wards. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to unitary development plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

30 Councillor Tinnion (Leam ward) highlighted his concern regarding 'one aspect' of the Council's electorate data relating to 'the forecast clearance to 2006'. In particular, Councillor Tinnion was concerned that in the existing Lamesley, Leam and High Fell wards the rates of clearance had been determined by the 'unpopularity of particular estates' and that the rates of clearance had been overestimated for the existing Bede, Birtley and Wickham North wards.

31 In light of Councillor Tinnion's comments, we sought further clarification from the Council as to the electoral data for these areas. The Council stated that it 'estimates that around 1500 houses will be cleared' by 2006. It explained that '540 dwellings are planned for clearance', that

these are 'specific identifiable properties' and that 'based on past experience it is envisaged that there will be further clearance in areas of low demand both in the council and private sectors'. It continued that 'although no sites have been identified, it is estimated that an additional 960 dwellings will be cleared by 2006'. Furthermore, it said, 'these 960 houses have been allocated to polling districts by identifying 10 wards where clearance is most likely to take place on the basis of low housing demand'. The Council argued that if it had attempted to 'narrow the forecasts down to particular areas and streets which might be cleared in the next five years, this would have created confusion and blight'. However, 'if, on the other hand, [the Council] had included only the 540 planned clearances, [the Council] would certainly have underestimated the true figures'.

32 Councillor Brain commented that 'there may be instances where substantial housing development takes place in the near future but without planning permission having been granted yet'. He contended that 'one such area is the Bleach Green Estate, Blaydon, where recently completed and currently agreed demolition of 490 properties is taking place' and that as this 'land continues to be designated for housing use in the Unitary Development Plan' he 'would therefore consider it almost certain that further development will take place in the near future, although it is not possible to quantify this at present'. Councillor Brain supported the Council's proposed Blaydon ward, but requested that the planned development of the Bleach Green Estate 'be taken into account in the event of any suggestions being made to further extend the proposed ward boundary'.

33 In light of Councillor Brain's comments, we sought further clarification from the Council as to the electoral data for this area. The Council stated that it 'was particularly mindful of the BCFE's advice that forecasts should be based on realistic expectations' and therefore 'as far as new house building is concerned, [its] forecasts are based on development sites where construction has already started, sites with existing planning permission and sites for which a planning application has been submitted'. The Council agreed with Councillor Brain 'that there may be instances where substantial housing development will take place in the near future but without planning permission having been granted yet, and that one such instance is the Bleach Green Estate in Blaydon'. The Council noted 'that the extent of clearance on the estate has been agreed, but progress is dependent on finding acceptable alternative accommodation for the residents currently living in the houses to be cleared'. Therefore 'it is not possible to say with any certainty how much, if any, new housing will be developed on the site by December 2006 and... [the Council has] not made any allowances for such development in [its] electorate forecasts'.

34 As the Council noted, Councillor Brain was not requesting that the electoral forecasts be changed, but rather was highlighting this issue so it can be considered. As Councillor Brain states 'I consider that the approach taken in calculating future population numbers to have been the most accurate and rigorous means of forecasting available'. We have considered Councillor Tinnion's comments and the Council's response and we are minded to agree with the Council that its approach to the allocation of housing clearance is a reasoned method of producing accurate electorate forecasts.

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

Council size

36 Gateshead Council presently has 66 members. The three borough-wide schemes we received during Stage One from the Council, Councillor Tinnion and David Clelland MP all proposed to retain the existing council size of 66 members. The Council was the only respondent to discuss the issue of council size in detail, as Councillor Tinnion and Mr Clelland MP focused on designing the most appropriate warding structure for Gateshead. However, it

should be noted that Councillor Tinnion stated that although he was 'generally in favour of a reduced number of councillors' he accepted 'the view of [his] colleagues'.

37 The Council undertook a detailed examination of its political management structure. It described how it had modernised its structure by adopting a leader and cabinet system in May 1999, but 'it was conscious of the need to retain the corporate approach among members' which 'meant retaining a role for all members in the formulation of policy'. The Council 'established a range of advisory groups to bring all members together to discuss the development of policy and services and to review performance'. Therefore the Council judged that 'although members may have lost their traditional committee role in 1999, all members continued to play a variety of demanding roles'. Non-cabinet members play key roles as members of the council; regulatory committees; five overview and scrutiny panels; and five advisory groups, to recognise that 'the Council was concerned that non-cabinet members should continue to be able to exercise sufficient control over policy and scrutiny'.

38 The Council studied how 'in addition to undertaking a variety of roles within the political management structure, members undertake a significant representative role: representing the authority in its relationships with other bodies, and representing their wards and their constituents'. It described how there are '12 major partnership bodies operating in Gateshead on which the Council is represented' which 'cover both functional areas (community safety, early years development and childcare and health) and geographical areas, reflecting the Council's commitment to regeneration of its area'. Members of the Council also participate in a range of local and regional bodies. The Council considered that 'the role of members as ward representatives or community champions continues to place increasing demands on members'. It stated that the evidence of two reviews of members' allowances (during which councillors had to estimate the time spent on their role outside formal council meetings) demonstrates that 'on average councillors felt that over half of their time was spent dealing with constituents' queries as well as needing to keep themselves up to date with current issues'.

39 The Council considered that 'the increasing demands of the ward representative role do not appear to have been compensated by any reduction in the political management role' as 'the Council has consciously chosen to adopt a member-led political management structure with a strong focus on policy and on corporate working'. The Council considered that although the 'number of places on certain bodies' could be reviewed 'in light of experience gained in operating a modernised structure since 1999, [it felt] these bodies are now at the optimum size' arguing that 'to reduce the number of members would be to risk its effectiveness'.

40 The Council concluded that 'logic of the structure it put in place appears to require 66 members; to reduce this number would overburden members to the extent that both the management and representative roles are put at risk'. Therefore 'in light of the political management structures now in place, 66 councillors is the appropriate size for Gateshead Council in order to secure effective and convenient local government'.

41 We judge that the Council has made a detailed study of the requirements of governance under its new political structure and considered its experience of operating within the new structures in reaching a balanced conclusion on the appropriate council size to secure effective and convenient local government for Gateshead. We agree with the Council that due to the modernisation programme members may have lost their traditional committee role but as they still perform a variety of roles and functions, the demands on councillors in Gateshead have not necessarily diminished. We also note that no alternative council size has been proposed.

42 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 achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 66 members.

Electoral arrangements

43 We have carefully considered all the submissions received during Stage One. We note that there is a degree of consensus between the three borough-wide schemes for the five wards west of the River Derwent. The schemes diverge on proposing the most appropriate warding pattern for the areas east of the River Derwent and in particular for the most appropriate warding pattern for the Whickham and Dunston areas.

44 The Council stated that 'electoral equality is the cornerstone of [its] submission' which reflects 'community identity and the need to secure convenient local government'. It submitted its proposals 'after extensive publicity and consultation with local people', but explained that 'it is fair to say that the roadshows, despite the effort put into them, did not arouse a great deal of public interest' although 'where [the public] did comment, it was generally to express satisfaction with the proposals'. The Council stated that 'over the whole course of the consultation, very few expressions of dissatisfaction with the draft proposals were recorded'. However, 'after the roadshows and focus groups had finished, around 100 letters and a 300 name petition were received from local people expressing opposition to the Council's proposals for Dunston'.

45 David Clelland MP stated that his 'proposal preserves community links where they currently exist' and 'are less dramatic than those of the local authority'. We were concerned that the electorate data produced by Mr Clelland were not an accurate reflection of his proposals and we requested more detailed information describing the electorates that comprise each of his proposed wards. Mr Clelland highlighted that he did not 'have the time or resources to submit [this] kind of detail' and that he is 'anxious that communities are kept together where possible' and that his 'submission is intended to show that this is possible within the rules and regulations' under which the PER is conducted and demonstrates 'that there are alternatives to the Council's proposals that would be acceptable to the local community'.

46 Mr Clelland highlighted his concern that 'if it is necessary for submissions to be so detailed as [the BCFE has] suggested then there is little chance of any other opinion than the local council's having any influence'. We welcome any proposals for changes to electoral arrangements, but it is of considerable assistance if such proposals are accompanied by details of current and forecast electorates based on local authority estimates. If we note that there are gaps in this material or where more information is required, we may wish to seek clarification of such proposals. While we will have regard to all material submitted, well argued cases which achieve a high level of electoral equality, address the statutory criteria, and are backed by evidence are likely to carry more weight.

47 Councillor Tinnion approached the development of his scheme by deciding 'how to take account of the under-representation of the Whickham area'. He argued that his 'proposals produce substantially less division of communities' in comparison with the Council's scheme and that they 'would easily gain majority support from the people of Gateshead in head to head comparison with the Council's scheme'. Councillor Tinnion stated that he 'consulted as best [he] could with councillors and others' and that his 'proposals for the Whickham area received overwhelming support' from Blaydon Constituency Labour Party 'at the final constituency meeting in August'.

48 The proposals of Councillor Tinnion and David Clelland MP attempted to retain the existing Dunston ward as far as possible as they judged that this would provide the best reflection of the local Dunston community. The Council noted the degree of opposition to its proposals for the Dunston area, but contended that 'it has not proved possible to devise an alternative proposal which addresses these concerns while at the same time providing for a solution for the borough as a whole that meets the BCFE's guidance and the statutory criteria'. We consider that the proposals from Councillor Tinnion and David Clelland MP, in attempting to retain the existing Dunston ward, do not pay sufficient regard to the need to reflect community identities in the Whickham area. However, in light of the opposition to the Council's proposals for the Dunston

area, we are concerned that its proposals would not necessarily provide the best reflection of community identity in the Dunston area. Accordingly, having visited the area, we have developed our own alternative proposals which we judge will recognise the opposition to the Council's proposals for the Dunston area, reflect community identities in the Whickham area, while maintaining a good reflection of the statutory criteria in the rest of the borough.

49 In view of the consultation exercise the Council undertook with interested parties and the consensus regarding the five wards west of the River Derwent, we have based our recommendations on the Council's proposals for the rest of the borough. We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. However, we propose a number of amendments to secure more effective and convenient local government. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- i. Blaydon, Chopwell & Rowlands Gill, Crawcrook & Greenside, Ryton and Winlaton wards;
- ii. Bensham, Dunston, Whickham North, Whickham South and Teams wards;
- iii. Birtley and Lamesley wards;
- iv. Bede, Deckham, Felling and Saltwell wards;
- v. Chowdene, High Fell and Low Fell wards;
- vi. Leam, Pelaw & Heworth and Wrekendyke wards.

50 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.

Blaydon, Chopwell & Rowlands Gill, Crawcrook & Greenside, Ryton and Winlaton wards

51 These five wards comprise the area west of the River Derwent. The existing Blaydon, Chopwell & Rowlands Gill, Crawcrook & Greenside, Ryton and Winlaton wards have 4% fewer, 7% more, 8% more, 5% more and 9% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (13% fewer, 7% more, 7% more, 10% more and 8% fewer by 2006).

52 There was a consensus between the three respondents who proposed borough-wide schemes for this area. Councillor Tinnion stated that he was 'not convinced that [his] proposals west of the Derwent are preferable to the Council's'. David Clelland MP stated that he was 'happy to accept the proposals of the Council for these four wards' (Blaydon, Crawcrook & Greenside, Ryton and Winlaton wards), and proposed to retain the existing Chopwell & Rowlands Gill ward.

53 The Council proposed to broadly retain the current Chopwell & Rowlands Gill. It noted that this was 'the largest proposed ward', but argued that 'it would not be possible to reduce its size to any extent without splitting a natural community'. The Council 'proposed to make a slight adjustment to the northern boundary of the present Chopwell & Rowlands Gill ward so as to put the whole of the hamlet of Coalburns into [the proposed] Crawcrook & Greenside ward'. The Council proposed to amend the boundary between the existing Crawcrook & Greenside and Ryton wards 'to make a very clear distinction between the western end of Ryton and the eastern end of Crawcrook' by transferring the areas broadly east of Moor House and Moss Crescent, and south of the A695, Stephen's Hall, Lead Road and Beweshill Lane from the existing Ryton ward to form part of the proposed Crawcrook & Greenside ward. The Council proposed that the remaining areas of the existing Ryton ward comprise its modified Ryton ward. It proposed to transfer High Spen village from the existing Crawcrook & Greenside ward to comprise part of its proposed Winlaton ward. It noted that the village's 'closest links are probably with Rowlands Gill, but considerations of [electoral] equality rule out its inclusion in [the proposed] Chopwell & Rowlands Gill ward'. However, the Council noted that the village 'has a road link through Barlow into Winlaton'. The Council proposed to redefine the boundary between the existing Blaydon and Winlaton wards to achieve a better level of electoral equality. It proposed to transfer the area

broadly east of West Lea and Axwell View, and Half Fields Road, Commercial Street and Litchfield Lane, and the area broadly north of California from the existing Winlaton ward to comprise part of its proposed Blaydon ward. With this amendment the Council proposed to broadly retain the existing Blaydon ward.

54 We have carefully considered the submissions we have received for this area. We propose to adopt the Council's proposed Blaydon, Chopwell & Rowlands Gill, Crawcrook & Greenside, Ryton and Winlaton wards as we judge that they provide a good balance between the statutory criteria. We also note the degree of consensus between the three borough-wide schemes submitted during Stage One for this area. However, we were concerned that a number of the Council's proposed boundaries would not be easily identifiable, particularly where they cross open countryside. Therefore, we propose three amendments to provide for more identifiable boundaries between the proposed wards of Crawcrook & Greenside, Ryton, Winlaton and Chopwell & Rowlands Gill. These amendments would not affect any electors. We were concerned that the proposed boundary between the proposed Blaydon and Winlaton wards would not secure a good level of effective and convenient local government. Officers from the Committee visited the area and considered that the proposal for the boundary to run behind the properties on the eastern side of Litchfield Lane would provide for a clear demarcation between two urban areas. However, we judged that the proposal for the boundary to follow the centre of Cromwell Avenue and Jobling Lane would not secure a good level of effective and convenient local government, and therefore propose that the boundary run behind the properties of the western side of Cromwell Avenue and the southern side of Jobling Lane.

55 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Blaydon, Chopwell & Rowlands Gill, Crawcrook & Greenside, Ryton and Winlaton wards would have 10% more, 7% more, 3% fewer, 6% fewer and equal to the average number of electors per councillor for the borough respectively (1% more, 7% more, 4% fewer, 2% fewer and equal to the average by 2006).

Bensham, Dunston, Whickham North, Whickham South and Teams wards

56 These five wards comprise the central area of the borough. The current Bensham, Dunston, Whickham North, Whickham South and Teams wards have 25% fewer, 11% more, 17% more, 25% more and 8% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (18% fewer, 16% more, 17% more, 23% more and 12% more by 2006).

57 The Council proposed to reconfigure these five wards. It noted that the existing Whickham South and Whickham North wards are significantly under-represented. The Council proposed to broadly retain the existing Whickham South ward as it represents a 'coherent grouping', but proposed to transfer an area broadly north of Warwick Avenue and Oakfield Road and east of Burnthouse Lane to comprise part of its proposed Whickham North ward to achieve a better level of electoral equality.

58 It proposed to split the existing Whickham North, Dunston and Teams wards to form parts of four wards. The Council proposed a modified Whickham North ward comprising the area of the existing Whickham North ward broadly south of Alexandra Drive, Grosvenor Avenue, South View Terrace and Lonan Drive. It argued that the area north of these residential roads would represent 'a distinctly identifiable community centred on the Swalwell housing estate' and proposed that this area join with a northern area of the existing Dunston ward broadly west of Princess Drive and Swan Drive and north of the A1 and Ellison Road, west of Ede Avenue, and north of Oak Avenue and Dunston Bank to form a new Dunston & Riverside ward. It proposed that the southern area of the existing Dunston ward join with the southern area of the existing Teams ward broadly south of the railway line (adjacent to Earlsway) to form a new Dunston Hill ward. Finally, the Council proposed that the northern area of the existing Teams ward unite with an area east of Princess Drive and Swan Drive, within the existing Dunston ward, and a western

area of the existing Bensham ward, broadly west of Rectory Road, Bewick Road, Coatsworth Road, Poplar Crescent and Bensham Road, to comprise a new Redheugh ward representing 'a compact urban area'.

59 The Council 'recognised that [its] proposals regarding Dunston did attract some adverse comment during the public consultation (although some people from the area said that they had no objection) and a number of letters of objection afterwards'. It argued that its 'proposal seems to be the most realistic way of addressing the problem posed by the surplus electorate in Whickham' and that 'it has not proved possible to devise an alternative proposal which addresses the concerns expressed while at the same time providing a solution for the borough as a whole'. It argued that its proposed Dunston Hill ward 'combines the adjacent areas of Lobley Hill and the southern part of Dunston, which form a continuous built up area immediately to the west of the A1'.

60 David Clelland MP argued that the Council's proposal for the existing Dunston ward represents 'a controversial break up of the existing ward structure'. He contended that 'Dunston is very much a village community'. He proposed to broadly retain the existing Dunston and Teams wards. Mr Clelland proposed to transfer an area broadly east of Knightside Gardens and north of Whickham Highway from the current Dunston ward to comprise part of his proposed Team Valley ward. This ward would comprise a western area of the current Teams ward, broadly west of the railway lines adjacent to Earlsway and Lobley Hill Road, and west of Bensham Crescent and Askew Road West. He proposed that the areas east of these features and roads combine with an area of the current Bensham ward broadly west of Alexandra Road, Coatsworth Road and Village Heights to comprise a modified Bensham ward. He proposed to amend the current Teams ward's southern boundary to secure a more identifiable boundary, described in more detail below.

61 David Clelland MP proposed a substantial reconfiguration of the existing Whickham South ward. He proposed to broadly retain the existing Whickham North ward, proposing to transfer the areas broadly east of Whaggs Lane and Rectory Lane and south of Front Street and Whickham Highway to comprise part of the north-eastern area of his proposed Whickham South ward. He proposed that this ward would comprise the majority of the existing Whickham South ward and proposed for the Sunnyside and Marley Hill settlements to be transferred to comprise the western area of his proposed Lamesley ward.

62 Mr Clelland forwarded 124 standard letters signed by local residents. The letter opposed the Council's proposals because they would 'entail unnecessarily radical changes that would result in the division of the community of Dunston, which is now cohesive and identifiable'.

63 Councillor Tinnion approached the development of his scheme for this area by deciding 'how to take account of the under-representation of the Whickham area'. He noted that 'somewhere the green belt [has] to be crossed'. He proposed to split the existing Whickham South and Teams wards to produce three new wards. He proposed that the Sunnyside and Marley Hill settlements combine with the southern area of the existing Teams ward, broadly south of the railway line (adjacent to Earlsway), to comprise his proposed Lobley Hill & Sunnyside ward. He proposed to amend the existing boundary between Whickham North and Whickham South wards in order that an area broadly west of Larkspur Road, Fallside Road, Swalwell Bank and south of Lonnen Drive is transferred from the existing Whickham North ward to comprise part of his proposed Whickham South ward. With this amendment he propose to broadly retain the existing Whickham North ward.

64 Councillor Tinnion proposed that the northern area of the existing Teams ward combine with an eastern area of the current Dunston ward, an area broadly east of Ravensworth Road, Ellison Road and the A1, and a western area of the current Saltwell ward, broadly west of West Park Road, Rectory Road and Saltwell Road, and south of Dunsmuir Grove, to comprise a modified Teams ward. With this amendment he proposed to broadly retain the existing Dunston

ward, proposing to amend the existing southern boundary to follow Whickham High Road and the western side of the Nursery, thereby transferring this area to comprise his proposed Sunnyside & Lobley Hill ward. He proposed a modified Bensham ward to comprise the areas west of Cuthbert Street and south of Bensham Road within the current Bensham ward, the areas west of Saltwell Road and north of Dunsmuir Grove, Westfield Road, Westfield Terrace and Shipcote Lane within the current Saltwell ward, the area west of High West Street within the current Bede ward, and the area north of Cramer Street within the current Deckham ward.

65 A local resident opposed the Council's proposals. He argued that 'Dunston is a community and a village with an identity' reflected in the area's 'popular and growing community festival, a busy Community Centre [and] Activity Centre', and that the Council's proposals 'would divide and split [the] village and community'.

66 We have carefully considered all the submissions we have received for this area. We acknowledge that both David Clelland MP and Councillor Tinnion have attempted to retain the existing Dunston ward as far as possible, as they judge that this would provide the best reflection of community identities. However, we are concerned that their proposals, in attempting to provide the most appropriate solution to the under-representation in the area, would not provide the best reflection of community identities or secure a high level of effective and convenient local government for the rest of the Whickham area. We did not consider that David Clelland MP or Councillor Tinnion have provided sufficient evidence and argumentation to persuade us that their alternative proposals would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than the Council's proposals. We note that there has been considerable opposition to the Council's proposals for the existing Dunston ward. We were concerned that the Council's proposals would divide the existing Dunston ward to comprise part of three new wards and would divide the Swalwell area from the Whickham area, and therefore not provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

67 We have considered the standard letters forwarded by David Celland MP, but it should be noted that in determining the strength of local opinion on an issue, the number of proforma letters received are not necessarily a true guide. In practice, a well argued representation containing detailed evidence is likely to carry more weight.

68 We appreciate that developing warding arrangements for this area is hindered by the need to provide the most appropriate solution to the issue of the significant under-representation of the existing wards while also taking account of the area's geography. Even so, due to the significant under-representation in the area, the existing three ward structure of Whickham South, Whickham North and Dunston wards must be revised to produce a four ward structure to provide the best balance between the statutory criteria. We have not been persuaded that broadly retaining the existing Dunston ward would provide the best balance between the statutory criteria in the rest of this area, particularly Whickham. In light of our concerns that the warding arrangements submitted by the Council, David Clelland MP and Councillor Tinnion would not provide the best reflection of the statutory criteria and given the level of opposition to the Council's proposals, we have considered alternative options for the area. Having visited the area, we consider that the Council's proposed Whickham South ward would provide a good reflection of community identities, and therefore propose to adopt the proposed ward as part of our draft recommendations. However, we noted that the Council's proposal for the boundary to run along the centre of Warwick Avenue and Oakfield Road would divide cul-de-sacs, and therefore propose that the boundary follow the rear of properties on the southern side of these two roads and the rear of the properties on Burns Close, Warwick Close, Lindale Avenue, Northcote and Grange Farm Drive. We noted that the existing boundary divides Ingleside cul-de-sac and consequently we propose that the boundary follow the south side of Ingleside.

69 We propose to divide the existing Dunston ward into north and south regions, using the A1 as a boundary to form two new wards. We judge that this would minimise the impact on the Dunston and Dunston Hill communities. We propose that the south region joins with an eastern

area of the existing Whickham North ward broadly east of Whaggs Lane, Rectory Lane, Coalway Lane, Ashfield Park and Swalwell County Primary School, and broadly south of Grosvenor Avenue, Alexandra Drive and Market Lane to comprise our proposed Dunston Hill & Whickham ward. With this amendment we propose to broadly retain the existing Whickham North ward, which would also contain the area that the Council proposed be transferred from the existing Whickham South ward. We propose that the northern region of the existing Dunston ward, broadly north of the A1, join with a northern area of the existing Teams ward, broadly north of the A184 and the railway line adjacent to Eslington Park, to comprise our proposed Dunston & Teams ward. We propose that the southern area of the existing Teams ward join with a western area of the existing Bensham ward, broadly west of Rectory Road, Bewick Road, Coatsworth Road, Poplar Crescent and Bensham Road, to comprise our proposed Lobley Hill & Bensham ward.

70 We note that our proposals would use the Council's proposed Whickham South ward and its proposed Redheugh ward's eastern boundary for our proposed Lobley Hill & Bensham ward. Having visited the area, we judge that the use of the A1 and the railway line would provide clear demarcations between urban areas and that, on balance, our proposals would provide for the most appropriate solution to the issue of under-representation in the area while facilitating the development of a scheme in the remainder of the borough that would best reflect the statutory criteria. As we have developed our own alternative proposals for this area we would particularly welcome local views and comments during Stage Three.

71 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Dunston & Teams, Dunston Hill & Whickham, Lobley Hill & Bensham, Whickham North and Whickham South wards would have 9% fewer, 1% more, 6% more, 3% fewer, 3% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4% more, equal to, 3% more, 2% fewer and 2% more by 2006).

Birtley and Lamesley wards

72 These two wards comprise the south-eastern area of the borough. The existing Birtley ward comprises Birtley Central and Birtley South parish wards of Birtley parish and has 6% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average both now and by 2006. The existing Lamesley ward comprises Lamesley parish and Birtley North parish ward of Birtley parish and has 8% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average both now and in 2006.

73 At Stage One the Council proposed broadly retaining the existing Lamesley ward, albeit with minor amendments to transfer the area broadly south of Easedale Gardens and east of Seaham Gardens from the existing High Fell ward to comprise part of its proposed Lamesley ward, as discussed below. The Council proposed retaining the current Birtley ward, stating that 'by being on the extreme edge the variance of minus 5.7% does not seem unreasonable'.

74 David Clelland MP proposed a tidying up measure stating 'the current boundary between Teams ward and Lamesley ward dissects buildings and necessitates constant reference to detailed maps to determine who is the relevant MP or councillor at the margins of the boundary'. His proposal involved re-drawing the boundary along the Team Valley Trading Estate starting at the junction of Station Road and Eastern Avenue, to run west along Eastern Avenue to the roundabout on Kingsway, south along Kingsway to the junction with Sixth Avenue, west along Sixth Avenue to Dukesway, north along Dukesway to the A1 Western bypass pedestrian underpass, and west along the line of the underpass to join the current boundary.

75 As described above, to facilitate his proposals in the Whickham and Dunston areas, David Clelland MP proposed that the Sunnyside and Marley Hill area comprise the western part of his proposed Lamesley ward. He proposed modifying the boundary in the north of Birtley Ward. His proposed boundary would leave the existing boundary to run north on Fellcross, east along Sanders Gardens and northeast along Highridge. It would then run to the east and north of the properties on Highridge and Mount Court to rejoin the existing boundary.

76 Councillor Tinnion proposed an amendment to the existing Lamesley ward to address ‘the effect of long-outdated parish boundaries which have led areas around the southern fringe of Chowdene to be included in Lamesley ward when they would otherwise be included in Chowdene ward’. He proposed to amend the northern boundary of Lamesley ward from where it intersects with Chowdene Bank. His proposed boundary would follow the railway line, the A1 and Long Bank. It would run to the south and west of Ravensworth Golf Course to join the existing boundary between Chowdene ward and High Fell ward at Waverley Road. It would then follow this existing boundary northwards before running east along the northern boundary of the golf course. His proposed boundary would run south down High Street and east along Springwell Road to rejoin the existing boundary.

77 Councillor Tinnion also proposed an amendment to the northern boundary of Birtley ward. His proposed boundary would leave the existing boundary at the northeast point of the Mount Road Estate to run north of the new housing estate and rejoin the existing boundary at the B1288. He argued that the development in the Northside area ‘would compensate for any initial shortfall’ in both of his proposed Lamesley and Birtley wards.

78 We have carefully considered all the submissions we have received for this area. As discussed above, we consider that David Clelland MP’s proposal for the Sunnyside and Marley Hill settlements to comprise part of his proposed Lamesley ward would not provide a better reflection of community identities than the Council’s proposals. We note his proposal to amend the boundary through the Team Valley Trading Estate. However, although we recognise that this amendment would not affect electors or necessitate the creation of parish wards, we are reluctant to propose such an amendment as we judge that effective and convenient local government might be better achieved by ensuring the parish and borough ward boundary remain coterminous. We are also of the opinion that utilising the A1 as both the parish and borough ward boundary would provide the most identifiable boundary and secure a better level of effective and convenient local government as the Team Valley Trading Estate would not be divided between two wards. However, this would create an unviable parish ward and it should be noted that it is outside of our remit to amend external parish boundaries. We have considered Councillor Tinnion’s proposal for an area within the current Lamesley ward to comprise part of his proposed Angel ward. However, in light of the consultation conducted by the Council, and as the proposal would necessitate the creation of a parish ward, we are reluctant to adopt this proposal. We would, however, particularly welcome local views and comments on the proposals put forward by David Clelland MP and Councillor Tinnion during Stage Three.

79 We have considered the amendments proposed by both David Clelland MP and Councillor Tinnion to the boundary between their proposed Lamesley and Birtley wards, but we consider that the existing arrangement provides for an identifiable boundary and clear delineation between urban areas. We consider that Binsby Gardens and Millbeck Gardens would identify with the communities comprising the existing Chowdene and High Fell wards, and are therefore of the view that Councillor Tinnion’s proposal for this area to comprise part of his proposed Lamesley ward would not provide a good reflection of community identities. We are minded to agree with the Council that retaining the current Birtley ward and transferring an area from the current High Fell ward to comprise part of an amended Lamesley ward would provide a good level of electoral equality while reflecting community identities.

80 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Birtley and Lamesley wards would have 6% fewer and 1% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively both now and by 2006.

Bede, Deckham, Felling and Saltwell wards

81 These four wards comprise part of the north-eastern area of the borough. The current Bede, Deckham, Felling and Saltwell wards have 18% fewer, 10% fewer, 17% fewer and 4% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (12% fewer, 13% fewer, 18% fewer and 7% fewer by 2006).

82 The Council proposed to broadly retain these four wards. As discussed above, it proposed to divide the existing Bensham ward, proposing that the area east of Rectory Road, Bewick Road, Coatsworth Road, Poplar Crescent and Bensham Road combine with the areas broadly west of Old Ford Road, Allhusen Terrace and Duncan Street, and north of Cobden Street, Cobden Terrace and Cross Street within the existing Bede ward, to comprise a new Bridges ward. It argued that its proposed Bridges ward 'brings together into a single ward the whole of the centre of Gateshead'. As the Council considered that 'the urban area of Felling is a distinct community', it proposed to retain the current Felling ward's eastern boundary, but proposed to amend the existing southern boundary and western boundary in order that an area west of Nursery Lane and north of Hopper Road within the existing Leam ward, and the areas broadly east of Allhusen Terrace, Duncan Street and Medway Crescent within the current Bede ward, are transferred to comprise part of its modified Felling ward to achieve a better level of electoral equality. The Council proposed a modified Deckham ward, proposing that the areas broadly west of Medway Crescent and south of Cobden Street, Cobden Terrace and Cross Street are transferred from existing Bede ward to comprise part of the northern area of its proposed Deckham ward. It proposed a modified Saltwell ward to comprise the existing ward and the area east of Rectory Road and south of Bewick Road within the current Bensham ward, arguing that this would represent a 'homogeneous ward' with an 'adjustment to the northern boundary to achieve a higher degree of [electoral] equality'.

83 David Clelland MP proposed to broadly retain these four wards. He proposed to amend the existing Bede ward's western boundary so that an area broadly east of Alexandra Road, Coatsworth Road and Village Heights within the current Bensham ward is transferred to comprise part of his modified Bede ward. He proposed to amend the existing Felling ward's eastern boundary in order that an area west of Gosforth Terrace, Wynn Gardens and Portland Street and an area west of High Heworth Lane are transferred from the current Pelaw & Heworth ward to comprise part of the eastern area of a modified Felling ward. He proposed to amend the existing Deckham ward's south-western boundary in order that an area broadly north of Church Road, east of Grove Road and Salkeld Road, and south of Evisstones Road be transferred from the existing Low Fell ward to comprise part of a modified Deckham ward. He proposed to amend the existing Saltwell ward's northern boundary so that an area west of High West Street be transferred from the current Bede ward to comprise part of a modified Saltwell ward.

84 Councillor Tinnion proposed an alternative arrangement for this area. He proposed to divide the existing Saltwell ward to comprise parts of four wards. As described above, he proposed that a western area comprise part of his proposed Teams ward, while a northern part comprise his proposed Bensham ward. He proposed that an eastern area of the existing Saltwell ward, broadly north of the Saltwell Park Mansion and Heathfield House, east of West Park Road and Rectory Road and south of Westfield Road and Westfield Terrace combine with an area comprising the existing Deckham ward, broadly south of Cramer Street and north of Pottersway and Carr Hill Road, to form a new Shipley ward. He proposed a new Baltic & Sage ward to comprise the existing Bede ward, an area west of Old Ford Road within the current Felling ward and a northern area of the existing Bensham ward, broadly east of Cuthbert Street and north of Bensham Road. He proposed to broadly retain the existing Felling ward, proposing to amend the eastern boundary in order to transfer the areas broadly west of Heworth Grange Comprehensive School and St Cuthberts Drive from the existing Pelaw & Heworth ward, and the Millbrook area from the existing Leam ward to comprise part of his modified Felling ward.

85 We have carefully considered all the submissions we have received for this area. We propose to broadly adopt the proposals submitted by the Council for these four wards as we consider that they would provide for identifiable boundaries while securing a good level of electoral equality and reflect community identities. We consider that Mr Clelland's proposal to transfer parts of the existing Pelaw & Heworth ward to comprise part of his proposed Felling ward would not provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than the Council's proposal to retain the current boundary. We note that both the Council and David Clelland MP propose to broadly retain the current Deckham and Saltwell wards, but due to the level of consultation conducted by the Council we propose to adopt its proposed Saltwell ward and we consider that the Council's proposed Deckham ward would provide a better reflection of community identities. Owing to our proposals for the existing Teams and Bensham ward we are unable to incorporate Councillor Tinnion's proposals to divide the existing Saltwell ward to comprise four new wards, nor are we convinced that his proposed Deckham, Baltic & Sage and Felling wards would provide a better reflection of the statutory criteria than the Council's proposals. We are minded to agree with the Council that its proposed Bridges ward would represent the centre of Gateshead and that its proposed Felling ward would comprise a distinct urban area.

86 Having visited the area, we were concerned that a number of the proposed boundaries would not be easily identifiable or would divide cul-de-sacs from their access routes. We were concerned that the Council's proposed boundary between the proposed Bridges and Felling ward would not be easily identifiable, and therefore propose that the boundary continue along Allhusen Terrace to join with Sunderland Road. We were concerned that the proposal to utilise the centre of Hodkin Gardens for the proposed Deckham's eastern boundary would divide the estate, and therefore we propose that the boundary run behind the houses on the western side. We are concerned that the communities surrounding Ventnor Gardens may identify with the communities that comprise the proposed Low Fell ward rather than the communities which comprise the proposed Saltwell ward. However, we note that to transfer the whole of this area would have a detrimental effect on electoral equality, and therefore propose that the boundary follow the rear of the properties on the south side of Ventnor Crescent in order that the area broadly south of Ventnor Crescent and east of the railway line comprise part of our proposed Low Fell ward. We were concerned that the Council's proposal for the proposed Felling ward's southern boundary to utilise Hopper Road would divide Robert Owen Gardens from its access route, and therefore propose that the boundary follow the rear of these properties in order that this cul-de-sac comprises part of our proposed Leam South ward.

87 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Bridges, Deckham, Felling and Saltwell wards would have 17% fewer, 2% more, 2% more and 2% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1% fewer, equal to, 2% fewer and 1% fewer by 2006).

Chowdene, High Fell and Low Fell wards

88 These three wards comprise part of the north-eastern area of the borough. The existing Chowdene, High Fell and Low Fell wards have 1% fewer, 11% fewer and 13% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3% fewer, 15% fewer and 11% more by 2006).

89 In this area, the Council put forward a warding arrangement broadly based on the existing wards. It proposed to amend the boundary between the existing High Fell and Low Fell wards to transfer an area broadly south of Edgemont Drive and Hill Croft, east of Church Road and Wynbury Road and north of Ennerdale Gardens from the current Low Fell ward to comprise part of its proposed High Fell ward. The Council proposed further amendments to the existing High Fell ward in order that the Springwell Estate be transferred from the current Leam ward, that the area broadly south of Easedale Gardens and east of Seaham Gardens be transferred to comprise part of its proposed Lamesley ward, and that the residential area surrounding

Ulverston Gardens and Barrowdale Gardens be transferred to comprise part of its proposed Chowdene ward. This ward would also contain the rest of the existing Chowdene ward.

90 David Clelland MP proposed a revised warding arrangement for this area. He proposed to broadly retain the existing Low Fell ward, proposing to amend the boundary so that an area north of Church Road, east of Grove Road and Salkeld Road, and south of Evistones Road be transferred to his proposed Deckham ward. He proposed a modified High Fell ward, proposing that the areas of Binsby Gardens and Millbeck Gardens and an area south of Easedale Gardens and west of Stanley Gardens combine with the existing Chowdene ward to comprise a modified Chowdene ward. He proposed that the Eighton Banks parish ward of Lamesley parish be transferred from the existing Lamesley ward to comprise the southern area of his proposed High Fell ward.

91 Councillor Tinnion also proposed revised warding arrangements for this area. He proposed a revised Low Fell ward in order that an area broadly south of Saltwell Park Mansion and Heathfield House combine with the majority of the existing Low Fell ward to comprise a modified Low Fell ward. He proposed to amend the boundary between the existing Low Fell and High Fell wards in order that an area south of Evistones Road, east of Salkeld Road, Grove Road, Larne Crescent and Buttermere Gardens within the current Low Fell ward, comprise part of his proposed High Fell ward. He proposed a revised High Fell ward, proposing to retain the existing eastern boundary, but proposed that an area broadly west of Carr Hill Road and south of Pottersway be transferred from the existing Deckham ward to comprise part of the northern area of his proposed High Fell ward. He further proposed to amend the existing High Fell ward's southern boundary so that an area broadly west of High Street and south of Moss Side and Barrowdale Gardens be transferred to his proposed Lamesley ward. He proposed to broadly retain the existing Chowdene ward and rename it Angel ward, but proposed to revise the existing southern boundary to follow the A1, Long Bank and the southern and eastern boundaries of Ravensworth Golf Course to join the existing boundary where it follows Waverley Road. Councillor Tinnion argued that this proposal would provide a solution to the 'effect of long-outdated parish boundaries which have led areas around the southern fringe of Chowdene to be included in Lamesley ward when they would otherwise be included in Chowdene ward'.

92 We have carefully considered the submissions we have received for this area. We propose to broadly adopt the proposals submitted by the Council as we judge that its proposed Chowdene, High Fell and Low Fell wards would provide the best balance between the statutory criteria. We consider that the Council's proposal for the Springwell Estate to comprise part of its proposed High Fell ward would provide a good reflection of community identities, as we are minded to agree that this area would identify with the other communities comprising the proposed High Fell ward. As discussed above, we have considered Councillor Tinnion's proposal for part of the existing Lamesley ward to comprise part of his proposed Angel ward, but in light of the consultation conducted by the Council and as the proposal would necessitate the creation of a parish ward we are reluctant to adopt this proposal and we would hope to receive local views and comments regarding this proposal. We have considered Mr Clelland's proposal for Eighton Banks parish ward to comprise part of his proposed High Fell ward, but as this would place Lamesley parish in two borough wards, and in light of the consultation conducted by the Council, we judge that this proposal would not secure a good level of convenient and effective local government. We have considered Mr Clelland's alternative arrangement for a modified Low Fell ward, but in light of the consultation conducted by the Council, we judge that the Council's proposed Low Fell ward is the most appropriate solution to the under-representation with the existing ward. We consider that Binsby Gardens and Millbeck Gardens may identify with the surrounding communities, rather than the communities that comprise the existing Lamesley ward, and therefore we consider that Councillor Tinnion's proposal for this area to comprise part of his proposed Lamesley ward would not provide a good reflection of community identities.

93 We were concerned that the Council's proposal for the area broadly south of Easedale Gardens and east of Seaham Gardens to comprise part of its proposed Lamesley ward would not provide the best reflection of community identity, but after officers from the Committee visited the area we are minded to agree that this proposal would contain the whole of the Eighton Banks and Long Banks areas in a single ward. We were concerned that Binsby Gardens and Millbeck Gardens and the properties on the eastern side of Easedale Gardens, which the Council proposed to comprise part of the proposed High Fell ward, would identify with the communities that comprise the proposed Chowdene ward, we therefore propose to transfer this area to comprise part of the eastern area of our proposed Chowdene ward to better reflect community identities in this area.

94 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Chowdene, High Fell and Low Fell wards would have 7% more, 2% more and 4% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5% more, 2% fewer and 2% more by 2006).

Leam, Pelaw & Heworth and Wrekendyke wards

95 These three wards comprise the eastern area of the borough. The current Leam, Pelaw & Heworth and Wrekendyke wards have 10% more, 6% fewer and 15% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (6% more, 7% fewer and 19% more by 2006).

96 The Council proposed a warding arrangement for this area broadly based on the existing warding pattern. It proposed to amend the existing Wrekendyke and Leam wards to form its proposed Leam South and Wardley Leam wards. Its proposed Leam South ward would comprise the existing Leam ward less the Springwell Estate and the area north of Hopper Road. The Council proposed to amend the boundary between the existing Leam and Wrekendyke wards to follow Woodwynd path, thereby transferring the Rickgarth Estate from the existing Wrekendyke ward to comprise part of the proposed Leam South ward. With this amendment, the Council proposed that the existing Wrekendyke ward, less the Broadlands Estate, comprise its proposed Wardley Leam ward. The Council proposed that the Broadlands Estate combine with the existing Pelaw & Heworth ward to comprise a revised Pelaw & Heworth ward. The Council argued that the name Leam South ward 'was preferred in order to distinguish it from the Leam Lane area that forms part' of the proposed Wardley Leam ward, while the Wardley Leam ward name 'appears the preferred name as a ward name to Wrekendyke which risks being confused with the area of Wrekenton'.

97 David Clelland MP proposed revised arrangements for the existing Wrekendyke and Pelaw & Heworth wards, but proposed to retain the existing Leam ward. He proposed to amend the boundary between the existing Wrekendyke and Pelaw & Heworth wards for the boundary to follow Cripps Avenue and Thorne Avenue, then run along the rear of the properties on the north side of Morris Gardens to join and follow Penschaw view. It would then follow Palmer Gardens to join and briefly follow White Mere Gardens and then depart to follow the northern boundary of Allotment Gardens and the eastern edge of West Crescent to join and follow the dismantled railway line to the borough external boundary. He proposed to amend the existing Pelaw & Heworth ward's western boundary with the current Felling ward as described above.

98 Councillor Tinnion proposed to broadly retain the existing Leam ward less the area he proposed to comprise part of his proposed Felling ward as described above and that it be renamed Windy Nook ward. He proposed revised arrangements for the existing Wrekendyke and Pelaw & Heworth wards. He proposed to amend the boundary between the existing Wrekendyke and Pelaw & Heworth wards to follow the A184. He proposed for the boundary to depart from the A184 to run along the rear of the properties on the western side of Laburnham Avenue and then to follow the western boundary of the running track, east of St Cuthbert's Drive, to join the existing boundary of Colegate West to form the eastern boundary of his proposed Wrekendyke ward. He proposed that the boundary follow the A184 to form the southern boundary of his proposed Pelaw ward.

99 Councillor Tinnion opposed the Council's 'proposed division of the Nursery Lane Estate', arguing that it is 'undeniably Windy Nook' and that the 'boundary between Windy Nook and Felling is remarkably clear... running along Brettanby Road, Rectory Road and Rectory Road East'.

100 We have carefully considered all the submissions we have received for this area. We propose to broadly adopt the Council's proposed Leam South, Wardley Leam and Pelaw & Heworth wards. We judge that the Council's proposals for the Springwell Estate to comprise part of its proposed High Fell ward, for the Rickgarth Estate to comprise part of its proposed Leam South ward and for the Broadlands Estate to comprise part of its proposed Pelaw & Heworth ward would provide a good reflection of community identities. We have considered Councillor Tinnion's argument that the Council's proposal would divide the Nursery Lane Estate, but, in light of the consultation conducted by the Council, we judge that we have not received sufficient evidence to be persuaded that the Council's proposal would not provide a good reflection of community identity in the area. We have considered Mr Clelland's alternative proposals, but we consider that they would not provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. In particular we were concerned that his proposal to amend the existing Pelaw & Heworth ward's eastern and western boundary would not provide a better reflection of community identity. We have considered the alternative arrangements submitted by Councillor Tinnion, but have not been persuaded that his proposals should be adopted as we judge that, in light of the consultation conducted by the Council, he has not provided sufficient evidence to contend that his proposed Wrekendyke and Pelaw wards would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than the Council's proposals. We also judge that retaining the Springfield Estate in his proposed Windy Nook ward would not provide a better reflection of community identity than the Council's proposal for the estate to comprise part of its proposed High Fell ward.

101 Having visited the area, we were concerned that the existing Leam ward's northern boundary following Rectory Road divides cul-de-sacs, and therefore propose for the boundary to follow the rear of the properties on the south side of Rectory Road, in order that the residential roads of Fleming Gardens, Hall Gardens, Squires Gardens and Sunningdale Close are transferred to our proposed Felling ward. We note Councillor Tinnion's argument that the use of Rectory Road provides a clear demarcation between two urban areas, but we consider that our amendment would secure an improved level of effective and convenient local government and still provide for an easily identifiable boundary.

102 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Leam South, Pelaw & Heworth and Wardley Leam wards would have 3% more, equal to and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to, 1% fewer and 2% fewer by 2006).

Electoral cycle

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

Conclusions

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

- a council of 66 members should be retained;
- there should be 22 wards;
- the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified and one ward should retain its existing boundaries.

105 Our draft recommendations would involve modifying all but one of the existing wards in the borough of Gateshead. As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following areas:

- we propose new Dunston & Teams, Dunston Hill & Whickham and Lobley Hill & Bensham wards;
- we propose a modified Whickham North ward;
- we propose five boundary amendments affecting the proposed Blaydon, Chowdene, Deckham, High Fell, Leam South, Pelaw & Heworth, Saltwell, Wardley Leam and Winlaton wards.

106 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will effect 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	66	66	66	66
Number of wards	22	22	22	22
Average number of electors per councillor	2,296	2,296	2,280	2,280
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	9	1	12	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	2	0	1	0

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

Draft recommendation
Gateshead Council should comprise 66 councillors serving 22 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A and the large maps.

Parish council electoral arrangements

108 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough.

109 Our proposed borough warding arrangements would retain Lamesley parish and the existing Birtley North parish ward of Birtley parish wholly in the proposed Lamesley ward. Therefore we are not proposing any consequential changes to the parish councils' electoral arrangements. We propose minor amendments to the borough ward boundary between the

proposed Lamesley and Birtley wards in order that the boundary does not continue to be defaced, and is therefore easily identifiable. This will not affect any electors. As a consequence we propose to amend the parish ward boundary between the existing Birtley North and Birtley Central parish wards to reflect the borough ward boundary. We do not propose any further amendments to Birtley Parish Council's electoral arrangements.

Map 2: Draft recommendations for Gateshead

5 What happens next?

110 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Gateshead contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 22 April 2003. 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.

111 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

112 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 Gateshead: detailed mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Gateshead 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 Gateshead.

Map A1: Draft recommendations for Gateshead: 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.