

Contents

Summary	1
1 Introduction	3
2 Analysis and final recommendations	5
Submissions received	5
Electorate figures	6
Council size	6
Electoral fairness	8
Draft recommendations	8
General analysis	9
Electoral arrangements	9
North east Central Bedfordshire	10
Mid Central Bedfordshire	13
South Central Bedfordshire	18
Conclusions	22
Parish electoral arrangements	23
3 What happens next?	27
4 Mapping	29
Appendices	
A Glossary and abbreviations	31
B Code of practice on written consultation	35
C Table C1: Final recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council	37
D Additional legislation we have considered	41

Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body which conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. The broad purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements – the number of councillors and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions – for a specific local authority. We are conducting an electoral review of Central Bedfordshire to ensure that the new unitary authority has appropriate electoral arrangements that reflect its functions and political management structure.

The review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same. The Boundary Committee for England commenced the review in 2009. However, on 1 April 2010, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee and is now conducting the review. It therefore falls to us to complete the work of the Boundary Committee.

This review was conducted as follows:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
Council size	4 August 2009	Submission of proposals to the Boundary Committee on council size for the authority and its analysis and deliberation
One	27 October 2009	Submission of proposals to the Boundary Committee
Two	12 January 2010	Boundary Committee's analysis and deliberation
Three	17 May 2010	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	13 July 2010	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Draft recommendations

The Boundary Committee proposed a council size of 59 comprising a pattern of 12 single-member wards, 10 two-member wards and nine three-member wards. The proposals were broadly based on Central Bedfordshire Council's Stage One proposals with some modification. The draft recommendations would provide good levels of electoral equality.

Submissions received

During Stage Three, we received 70 representations. In particular, we received comments in relation to the proposed warding patterns in Heath & Reach and the towns of Sandy, Leighton-Linslade and Dunstable. Elsewhere in the district, the draft recommendations were broadly well-received. All submissions can be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Analysis and final recommendations

Electorate figures

Central Bedfordshire Council submitted electorate forecasts for December 2013, a period five years on from the December 2008 electoral roll. These forecasts projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% over this period. The Boundary Committee initially had some concerns that this level of growth appeared somewhat high. However, it noted that during the five-year period 2003–08, the electorate of the area covered by Central Bedfordshire increased by approximately 5%, broadly in line with the projected increase of approximately 7% by 2013.

Following recent changes in legislation, we also need to have regard to a five-year forecast from the date of the publication of our final recommendations. We therefore requested that the Council provide a forecast for 2015. Having considered these projected electoral forecasts, we are content that they provide the best estimate that can be made at this time.

Council size

We proposed a council size of 59 as part of our draft recommendations. During Stage Three, four respondents commented on the proposed council size, two respondents supported the proposed council size in principle while the Council reiterated its preference for a council size of 60. Houghton Regis Town Council suggested that a council size of 59 members would be too small. In the absence of further substantive evidence to support an alternative number, we have confirmed the draft recommendations for a council size of 59 members as final.

General analysis

Having considered the submissions received during Stage Three, we confirm the draft recommendations as final with the exception of two ward name changes and changes to parish electoral arrangements in the parishes of Biggleswade, Dunstable and Leighton-Linslade.

We consider our proposals will ensure good electoral equality while providing an accurate reflection of community identities and interests where we have received such evidence during stages One and Three.

What happens next?

We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council. A draft Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements which will come into force at the next elections for Central Bedfordshire Council, in 2011.

We are grateful to all those organisations and individuals who have contributed to the review through expressing their views and advice. The full report is available to download at www.lgbce.org.uk.

1 Introduction

1 The Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee for England to conduct a review of the electoral arrangements for the new Central Bedfordshire unitary authority which commenced on 4 August 2009. The Boundary Committee wrote to Central Bedfordshire Council as well as other interested parties, inviting the submission of proposals on the size for the new council. Following the Committee's decision on the appropriate council size, it invited the submission of proposals on warding arrangements for the new council.

2 On 1 April 2010, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee. It therefore falls to us to complete the work of the Boundary Committee.

3 The submissions received during Stage One of this review informed our *Draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council*, which were published on 17 May 2010.

What is an electoral review?

4 The main aim of an electoral review is to try to ensure 'electoral equality', which means that all councillors in a single authority represent approximately the same number of electors. Our objective is to make recommendations that will improve electoral equality, while also trying to reflect communities in the area and provide for effective and convenient local government.

5 Our three main considerations – equalising the number of electors each councillor represents; reflecting community identities and interests; and providing for effective and convenient local government – are set out in legislation¹ and our task is to strike the best balance between them when making our recommendations.

6 Our powers, as well as the guidance we have provided for electoral reviews and further information on the review process, can be found on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Why are we conducting a review in Central Bedfordshire?

7 In December 2007, the Government approved a bid from Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire district councils for a unitary council to take over the responsibility for all local government services in the area which were formerly provided by Bedfordshire County Council and the two district councils. A Statutory Instrument was subsequently approved by Parliament, establishing a new Central Bedfordshire unitary authority from 1 April 2009. The Electoral Commission was obliged, by law, to consider whether an electoral review was needed following such a change in local government. Its view was that an electoral review of Central Bedfordshire was appropriate at the earliest opportunity.

¹ Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

How will the recommendations affect you?

8 The recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the council. They will also decide which ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward and, in some instances, which parish or town council wards you vote in. Your ward name may change, as may the names of parish or town council wards in the area. If you live in a parish, the name or boundaries of that parish will not change.

What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

9 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Members of the Commission are:

Max Caller CBE (Chair)
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL (Deputy Chair)
Jane Earl
Joan Jones CBE
Professor Colin Mellors

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill
Director of Reviews: Archie Gall

2 Analysis and final recommendations

10 We have now finalised our recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire.

11 As described earlier, our prime aim when recommending new electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire is to achieve a level of electoral fairness – that is, each elector’s vote being worth the same as another’s in the election of councillors. In doing so we must have regard to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009², with the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government
- provide for equality of representation
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities in particular
 - the desirability of arriving at boundaries that are easily identifiable
 - the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties

12 Legislation also states that our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on the existing number of electors in an area, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of electors likely to take place over the next five years following the end of a review. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for the wards we put forward at the end of the review.

13 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral fairness is unlikely to be attainable and there must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach is to keep variances in the number of electors each councillor represents to a minimum. We therefore recommend strongly that, in formulating proposals for us to consider, local authorities and other interested parties should also try to keep variances to a minimum, making adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. As mentioned above, we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral fairness over a five-year period.

14 Our recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of Central Bedfordshire or the external boundaries or names of parish or town councils, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that our recommendations will have an adverse effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary constituency boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Submissions received

15 Prior to and during the initial stages of the review, members and officers of the Boundary Committee visited Central Bedfordshire and met with officers, members and parish and town councils. The Committee received 21 submissions during its initial consultation on council size for the new authority. Forty-four representations were received during Stage One and 70 submissions at Stage Three. All submissions may be inspected at both our offices and those of Central Bedfordshire Council. All representations received can also be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

² Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

16 We take the evidence received during consultation very seriously and the submissions received were carefully considered before we formulated our final recommendations. Officers from the Commission have also been assisted by officers at Central Bedfordshire Council who have provided relevant information throughout the review. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance.

Electorate figures

17 As part of this review, Central Bedfordshire Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2013, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% over the five-year period from 2008–13.

18 We had some concerns about whether a 7% growth rate would be realised. However, it was noted that during the five-year period 2003–08, the electorate of the area covered by Central Bedfordshire increased by approximately 5%. We were satisfied that the methodology provided by the Council to support the electorate figures took into account all proposed developments and points of growth in the district up until 2013.

19 During Stage One, Central Bedfordshire Labour Party asserted that the Council's projected increase in the electorate was conservative. However, it did not provide evidence to support a larger increase in the five-year electorate forecast than that provided by the Council.

20 Following recent changes in legislation, we are required to have regard to a five-year forecast from the date of the publication of our final recommendations. We therefore requested that the Council provide a further electorate forecast for 2015. Having considered these projected electoral forecasts, we are satisfied that they provide the best estimate of electorate growth over the next five years. We have therefore used them as the basis of our final recommendations.

Council size

21 The Bedfordshire (Structural Changes) Order ('the Order') provided electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council that resulted in a 'doubling-up' of members in the divisions of the former County Council. The Council is therefore currently operating with a council size of 66 members.

22 Central Bedfordshire is a new council, with new functions and responsibilities. It is therefore necessary to consider the number of members required for the authority to provide effective and convenient local government. Furthermore, it is important to consider this in isolation from the former number of county and district councillors for Central Bedfordshire, and to consider how the new authority is managed and how it intends to engage with and empower its local communities.

23 At the beginning of the electoral review, the Boundary Committee consulted specifically on council size and received 20 submissions. These submissions may be inspected at both our offices and those of the Central Bedfordshire Council. All representations received can also be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

24 The Boundary Committee received proposals for five different council sizes ranging from 48 to 84. These included proposals for a council size of 66 (as per the electoral arrangements provided by the Order) from several respondents. The Council took an evidence-based approach in its consideration of council size and outlined an allocation of members to overall responsibilities and committee membership. The Council's was the only representation that provided evidence for council size that reflected the proposed political management structure of the authority.

25 The Boundary Committee considered the Council's proposal to have merit. However, it noted that it had discounted members of the Executive and Development Management Committee from assuming membership of other committees given the workload of these committees.

26 The Boundary Committee did not consider there was sufficient evidence to support the Council's assertion that the workload of the Development Management Committee would preclude its members from assuming more than one additional committee post. The Boundary Committee was also of the view that the impact of the Planning Act 2008 would reduce the workload of the Development Management Committee with regard to planning applications. Consequently, the Boundary Committee considered a council size of fewer than 66 members was appropriate.

27 The Boundary Committee requested further information from the Council to support its proposed council size of 66 and met with members and officers of the Council to outline their concerns. In light of those discussions, the Council submitted a revised proposal for a council size of 60 members. The Council's revised proposal did not discount members of the Development Management Committee from assuming more than one additional committee post per member.

28 Based on the Council's approach in calculating a proposed council size, its revised submission would result in a council size of 59 members. However, the Council proposed a council size of 60 'to meet the needs of... towns, parishes and local communities'. Nonetheless, the Boundary Committee did not consider the Council had provided sufficient evidence to support an additional member. The Committee therefore recommended a council size of 59 as the basis of the review.

29 During Stage Three, four respondents commented on the proposed council size of 59. The Council reiterated its preference for a council size of 60, a local resident expressed support for the proposed council size while another local resident indicated his support for a general reduction from the existing council size of 66. Houghton Regis Town Council expressed a view that a council size of 59 would be too small to represent communities effectively in the district. However, the Town Council did not propose an alternative council size.

30 Based on the evidence received during the initial stage on council size, and in the absence of further substantive evidence received during stages One and Three, we have decided to confirm a council size of 59 elected members for Central Bedfordshire as part of our final recommendations. We are of the view that a council size of 59 members would provide for effective and convenient local government in the context of the Council's internal political management structure and will facilitate the new role of councillors.

Electoral fairness

31 As discussed in the introduction to this report, the prime aim of an electoral review is to achieve electoral fairness within a local authority.

32 Electoral fairness, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when in the respect of the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. It is expected that the Commission's recommendations should provide for electoral fairness whilst ensuring that we reflect communities in the area, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

33 In seeking to achieve electoral fairness, we work out the average number of electors per councillor. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the authority (192,915 in December 2008 and 210,005 by December 2015) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 59 under our final recommendations. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our final recommendations is 3,270 in 2008 and 3,559 by 2015.

34 Under the final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in two of the 31 wards will vary by more than 10% from the average across the district by 2015. Overall, we are satisfied that we have achieved good levels of electoral fairness under our final recommendations for Central Bedfordshire.

Draft recommendations

35 During Stage One, 44 submissions were received including district-wide schemes from Central Bedfordshire Council ('the Council'), Central Bedfordshire Labour Party ('the Labour Party') and the Liberal Democrat group. Leighton-Linslade Liberal Democrats, North Bedfordshire Liberal Democrats and a local resident endorsed the Liberal Democrat group's proposals. The district-wide schemes were all based on a council size of 59, as proposed by the Boundary Committee. The three schemes all proposed a mixed pattern of single- and multi-member wards and would provide for good levels of electoral equality.

36 While the three schemes differed, we noted some similarities in the composition of the warding patterns proposed. However, in some instances, the Liberal Democrat group's and the Labour Party's schemes proposed what appeared to be somewhat arbitrary splits of parishes. In contrast, with the exception of the main towns of Biggleswade, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade (where the division of parishes between wards is unavoidable), the Council's scheme was based on whole parishes as the building blocks of its proposed warding pattern.

37 Overall, we considered that the Council's scheme would provide clear ward boundaries and, where not constrained by the geography of the area, would provide a good reflection of communities in the district. We therefore broadly based our draft recommendations on the Council's scheme. However, we proposed a number of modifications based on comments received during Stage One to provide clearer boundaries and reflect access routes.

38 The draft recommendations would result in 12 single-member wards, 10 two-member wards and nine three-member wards.

General analysis

39 As indicated above, our draft recommendations were based broadly on the proposals of the Council with a number of modifications to reflect comments received during Stage One and to provide clearer ward boundaries.

40 During Stage Three, the Council supported the draft recommendations with the exception of the proposals for Sandy town and the proposed ward names in Houghton Regis town. The Labour Party opposed the draft recommendations in the areas it provided comments for and broadly reiterated its Stage One proposals.

41 The draft recommendations were broadly well-received with several respondents endorsing the warding pattern for their respective area. However, we received some opposition to the draft recommendations, most notably those for the towns of Sandy, Leighton-Linslade and Dunstable. However, in the absence of sufficient evidence to support alternative warding patterns where these have been put forward during Stage Three, we have decided not to move away from the draft recommendations.

42 Consequently, we confirm the draft recommendations as final, although we propose two ward name changes. As discussed on pages 23–26, we have also made a number of recommendations in respect of parish electoral arrangements.

43 Our final recommendations are for a pattern of 12 single-member wards, 10 two-member wards and nine three-member wards. We consider our proposals to provide good electoral equality while providing an accurate reflection of community identities and interests where we have received such evidence during stages One and Three.

44 A summary of our proposed electoral arrangements is set out in Table C1 (on pages 37–39) and the large maps accompanying this report.

Electoral arrangements

45 This section of the report details the submissions we received, our consideration of them, and our final recommendations for each area of Central Bedfordshire. The following areas are considered in turn:

- North east Central Bedfordshire (pages 10–13)
- Mid Central Bedfordshire (pages 13–17)
- South Central Bedfordshire (pages 18–22)

46 Details of the final recommendations are set out in Table C1 on pages 37–39, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

North east Central Bedfordshire

47 North east Central Bedfordshire broadly comprises the northern area of the former Mid Bedfordshire District Council. This area is generally rural in character but contains the towns of Biggleswade and Sandy.

48 During Stage One, in addition to district-wide proposals discussed in paragraph 35, seven specific comments in relation to this area were received. These submissions can be viewed on our website.

49 We largely based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals. The Council's proposed wards in this area would provide good electoral equality with the exception of its proposed Potton ward which would have 12% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2015. The draft recommendations departed from the Council's proposals in Sandy town where we adopted an alternative warding pattern based on evidence received during Stage One. We also proposed a minor modification in Biggleswade town to provide clearer ward boundaries that would reflect access routes.

Sandy town and its hinterland

50 In our draft recommendations for Sandy town, we proposed a three-member ward comprising the parishes of Sandy and Blunham. This was a modification to the Council's proposals in this area.

51 The Council's proposed Sandy ward should comprise the majority of Sandy parish. However, it would exclude the Fallowfield and Beeston areas of Sandy in the west of the parish. Fallowfield and Beeston would instead be warded with the adjacent rural parishes to the west. This warding pattern would provide for good electoral equality. However, a number of respondents opposed the split of Sandy parish, specifically the warding of the urban areas of Fallowfield and Beeston with the rural parishes to their west, as proposed by the Council.

52 In light of the representations and evidence received, we examined alternative warding patterns that would avoid the division of Sandy parish between wards. Consequently, we adopted Sandy Town Council's proposal for a three-member ward comprising the parishes of Sandy and Blunham. This ward would have good electoral equality with 9% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2015 and reflect good communication links between the constituent parishes.

53 During Stage Three, in addition to comments from the Council, we received seven submissions in relation to Sandy town and its hinterland. With the exception of Sandy Town Council, respondents opposed our proposed Sandy ward.

54 The Council and Blunham Parish Council argued that there was no commonality between the parishes of Blunham and Sandy and provided some evidence to support this view. Other respondents also opposed the rural/urban mix of the proposed three-member Sandy ward. Respondents asserted that Blunham parish shared greater commonality with adjoining rural parishes to its south and Great Barford, the latter being in the adjacent Bedford Borough and therefore, outside the remit of the review.

55 The Council reiterated its Stage One proposal for a largely rural ward comprising the

parishes of Blunham, Moggerhanger, Northill, Old Warden and Southill, plus the Fallowfield and Beeston areas of Sandy parish. The Council primarily asserted community links between Blunham parish and the adjacent Moggerhanger parish. The Council stated that 'the plethora of events run in the nearby Moggerhanger Park is fully supported by the residents of Blunham'. The Council added that 'the local football team is from the combined villages of Blunham and Moggerhanger'. These sentiments were echoed by several local residents.

56 While Blunham Parish Council asserted its rural character and stated it has 'no affinity with the town of Sandy', it did not provide evidence of community identities to illustrate links with adjoining rural parishes. However, the Parish Council demonstrated its links with Great Barford stating residents of the parish 'tend to use the doctors and other amenities [of Great Barford]', which as noted above, is in Bedford Borough Council's area.

57 Sandy Town Council supported the draft recommendations. The Town Council provided good evidence of the facilities and amenities within Sandy town used by residents of Fallowfield and Beeston. The Town Council stated residents of Fallowfield and Beeston 'use Sandy [town] for healthcare, schooling, library and church facilities, recreational activities such as clubs, societies and public houses. The Town Council further asserted that residents of Blunham parish 'use Sandy for doctors and dentists, the library and transport via the railway station'.

58 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, and have toured the Sandy town area and its hinterland and observed the communication links reflected in the draft recommendations and the Council's alternative proposal. We also gave specific consideration to the Council's proposed warding pattern in this area and assessed the clarity of its proposed split of Sandy town.

59 We noted during a visit to the area that the Council's proposed boundary separating the Fallowfield estate from Sandy town was reasonably clear, following a footpath between the rear of the Fallowfield estate and Sandy Upper School & Community College before following the A1 to the south and the railway to its north. In separating the Beeston area of Sandy town, the Council's proposed boundary would follow the River Ivel, north of New Road, before rejoining the railway, again providing a clear boundary.

60 However, in considering the communication links between the respective areas, we noted that Blunham parish has clear links to Sandy town via Tempsford Road and the A1, albeit via the adjacent Tempsford parish. Sandy town can also be accessed from Blunham via Moggerhanger parish to its south and latterly Bedford Road. While both routes include adjacent parishes, they provide clear communication links via road. Similarly, we noted Blunham parish shares good communication links with Moggerhanger parish via Station Road and Blunham Road.

61 We have given considerable thought to this area and made a detailed inspection visit. Although it was a balanced decision, given the evidence received during consultation, we remain of the view that dividing Sandy parish between district wards would not provide a good reflection of community identities and interests. However, we also acknowledged the support for warding Blunham with adjoining rural parishes. We therefore considered alternative electoral arrangements which would enable the warding of Blunham with parishes to its south while avoiding a split of Sandy town. However, given the electorate of

Sandy parish, this would have a consequential effect on our draft recommendations for the wider warding pattern in this area, for which there was a measure of support. This constrained our scope for considering an alternative warding pattern. In light of this, we therefore consider the draft recommendations to provide the most appropriate warding pattern for Sandy town.

62 We consider the draft recommendations provide the best balance between the statutory criteria. We acknowledge the arguments made by respondents to ward Blunham parish with other rural parishes. Furthermore, following the tour of the area we consider that the Council's proposals would use reasonably clear ward boundaries, albeit requiring a split of Sandy parish between wards. However, only limited evidence was provided to support this change during Stage Three. This was in contrast to the strong evidence in support of the draft recommendations provided by Sandy Town Council. On balance therefore, we confirm the draft recommendations for Sandy town as final.

Biggleswade town and its hinterland

63 In our draft recommendations for Biggleswade town and its hinterland, we adopted the Council's proposals with a minor modification to better reflect access routes to properties on St Andrews Close. The proposals would have good electoral equality and clear ward boundaries.

64 During Stage Three, the Labour Party and its Biggleswade branch reiterated the Labour Party's Stage One proposals for a pattern of single-member wards for Biggleswade parish. However, neither provided evidence of community identity to support the proposals and we were therefore not persuaded to adopt this modification as part of our final recommendations.

65 The Labour Party also highlighted a minor anomaly to the electorate figures in Biggleswade town. This anomaly would not affect electoral equality and we have confirmed the correct figures with the Council.

66 Langford Parish Council supported the draft recommendations for the proposed Stotfold ward. However, it proposed the ward be named 'Stotfold and Langford'. Given Langford parish is the other main settlement in the proposed ward, we consider this name better reflects the constituent communities of the proposed ward. We have therefore decided to adopt the ward name of Stotfold & Langford as part of the final recommendations.

67 Clifton Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations for the proposed three-member Arlesey ward. The Parish Council argued that it did not share community identities with Arlesey parish and proposed an alternative warding pattern of three single-member wards. However, the Parish Council did not provide evidence to support its proposal.

68 We noted that a pattern of single-member wards based on whole parishes in this area would result in extremely poor electoral equality. In order to provide good electoral equality, a warding pattern of three single-member wards would therefore require an arbitrary division of parishes between district wards. We were therefore not persuaded to adopt this modification as part of our final recommendations.

69 We did not receive further comments on the draft recommendations for north east

Central Bedfordshire during Stage Three. We have therefore decided to confirm the remainder of our draft recommendations as final.

70 Table C1 (on pages 37–39) provides details of the electoral variances of the final recommendations for wards in north east Central Bedfordshire. The final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Mid Central Bedfordshire

71 Mid Central Bedfordshire broadly comprises the southern area of the former Mid Bedfordshire District Council. Mid Central Bedfordshire is rural in nature, with several scattered urban settlements.

72 During Stage One, in addition to the district-wide proposals discussed in paragraph 35, 17 specific representations in relation to this area were received. These submissions can be viewed on our website.

73 As discussed in paragraph 37, we largely based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals. The Council's proposed wards in this area would provide good electoral equality with the exception of its proposed Barton-le-Clay ward which would have 12% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2015. However, this ward would be coterminous with the parish of the same name and provide a good reflection of community identities.

74 The draft recommendations for mid Central Bedfordshire were wholly based on the Council's Stage One proposals. However, we gave particular consideration to alternative warding patterns in the Flitwick and Toddington areas and sought further evidence on these during Stage Three.

Flitwick town and its hinterland

75 In our draft recommendations for Flitwick town and its hinterland, we adopted the Council's scheme without modification. However, following reasonably well-evidenced submissions received during Stage One, we gave careful consideration to an alternative warding pattern for this area.

76 During Stage One, the parish councils of Pulloxhill and Silsoe both proposed a ward comprising the parishes of Flitton & Greenfield, Pulloxhill and Silsoe. The parish councils provided reasonable evidence of shared community identities in support of their proposal. However, adopting this warding pattern would have a knock-on effect in the wider mid Central Bedfordshire area. We therefore considered a larger two-member ward comprising the parishes of Flitton & Greenfield, Gravenhurst, Pulloxhill, Shillington, Silsoe, Tingrith and Westoning which would reflect the commonality between the parishes of Flitton & Greenfield, Pulloxhill and Silsoe.

77 However, we did not consider we had received sufficient evidence to support a shared sense of community identity amongst all the constituent parishes in a larger two-member ward. We therefore adopted the Council's proposals for two single-member wards of Westoning, Flitton & Greenfield and Silsoe & Shillington. In the draft recommendations we sought further evidence to support the alternative two-member warding pattern.

78 During Stage Three we received four submissions in relation to this area. Silsoe Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations and reiterated its Stage One proposal to be linked with Flitton & Greenfield and Pulloxhill parishes. However, it did not provide evidence of community identity to support this proposal. Instead, the Parish Council asserted 'an affiliation with Pulloxhill'. The parish council suggested that, if this was not acceptable, the alternative two-member ward outlined in our draft recommendations was preferable. However, the Parish Council did give reasons for preferring the alternative two-member ward.

79 Conversely, the parish councils of Flitton & Greenfield and Pulloxhill both supported the draft recommendations. We note that during Stage One, Pulloxhill Parish Council proposed that it be warded with the parishes of Flitton & Greenfield and Silsoe.

80 Shillington Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations for the proposed Silsoe & Shillington ward. The Parish Council reiterated its Stage One comments in support of a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Gravenhurst, Meppershall and Shillington and disagreed that it shared any commonality with Silsoe parish. Silsoe Parish Council shared that view. However, while Shillington Parish Council provided limited evidence in support of its proposal, a warding pattern comprising the aforementioned parishes would have a significant knock-on effect on the warding arrangements for adjoining areas. The Parish Council did not comment on the alternative two-member ward.

81 We note the evidence of community identity received during Stage One in support of warding the parishes of Flitton and Greenfield, and Pulloxhill and Silsoe within a single two-member ward. However, this evidence did not extend to the other constituent parishes in the alternative two-member ward. Furthermore, we did not receive evidence to support this alternative proposal during Stage Three.

82 In the absence of new evidence, we are not persuaded that we have received sufficient evidence to support modifications to the draft recommendations in this area. Given the support for the draft recommendations from two of the parish councils in this area, and the lack of evidence to support the alternative two-member ward, we have decided to confirm our proposed Westoning, Flitton & Greenfield and Silsoe & Shillington wards as final. These two wards would have good electoral equality containing 2% more and an equal number of electors per councillor to the district average respectively by 2015.

83 In Flitwick town itself, the Labour Party reiterated its Stage One proposal for a pattern of single-member wards. However, it did not provide evidence of community identities to support the proposal. This warding pattern would also require a split of Flitwick parish which we do not consider would reflect community identities and interests. We have therefore decided to confirm the draft recommendations for Flitwick town and its hinterland as final.

Toddington and its hinterland

84 Our draft recommendations for Toddington and its hinterland were based on the Council's scheme without modification. However, following a reasonably well-evidenced submission received during Stage One, we gave careful consideration to an alternative warding pattern in this area.

85 During Stage One, a local resident proposed two single-member wards in place of the Council's proposed two-member Toddington ward. The local resident proposed a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Harlington, Streatley and Sundon and a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Toddington and Chalton. The local resident provided reasonable evidence of communication links to demonstrate a shared community of interest between Harlington, Streatley and Sundon parishes.

86 During Stage One, we also received comments from Chalton, Harlington and Streatley parish councils, all with differing views on the warding pattern in this area.

87 On balance, and in light of various local opinions in this area, we considered the Council's proposals would provide the best reflection of communities based on the submissions received during Stage One. Furthermore, the local resident's proposed ward comprising Toddington and Chalton parishes would have 12% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2015, slightly higher than we would normally wish to propose. However, having considered the local resident's proposal to have merit, we invited further comments and evidence in support of this alternative warding pattern during Stage Three.

88 During Stage Three we received three submissions in relation to this area. The local resident, the proponent of the alternative warding proposal during Stage One, reiterated his support for a single-member warding pattern but provided limited further evidence of community identity in support of his proposal.

89 The local resident cited 10 examples of commonality to support his proposed warding pattern. These included local funding issues which we cannot take into consideration. The local resident also reiterated that his proposed warding pattern would broadly observe the M1 and railway and referenced the Chilterns AONB including the parishes of Harlington, Sundon and Streatley in illustrating commonality between these parishes.

90 Harlington Parish Council proposed it be warded with the parishes of Sundon and Streatley. The Parish Council cited the Chilterns AONB in illustrating a shared commonality and asserted they shared 'common issues'. A further local resident supported the proposed two-member Toddington ward as the 'best compromise' in reflecting community identities in the area.

91 We have not received persuasive evidence to warrant adopting the local resident's alternative warding pattern. While we consider this warding pattern to have merit, this is balanced against the lack of substantive evidence received during Stage Three. We have also received a measure of support for our draft recommendations from a local resident and note that while Harlington Parish Council expressed a desire to be warded with the parishes of Streatley and Sundon, this grouping of parishes is also reflected in our proposed two-member Toddington ward.

92 We consider the draft recommendations to provide the best balance between the

evidence and views expressed during consultation, and to provide the best reflection of our statutory criteria. Consequently, we have decided to confirm the draft recommendations for Toddington and its hinterland as final.

Amphill town and its hinterland

93 The draft recommendations for Amphill were based on the Council's scheme without modification. The scheme included a three-member Amphill ward comprising the parishes of Amphill, Clophill and Maulden. During Stage One, both Clophill and Maulden parish councils opposed the Council's proposed Amphill ward on the basis of the urban/rural mix that would result. Both parish councils proposed they be warded separately from Amphill parish, to reflect their rural character.

94 Given the electorate of these parishes, this could only be facilitated via a somewhat arbitrary split of Maulden parish. This would require the transfer of approximately 500 electors from Maulden parish to Amphill in order to provide good electoral equality. We were therefore not persuaded to adopt this warding pattern as part of our draft recommendations.

95 During Stage Three we received six submissions in relation to the proposed Amphill ward. As at Stage One, respondents wholly opposed the proposed three-member ward.

96 Amphill Town Council and Maulden Parish Council both objected to the proposed Amphill ward on the basis that it would combine diverse areas with little in common. This view was echoed by other respondents. Councillor Mrs Angela Barker (Maulden, Clophill, Haynes and Houghton Conquest) proposed retaining the existing ward. This would comprise the parishes of Maulden, Clophill, Haynes and Houghton Conquest. While this ward would have good electoral equality when taken in isolation, it would not address the poor electoral equality of a two-member Amphill ward.

97 In support of the status quo, Councillor Mrs Barker stated 'Maulden and Clophill residents have no connection with the larger area of Amphill'. However, she added that residents of these parishes look towards Amphill for 'doctors, dentist, supermarkets and larger shops', suggesting that Amphill town was a focus for the provision of local amenities and facilities for the surrounding area.

98 A local resident suggested links between Amphill and the adjacent Millbrook parish, suggesting that 'close links [between Amphill and Millbrook] have been built up over the years'. We therefore explored an alternative warding pattern for a two-member ward comprising the parishes of Amphill and Millbrook while providing a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Maulden and Clophill. However, given the relatively small electorate of Millbrook, this would still not address the poor electoral variance of a two-member ward comprising Amphill parish and have a negligible improvement on a two-member Amphill ward coterminous with the parish.

99 Having explored alternative warding patterns in this area to reflect local views and comments put forward during consultation, we do not consider these proposals would provide effective and convenient local government or good electoral equality. We believe that the draft recommendations would provide a better reflection of the statutory criteria in this area.

100 We acknowledge that the proposed Ampthill ward would include both urban and rural areas. However, this is not uncommon where an area is characterised by scattered urban settlements within a broadly rural geography. Furthermore, the rural parishes in this area clearly look to Ampthill parish for local amenities and facilities and share good road links. Consequently, we are not persuaded to adopt a modification to the proposed Ampthill ward and confirm our draft recommendations for Ampthill town as final.

101 In relation to the hinterland of Ampthill town, we received three submissions. Marston Moretaine Parish Council supported the proposed three-member Cranfield & Marston Moretaine ward while Lidlington Parish Council did not express support or opposition for the proposals. Instead, the Parish Council expressed concerns regarding a three-member ward and recommended the Commission allocate a 'designated electorate' for each member within Cranfield & Marston Moretaine ward as part of the final recommendations. However, working arrangements within multi-member wards are purely a matter for members. Therefore, it is not within the Commission's remit to specify a 'designated electorate' or area of responsibility for elected members in multi-member wards.

102 Haynes Parish Council expressed concerns regarding the projected growth for the proposed Houghton Conquest ward. In noting the projected growth in this ward will largely be realised in Houghton Conquest parish rather than Hayes parish, the Parish Council questioned if Haynes parish would be 'adequately covered'. However, the allocation of members to this ward would reflect the collective growth of the constituent parishes and not merely that of Houghton Conquest parish.

103 Haynes Parish Council also proposed Houghton Conquest be named Haynes given 'there are already other "Houghton" wards [in Houghton Regis town]' elsewhere in Central Bedfordshire.

104 Given Houghton Conquest is the main settlement within the proposed ward, we considered it should be included in the proposed ward name. However, as Haynes parish is the other settlement of the proposed ward we consider its inclusion in the proposed ward name better reflects the constituent communities in this area. We have therefore decided to adopt the ward name of Houghton Conquest & Haynes as part of our final recommendations.

105 Elsewhere in mid Central Bedfordshire, Eversholt Parish Council broadly supported the draft recommendations for the proposed Aspley & Woburn ward. We did not receive further comments on the draft recommendations for mid Central Bedfordshire during Stage Three. We have therefore decided to confirm the remainder of our draft recommendations as final.

106 Table C1 (on pages 37–39) provides details of the electoral variances of the final recommendations for wards in mid Central Bedfordshire. The final recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

South Central Bedfordshire

107 South Central Bedfordshire broadly comprises the area covered by the former South Bedfordshire District Council. It contains the main towns of Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade. The remaining area is largely rural.

108 During Stage One, in addition to the district-wide proposals discussed in paragraph 35, we received 17 specific comments in relation to this area. These submissions can be viewed on our website. The majority of comments received were in relation to Heath & Reach parish and opposed the Council's proposals for this area.

109 As discussed in paragraph 37, we largely based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals. Broadly speaking, the Council's proposed wards in this area would provide good electoral equality. However, we moved away from the Council's proposals in Dunstable town where we adopted an alternative warding pattern based on evidence received during Stage One. We also proposed a minor modification in Leighton-Linslade town to ensure that ward boundaries adhered to clear ground detail.

Leighton-Linslade town

110 In our draft recommendations for Leighton-Linslade town, we adopted the Council's proposals with a minor modification to ensure a more clearly defined ward boundary.

111 During Stage Three we received nine specific submissions in relation to our draft recommendations for Leighton-Linslade town. The Labour Party also commented on the warding arrangements in this area as part of its submission.

112 The respondents opposed our draft recommendations for Leighton-Linslade and considered the proposed wards too large geographically to reflect the discrete communities of the town. The Labour Party and two local residents proposed that a pattern of single-member wards be adopted for the town. However, with the exception of the Labour Party, which reiterated its Stage One comments, respondents did not provide specific alternative warding patterns. Furthermore, we have not received evidence of community identities to support an alternative warding pattern.

113 We note the comments and opposition to the draft recommendations in Leighton-Linslade town. However, multi-member wards of this geographic size are not uncommon in similarly-sized urban areas. Our proposed wards in Leighton-Linslade town will provide good electoral equality and clear and strong boundaries that follow the Grand Union Canal and the A4012. Conversely, we have not received well-evidenced proposals to warrant adopting an alternative warding pattern. Consequently, we have decided not to adopt a modification in this area and confirm our draft recommendations for Leighton-Linslade town as final.

Heath & Reach

114 As discussed in paragraph 108, the majority of comments received during Stage One were in relation to Heath & Reach. Respondents opposed the Council's proposals in this area which would ward Heath & Reach parish with parishes to its east. Instead respondents argued strongly for no change to the warding pattern in this area, in which Heath & Reach parish is warded with the Plantation area of Leighton-Linslade to its south.

115 During Stage One, we received good evidence of shared community identities between Heath & Reach parish and Plantation in support of retaining the status quo.

116 While we acknowledged the evidence of shared community identity and communication links between Heath & Reach and Plantation, the proposal to retain the existing ward in this area would not secure good electoral equality based on a council size of 59. To ward Heath & Reach parish with Plantation under a council size of 59 and achieve good electoral equality would have a significant consequential effect to warding arrangements beyond Leighton-Linslade town and its immediate surrounding area. Furthermore, it would result in an arbitrary split of Leighton-Linslade parish. Taken together, we were of the view that this would not provide the best balance between the statutory criteria to which we are required to have regard when considering the area as a whole.

117 During Stage Three we received 14 comments in relation to Heath & Reach. Respondents reiterated the comments submitted during Stage One. However, while not expressing support for the proposal, Councillor Alan Shadbolt (Plantation) accepted the rationale for the draft recommendations in this area.

118 Heath & Reach Parish Council expressed concerns over 'the practicalities of one councillor representing the six parishes all with differing priorities and issues'. This was echoed by a local resident. However, we note that this number of parishes within a predominately rural ward is not uncommon.

119 Both Heath & Reach Parish Council and the local resident also referenced the proposed Heath & Reach ward breaching the A5 to include Chalgrave parish. As noted by the Parish Council and the local resident, the Liberal Democrat group's Stage One proposals would ward Heath & Reach with communities to its north. However, as outlined in our draft recommendations, we did not consider this proposal would provide the best possible warding pattern given it would breach the A5 to the north of the parish. While our proposed Heath & Reach ward also breaches the A5 to include Chalgrave parish, the northern boundary of the proposed ward does otherwise follow the A5 and Chalgrave has clear access to the other constituent parishes via Hockliffe Road. We were therefore of the view that this provided a clearer warding pattern than that proposed by the Liberal Democrats.

120 During Stage Three we toured Heath & Reach and noted its commonality with the Plantation area and the strong communication links between the two areas. We acknowledge the similar character and shared community identities between Heath & Reach and Plantation. However, as noted in our draft recommendations, an alternative warding pattern would not be viable without extensive re-warding and an arbitrary split of Leighton-Linslade parish to ensure good electoral equality. This would not provide for effective and convenient local government in the area as a whole. Consequently, we are unable to adopt a modification to our proposals in this area and confirm the draft recommendations for Heath & Reach ward as final.

121 During Stage Three, Councillor Shadbolt proposed Heath & Reach ward be named 'Leighton Rural' or 'Leighton Villages'. However, given Heath & Reach parish is the main settlement of the proposed ward, we were not persuaded to adopt this alternative ward name as part of our final recommendations.

Dunstable town and its hinterland

122 In our draft recommendations for Dunstable town, we adopted the Council and the Liberal Democrat group's proposals with the exception of their proposed Dunstable-Beecroft and Dunstable-Northfields wards. In light of a Stage One submission from Councillor Julian Murray (Northfields), we considered an alternative warding pattern to reflect evidence of community identities provided by Councillor Murray.

123 Councillor Murray proposed retaining the existing Northfields ward which, broadly speaking, would combine the Council's proposed Dunstable-Beecroft and Dunstable-Northfields wards, minus the area broadly to the east of High Street North and south of Chiltern Road. The properties in this area would centre on Falcon Close.

124 On the basis of the evidence received during Stage One, we proposed a two-member Dunstable-Northfields ward comprising the Council's and the Liberal Democrat Group's proposed Dunstable-Beecroft and Dunstable-Northfields wards. This ward would include the area outlined in paragraph 123.

125 During Stage Three, we received nine submissions in relation to the proposed Dunstable-Northfields ward. Respondents were largely local residents from the area in and around Falcon Close. The Labour Party also made comments reiterating its Stage One proposals in Dunstable town.

126 Respondents opposed the proposed Dunstable-Northfields ward and proposed the inclusion of this area within Dunstable-Central ward. Broadly speaking, respondents did not provide strong evidence of community identity in support of the inclusion of this area within Dunstable-Northfields ward. However, one local resident stated that residents in this area 'tend to look towards the town centre [within the proposed Dunstable-Central ward] for shopping, post office services, worship, Doctors, entertainment etc'.

127 Councillor Murray proposed an alternative warding pattern to facilitate the transfer of this area to the proposed Dunstable-Central ward. However, it would require the transfer of approximately 800 electors between the proposed Dunstable-Northfields and Dunstable-Central wards. While this would result in revised Dunstable-Northfields and Dunstable-Central wards with 0% and 12% more electors per councillor than the district average, respectively, by 2015, it would result in an unclear ward boundary, deviating from main roads in order to provide reasonable electoral equality. We have therefore decided not to adopt this modification as part of our final recommendations.

128 In exploring alternative warding patterns to reflect the local views received during Stage Three, we also reconsidered the Council's and the Liberal Democrat Group's Stage One proposals. However, we also note that under these proposals, the area centred on Falcon Close would be included in their proposed single-member Dunstable-Beecroft ward and not Dunstable-Central.

129 We acknowledge the opposition to the proposed Dunstable-Northfields ward, specifically from local residents. However, we have not received sufficient evidence of community identity to support including this area within the proposed Dunstable-Central ward. Furthermore, facilitating such a change would require consequential re-warding within Dunstable town as a whole and we are not persuaded that we have received sufficient evidence to warrant such a departure from our draft recommendations. We

therefore confirm the draft recommendations for Dunstable-Northfields ward as final.

130 During Stage Three, four respondents including Councillor Murray also opposed the proposed two-member Dunstable-Watling ward. Respondents proposed the ward be split and the western area be transferred to the proposed Dunstable-Central ward and the remainder form a single-member Dunstable-Watling ward. Consequently this would create a two-member Dunstable-Central ward with a further modification to transfer approximately 1,500 electors between the two wards to provide good electoral equality. This would be similar to the existing Chiltern and Watling wards.

131 We received limited evidence of community identity to support this modification. However, the Dunstable Chiltern Conservative Party Ward Committee ('the Chiltern Conservative Party') cited amenities, facilities and places of worship within the proposed Dunstable-Central ward which are used by Chiltern residents.

132 We acknowledge the views expressed in support of dividing our proposed Dunstable-Watling ward. However, on balance, we do not consider we have received sufficient evidence of community identity to warrant this modification. The proposals would result in the significant transfer of electors between the proposed wards, and we do not consider we have received sufficiently robust evidence to support what would constitute a significant modification to our proposals for the town as a whole. On balance, we have therefore decided to confirm the draft recommendations for Dunstable-Watling ward as final.

133 In the hinterland of Dunstable town, Billington Parish Council supported our draft recommendation for Eaton Bray ward. However, the Parish Council proposed an alternative ward name of 'Eaton Bray, Billington & Tottenhoe' or 'Eaton Bray, Great and Little Billington & Tottenhoe'. The Parish Council argued this would reflect the inclusion of Billington within the area.

134 We note the Parish Council's proposed ward names and acknowledge its comments regarding the need to reflect communities in the proposed ward name. However, neither of its proposed ward names would be consistent with the naming convention of wards elsewhere in the authority. We have therefore decided not to adopt the proposed ward names as part of our final recommendations.

Houghton Regis town

135 In our draft recommendations for Houghton Regis town, we adopted the Council's and the Liberal Democrat Group's proposals with a minor modification to adhere to ground detail and provide clearer ward boundaries.

136 During Stage Three, the Council, the Labour Party and a local resident proposed modifications to the draft recommendations in Houghton Regis town. As discussed in paragraph 29, Houghton Regis Town Council objected to the proposed overall council size for the district. However, the Town Council did not comment on the warding pattern in this area.

137 The Council proposed that the wards in Houghton Regis town be renamed to include the prefix of 'Houghton Regis'. However, we consider these proposed ward names would be too long.

138 The Labour Party argued that the western area of the Tithe Farm estate, within the proposed Houghton Hall ward, would have poor access to other areas in the proposed ward. The Labour Party argued this area should therefore be transferred to the proposed Tithe Farm ward. However, we note that these properties would have reasonable access particularly via Tithe Farm Road and the High Street.

139 Consequently, we have decided not to adopt either the Council's or the Labour Party's proposals as part of our final recommendations.

140 A local resident also proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Dunstable-Ickniel and Houghton Hall wards. The local resident stated that the proposed boundary straddles the Woodside Industrial Estate. However, this ward boundary follows the parish boundary between Dunstable and Houghton Regis and adoption of the proposed modification would not result in the creation of a viable parish ward. We have therefore decided not to adopt it as part of our final recommendations.

141 We did not receive further comments on the draft recommendations for south Central Bedfordshire during Stage Three. We have therefore decided to confirm the remainder of the draft recommendations as final.

142 Table C1 (on pages 37–39) provides details of the electoral variances of the final recommendations for wards in south Central Bedfordshire. The final recommendations are shown on Map 1, Map 3 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

143 Table 1 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, based on 2008 and 2015 electorate figures.

Table 1: Summary of electoral arrangements

	Final recommendations	
	2008	2015
Number of councillors	59	59
Number of electoral wards	31	31
Average number of electors per councillor	3,270	3,559
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	11	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	0

Final recommendation

Central Bedfordshire Council should comprise 59 councillors serving 31 wards, as detailed and named in Table C1 and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

144 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

145 During Stage One, some respondents proposed changes to parish electoral arrangements where these were not as a consequence of our proposed district warding arrangements. Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make such changes as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Central Bedfordshire Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

146 During Stage Three a number of respondents, including the Council, proposed alternative parish electoral arrangements to those put forward in the draft recommendations. The alternative parish electoral arrangements would provide greater parity in the allocation of parish councillors per parish ward.

147 While general parity in the number of electors per parish councillor is desirable, the 2009 Act does not require electoral equality at parish level. However, as the proposals received are for parishes that require consequential changes we have reflected these in our final recommendations.

148 To meet our obligations under the 2009 Act, we propose consequential parish warding arrangements for the parishes of Biggleswade, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade.

149 During Stage Three, the Council proposed revised parish electoral arrangements for Biggleswade parish. The Biggleswade branch of the Labour Party also submitted revised parish electoral arrangements. However, its proposals were based on its proposed warding pattern in Biggleswade town which we have not adopted as part of our final recommendations. We have therefore decided to adopt the Council's proposals for Biggleswade parish as part of our final recommendations.

150 The parish of Biggleswade is currently divided into three parish wards: Holme (returning four members), Ivel (returning six members) and Stratton (returning five members).

151 As a result of our proposed district ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Biggleswade parish.

Final recommendation

Biggleswade Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Holme (returning three members), Ivel (returning seven members) and Stratton (returning five members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 2.

152 During Stage Three, the Council proposed revised parish electoral arrangements for Dunstable parish. Dunstable Town Council and Councillor Peter Hollick (Watling) put forward identical proposals to the Council while Dunstable Parish Councillor Mrs Pat Staples made similar proposals. The Council's proposals would provide greater parity in the allocation of parish councillors per parish ward. We therefore propose adopting the Council's proposals for Dunstable parish as part of our final recommendations.

153 The parish of Dunstable is currently divided into six parish wards: Chiltern (returning three members), Dunstable Central (returning three members), Icknield (returning four members), Manshead (returning three members), Northfields (returning four members) and Watling (returning four members).

154 As a result of our proposed district ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Dunstable parish.

Final recommendation

Dunstable Town Council should comprise 21 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Central (returning three members), Icknield (returning five members), Northfields (returning five members), Manshead (returning three members) and Watling (returning five members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 4.

155 During Stage Three, we did not receive any comments on the parish electoral arrangements for Houghton Regis parish. We therefore confirm the draft recommendations for parish electoral arrangements in Houghton Regis parish as final.

156 The parish of Houghton Regis is currently divided into three parish wards: Houghton Hall (returning six members), Parkside (returning four members) and Tithe Farm (returning four members).

157 As a result of our proposed district ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Houghton Regis parish.

Final recommendation

Houghton Regis Town Council should comprise 14 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Houghton Hall (returning six members), Parkside (returning four members) and Tithe Farm (returning four members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 4.

158 The draft recommendations proposed the parish of Leighton-Linslade return 20 parish councillors as provided for in the District of South Bedfordshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2001. However, during Stage Three, a number of respondents, including the Council and Leighton-Linslade Town Council, stated that Leighton-Linslade parish returns 21 parish councillors following a local Order made subsequent to 2001.

159 We requested sight of an electoral changes Order to verify that the Town Council comprised 21 parish councillors. However, neither the Council nor Leighton-Linslade Town Council possessed an Order. Nonetheless, the Council has provided copies of the former South Bedfordshire District Council minutes where the increase was agreed. Consequently, we propose reflecting this as part of our final recommendations.

160 In addition to commenting on the anomaly in the number of parish councillors, the Council, the Town Council, the Town Council's Liberal Democrat Group and a local resident submitted alternative parish electoral arrangements for the parish. With the exception of the local resident, the proposals were broadly similar.

161 Given the similarity in the proposals received and the support for the Town Council's proposed parish electoral arrangements, we have decided to adopt the Town Council's proposed parish electoral arrangements for Leighton-Linslade parish.

162 The parish of Leighton-Linslade is currently divided into six parish wards: All Saints (returning three members), Grovebury (returning four members), Linslade (returning three members), Planets (returning three members), Plantation (returning four members) and Southcott (returning four members).

163 As a result of our proposed electoral ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Leighton-Linslade parish.

Final recommendation

Leighton-Linslade Town Council should comprise 21 councillors, as at present, representing eight wards: Barnabas (returning three members,) Brooklands (returning two members), Grovebury (returning four members), Leston (returning one member), Plantation (returning three members), Planets (returning two members), Southcott (returning four members) and St George's (returning two members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 3.

3 What happens next?

We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council. A draft Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements which will come into force at the next elections for Central Bedfordshire Council, in 2011.

4 Mapping

Final recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Central Bedfordshire Council:

Sheet 1, Map 1 illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Central Bedfordshire Council.

Sheet 2, Map 2 illustrates the proposed wards in Biggleswade town.

Sheet 3, Map 3 illustrates the proposed wards in Leighton-Linslade town.

Sheet 4, Map 4 illustrates the proposed wards in Dunstable town and Houghton Regis town.

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
Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England was a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Boundary Committee's functions were assumed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in April 2010
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever division they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. It regulates party and election finance and sets standards for well-run elections

Electoral fairness	When one elector's vote is worth the same as another's
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. For the purposes of this report, we refer specifically to the electorate for local government elections
Local Government Boundary Commission for England (or LGBCE)	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee for England in April 2010
Multi-member ward or division	A ward or division represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	The 10 National Parks in England are areas of protected countryside; further details can be found at www.nationalparks.gov.uk
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 or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority 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 electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town Council'
Parish (or Town) Council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; 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 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 and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enabled local authorities in England to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from two broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet or a cabinet with a leader
Town Council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at www.nalc.gov.uk
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (November 2000) (http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/consult/code/_consultation.pdf) 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 Local Government Boundary Commission 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 Local Government Boundary Commission 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 at the start of the review and on our draft recommendations. Our consultation stages are a minimum total of 16 weeks.
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.

Appendix C

Table C1: Final recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2015)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Amphill	3	9,151	3,050	-7%	9,702	3,234	-9%
2	Arlesey	3	11,215	3,738	14%	11,382	3,794	7%
3	Aspley & Woburn	1	3,702	3,702	13%	3,792	3,792	7%
4	Barton-le-Clay	1	3,936	3,936	20%	3,991	3,991	12%
5	Biggleswade North	2	5,388	2,694	-18%	7,058	3,529	-1%
6	Biggleswade South	2	6,920	3,460	6%	7,067	3,534	-1%
7	Caddington	2	7,440	3,720	14%	7,660	3,830	8%
8	Cranfield & Marston Moretaine	3	9,242	3,081	-6%	10,622	3,541	-1%
9	Dunstable-Central	1	3,438	3,438	5%	3,712	3,712	4%
10	Dunstable-Icknield	2	5,922	2,961	-9%	7,196	3,598	1%
11	Dunstable-Manshead	1	3,632	3,632	11%	3,842	3,842	8%

Table C1 (cont.): Final recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2015)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12	Dunstable-Northfields	2	6,491	3,246	-1%	7,439	3,720	4%
13	Dunstable-Watling	2	7,614	3,807	16%	7,760	3,880	9%
14	Eaton Bray	1	3,400	3,400	4%	3,436	3,436	-3%
15	Flitwick	3	10,297	3,432	5%	10,347	3,449	-3%
16	Heath & Reach	1	3,253	3,253	-1%	3,444	3,444	-3%
17	Houghton Conquest & Haynes	1	2,099	2,099	-36%	3,598	3,598	1%
18	Houghton Hall	2	5,654	2,827	-14%	6,479	3,240	-9%
19	Leighton Buzzard North	3	10,767	3,589	10%	11,568	3,856	8%
20	Leighton Buzzard South	3	8,393	2,798	-14%	11,761	3,920	10%
21	Linslade	3	9,229	3,076	-6%	9,637	3,212	-10%
22	Northill	1	3,470	3,470	6%	3,540	3,540	-1%
23	Parkside	1	3,492	3,492	7%	3,576	3,576	0%

Table C1 (cont.): Final recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2015)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
24	Potton	2	6,163	3,082	-6%	6,295	3,148	-12%
25	Sandy	3	9,592	3,197	-2%	9,672	3,224	-9%
26	Shefford	2	6,569	3,285	0%	6,803	3,402	-4%
27	Silsoe & Shillington	1	3,296	3,296	1%	3,545	3,545	0%
28	Stotfold & Langford	3	8,953	2,984	-9%	10,599	3,533	-1%
29	Tithe Farm	1	3,104	3,104	-5%	3,223	3,223	-9%
30	Toddington	2	7,533	3,767	15%	7,613	3,807	7%
31	Westoning, Flitton & Greenfield	1	3,560	3,560	9%	3,646	3,646	2%
	Totals	59	192,915	-	-	210,005	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,270	-	-	3,559	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Central Bedfordshire Council.

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

Appendix D

Additional legislation we have considered

Equal opportunities

In preparing this report we have 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

We have 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.

