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Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) 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 Stafford Borough Council to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the authority.

The review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same. The Commission commenced the review in July 2013.

This review is being conducted as follows:

Stage starts	Description
23 July 2013	Consultation on council size begins
22 October 2013	Submission of proposals for ward patterns to the LGBCE
8 January 2014	LGBCE's analysis and formulation of draft recommendations
15 April 2014	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
25 June 2014	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Submissions received

During the preliminary stage of this review we received two submissions on council size, one from Stafford Borough Council ('the Council') and one from Stafford Labour Group. During consultation on council size we received 30 submissions. During consultation on proposed ward boundaries we received three borough-wide submissions: one from the Council, one from the Labour Party Group and a joint submission made by Councillor Thomas and Councillor Stephens. We received additional representations from Stafford Council Independent Group, Stone Constituency Labour Party, Stone Constituency Conservative Association, seven parish and town councils and two members of the public. All submissions can be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

Stafford Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for 2019, a date five years on from the scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2014. This is prescribed in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 ('the 2009 Act'). These forecasts projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 3.4% over this period.

We are content that these forecasts are the most accurate available at this time and have used these figures as the basis of our draft recommendations.

Council size

Stafford Borough Council currently has a council size of 59 councillors. At the beginning of the electoral review we met with elected members and council officers to discuss council size.

Following these preliminary discussions, we received two submissions, one from the Council proposing a council size of 40 members and one from Stafford Labour Group proposing a council size of 45. Both submissions put forward evidence relating to the Council's governance and management structure, scrutiny of the council, work on outside bodies and the members' representational role.

We considered the evidence provided by both the Council and the Labour Group on council size. We were of the view that the submission made by the Council during the preliminary period more clearly demonstrated how a council of 40 members would continue to ensure effective governance and decision-making arrangements in Stafford. We therefore began a period of consultation on this number.

Thirty submissions were received during this consultation which showed mixed support for a council size of 40. However, no substantive evidence was presented to contradict the rationale presented by the Council, nor was any other council size adequately evidenced. As a consequence, we are content to confirm a council size of 40 as part of our draft recommendations.

General analysis

Having considered the submissions received during consultation, we have developed proposals that are based partly on those of the Council and partly on those of the Labour Group. However, we have made a number of modifications to both proposals in some areas of the borough to provide a better balance between our statutory criteria. The borough-wide proposal put forward by Councillors Thomas and Stephens was based on a council size of 44. In considering their submission we carried out an allocation exercise to determine whether a council size of 44 would provide a better allocation of members for wards across the borough. However, this exercise suggested to us that 40 members would provide the best allocation for warding arrangements.

Our draft recommendations for Stafford are for a mixed pattern of seven single-member, 15 two-member and one three-member wards. We consider our recommendations provide for good electoral equality while providing an accurate reflection of community identities and interests where we have received such evidence during consultation.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on the draft recommendations on the proposed electoral arrangements for Stafford Borough Council contained in the report. **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. We will take into account all submissions received by **24 June 2014**. Any submissions received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We would particularly welcome local views backed up by demonstrable evidence. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations. Express your views by writing directly to us at:

Review Officer
Stafford Review
The Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76–86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG
reviews@lgbce.org.uk

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

You can also view our draft recommendations for Stafford on our interactive maps at <http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk>

1 Introduction

1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body which conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. This electoral review is being conducted following our decision to review Stafford Borough Council's electoral arrangements to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same across the authority.

2 We wrote to the Council as well as other interested parties, inviting the submission of proposals on council size. We then held two periods of consultation, first on council size, and then on warding arrangements for the Council. The submissions received during these stages of the review have informed our draft recommendations.

3 We are now conducting a full public consultation on the draft recommendations. Following this period of consultation, we will consider the evidence received and will publish our final recommendations for the new electoral arrangements for Stafford Borough Council in September 2014.

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 identity; 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. 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 Stafford?

6 We decided to conduct this review following the Council's request for the Commission to conduct an electoral review. The Council's request was with a view to reducing council size.

How will the recommendations affect you?

7 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 council wards you vote in. Your ward name may also change, as may the names of parish or town council wards in the area. The names or boundaries of parishes will not change as a result of our recommendations.

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

8 It is therefore important that you let us have your comments and views on the draft recommendations. We encourage comments from everyone in the community, regardless of whether you agree with the draft recommendations or not. The draft recommendations are evidence based and we would therefore like to stress the importance of providing evidence in any comments on our recommendations, rather than relying on assertion. We will be accepting comments and views until 24 June 2014. After this point, we will be formulating our final recommendations which we are due to publish in September 2014. Details on how to submit proposals can be found on page 19 and more information can be found on our website, www.lgbce.org.uk

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)
Professor Colin Mellors (Deputy Chair)
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL
Sir Tony Redmond
Dr Colin Sinclair CBE
Professor Paul Wiles CB

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill
Director of Reviews: Archie Gall

2 Analysis and draft recommendations

10 Before finalising our recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Stafford Borough Council we invite views on these draft recommendations. We welcome comments relating to the proposed ward boundaries and ward names. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

11 As described earlier, our prime aim when recommending new electoral arrangements for Stafford is to achieve a level of electoral fairness – that is, each elector’s vote being worth the same as another’s. In doing so we must have regard to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009,² 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 a five-year period from the date of our final recommendations. 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 Additionally, in circumstances where we propose to divide a parish between district wards or county divisions, we are required to divide it into parish wards so that each parish ward is wholly contained within a single district ward or county division. We cannot make amendments to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

15 These recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of Stafford Borough Council or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that the recommendations will have an adverse effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. The 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.

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

Submissions received

16 Prior to, and during, the initial stage of the review, we visited Stafford Borough Council and met with members, parish council representatives and officers. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance.

17 We received two preliminary submissions on council size from the Council and the Labour Group and 30 further submissions during a subsequent period of consultation. During consultation on proposed ward boundaries, we received three borough-wide submissions: one from the Council, one from the Labour Group and a joint submission made by Councillor Thomas and Councillor Stephens. We received additional representations from Stafford Council Independent Group, Stone Constituency Labour Party, Stone Constituency Conservative Association, seven parish and town councils and two members of the public. All representations received can be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Electorate figures

18 As part of this review, the Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2019, five years from the end of this review, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 3.4% over the period from 2012–19. The most significant growth is forecast for Stafford town centre, where a significant housing development is being built on the site of the old St George's Hospital. Notable growth is also forecast in the parish of Creswell that borders Stafford town to the north.

19 Having considered the information provided by the Council, we are satisfied that the projected figures are the best available at the present time and these figures form the basis of our draft recommendations.

Council size

20 Stafford Borough Council currently has 59 councillors elected from 26 borough wards, comprising three single-member, 13 two-member and 10 three-member wards. During preliminary discussions on council size, the Council proposed a reduced council size of 40 members and the Labour Group proposed a council size of 45 members. Both the Council and the Labour Group put forward evidence relating to the Council's governance and management structure, scrutiny of the council, work on outside bodies and the members' representational role. We considered that the Council more clearly demonstrated how a council of 40 members would continue to ensure effective governance and decision-making arrangements in Stafford.

21 During the consultation on council size we received 30 submissions. There was mixed support for a reduction in council size from members of the public. However, no substantive evidence was presented to contradict the rationale presented by the Council, nor was any other council size adequately evidenced. During consultation on warding arrangements we received a borough-wide submission made by Councillors Thomas and Stephens based on a council size of 44. Having considered the evidence received in support of this submission and after carrying out an allocation exercise we consider that 40 members would provide the best allocation of members to different areas of the borough and result in wards across the borough which would result in good levels of electoral equality.

22 We are content that a council size of 40 members would not impact adversely on governance arrangements, member workload or councillors' representational role. Therefore, our draft recommendations for Stafford Borough Council are based on a council size of 40.

Electoral fairness

23 Electoral fairness, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. It is expected that our recommendations will provide for electoral fairness, reflect communities in the area, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

24 In seeking to achieve electoral fairness, we work out the average number of electors per councillor. The borough average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough (98,544 in 2012 and 101,879 by 2019) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 40 under our draft recommendations. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 2,464 in 2012 and 2,547 by 2019.

25 Under our draft recommendations, all of our proposed wards are forecast to have electoral variances of no more than 10% from the average for the borough by 2019. We are therefore satisfied that we will have achieved good levels of electoral fairness for Stafford.

General analysis

26 During consultation, we received 15 submissions on warding arrangements for Stafford. We received two borough-wide submissions based on a council size of 40 – one from the Council and one from the Labour Group. We also received a joint borough-wide submission from Councillor Thomas and Councillor Stephens based on a council size of 44. We received additional representations from Stafford Council Independent Group, Stone Constituency Labour Party, Stone Constituency Conservative Association, seven parish and town councils and two members of the public.

27 Our consideration of the submission from Councillors Thomas and Stephens is discussed in paragraph 21 above. As a result of this consideration we have not adopted any of the warding proposals suggested by Councillors Thomas and Stephens as part of our draft recommendations.

28 Both the Council's and the Labour Group's borough-wide proposals would result in good levels of electoral equality across the authority and used clear and identifiable boundaries in most areas. Both submissions put forward evidence of community identity in support of their proposals.

29 In the rural area of Stafford, the Council and the Labour Group suggested broadly similar warding patterns with some differences in the north, east and south. Across most of the rural area we consider that the proposals made by the Council better reflected our statutory criteria. However, in the east of the borough we considered that the Labour Group's proposed Milford & District and Milwich & District wards provided a better reflection of our statutory criteria. Therefore, as part of our

draft recommendations we have adopted a mixture of the Council's and the Labour Group's borough-wide warding patterns for the rural area.

30 In Stone the Council and the Labour Group made similar proposals for a three-member Walton ward. However, in the east of Stone, the Council proposed a two-member St Michael's ward and a one-member Stonefield ward, whereas the Labour Group proposed a three-member St Michael's & Stonefield ward. We consider that the proposal made by the Labour Group better reflected our statutory criteria and are therefore adopting it as part of our draft recommendations.

31 In Stafford town the Council and the Labour Group made similar proposals for some areas and different proposals for others, most notably in the north and east of Stafford. In most areas of Stafford town we have adopted the proposals made by the Labour Group, with some minor amendments to better reflect the statutory criteria.

32 We noted that a number of proposed wards in both submissions divided communities and did not always appear to use clear boundaries. In some areas we have made changes to the proposals submitted to us in order to provide for more easily identifiable ward boundaries and better reflect our statutory criteria.

33 Our draft recommendations are for seven single-member, 15 two-member and one three-member wards. We consider that our draft recommendations provide for good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests where we have received such evidence during consultation.

34 A summary of our proposed electoral arrangements is set out in Table 1 (on page 16) and the large map accompanying this report.

35 We welcome all comments on these draft recommendations. We also welcome comments on the ward names we have proposed as part of the draft recommendations.

Electoral arrangements

36 This section of the report details the submissions we have received, our consideration of them, and our draft recommendations for each area of Stafford. The following areas of the authority are considered in turn:

- East rural Stafford (page 11)
- West rural Stafford (page 12)
- North rural Stafford and Stone (pages 12–14)
- Stafford town – south (page 14)
- Stafford town – north and central (pages 15–16)

37 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Table A1 on pages 23–5 and illustrated on the large map accompanying this report.

East rural Stafford

Haywood & Hixon

38 The Council and the Labour Group made identical submissions for a two-member Haywood & Hixon ward comprising the parishes of Colwich and Hixon. A submission from Hixon Parish Council also commented on this area, stating that it would rather be in a ward with neighbouring parishes to the north rather than the proposed Haywood & Hixon ward. However, owing to the relatively large electorate in Hixon, including it in a ward with parishes to the north would have significant knock-on effects and would require consequential changes to the warding patterns proposed across the rest of the rural area. We considered that insufficient evidence had been received to support these substantial modifications.

39 We are content that the Haywood & Hixon ward proposed by the Council and the Labour Group would facilitate effective and convenient local government, uses clear and identifiable boundaries and results in good electoral equality. We therefore propose to adopt this ward as part of our draft recommendations.

Milford and Milwich

40 To the north and east of Stafford town the Council proposed a two-member Milford & District ward and a single-member Milwich & District ward. The Labour Group proposed a single-member Milford & District ward and a two-member Milwich & District ward. We received additional representations regarding this area from Brocton Parish Council, Hilderstone Parish Council, Marston Parish Council and Stowe-by-Chartley Parish Council.

41 In this area we consider that the proposal made by the Labour Group provides the best reflection of our statutory criteria. The boundary between the two wards is marked by a railway line, the River Sow and the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. Internal transport links across both wards are good and the Labour Group's proposal also avoids dividing the grouped parishes of Weston and Gayton. These parishes would have been divided under the Council's proposal. We also considered that the Labour Group warding pattern better reflected the views of the parishes in this area and we are therefore content to adopt the Labour Group's proposals as part of our draft recommendations.

42 We are of the view that the inclusion of '& District' in these ward names is unnecessary and could potentially cause confusion for the electorate. Accordingly, we propose to name these wards Milford and Milwich. Under our draft recommendations Milford and Milwich wards would have 2% fewer and equal to the number of electors per councillor than the average for the borough by 2019, respectively.

43 Our draft recommendations for east rural Stafford are, therefore, two-member Haywood & Hixon and Milwich wards and a single-member Milford ward having 2% more, equal to and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the borough by 2019, respectively.

West rural Stafford

Seighford & Church Eaton

44 To the west of Stafford the Council proposed a two-member Seighford & Eaton ward comprising the parishes of Bradley, Church Eaton, Creswell, Ellenhall, Haughton, Hyde Lea, Ranton, Seighford and Whitgreave. The Labour Group proposed dividing the area covered by these parishes to create two single-member wards of Church Eaton and Seighford, with the inclusion of part of Eccleshall parish in its proposed Seighford ward. We also received a representation from the Independent Group which also proposed two-single member wards for this area of the borough. This Independent Group's warding pattern was similar to that proposed by the Labour Group.

45 In this area we considered that the Council's proposal for a two-member ward provides the best reflection of our statutory criteria. The proposal uses clear and identifiable boundaries and appears to reflect community identity in the area. Our primary concern with the Labour Group's proposal was the inclusion of part of Eccleshall parish which would have resulted in the creation of an unviable parish ward containing just 77 electors (we consider a parish ward to be unviable if it contains fewer than 100 electors). Nor were we persuaded by the arguments made by the Independent Group in support of two single-member wards. We have therefore decided to adopt the Council's proposed two-member Seighford & Church Eaton ward as part of our draft recommendations.

Eccleshall and Gnosall & Woodseaves

46 The Council and the Labour Group made broadly similar proposals for a two-member Eccleshall ward comprising the parishes of Adbaston, Chebsey, Eccleshall and Standon. As stated in paragraph 44, the Labour Group proposed putting part of Eccleshall parish into its proposed Seighford ward. As we consider that proposal would result in the creation of an unviable parish ward we are content to adopt the Eccleshall ward as proposed by the Council as part of our draft recommendations.

47 The Council and the Labour Group made identical proposals for a two-member Gnosall & Woodseaves ward comprising the parishes of Forton, Gnosall, High Offley and Norbury. We consider that these proposals are reflective of our statutory criteria. The proposed Gnosall & Woodseaves ward uses clear and identifiable boundaries and provides good electoral equality, and we are content to adopt it as part of our draft recommendations.

48 Our draft recommendations for west rural Stafford are, therefore, two-member Eccleshall, Gnosall & Woodseaves and Seighford & Church Eaton wards having 6% more, 2% more and equal to the number of electors per councillor than the borough average by 2019, respectively.

North rural Stafford and Stone

Barlaston and Fulford

49 In the north of the borough both the Council and the Labour Group proposed a single-member Barlaston ward coterminous with the Barlaston parish boundary and a two-member Fulford ward that is coterminous with the Fulford parish boundary. We consider that these proposals reflect community identity in these areas and provide clear and identifiable boundaries. Accordingly, we are content to adopt the Barlaston

and Fulford wards as proposed by both the Council and the Labour Group as part of our draft recommendations.

Swynnerton & Oulton

50 To the north-west of Stone town the Council proposed a two-member Swynnerton & Oulton ward comprising the parish of Swynnerton and the northern part of Stone Rural parish. The Labour Group proposed two single-member wards of Oulton & Yarnfield which comprised the northern part of Stone rural parish and the southern part of Swynnerton parish (including Yarnfield village) and a Swynnerton ward which comprised the rest of Swynnerton parish.

51 We were concerned that under the Labour Group's proposal electors in Yarnfield would not have direct road transport links to the rest of the ward. We therefore consider that the Council's proposal for a two-member Swynnerton & Oulton ward is more reflective of our statutory criteria and have decided to adopt it as part of our draft recommendations.

Stone

52 The Council proposed dividing the parish of Stone into a single-member Stonefield ward and a two-member ward of Walton and St Michael's. The Labour Group proposed a two-member Walton ward that was broadly similar to that proposed by the Council but had a different northern boundary. The Labour Group also proposed a three-member St Michael's & Stonefield ward in the eastern part of the parish. In this part of the borough, we received additional representations from Stone Constituency Labour Party, Stone Town Council and a member of the public.

53 Stone Town Council argued that the area should be represented by six councillors rather than five and that the boundaries of the current Stonefield & Christchurch ward should not be changed. If Stone were allocated six councillors it would result in Stone being over-represented and would deliver unacceptable levels of electoral inequality. No evidence was provided in support of the Town Council's assertion that the boundaries of Stonefield & Christchurch should remain unchanged and, in any case, using the existing boundary would result in a significant level of electoral inequality. The member of the public stated that the parish should be allocated five councillors to ensure adequate representation.

54 We considered that the boundaries proposed by the Labour Group, which were supported by the Stone Constituency Labour Party, provide the best reflection of our statutory criteria in Stone. The washlands of the River Trent provide a natural and recognisable boundary between the two halves of the parish. We consider that a three-member St Michael's & Stonefield ward is likely to be more reflective of community identity and eliminates the need to divide Stonefield as proposed by the Council. We are therefore adopting the three-member St Michael's & Stonefield ward and the two-member Walton ward proposed by the Labour Group as part of our draft recommendations. We did consider some amendments to the boundary between the two wards proposed by the Labour Group in order to improve electoral equality; however, we consider that the boundary proposed by the Labour Group provides the best balance between our statutory criteria.

55 Our draft recommendations for north rural Stafford and Stone are, therefore, a three-member St Michael's & Stonefield ward, two-member Fulford, Swynnerton & Oulton and Walton wards and a single-member Barlaston ward. These wards would

have 8% more, 3% fewer, 2% fewer, 8% fewer and 6% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the borough by 2019, respectively.

Stafford town – south

Baswich, Penkside and Weeping Cross & Wildwood

56 In the south-east of Stafford town, the Council and the Labour Group made near-identical proposals for a single-member Penkside ward and two-member wards of Baswich and Weeping Cross & Wildwood. Both proposals used clear boundaries which followed main roads, railway lines and parish boundaries that appeared to reflect community identity in the area. The warding patterns also provided for good levels of electoral equality.

57 The two proposals differed only in that the Council included Hall Close and Pioneer Way in its Penkside ward, whereas the boundary proposed by the Labour Group continued along Silkmore Lane and included Hall Close and Pioneer Way in Weeping Cross & Wildwood ward. Having visited the area we consider that the proposal made by the Labour Group for this area better reflects community identity and provides for a more identifiable boundary. We are therefore content to adopt the wards of Baswich, Penkside and Weeping Cross & Wildwood as proposed by the Labour Group as part of our draft recommendations.

Manor

58 The Council and the Labour Group made identical proposals for a two-member Manor ward bounded by Rising Brook and Rowley Bank to the north, the West Coast Main Line to the east and the Hyde Lea parish boundary to the west. We are content that this ward reflects our statutory criteria, and having visited the area, we consider that the northern boundary to the ward is a barrier in the area. We are therefore adopting the Manor ward proposed by both the Council and the Labour Group as part of our draft recommendations.

Highfields & Western Downs and Rowley

59 To the west of Stafford town centre, the Council proposed three single-member wards of Highfields, Western Downs and Rowley. The Labour Group proposed a similar single-member Rowley ward and a two-member Highfields & Western Downs ward. We considered that the Labour Group's proposals better reflect our statutory criteria and appear to reflect community identity in this area. We are therefore adopting the Labour Group's proposals for a single-member Rowley ward and a two-member Highfields & Western Downs ward subject to a minor amendment.

60 The Labour Group proposed including King Edward VI High School in Rowley ward whereas the Council included it in their proposed Highfields ward. We note that the main entrance to the school is off West Way and we have therefore included the school in our Highfields & Western Downs ward with the boundary running around the school grounds.

61 Our draft recommendations for Stafford town – south are, therefore, two-member Baswich, Highfields & Western Downs, Manor and Weeping Cross & Wildwood wards and single-member Penkside and Rowley wards. These wards would have 3% more, 4% fewer, 2% more, 3% fewer, 3% fewer and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the borough by 2019, respectively.

Stafford town – north and central

Doxey & Castletown

62 The Council and the Labour Group made identical proposals for a single-member Doxey & Castletown ward incorporating the parish of Doxey and the Castletown area of Stafford. We are content that this ward reflects our statutory criteria and secures good electoral equality. We are therefore adopting the Doxey & Castletown ward proposed by both the Council and the Labour Group as part of our draft recommendations.

Common and Holmcroft

63 To the north of the town centre the Council proposed two-member wards of Common and Holmcroft, whereas the Labour Group proposed a single-member Common ward and a two-member Holmcroft ward. Having visited the area we are of the view that the proposals made by the Labour Group use more identifiable boundaries in this area, particularly between Common and Holmcroft ward where they proposed that the boundary runs along Stone Road (A34) for much of its length. We consider that the boundary proposed by the Council that would run along Holmcroft Road appeared to divide the community in that area. We have therefore decided to adopt the Common and Holmcroft wards as proposed by the Labour Group as part of our draft recommendations, subject to a minor amendment. We consider that Sandon Road is a clear and identifiable boundary and under our draft recommendations propose that the boundary of Common ward runs to the southern end of Sandon Road in its entirety.

Forebridge

64 The Council and the Labour Group both proposed a single-member Forebridge ward covering the town centre and the residential area immediately to the south. We consider that this ward provides a good reflection of our statutory criteria. However, we are of the view that the A518 and the A34 would provide a more recognisable northern boundary for the ward. We therefore propose that the area of housing and industrial estates to the north of these roads are included in the neighbouring Coton ward. Subject to this amendment we have adopted the Forebridge ward as proposed by both the Council and the Labour Group as part of our draft recommendations. Under our draft recommendations, Forebridge would have 3% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the borough by 2019.

Coton and Littleworth

65 To the east of the town centre, the Council proposed three single-member wards of Coton, Kingston Hill and Littleworth. The Labour Group suggested a pattern of two-member wards of Coton and Littleworth. Again, we considered that the Labour Group proposal generally provides the best reflection of our statutory criteria for this area. We considered that its warding pattern uses clear and identifiable boundaries.

66 As described in paragraph 64 we have amended the northern boundary of the Labour Group's proposed Forebridge ward, incorporating part of it into Coton ward. The Labour Group's proposed Littleworth ward includes 50 electors from Hopton & Coton parish situated on Blenheim Close, Hampton Gardens and Kensington Drive which would require the creation of a parish ward. As stated in paragraph 45 we consider that a parish ward containing fewer than 100 electors is unviable. We therefore propose that the eastern boundary of Littleworth ward follows the Hopton & Coton parish boundary in its entirety.

67 Apart from these minor amendments we are content to adopt the two-member wards of Coton and Littleworth, as proposed by the Labour Group, as part of our draft recommendations.

68 Our draft recommendations for Stafford town – north are, therefore, two-member Coton, Holmcroft and Littleworth wards and single-member Common, Doxey & Castletown and Forebridge wards. These wards would have 1% fewer, 8% more, 7% fewer, 4% more, 5% fewer and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the borough by 2019, respectively.

Conclusions

69 Table 1 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, based on 2012 and 2019 electorate figures.

Table 1: Summary of electoral arrangements

	Draft recommendations	
	2012	2019
Number of councillors	40	40
Number of electoral wards	23	23
Average number of electors per councillor	2,464	2,547
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	3	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	0	0

Draft recommendation

Stafford Borough Council should comprise 40 councillors serving 23 wards, as detailed and named in Table A1 and illustrated on the large map accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

70 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.

71 Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make changes to parish electoral arrangements where these are as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Stafford Borough 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.

72 To meet our obligations under the 2009 Act, we propose consequential parish warding arrangements for the parishes of Stone and Stone Rural.

73 Stone Town Council is currently represented by 18 parish councillors representing four parish wards. 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 Stone parish.

Draft recommendations

Stone Town Council should return 18 parish councillors, as at present, representing three wards: St Michael’s & Stonefield (returning 11 members), Walton North (returning three members) and Walton South (returning four members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 1.

74 Stone Rural Parish Council is currently represented by 10 parish councillors representing four parish wards. 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 Stone Rural parish.

Draft recommendations

Stone Rural Parish Council should return 10 parish councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Aston (returning two members) and Oulton (returning eight members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 1.

3 What happens next?

75 There will now be a consultation period of 10 weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Stafford Borough Council contained in this report. We will take into account fully all submissions received by 24 June 2014. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

76 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Stafford and welcome comments from interested parties relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names and parish electoral arrangements. We would welcome alternative proposals backed up by demonstrable evidence during this stage. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

77 Express your views by writing directly to:

Review Officer
Stafford Review
The Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76–86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG

Submissions can also be made by using the consultation section of our website, www.lgbce.org.uk or by emailing reviews@lgbce.org.uk

78 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, we make available for public inspection full copies of all representations the Commission takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all Stage Three representations will be placed on deposit locally at the offices of Stafford Borough Council and at our offices in Layden House (London) and on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

79 If you are a member of the public and not writing on behalf of a council or organisation we will remove any personal identifiers, such as postal or email addresses, signatures or phone numbers from your submission before it is made public. We will remove signatures from all letters, no matter who they are from.

80 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations and consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, **whether or not** they agree with the draft recommendations. We will then publish our final recommendations.

81 After the publication of our final recommendations, the changes we have proposed must be approved by Parliament. An Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in draft in Parliament. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements to be implemented at the next elections for Stafford Borough Council in 2015.

82 This report has been screened for impact on equalities; with due regard being given to the general equalities duties as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. As no potential negative impacts were identified, a full equality impact analysis is not required.

4 Mapping

Draft recommendations for Stafford

83 The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Stafford Borough Council:

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Stafford Borough Council.

You can also view our draft recommendations for Stafford on our interactive maps at <http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk>

Appendix A

Table A1: Draft recommendations for Stafford Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2012)	Number of Electors per Councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Barlaston	1	2,239	2,239	-9%	2,402	2,402	-6%
2	Baswich	2	5,192	2,596	5%	5,264	2,632	3%
3	Common	1	2,701	2,701	10%	2,660	2,660	4%
4	Coton	2	4,334	2,167	-12%	5,060	2,530	-1%
5	Doxey & Castletown	1	2,299	2,299	-7%	2,426	2,426	-5%
6	Eccleshall	2	5,279	2,640	7%	5,382	2,691	6%
7	Forebridge	1	2,175	2,175	-12%	2,470	2,470	-3%
8	Fulford	2	4,824	2,412	-2%	4,943	2,472	-3%
9	Gnosall & Woodseaves	2	5,212	2,606	6%	5,217	2,609	2%
10	Haywood & Hixon	2	5,118	2,559	4%	5,174	2,587	2%
11	Highfields & Western Downs	2	4,978	2,489	1%	4,904	2,452	-4%
12	Holmcroft	2	5,513	2,757	12%	5,509	2,755	8%

Table A1 (cont.): Draft recommendations for Stafford Borough Council

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2012)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
13 Littleworth	2	4,594	2,297	-7%	4,722	2,361	-7%
14 Manor	2	5,285	2,643	7%	5,218	2,609	2%
15 Milford	1	2,470	2,470	0%	2,505	2,505	-2%
16 Milwich	2	4,793	2,397	-3%	5,078	2,539	0%
17 Penkside	1	2,494	2,494	1%	2,477	2,477	-3%
18 Rowley	1	2,460	2,460	0%	2,470	2,470	-3%
19 Seighford & Church Eaton	2	4,583	2,292	-7%	5,114	2,557	0%
20 St Michael's & Stonefield	3	7,860	2,620	6%	8,243	2,748	8%
21 Swynnerton & Oulton	2	4,669	2,335	-5%	4,997	2,499	-2%
22 Walton	2	4,673	2,337	-5%	4,699	2,350	-8%
23 Weeping Cross & Wildwood	2	4,799	2,400	-3%	4,945	2,473	-3%
Totals	40	98,544	-	-	101,879	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,464	-	-	2,547	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Stafford Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each electoral division 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 B

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
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 on 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 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 13 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and 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 Commission 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

