

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Walsall

October 2002

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WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

- **in nine of the 20 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the borough and three wards vary by more than 20% from the average;**
- **by 2006 this situation is not expected to improve substantially, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in nine wards and by more than 20% in two wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 61-62) are that:

- **Walsall Borough Council should have 60 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 20 wards, the same as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards should be modified and two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each borough councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- **In all of the proposed 20 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to continue with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average for the borough in 2006.**

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

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

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

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

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Large map reference
1	Aldridge Central & South	3	Part of Aldridge Central & South ward; part of Hatherton Rushall ward; part of Streetly ward	2 and 4
2	Aldridge North & Walsall Wood	3	Part of Aldridge North & Walsall Wood ward	2
3	Bentley & Darlaston North	3	Part of Bentley & Darlaston North ward; part of Willenhall South ward	3
4	Birchills Leamore	3	Part of Birchills Leamore ward; part of Bloxwich West ward; part of St Matthew's ward	1 and 3
5	Blakenall	3	Blakenall ward; part of Hatherton Rushall ward; part of St Matthew's ward	1, 2, 3 and 4
6	Bloxwich East	3	Bloxwich East ward; part of Bloxwich West ward; part of Pelsall ward	1
7	Bloxwich West	3	Part of Bloxwich West ward	1
8	Brownhills	3	Part of Brownhills ward	2
9	Darlaston South	3	Part of Bentley & Darlaston North ward; Darlaston South ward; part of Willenhall South ward	3
10	Paddock	3	Part of Paddock Wood ward	4
11	Palfrey	3	<i>Unchanged</i> Palfrey ward	3 and 4
12	Pelsall	3	Part of Blakenall ward; part of Brownhills ward; part of Hatherton Rushall ward; part of Pelsall ward	1 and 2
13	Pheasey	3	Part of Aldridge Central & South ward; part of Hatherton Rushall ward; Pheasey ward; part of Paddock Wood ward	4
14	Pleck	3	Part of Birchills Leamore ward; part of Pleck ward	3
15	Rushall–Shelfield	3	Part of Blakenall ward; part of Hatherton Rushall ward; part of Pelsall ward	2 and 4
16	Short Heath	3	Part of Short Heath ward; part of Willenhall South ward	1 and 3
17	St Matthew's	3	Part of Hatherton Rushall ward; part of Pleck ward; part of St Matthew's ward	3 and 4
18	Streetly	3	Part of Streetly ward	4
19	Willenhall North	3	<i>Unchanged</i> Willenhall North ward	1 and 3
20	Willenhall South	3	Part of Bentley & Darlaston North ward; part of Short Heath ward; part of Willenhall South ward	3

Notes: 1 The whole borough is unparished.

2 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2 and the large maps.

3 We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Walsall

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Aldridge Central & South	3	10,282	3,427	8	9,961	3,320	7
2	Aldridge North & Walsall Wood	3	10,244	3,415	8	9,982	3,327	7
3	Bentley & Darlaston North	3	9,133	3,044	-4	8,881	2,960	-5
4	Birchills Leamore	3	9,399	3,133	-1	9,260	3,087	-1
5	Blakenall	3	9,072	3,024	-5	8,831	2,944	-5
6	Bloxwich East	3	9,186	3,062	-3	9,025	3,008	-3
7	Bloxwich West	3	9,811	3,270	3	9,520	3,173	2
8	Brownhills	3	9,582	3,194	1	9,330	3,110	0
9	Darlaston South	3	9,458	3,153	-1	9,559	3,186	2
10	Paddock	3	9,487	3,162	0	9,277	3,092	-1
11	Palfrey	3	9,857	3,286	4	9,617	3,206	3
12	Pelsall	3	8,773	2,924	-8	8,559	2,853	-8
13	Pheasey	3	8,658	2,886	-9	8,452	2,817	-9
14	Pleck	3	9,493	3,164	0	9,534	3,178	2
15	Rushall–Shelfield	3	9,491	3,164	0	9,250	3,083	-1
16	Short Heath	3	9,132	3,044	-4	8,887	2,962	-5
17	St Matthew's	3	9,258	3,086	-3	9,262	3,087	-1
18	Streetly	3	10,426	3,475	10	10,229	3,410	10
19	Willenhall North	3	9,616	3,205	1	9,353	3,118	0
20	Willenhall South	3	9,816	3,272	3	9,794	3,265	5
	Totals	60	190,174	-	-	186,563	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,170	-	-	3,109	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Walsall Borough Council's submission.

Notes: 1 The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 Please note that the figures for existing and proposed electorates differ slightly. However, this does not have a substantive effect on our proposals. This is due to rounding.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Walsall, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the seven metropolitan areas in the West Midlands as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. The programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Walsall. Walsall's last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in November 1978 (Report no. 310).

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

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

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Walsall was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties*. This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

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

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

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

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

exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

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

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

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

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

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

14 The borough of Walsall is bounded by Staffordshire to the north and by Birmingham, Sandwell and Wolverhampton to the south. The western part of the borough is made up of the older Black Country towns of Willenhall and Darlaston while the eastern part is more residential in nature. There is a wide range of traditional and new industries spread throughout the borough. The borough benefits from its position on the national motorway network and is within easy reach of both Birmingham Airport and the National Exhibition Centre.

15 The electorate of the borough is 190,193 (December 2001). The Council presently has 60 members who are elected from 20 wards.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 3,170 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will decrease to 3,109 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in nine of the 20 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average and three wards by more than 20%. The worst imbalance is in Pheasey ward where each councillor represents 25% fewer electors than the borough average. Moreover, the current allocation of councillors is incorrect. Under the existing council size, Pheasey ward is entitled to 2.25 councillors, but is currently represented by 3 councillors.

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

Map 1: Existing wards in Walsall

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Aldridge Central & South	3	9,956	3,319	5	9,706	3,235	4
2	Aldridge North & Walsall Wood	3	10,259	3,420	8	10,001	3,334	7
3	Bentley & Darlaston North	3	9,852	3,284	4	9,602	3,201	3
4	Birchills Leamore	3	9,622	3,207	1	9,367	3,122	0
5	Blakenall	3	7,799	2,600	-18	7,589	2,530	-19
6	Bloxwich East	3	8,422	2,807	-11	8,272	2,757	-11
7	Bloxwich West	3	11,238	3,746	18	10,971	3,657	18
8	Brownhills	3	9,586	3,195	1	9,338	3,113	0
9	Darlaston South	3	8,743	2,914	-8	8,848	2,949	-5
10	Hatherton Rushall	3	10,313	3,438	8	10,123	3,374	9
11	Paddock Wood	3	10,892	3,631	15	10,653	3,551	14
12	Palfrey	3	9,860	3,287	4	9,626	3,209	3
13	Pelsall	3	11,503	3,834	21	11,221	3,740	20
14	Pheasey	3	7,135	2,378	-25	6,973	2,324	-25
15	Pleck	3	7,253	2,418	-24	7,312	2,437	-22
16	Short Heath	3	9,149	3,050	-4	8,907	2,969	-5
17	St Matthew's	3	8,318	2,773	-13	8,288	2,763	-11
18	Streetly	3	10,878	3,626	14	10,610	3,537	14
19	Willenhall North	3	9,616	3,205	1	9,355	3,118	0
20	Willenhall South	3	9,799	3,266	3	9,781	3,260	5
	Totals	60	190,193	-	-	186,543	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,170	-	-	3,109	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Pheasey ward were relatively over-represented by 25%, while electors in Pelsall ward were relatively under-represented by 21%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

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

19 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the Borough Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. The LGCE received 11 representations during Stage One, including borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council and Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council.

Walsall Borough Council

20 The Borough Council proposed a council of 60 members, serving 20 wards, the same as at present. Under its proposals no ward would vary by more than 10% from the borough average both currently and in 2006.

Aldridge–Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association

21 The Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association also proposed maintaining the current arrangements of 60 councillors representing 20 wards. Their proposals were similar to those of the Borough Council in a number of areas.

The Walsall Labour Party

22 The Walsall Labour Party substantially supported the proposals put forward by the Borough Council. However, it proposed amendments to the Borough Council's proposals in the town centre area.

Aldridge–Brownhills Liberal Democrats

23 Aldridge–Brownhills Liberal Democrats generally supported the outline plans produced by the Borough Council. However, they proposed amendments in the eastern part of the borough.

St Matthew's Branch Labour Party

24 St Matthew's Branch Labour Party proposed a new Town Centre ward.

Other representations

25 A further six representations were received from a local committee, a borough councillor and four local residents. North Walsall Local Committee supported Councillor Woods Appendix D proposals to the Borough Council's consultation. Councillor Longhi submitted a petition signed by almost 1,000 residents proposing that the Allens Lane area of Pelsall remain part of a Pelsall ward. A local resident objected to the Borough Council's proposals in the Aldridge/Pheasey area while three local residents commented more generally on local politics.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

Electorate forecasts

31 Since 1975 there has been approximately a 2.5% decrease in the electorate of Walsall borough. The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting a decrease in the electorate of approximately 2% from 190,193 to 186,543 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects a general decrease across the majority of the borough. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

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

Council size

33 Walsall Borough Council presently has 60 members. The Borough Council and the Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association both proposed a council of 60 members and we received no alternative proposals regarding council size. The Borough Council stated that it had adopted a cabinet of 10 members, the maximum permitted and that this would meet thirteen

times a year along with the possibility of special meetings being called. It stated further that cabinet members were responsible for at least one key council function and that they would also conduct regular meetings with members of staff, partners and stakeholders. In addition it stated that it had established five Overview and Scrutiny Committees served by 10 members of which Cabinet members are ineligible, a number of Regulatory Committees served by 14 members each and a Standards Committee, as set out in the constitution which includes a further seven members. It also stated that seven district committees had been established of which all council members would serve and highlighted the other commitments of its members such as the West Midlands Joint Committee, West Midlands Police Authority, the West Midlands Local Government Association, health partnerships and their own surgeries.

34 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 60 members.

Electoral arrangements

35 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council's proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we have based our recommendations on the Borough Council's scheme. We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. However, to improve electoral equality further we propose minor modifications to the Borough Council's proposals in the Bloxwich area and propose a boundary amendment in the Aldridge area in order to better reflect community identity. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Bentley & Darlaston North, Darlaston South, Short Heath, Willenhall North and Willenhall South wards;
- (b) Birchills Leamore, Blakenall, Bloxwich East and Bloxwich West wards;
- (d) Paddock Wood, Palfrey, Pleck and St Matthew's wards;
- (e) Aldridge Central & South, Aldridge North & Walsall Wood, Brownhills, Hatherton Rushall, Pelsall, Pheasey and Streetly wards.

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

Bentley & Darlaston North, Darlaston South, Short Heath, Willenhall North and Willenhall South wards

37 The five wards of Bentley & Darlaston North, Darlaston South, Short Heath, Willenhall North and Willenhall South are located in the west of the borough and currently have 4% more, 8% fewer, 4% fewer, 1% more and 3% more electors per councillor than the borough average (3% more, 5% fewer, 5% fewer, equal to and 5% more than the borough average in 2006).

38 At Stage One, the Borough Council and Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association both proposed an identical warding pattern for the area. They proposed that the current Willenhall North ward be maintained on its current boundaries and proposed a minor amendment between the current Short Heath and Willenhall South wards. They proposed that a small number of properties on Clarkes Lane and some industrial premises on Stringes Lane, Stringes Close and Monmer Close be transferred from Short Heath ward to Willenhall South ward. The Borough Council stated that these proposals had been supported by Willenhall District Committee. They also proposed that the current Bentley & Darlaston North and Darlaston South wards be substantially maintained upon their current boundaries. However, they proposed that the area to the west of Midland Road, The Green, Blockall and St Lawrence

Way in the current Bentley & Darlaston North ward be transferred to the current Darlaston South ward. The Borough Council stated that this proposal had been supported by Darlaston District Committee.

39 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. We note that there appears to be agreement as to the most appropriate warding arrangements for the area, that the proposals have also received the support of local committees in the area and that the proposals would secure a good level of electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore propose adopting the proposals of the Borough Council and the Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association. Under our draft recommendations the proposed Bentley & Darlaston North, Darlaston South, Short Heath, Willenhall North and Willenhall South wards would initially have 4% fewer, 1% fewer, 4% fewer, 1% more and 3% more electors per councillor than the borough average (5% fewer, 2% more, 5% fewer, equal to the average and 5% more in 2006). Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Birchills Leamore, Blakenall, Bloxwich East and Bloxwich West wards

40 The four wards of Birchills Leamore, Blakenall, Bloxwich East and Bloxwich West are located to the north of the centre of the borough and currently have 1% more, 18% fewer, 11% fewer and 18% more electors per councillor than the borough average (equal to, 19% fewer, 11% fewer and 18% more in 2006).

41 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed minimal changes to the current Bloxwich East and Bloxwich West wards. However, in order to address the current imbalances in the area, it proposed transferring the area to the south of Reeves Street and Nursery Road to its proposed Birchills Leamore ward from the current Bloxwich West ward while transferring the area bounded by Somerfield Road, High Street and the eastern part of Nursery Road to its proposed Bloxwich East ward from the current Bloxwich West ward. It also proposed a number of alterations to the current Birchills Leamore ward. It proposed transferring an area north of Wolverhampton Road bounded by the disused Anson Branch Canal, Bentley Lane, Old Birchills and the Walsall Canal to its proposed Pleck ward. It further proposed that part of the current Bloxwich West ward, an area bounded by the Walsall-Hednesford railway line, Leamore Lane, the upper part of Green Lane and a line immediately to the south of Nursery Road, and part of the current St Matthew's ward, an area bounded by the Walsall Canal, the Wyrley & Essington Canal, Bloxwich Road and Stafford Street, Court Way, Blue Lane West and Wolverhampton Street be transferred to its proposed Birchills Leamore ward. It proposed enlarging the current Blakenall ward southwards to incorporate an area bounded by Littleton Street West, Stafford Street, Bloxwich Road (to Pratt's Bridge), the Wyrley & Essington Canal and the Walsall-Hednesford railway line from the current St Matthew's ward in order to address the current imbalance in the area.

42 Under the Borough Council's scheme its proposed Birchills Leamore, Blakenall, Bloxwich East and Bloxwich West wards would initially have 1% more, 5% fewer, 8% fewer and 6% more electors per councillor than the borough average (2% more, 5% fewer, 8% fewer and 5% more in 2006).

43 The Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association proposed that the area bounded by Elmore Green Road and Croxstalls Road and southwards to the east of the railway line in the current Bloxwich West ward be transferred to its proposed Birchills Leamore ward. It also proposed that the current Bloxwich East ward be maintained on its current boundaries, as well as a reconfigured Birchills Leamore ward and a new Blakenall ward that would include parts of High Heath and Shelfield.

44 We have carefully considered the proposals received at Stage One. We are of the view that the Borough Council's proposals would generally reflect the statutory criteria better than the

proposals of the Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association. Indeed, we note that the proposals of the Conservative & Unionist Association would not secure as identifiable ward boundaries as those of the Borough Council, particularly with regard to the proposed Blakenall ward. However, we propose boundary amendments to the Borough Council's proposed Bloxwich East ward and Bloxwich West and Birchills Leamore wards in order to secure an improved level of electoral equality in the area. We propose that the area to the south of Reeves Street be transferred to the proposed Bloxwich East ward from the proposed Bloxwich West ward and that Irvine Road and Stuart Street in the proposed Birchills Leamore ward also be transferred to the proposed Bloxwich East ward.

45 Under our draft proposals the proposed Birchills Leamore, Blakenall, Bloxwich East and Bloxwich West wards would initially have 1% fewer, 5% fewer, 3% fewer and 3% more electors per councillor than the borough average (1% fewer, 5% fewer, 3% fewer and 2% more in 2006). Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Paddock Wood, Palfrey, Pleck and St Matthew's wards

46 The four wards of Paddock Wood, Palfrey, Pleck and St Matthew's are located in the centre and south of the borough and currently have 15% more, 4% more, 24% fewer and 13% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (14% more, 3% more, 22% fewer and 11% fewer in 2006).

47 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed modifying the current Pleck ward. It proposed that its northern boundary be extended to take in the residential area to the north of the Wolverhampton Road, bounded by the disused Anson Branch Canal, Bentley Lane, Old Birchills and the Walsall Canal. It also proposed transferring the mainly industrial/commercial area bounded by the Walsall Canal, running south from the Flour Mills to Rollingmill and by the railway line into Walsall town centre and Wolverhampton Street from the current Pleck ward to its proposed St Matthew's ward. It argued that this would unite that area with other parts of the commercial town centre. Its proposed St Matthew's ward would retain the current ward boundaries with Palfrey and Paddock Wood wards in the south and south-east of the ward. It further proposed that the boundary of the town centre itself be revised in order that the commercial and industrial areas of the Premier and Town Wharf business parks, the newly built Crown Wharf retail park and the New Art Gallery and its environs be brought within the St Matthew's ward. It proposed that this boundary follow Rollingmill Street, the Walsall Canal, Wolverhampton Street, Blue Lane West, Court Way and Littleton Street West. The Council further proposed the transfer of the area to the north of Wolverhampton Street, Blue Lane West, Court Way and Littleton Street West to the proposed Birchills Leamore and Blakenall wards (mentioned previously) and the transfer of the area in the current Hatherton Rushall ward lying south of the Walsall-Sutton Coldfield railway line. It argued that this area has an affinity to Walsall town centre and its facilities.

48 The Borough Council also proposed that the current Paddock Wood ward be reconfigured in order to facilitate its proposals for the area. It proposed that Orchard Hills, the residential area accessed from Sutton Road, including Daffodil Road, Fallowfield Road, Longmeadow Road, Daisy Bank Crescent and Wood End Road be transferred to the proposed Pheasey ward. It argued that it was a 'discrete area, physically separate from the adjacent Park Hall Estate'. It also proposed that the current Palfrey ward be maintained on its current boundaries, arguing that the current arrangements reflect community identity.

49 Under the Borough Council's scheme its proposed Paddock, Palfrey, Pleck and St Matthew's wards would initially have equal to, 4% more, equal to and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (1% fewer, 3% more, 2% more and 1% fewer in 2006).

50 The Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association proposed that St Matthew's ward remain largely unchanged. However, it proposed that an area in the north-west of the current Palfrey ward be transferred and proposed that a small area in the south-west of the current Birchills Leamore ward be transferred to its proposed Pleck ward. It also proposed that the Orchard Hills area of the current Paddock Wood ward be transferred to its proposed Pheasey ward.

51 The Walsall Labour Party objected to the Borough Council's proposals for the Paddock Wood and St Matthew's area. It proposed modifying the proposed St Matthew's and Paddock wards. It proposed that the area to the east of Lichfield Road, north of Buchanan Road, to the east of Princes Avenue and to the south of The Crescent be combined to form a modified Paddock ward, while the areas to the west and south of Lichfield Road, to the south of Buchanan Road, west of Princes Crescent and to the north of The Crescent be combined to form a modified St Matthew's ward. St Matthew's Branch Labour Party also proposed a new Town Centre ward which was almost identical to that of the Walsall Labour Party. North Walsall Local Committee supported the scheme in Appendix D, part of the Borough Council's consultation document which, it argued, left the North Walsall Local Committee's area intact.

52 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. We note that there does not appear to be a consensus as how best to ward the town centre area. However, we note that the proposals of the Walsall Labour Party, St Matthew's Group Labour Party and North Walsall Local Committee would isolate the northern and southern parts of the proposed Paddock ward which would not be directly linked. We are therefore of the view that this would not best reflect community identity in the area. While the proposals of the Borough Council are not ideal, we cannot view any area in isolation and must consider how the proposals received would affect the area as a whole. Therefore, we are of the view that the Borough Council's proposed Paddock, Palfrey, Pleck and St Matthew's wards would better reflect the statutory criteria in the area than the alternative proposals received. However, we would be interested to receive alternative proposals at Stage Three that would better reflect the statutory criteria in the area. The electoral variances would be the same as those for the Borough Council's scheme. Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Aldridge Central & South, Aldridge North & Walsall Wood, Brownhills, Hatherton Rushall, Pelsall, Pheasey and Streetly wards

53 The seven wards of Aldridge Central & South, Aldridge North & Walsall Wood, Brownhills, Hatherton Rushall, Pelsall, Pheasey and Streetly are located in the east of the borough and currently have 5% more, 8% more, 1% more, 8% more, 21% more, 25% fewer and 14% more electors per councillor than the borough average (4% more, 7% more, equal to, 9% more, 20% more, 25% fewer and 14% more in 2006).

54 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed transferring the area to the east of Ford Brook in the current Pelsall ward to its proposed Hatherton Rushall ward. It also proposed that the agricultural land around Railswood Farm in the current Brownhills ward be transferred to its proposed Pelsall ward and that part of Pelsall Lane as far as and including Burton Avenue be transferred from the current Hatherton Rushall ward to its proposed Pelsall ward. It also proposed that the area to the south of the Walsall-Sutton Coldfield railway line be transferred from the current Hatherton Rushall ward to its proposed St Matthew's ward, arguing that this area relates more closely to the town centre. It proposed that the current Hatherton Rushall ward name be reviewed in the light of the fact that its proposed ward would now largely cover the Rushall, Shelfield and High Heath areas. The Council proposed to substantially retain the current Brownhills ward subject to the agricultural area to be transferred to its proposed Pelsall ward. It proposed that the existing Aldridge North & Walsall Wood ward be retained on its current boundaries.

55 The Borough Council proposed a number of amendments to the current Aldridge Central & South ward in order to address imbalances in the neighbouring wards of Pheasey and Streetly. It proposed that the area bounded by Longwood Lane, Walsall Road, Bosty Lane, Barr Common, Longwood Road and Sutton Road be transferred to its proposed Pheasey ward while the area bounded by Foley Road West, Wood Lane and Chester Road be transferred from the current Streetly ward to its proposed Aldridge Central & South ward. As mentioned previously the Borough Council proposed that the Orchard Hills area of the current Paddock Wood ward be transferred to the proposed Pheasey ward.

56 Under the Borough Council's scheme its proposed Aldridge Central & South, Aldridge North & Walsall Wood, Brownhills, Hatherton Rushall, Pelsall, Pheasey and Streetly wards would initially have 7% more, 8% more, 1% more, equal to, 8% fewer, 7% fewer and 10% more electors per councillor than the borough average (5% more, 7% more, equal to, 1% fewer, 8% fewer, 8% fewer and 10% more in 2006).

57 The Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative & Unionist Association proposed that the current Pheasey, Brownhills and Aldridge North & Walsall Wood wards be largely retained on their current boundaries. However, it proposed that the area to the north of and including Lothians Road to the east of Lichfield Road be transferred to its proposed Brownhills ward. It also proposed that Hatherton Rushall ward be largely maintained on its current boundaries subject to that area it proposed transferring to its proposed Blakenall ward (mentioned previously). Its proposed Aldridge Central & South, Pheasey and Streetly wards were similar to those proposed by the Borough Council. However, it proposed that the southern boundary of the proposed Aldridge Central & South ward be maintained. The Aldridge-Brownhills Liberal Democrats proposed a number of alterations to the Borough Council's outline plans for the area. As part of its submission it proposed that the High Heath area be included within a new Pelsall ward and proposed that the new ward covering part of the current Hatherton Rushall ward be named Rushall-Shelfield ward and that the ward covering the Pheasey area be named Beacon ward. Councillor Longhi submitted a petition numbering 988 signatures objecting to any proposals that would result in the Allens Lane area not being part of a proposed Pelsall ward. A local resident objected to the Borough Council's proposed Aldridge Central & South, Pheasey and Streetly wards. He argued that the electors on Longwood Road, Knights Hill, Barr Common Close and Road and part of Erdington Road were an integral part of the Aldridge area.

58 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. We note that the proposals of the Borough Council would achieve a good level of electoral equality and generally reflect the interests of local communities. We also note that the Borough Council's proposals were amended in the light of the objections to its proposals in the Allens Lane area. We therefore propose basing our draft recommendations in the area on its proposals. However, we were not convinced that the Borough Council's proposed boundary between Aldridge Central & South and Pheasey wards would best reflect the statutory criteria in the area. We therefore propose that the Borough Council's proposed boundary be amended to run to the rear of the properties on the southern side of Walsall Road and Bosty Lane and to the rear of the properties on the western side of Barr Common Road and Longwood Road. We note that electoral equality would worsen slightly in the proposed Aldridge Central & South ward but have been persuaded that the statutory criteria would be better reflected by this proposal. We also propose that the Red House Industrial Estate be wholly contained within the proposed Aldridge Central & South ward. We have been persuaded that the ward name Rushall-Shelfield would be more appropriate than the current Hatherton Rushall ward name but we have not been persuaded that the proposed Beacon ward name would be more reflective of the area than the current Pheasey ward name. We note that the Borough Council's proposed Streetly ward would vary by 10% both initially and in 2006. However, we acknowledge that the area is somewhat isolated from the surrounding area and therefore consider that the Borough Council's proposals would best reflect the statutory criteria.

59 Under our draft proposals the proposed Aldridge Central & South, Aldridge North & Walsall Wood, Brownhills, Pelsall, Pheasey, Rushall-Shelfield and Streetly wards would initially have 8% more, 8% more, 1% more, 8% fewer, 9% fewer, equal to and 10% more electors per councillor than the borough average (7% more, 7% more, equal to, 8% fewer, 9% fewer, 1% fewer and 10% more in 2006). Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Electoral cycle

60 Under section 7(3) of the Local Government Act 1972, all Metropolitan borough/cities have a system of elections by thirds.

Conclusions

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

- a council of 60 members should be retained;
- there should be 20 wards;
- the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards should be modified and two wards should retain their existing boundaries.

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

- we propose amending the boundary between the proposed Bloxwich East and Bloxwich West wards;
- we propose amending the boundary between the proposed Birchills Leamore and Bloxwich West wards;
- we propose amending the boundary between the proposed Aldridge Central & South and Rushall-Shelfield wards;
- we propose amending the boundary between the proposed Aldridge Central & South and Pheasey wards.

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

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	60	60	60	60
Number of wards	20	20	20	20
Average number of electors per councillor	3,170	3,170	3,109	3,109
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	9	0	9	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	3	0	2	0

64 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Walsall Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from nine to none. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

Draft recommendation

Walsall Borough Council should comprise 60 councillors serving 20 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, Appendix A and the large maps.

Map 2: Draft recommendations for Walsall

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

66 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

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

APPENDIX A

Draft recommendations for Walsall: Detailed mapping

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

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

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

Map A1: Draft recommendations for Walsall: Key map

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

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

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