

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Bedfordshire County Council

January 2004

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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:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

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

Summary

We began a review of Bedfordshire County Council's electoral arrangements on 10 December 2002.

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

We found that the current arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Bedfordshire.

- **In 31 of the 49 divisions, each of which are currently represented by a single councillor, the number of electors varies by more than 10% from the average for the county and 13 divisions vary by more than 20%.**
- **By 2007 this situation is expected to worsen with the number of electors forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 35 divisions and by more than 20% in 17 divisions.**

Our main proposals for Bedfordshire County Council's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and Paragraphs 102-103) are that:

- **Bedfordshire County Council should have 52 councillors, 3 more than at present, representing 46 divisions.**
- **As the divisions are based on district wards which have themselves been changed as a result of recent district reviews, the boundaries of all divisions will be subject to change.**

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

- **In 28 of the proposed 46 divisions the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the average.**
- **An improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in 35 divisions expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average by 2007.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 13 January 2004. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in 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 then be responsible for implementing change to the local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also decide when any changes will come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 8 March 2004.

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

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

Division name (by district council area)	Number of Councillors	Constituent district wards
Bedford Borough		
1 Brickhill	1	Brickhill ward
2 Bromham	1	Part of Bromham ward (Bromham parish and Biddenham North parish ward of Biddenham parish)
3 Cauldwell	1	Cauldwell ward
4 Clapham & Oakley	1	Clapham ward; Oakley ward
5 De Parys	1	De Parys ward; part Castle ward
6 Eastcotts	1	Eastcotts ward; part of Great Barford ward (Great Barford parish; Cople parish; Willington parish)
7 Goldington	1	Goldington ward
8 Harpur	1	Harpur ward
9 Harrold & Sharnbrook	1	Harrold ward; Sharnbrook ward; part of Carlton ward (Pavenham parish; Felmersham parish)
10 Kempston	2	Kempston East; part of Kempston North ward (North parish ward of Kempston parish) ; part of Kempston South ward
11 Kempston Rural	1	Turvey ward; part of Bromham ward (Biddenham South parish ward of Biddenham parish); part of Carlton ward (Carlton & Chellington parish; Stevington parish); part of Kempston North Ward (West parish ward of Kempston parish); part of Kempston South ward
12 Kingsbrook	1	Kingsbrook ward
13 Newnham	1	Newnham ward; part Castle ward
14 North East Bedford	1	Riseley ward; Roxton ward; part of Great Barford ward (Ravensden parish; Renhold parish)
15 Putnoe	1	Putnoe ward
16 Queens Park	1	Queens Park Ward; part Castle ward
17 Wilshamstead	1	Wilshamstead ward
18 Wootton	1	Wootton ward
Mid Bedfordshire district		
19 Ampthill	1	Ampthill ward
20 Biggleswade	2	Biggleswade Holme ward; Biggleswade Ivel ward; Biggleswade Stratton ward
21 Cranfield	1	Aspley Guise ward; Cranfield ward
22 Flitwick East	1	Flitton, Greenfield & Pulloxhill ward; Flitwick East ward
23 Flitwick West	1	Flitwick West ward
24 Langford & Henlow Village	1	Langford & Henlow Village ward; part of Clifton & Meppershall ward (Clifton parish)
25 Marston	1	Marston ward
26 Maulden & Houghton Conquest	1	Maulden & Clophill ward; part of Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden ward (Houghton Conquest parish; Haynes parish)
27 Northill & Blunham	1	Northill & Blunham ward; part of Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden ward (Southill parish; Old Warden parish); part of Sandy Ivel ward (Ivel West parish ward of Sandy parish); part of Sandy Pinnacle ward (Pinnacle North parish ward of Sandy parish)

Division name (by district council area)	Number of Councillors	Constituent district wards
28 Potton	1	Potton & Wensley ward
29 Sandy	1	Part of Sandy Ivel ward (Ivel East parish ward of Sandy parish); part of Sandy Pinnacle ward (Pinnacle South parish ward of Sandy parish)
30 Shefford	1	Part of Clifton & Meppershall ward (Meppershall parish); part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst ward (Shefford parish; Campton & Chicksands parish)
31 Silsoe & Shillington	1	Shillington, Stondon & Henlow Camp ward; Silsoe ward; part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst ward (Gravenhurst parish)
32 Stotfold & Arlesey	2	Arlesey ward; Stotfold ward
33 Woburn	1	Harlington ward; Westoning & Tingrith ward; Woburn ward
South Bedfordshire district		
34 Barton	1	Barton-Le-Clay ward; Streatley ward
35 Caddington	1	Caddington, Hyde & Slip End ward; part of Kensworth and Totternhoe ward (Kensworth parish)
36 Dunstable	2	Chiltern ward; Dunstable Central ward; Manshead ward
37 Grovebury	1	Grovebury ward
38 Houghton Regis	2	Houghton Hall ward; Parkside ward; Tithe Farm ward
39 Icknield	1	Icknield ward
40 Linslade & Planets	2	All Saints ward; Linslade ward; Planets ward
41 Northfields	1	Northfields ward
42 Plantation	1	Plantation ward
43 South West Bedfordshire	1	Eaton Bray ward; part of Kensworth & Totternhoe ward (Studham parish; Totternhoe parish; Whipsnade parish); part of Stanbridge ward (Great Billington parish, Stanbridge parish, Tilsworth parish)
44 Southcott	1	Southcott ward
45 Toddington	1	Heath & Reach ward; Toddington ward; part of Stanbridge ward (Chalgrave parish; Eggington parish)
46 Watling	1	Watling ward

Notes:

1. *The constituent district wards are those resulting from the electoral reviews of the three Bedfordshire districts which were completed in 2001. Where whole district wards do not form the building blocks, constituent parishes and parish wards are listed.*
2. *The large map inserted at the back of the report illustrates the proposed divisions outlined above and the maps in Appendix A illustrate some of the proposed boundaries in more detail.*

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Bedfordshire County Council

Division name (by district council area)		Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Bedford Borough								
1	Brickhill	1	6,663	6,663	18	6,296	6,296	7
2	Bromham	1	5,382	5,382	-4	6,199	6,199	5
3	Cauldwell	1	5,785	5,785	3	5,991	5,991	2
4	Clapham & Oakley	1	6,032	6,032	7	6,133	6,133	4
5	De Parys	1	5,790	5,790	3	5,507	5,507	-6
6	Eastcotts	1	4,576	4,576	-19	5,241	5,241	-11
7	Goldington	1	6,232	6,232	11	6,004	6,004	2
8	Harpur	1	6,164	6,164	9	5,856	5,856	0
9	Harrold & Sharnbrook	1	5,411	5,411	-4	5,354	5,354	-9
10	Kempston	2	13,426	6,713	19	13,055	6,528	11
11	Kempston Rural	1	4,482	4,482	-20	5,692	5,692	-3
12	Kingsbrook	1	6,457	6,457	15	6,191	6,191	5
13	Newnham	1	6,683	6,683	19	6,391	6,391	9
14	North East Bedford	1	5,919	5,919	5	6,377	6,377	9
15	Putnoe	1	6,680	6,680	19	6,304	6,304	7
16	Queens Park	1	6,502	6,502	15	6,461	6,461	10
17	Wilshamstead	1	3,634	3,634	-35	4,852	4,852	-17
18	Wootton	1	4,128	4,128	-27	5,065	5,065	-14
Mid Bedfordshire								
19	Amphill	1	5,358	5,358	-5	5,374	5,374	-9
20	Biggleswade	2	11,877	5,939	5	13,140	6,570	12
21	Cranfield	1	6,075	6,075	8	6,284	6,284	7
22	Flitwick East	1	5,838	5,838	4	5,668	5,668	-4
23	Flitwick West	1	5,864	5,864	4	5,555	5,555	-5
24	Langford & Henlow Village	1	5,969	5,969	6	5,929	5,929	1
25	Marston	1	3,853	3,853	-32	5,092	5,092	-13
26	Maulden & Houghton Conquest	1	5,578	5,578	-1	6,656	6,656	13
27	Northhill & Blunham	1	6,420	6,420	14	6,364	6,364	8
28	Potton	1	5,543	5,543	-2	5,444	5,444	-7
29	Sandy	1	6,641	6,641	18	6,288	6,288	7
30	Shefford	1	5,929	5,929	5	6,228	6,228	6
31	Silsoe & Shillington	1	5,666	5,666	1	5,701	5,701	-3

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
32 Stotfold & Arlesey	2	8,862	4,431	-21	10,926	5,463	-7
33 Woburn	1	5,574	5,574	-1	5,202	5,202	-11
South Bedfordshire							
34 Barton	1	5,551	5,551	-1	5,791	5,791	-1
35 Caddington	1	6,146	6,146	9	6,379	6,379	9
36 Dunstable	2	10,899	5,450	-3	11,396	5,698	-3
37 Grovebury	1	5,037	5,037	-11	5,995	5,995	2
38 Houghton Regis	2	12,279	6,140	9	13,017	6,509	11
39 Icknield	1	4,856	4,856	-14	5,030	5,030	-14
40 Linslade & Planets	2	10,891	5,446	-3	11,469	5,735	-2
41 Northfields	1	5,093	5,093	-10	5,586	5,586	-5
42 Plantation	1	4,839	4,839	-14	4,993	4,993	-15
43 South West Bedfordshire	1	5,561	5,561	-1	5,795	5,795	-1
44 Southcott	1	5,320	5,320	-6	5,490	5,490	-7
45 Toddington	1	6,134	6,134	9	6,428	6,428	9
46 Watling	1	5,264	5,264	-7	5,425	5,425	-8
Totals	52	292,863	-	-	305,616	-	-
Averages	-	-	5,632	-	-	5,877	-

Source: Electorate Figures are based on Bedfordshire County Council's submission.

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

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the county of Bedfordshire, on which we are now consulting. Our review of the county is part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. This programme started in 1996 and is expected to finish in 2004.

2 In carrying out these county reviews, we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 no. 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - achieve equality of representation;
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.
- The general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and
 - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

3 Details of the legislation under which we work are set out in The Electoral Commission's *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reviews* (published by the EC, July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of electoral divisions. In each two-tier county, our approach is first to complete the PERs of all the constituent districts and, when the Orders for the resulting changes in those areas have been made, then to commence a PER of the county council's electoral arrangements. Orders were made for the new electoral arrangements in the districts in Bedfordshire County Council in December 2001 and we are now embarking on our county review in this area.

5 Prior to the commencement of Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000 each county council division could only return one member. This restraint has now been removed by section 89 of the 2000 Act, and we may now recommend the creation of multi-member county divisions. In areas where we are unable to identify single-member divisions that are coterminous with ward boundaries and provide acceptable levels of electoral equality we will consider recommending two-member divisions if they provide a better balance between these two factors. However, we do not expect to recommend large numbers of multi-member divisions other than, perhaps, in the more urban areas of a county.

6 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 sets out the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements*. These statutory rules state that each division should be wholly contained within a single district and that division boundaries should not split unwarded parishes or parish wards.

7 In the *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been created locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local people are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configurations are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while also reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.

8 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the local authority 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.

9 Similarly, we will seek to ensure that each district area within the county is allocated the correct number of county councillors with respect to the district's proportion of the county's electorate.

10 The *Rules* provide that, in considering county council electoral arrangements, we should have regard to the boundaries of district wards. We attach considerable importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of divisions and wards. The term 'coterminosity' is used throughout the report and refers to situations where the boundaries of county electoral divisions and district wards are the same, that is to say where county divisions comprise either one or more whole district wards.

11 We recognise, however, that it is unlikely to be possible to achieve absolute coterminosity throughout a county area while also providing for the optimum level of electoral equality. In this respect, county reviews are different to those of districts. We will seek to achieve the best available balance between electoral equality and coterminosity, taking into account the statutory criteria. While the proportion of electoral divisions that will be coterminous with the boundaries of district wards is likely to vary between counties, we would normally expect coterminosity to be achieved in a significant majority of divisions. The average level of coterminosity secured under our final recommendations for the first eleven counties that we have reviewed (excluding the Isle of Wight) is 70%. We would normally expect to recommend levels of coterminosity of around 60% to 80%.

12 Where coterminosity is not possible in parished areas, and a district ward is to be split between electoral divisions, we would normally expect this to be achieved without dividing (or further dividing) a parish between divisions. There are likely to be exceptions to this, however, particularly where larger parishes are involved.

13 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.

14 A further area of difference between county and district reviews is that we must recognise that it will not be possible to avoid the creation of some county divisions which contain diverse communities, for example, combining rural and urban areas. We have generally sought to avoid this in district reviews, in order to reflect the identities and interests of local communities. Some existing county council electoral divisions comprise a number of distinct communities, which is inevitable given the larger number of electors represented by each councillor, and we would expect that similar situations would continue under our recommendations in seeking the best balance between coterminosity and the statutory criteria.

15 As a part of this review we may also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the county. However, we made some

recommendations for new parish electoral arrangements as part of our district reviews. We therefore only expect to put forward such recommendations during county reviews on an exceptional basis. In any event, we are *not* able to review administrative boundaries *between* local authorities or parishes, or consider the establishment of new parish areas as part of this review.

The review of Bedfordshire

16 We completed the reviews of the three district council areas in Bedfordshire in August 2001 and orders for the new electoral arrangements have since been made. This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Bedfordshire County Council. The last such review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in January 1984 (Report No.462).

17 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

18 Stage One began on 10 December 2002, when we wrote to Bedfordshire County Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified the three district councils in the county, Bedfordshire Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Bedfordshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the county, Members of Parliament with constituencies in the county, Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Bedfordshire County Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of submissions (the end of Stage One) was 14 April 2003.

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

20 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 13 January 2004 and will end on 8 March 2004, 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.**

21 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. The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order and decide when any changes come into effect.

Equal opportunities

22 In preparing this report the Committee has had regard to the general duty under section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 to promote racial equality and to the approach set out in BCFE (03) 35, *Race Relations Legislation*, which the Committee considered and agreed at its meeting on 9 April 2003.

2 Current electoral arrangements

23 The county of Bedfordshire comprises the three districts of Bedford Borough, Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire. The electorate of the county is 292,863 (December 2002). The council currently has 49 members, with one member elected from each division.

24 Bedfordshire is traditionally a manufacturing county with major employment in agriculture and mineral extraction. It is also an area of natural beauty, with the River Great Ouse running through it. With its southern border lying just 30 miles from London and having close links to London Luton Airport, it is considered the gateway to East Anglia and the Midlands.

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

26 At present each councillor represents an average of 5,977 electors, which the County Council forecasts will increase to 6,237 by the year 2007 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration over the last two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 31 of the 49 divisions varies by more than 10% from the district average, 13 divisions by more than 20% and four divisions by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Flitwick division where the councillor represents 64% more electors than the county average.

27 As detailed previously, in considering the County Council's electoral arrangements, we must have regard to the boundaries of district wards. Following the completion of the reviews of district warding arrangements in Bedfordshire, we are therefore faced with a new starting point for considering electoral divisions; our proposals for county divisions will be based on the new district wards as opposed to those which existed prior to the recent reviews. In view of the effect of these new district wards, and changes in the electorate over the past twenty years which have resulted in electoral imbalances across the county, changes to most, if not all, of the existing county electoral divisions are inevitable.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements

Division name (by district council area)		Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Variance from average %
Bedford Borough						
1	Brickhill	1	5,835	-2	5,515	-12
2	Bromham	1	7,701	29	9,434	51
3	Castle	1	4,261	-29	4,077	-35
4	Cauldwell	1	6,528	9	6,791	9
5	Clapham	1	4,799	-20	4,936	-21
6	De Parys	1	5,008	-16	4,758	-24
7	Goldington	1	4,511	-25	4,265	-32
8	Great Barford & Wilstead	1	8,700	46	10,557	69
9	Harpur	1	6,164	3	5,856	-6
10	Harrold	1	5,970	0	5,878	-6
11	Kempston East	1	7,419	24	7,092	14
12	Kempston West	1	6,633	11	6,559	5
13	Kingsbrook	1	5,189	-13	4,900	-21
14	North East Bedford	1	6,255	5	6,808	9
15	Newnham	1	7,468	25	7,113	14
16	Putnoe	1	4,629	-23	4,368	-30
17	Queens Park	1	6,502	9	6,434	3
18	Wootton	1	6,374	7	7,630	22
Mid Bedfordshire						
19	Amphill	1	5,564	-7	5,564	-11
20	Aspley Guise	1	5,307	-11	5,211	-16
21	Biggleswade Ivel	1	5,498	-8	5,154	-17
22	Biggleswade Stratton	1	6,379	7	7,986	28
23	Cranfield & Marston	1	6,833	14	8,238	32
24	Flitwick	1	9,816	64	9,381	50
25	Harlington	1	6,501	9	6,312	1
26	Langford	1	6,162	3	6,166	-1
27	Maulden	1	5,578	-7	6,656	7
28	Northill	1	4,656	-22	4,384	-30
29	Potton	1	5,543	-7	5,444	-13
30	Sandy	1	8,402	41	8,268	33
31	Shefford & Clifton	1	6,910	16	7,087	14
32	Shillington & Henlow	1	6,856	15	6,979	12
33	Stotfold	1	5,039	-16	7,018	13

Division name (by district council area)		Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Variance from average %
South Bedfordshire						
34	Barton	1	5,978	0	6,233	0
35	Beaundesert	1	6,093	2	7,121	14
36	Brooklands	1	5,140	-14	5,293	-15
37	Caddington	1	4,975	-17	5,162	-17
38	Dunstable Central	1	6,294	5	6,618	6
39	Eaton Bray	1	6,752	13	7,146	15
40	Houghton Regis North West	1	5,304	-11	5,593	-10
41	Houghton Regis South East	1	6,975	17	7,424	19
42	Icknield	1	4,856	-19	5,030	-19
43	Linslade	1	4,391	-27	4,622	-26
44	Northfields	1	5,093	-15	5,586	-10
45	Plantation	1	4,851	-19	5,005	-20
46	Priory	1	4,144	-31	4,304	-31
47	Southcott	1	4,686	-22	4,837	-22
48	Toddington	1	6,613	11	6,922	11
49	Watling	1	5,725	-4	5,899	-5
Totals		49	292,860	-	305,616	-
Averages		-	5,977	-	6,237	-

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

Note: Each division is represented by a single councillor, and the electorate columns denote the number of electors represented by each councillor. The variance from average column shows how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies from the average for the county. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2002, electors in Priory division were relatively over-represented by 31%, while electors in Flitwick division were relatively under-represented by 64%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Submissions received

28 At the start of this review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Bedfordshire County Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

29 During this initial stage of the review, officers from The Boundary Committee visited the area and met officers and members of the County Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 14 submissions during Stage One, including a county-wide scheme from the County Council, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the County Council.

Bedfordshire County Council

30 The County Council proposed a council of 52 members, three more than at present, serving 52 divisions, compared with the existing 49 members, representing 49 single-member divisions.

31 Under the council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10% from the county average in 26 of the proposed divisions, and would vary by more than 20% in eight divisions. By 2007, the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10% in 19 divisions, and would vary by more than 20% in two divisions.

District and Borough Councils

32 Mid Bedfordshire District Council proposed its own division pattern for Mid Bedfordshire comprising 13 single-member and two two-member divisions.

Political Groups

33 We received four submissions from local political parties. Bedford Borough Council Liberal Democrat Group (the 'Liberal Democrats') proposed that the council size should remain at 49 and made some divisions proposals for Bedford Borough. Bedfordshire South Conservatives agreed with the County Council's proposals, but put forward some name changes for divisions in South Bedfordshire district. County Councillor Scott (Northill division) and Councillor Payne (Great Barford and Wilshamstead division) wrote on behalf of the Conservative Associations covered by the area of Mid Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough respectively, in full support of the County Council's proposals.

Parish and Town Councils

34 We received responses from two parish councils and one town council. Odell Parish Council objected to the County Council's proposal for increasing council size. Oakley Parish Council made two submissions, one asking for the status quo to be maintained, and the other putting forward an alternative proposal from that of the County Council for part of the rural area of Bedford Borough. Leighton-Linslade Town Council opposed the County Council's proposal for the Leighton-Linslade area and suggested an alternative council size of 56.

County Councillors

35 County Councillor Gwynne Jones (Bromham division) submitted an alternative proposal for the rural area of Bedford Borough consisting of eight single-member divisions. Councillor Golby (Harlington division) proposed a revised Harlington division. County Councillor

Heffernan (Leighton Buzzard Beaudesert division) submitted objections to the County Council's proposals for the All Saints area, and made an alternative suggestion for this area.

Other representations

36 We received one other submission, from a local resident, proposing changes to Leighton-Linslade.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

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

38 As with our reviews of districts, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Bedfordshire 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, and 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 division of the county’.

39 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 maintaining local ties, and to the boundaries of district wards.

40 We have discussed in Chapter One the additional parameters which apply to reviews of county council electoral arrangements and the need to have regard to the boundaries of district wards and in order to achieve coterminosity. In addition, our approach is to ensure that, having reached conclusions on the appropriate number of councillors to be elected to the county council, each district council area is allocated the number of county councillors to which it is entitled.

41 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every division of a county.

42 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, especially when also seeking to achieve coterminosity in order to facilitate convenient and effective local government. 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. Accordingly, 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 the boundaries of district wards and community identity. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be taken into account and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

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

Electorate forecasts

44 Since 1975 there has been an 13% decrease in the electorate of Bedfordshire County Council. This decrease is largely due to Luton ceasing to be a part of Bedfordshire in April

1997, when it became a Unitary Authority. The County Council submitted electorate forecasts for 2007, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 4% from 292,863 to 305,616 over the five-year period from 2002 to 2007. It expects most of the growth to be in South Bedfordshire, although a significant amount is also expected in the other two districts. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans and the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

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

Council size

46 As explained earlier, we now require justification for any council size proposed, whether it is an increase, decrease, or retention of the existing council size. We will not generally seek a substantial increase or decrease in council size but we are prepared to consider the case for change where there is persuasive evidence.

47 Bedfordshire County Council presently has 49 members. The County Council proposed an increase in council size to 52 members. In reaching its decision on council size, the County Council considered a number of factors and consulted widely. It explained that in 1999, ahead of the Local Government Act 2000, the county adopted an executive political structure, with a leader and seven executive members, together with select/scrutiny committees, task groups and non-executive committees in place of the previous arrangements. The County Council argued that the distribution changes in the electoral forecast would cause an equal representation in the two urban areas of South Bedfordshire (Dunstable and Leighton-Linslade). It contended that the imbalance would cause 'substantial changes which would combine rural and urban areas'. The County Council considered that the number of councillors representing each district should be commensurate with that district's proportion of the county's electorate, and stated that 'a modest increase in council size is necessary to serve the interests of local residents' and 'provide appropriate representation across the Districts of the county'.

48 Bedfordshire South Conservatives (the Conservatives) and Councillor Gwynne Jones supported the argumentation submitted by the County Council regarding council size.

49 The Liberal Democrats considered that the council size should remain at 49, but provided no justification for this. Odell Parish Council strongly opposed an increase in council size 'on the grounds that a case for change has simply not been made [by Bedford County Council]'. Leighton-Linslade Town council proposed a council size of 56, so that six councillors would represent Leighton Linslade, 'one for each of the existing district wards in the town'.

50 After considering the representations received on council size we did not consider that we had sufficient evidence and argumentation to make a decision on the most appropriate size for Bedfordshire County Council. We therefore asked all interested parties who submitted a representation at Stage One as to why the proposed council sizes would provide for more effective and convenient local government for Bedfordshire.

51 We received further evidence from the County Council, Councillor Heffernan and the Conservatives.

52 The County Council described in detail the roles and responsibilities of both its executive and non-executive members and considered 'that a small increase in the number of councillors is necessary to provide for these increased demands'. The County Council provided detail of the overall number of meetings attended in Bedfordshire, which had

increased from 242 in 1998 (before the introduction of the new arrangements) to 333 in 2002, since the introduction of its new constitution.

53 The County Council described how, in the 2002/03 financial year, its five select/scrutiny committees, totalling 53 councillors (councillors may sit on any number of committees), met a combined total of 76 times for formal meetings. In addition to this, the chairpersons' of each committee met eight times. The County Council also detailed the duties of the select committees' task groups. In the last year, for example, the Community and Environment select committee used four task groups (comprising 21 members) that met a total of 31 times and the Individual Well Being select committee formed two task groups of four members which met five times during the same period. The County Council also detailed its newly established Corporate Parenting Panel, comprising six members, and estimated that the annual time commitment for each of the six councillors is 41 days. The County Council estimated that each of its meetings consumed an average of half a day, and considered the increase in council size would enable councillors to 'fulfil better their different roles as envisaged by the Government's modernised arrangements'.

54 The Conservatives also considered that workload had increased under the new political structure, in particular direct consultation with local residents. Councillor Heffernan contended that he could envisage 'no hardship to the citizens represented' if council size remains at 49. He also considered that 'no noticeable increase in workload' had occurred.

55 We judged that the County Council had made a sufficient study of the requirements of governance under its new political structure and considered its experience of operating within the new structure to reach a balanced conclusion on the appropriate council size to secure effective and convenient local government for Bedfordshire. We agreed that members are required to perform a variety of roles and functions and that the demands of councillors had not diminished. We note the opposition to the proposed council size of 52 by the Liberal Democrats, however no new evidence was provided to persuade us that the existing council size would provide more effective and convenient local government for Bedfordshire than an increase in members.

56 In light of support from Councillor Gwynne Jones and the Conservatives, we considered that the County Council had provided the most persuasive argumentation and evidence to support its proposed council size. Therefore, having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 52 members.

Electoral arrangements

57 We have carefully considered all the representations received. The County Council's proposals would increase the council size from 49 to 52. The County Council's proposals would improve electoral equality, compared to the existing arrangements, with the number of divisions in which the number of electors would vary by more than 10% from the county average reduced from 35 to 19 by 2007. We noted that the County Council's scheme provided a level of coterminosity of just 52% for the whole county.

58 We were concerned that in all of the submissions we received, there was a lack of good evidence and argumentation supporting the proposals, especially in relation to community identities and interests across the county. Under the Local Government Act 1992 we must have regard to the need to reflect the identities and interest of local communities. However, in Bedfordshire this has been difficult due to the lack of argumentation and evidence received regarding community identities and interests and, for the most part, we have had to base our draft recommendations on proposals that provide a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity with only a limited understanding of community identities

and interests in the affected areas. We would therefore welcome further evidence regarding community identities and interest across Bedfordshire at Stage Three.

59 We found obtaining good levels of coterminosity in Bedford and Mid Bedfordshire difficult. The district wards did not easily lend themselves to forming coterminous divisions with acceptable levels of electoral equality. While the achievement of coterminosity will normally be secondary to the achievement of electoral equality, there sometimes have to be exceptions. In an urban area, for example, we may consider that an electoral imbalance in one division might be justified if it facilitated both the appropriate number of county councillors for the district and coterminosity between the boundaries of district wards and electoral divisions throughout the remainder of the district area.

60 As indicated above, we are adopting a council size of 52, as proposed by the County Council. Across the county we are adopting locally proposed schemes with some amendments in order to improve electoral equality and coterminosity. In Bedford Borough we are adopting a combination of the County Council's proposals and those of Councillor Gwynne Jones, with our own amendments in two divisions. In Mid Bedfordshire we are adopting a combination of the County Council's and Mid Bedfordshire District Council's proposals, with our own amendments to three divisions. We are adopting the County Council's proposals for South Bedfordshire, with locally proposed amendments in five divisions. In each instance these amendments to the proposed schemes are to improve on either the level of electoral equality or coterminosity.

61 As stated earlier in the report, following the commencement of part IV of the Local Government Act 2000, we may now recommend the creation of multi-member divisions. Two two-member divisions were proposed at Stage One, which we are adopting, along with four more in the urban areas of the three districts. We consider that they provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than either the existing arrangements or any of the proposals received at Stage One. We are proposing one two-member division in the urban area of Bedford Borough and three in the urban areas of South Bedfordshire district, along with the two proposed by Mid Bedfordshire District Council in Mid Bedfordshire.

62 Our draft recommendations provide 61% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions. Our recommendations would initially produce 18 divisions with electoral variances of over 10% and four divisions with electoral variances over 20%. This is forecast to improve by 2007, with 11 divisions having electoral variances of over 10% and no division having a variance over 20% from the county average.

63 Our proposals would also involve warding three parishes, Biddenham and Kempston in Bedford and Sandy in Mid Bedfordshire, in order to facilitate a balance between electoral equality and community identity, detailed later in the report. For county division purposes, the three borough and district areas in the county are considered in turn, as follows:

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|---------|
| i. | Bedford Borough | page 26 |
| ii. | Mid Bedfordshire district | page 29 |
| iii. | South Bedfordshire district | page 31 |

64 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and on the large maps inserted at the back of this report.

Bedford Borough

65 Under the current arrangements, the borough of Bedford is represented by 18 county councillors serving 18 divisions. Brickhill, Castle, Clapham, De Parys, Goldington, Kingsbrook and Putnoe divisions are over-represented, with 2%, 29%, 20%, 16%, 25%, 13% and 23% fewer electors per county councillor than the county average respectively (12%, 35%, 21%, 24%, 32%, 21% and 30% fewer by 2007). Bromham, Cauldwell, Great

Barford & Wilstead, Kempston East, Kempston West, North East Bedford, Newnham, Queens Park, Wootton and Harpur divisions are under represented, with 29%, 9%, 46%, 24%, 11%, 5%, 25%, 9%, 7% and 3% more electors per county councillor than the county average respectively (51%, 9%, 69%, 14%, 5%, 9%, 14%, 3%, 22% more and 6% fewer by 2007). Harrold division would initially have the same number of electors as the county average and would be over-represented by 6% by 2007.

66 At Stage One we received five submissions in relation to the borough of Bedford. The County Council, Councillor Gwynne Jones and Oakley Parish Council submitted borough-wide or partial schemes based on an increase in the number of councillors representing Bedford from 18 to 19, to which it would be entitled under a council size of 52.

67 In the urban area of the borough, the County Council proposed 11 divisions. Brickhill, Cauldwell, Goldington, Harpur, Kingsbrook and Putnoe divisions all use the new district ward boundaries to form six single-member coterminous divisions. A Queens Park division would contain the district ward of Queens Park and part of Castle district ward, that area west of Greyfriars and River Street. A De Parys division would contain the district ward of De Parys and part of Castle district ward, that part to the east of Greyfriars and River Street and to the west of Bushmead Avenue, to include all properties located on Bushmead Avenue. A Newnham division would contain Newnham district ward with the remaining part of Castle district ward. The County Council proposed two non-coterminous Kempston divisions, Kempston West and Kempston East. Kempston West would contain Kempston North district ward, part of Kempston East district ward, that part west of Bunyan Road, and part of Kempston South district ward, that part west of Woburn Road. A Kempston East division would contain the remaining part of Kempston East district ward and the remaining part of Kempston South district ward.

68 In the rural area of Bedford borough the County Council proposed eight divisions. A non-coterminous North East Bedfordshire division would contain Riseley and Roxton district wards and part of Great Barford district ward (the parishes of Ravensden and Renhold). In the North West of the borough a non-coterminous Harrold & Sharnbrook division would contain Harrold and Sharnbrook district wards and part of Carlton district ward (the parishes of Carlton & Chellington, Felmersham and Pavenham). A Clapham & Oakley division would contain Clapham district ward and Oakley district ward and would be coterminous. In the west of the borough a Bromham division would contain part of Bromham district ward (the parish of Bromham), part of Carlton ward (the parish of Stevington) and part of Turvey ward (the parish of Turvey). A Biddenham division would contain part of Bromham district ward (the parish of Biddenham) and part of Turvey district ward (the parishes of Stagsden and Kempston Rural).

69 In the south of Bedford borough the County Council proposed a coterminous Wootton division, which would contain Wootton district ward. A coterminous Wilshamstead division would contain Wilshamstead district ward, and an Eastcotts and Great Barford division in the southeast would contain Eastcotts district ward and part of Great Barford district ward (the parishes of Cople, Willington and Great Barford).

70 Under the County Councils proposals 47% coterminosity would be secured within the borough. Biddenham, Bromham, Eastcotts & Great Barford, Wilshamstead and Wootton divisions would initially contain fewer electors per councillor than the county average, by 41%, 7%, 19%, 35% and 27% respectively (12%, 14%, 11%, 17% and 14% by 2007). Brickhill, Cauldwell, Goldington, Kingsbrook, Putnoe, Newnham, Queens Park, Kempston West, Kempston East, Clapham & Oakley, Harrold & Sharnbrook, North East Bedford and De Parys would initially contain more electors per councillor than the county average by 18%, 3%, 11%, 15%, 19%, 19%, 15%, 23%, 27%, 7%, 8%, 5% and 3% respectively (7%, 2%, 2%, 5%, 7%, 9%, 10%, 22%, 18%, 4%, 2%, 9% more and 6% fewer by 2007). Harpur would initially have 9% more electors per councillor than the county average, and would be equal to the county average by 2007.

71 County Councillor Gwynne Jones proposed a rural scheme for the borough of Bedford. Five divisions (North East Bedford, Wilshamstead, Wootton, Eastcotts & Great Barford and Clapham & Oakley) would be the same as the County Council's, with name changes in the latter two divisions to Great Barford and North Bedford Villages respectively. A Sharnbrook division would contain Harrold district ward, Sharnbrook district ward and part of Carlton district ward (the parishes of Felmersham and Pavenham). A Bromham division would contain part of Bromham district ward, the parish of Bromham and the northern part of Biddenham parish, that part north of the rear of the properties running west along Biddenham Turn, Vicars Close and Church End. A Kempston Rural division would contain Turvey district ward, part of Carlton district ward (the parishes of Carlton & Chellington and Stevington) and part of Bromham ward, the remaining part of Biddenham parish.

72 Oakley Parish Council proposed a scheme for four divisions in the rural area of Bedford borough. A Clapham division would contain Clapham district ward and part of Carlton district ward (the parishes of Felmersham and Pavenham). A Harrold & Sharnbrook division would contain Harrold district ward and Sharnbrook district ward. A proposed Turvey division would contain Turvey district ward and part of Bromham district ward (the parish of Biddenham). An Oakley and Bromham division would contain Oakley district ward and part of Bromham district ward (the parish of Bromham). Oakley Parish Council contended that it had existing ties with Bromham through the shared team ministry and these should remain.

73 We have carefully considered the representations we have received at Stage One. We note the reasonable levels of electoral equality proposed in the County Council's scheme and that of Councillor Gwynne Jones. We also note the good levels of electoral equality in two divisions of Oakley Parish Council's proposal. However, we have not been persuaded by the high electoral variance for the remainder of the scheme. We consider that, in the south west of the borough, the County Council's proposed electoral variances for 2007 are higher than is acceptable for non-coterminous divisions. Therefore, we propose to adopt the divisions of Sharnbrook and Bromham as proposed by Councillor Gwynne Jones, in the interests of electoral equality. We note that our proposals would involve the warding of Biddenham parish, to make a Biddenham North parish ward and a Biddenham South parish ward following the proposed division boundaries. However, we consider that this is justified as it would provide a significant improvement in electoral equality and has been locally proposed. Our proposals for the internal electoral arrangements of Biddenham Parish Council are discussed later in the report.

74 We also propose to adopt Councillor Gwynne Jones' proposed Kempston Rural division subject to the addition of polling district BAQ from Kempston North. Whilst we recognise that this is not ideal, having visited the area we consider it will facilitate improved electoral equality in the rest of the borough. We note that the County Council do not propose any two-member divisions in the county. However, we consider that in order to attain a good balance between coterminosity and electoral equality in the borough, this is necessary. We therefore, propose a two-member Kempston division that would contain Kempston East district ward, part of Kempston South district ward (South parish ward) and the remaining part of Kempston North district ward. We propose adopting the County Council's scheme for the remainder the borough as we consider it provides acceptable levels of electoral equality. We note that our proposals would involve the re-warding of Kempston North parish, to make North and West parishes. However, we consider that this is justified as it would provide a significant improvement in electoral equality. Our proposals for the internal electoral arrangements of Kempston Parish Council are discussed later in the report.

75 Under our draft recommendations the borough of Bedford will have 50% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries. Under our draft recommendations Harrold & Sharnbrook and Bromham divisions would initially contain fewer electors per councillor than the county average by 4% and 4% respectively (9% fewer and 5% more by 2007). Kempston division would initially contain 19% more electors than the county average, and 11% more by 2007. Kempston Rural would initially contain 20% fewer electors than the

county average, and 3% fewer by 2007. Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large maps at the back of the report.

Mid Bedfordshire

76 Under the current arrangements, the district of Mid Bedfordshire is represented by 15 county councillors serving 15 divisions. Ampthill, Aspley Guise, Biggleswade Ivel, Northill, Potton, Maulden and Stotfold divisions are over represented, with 7%, 11%, 8%, 22%, 7%, 7% and 16% fewer electors per county councillor than the county average respectively (11%, 16%, 17%, 30% and 13% fewer, and 7% and 13% more in 2007). Biggleswade Stratton, Cranfield & Marston, Flitwick, Harlington, Sandy, Shefford & Clifton, Shillington & Henlow and Langford are under represented with 7%, 14%, 64%, 9%, 41%, 16%, 15% and 3% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (28%, 32%, 50%, 1%, 33%, 14% and 12% more and 1% fewer by 2007).

77 At Stage One we received three submissions in relation to the district of Mid Bedfordshire. The County Council and Mid Bedfordshire District Council (the District Council) submitted district-wide schemes. Councillor Golby submitted a proposal for a single division based on an increase in the number of councillors representing Mid Bedfordshire from 16 to 17, to which it would be entitled under a council size of 52.

78 The County Council proposed 17 single-member divisions for the district. In the north of the district it proposed a coterminous Potton division which would contain Potton & Wensley district ward. A Sandy division would contain part of Sandy Ivel district ward, that part to the east of the A1 motorway and north of the River Ivel, and Sandy Pinnacle district ward, less polling district DW3. The County Council's submission noted local support for this division from Sandy Town Council. A Northill & Blunham division would contain Northill & Blunham district ward with the remaining part of Sandy Ivel district ward and the remaining part of Sandy Pinnacle district ward. A Biggleswade Barnett division would contain Biggleswade Stratton district ward and part of Biggleswade Holme district ward, that part to the east of Dells Lane. A Biggleswade Franklyn division would contain Biggleswade Ivel district ward and the remaining part of Biggleswade Holme district ward. A Haynes division would contain Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old Warden district ward and part of Clifton and Meppershall district ward (the parish of Clifton).

79 In the southeast of the district the County Council proposed a coterminous Stotfold division, which would contain Stotfold district ward. An Arlesey division would contain Arlesey district ward and part of Langford & Henlow Village district ward (the parish of Langford). A proposed Shillington & Henlow division would contain Shillington, Stondon & Henlow Camp district ward with part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst district ward (the parish of Gravenhurst), and part of Langford & Henlow Village district ward (the parish of Henlow Village). A Shefford division would contain part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst district ward (the parishes of Campton & Chicksands and Shefford) and part of Clifton and Meppershall district ward (the parish of Meppershall).

80 In the west of Mid Bedfordshire the County Council proposed a Cranfield division which would contain Cranfield district ward, part of Aspley Guise district ward (the parish of Husborne Crawley) and part of Woburn district ward (the parish of Ridgmont). A Woburn division would contain Harlington district ward, Westoning & Tingrith district ward, part of Woburn district ward (the parishes of Aspley Heath, Battlesden, Eversholt, Milton Bryan, Potsgrove and Woburn) and part of Aspley Guise district ward (Aspley Guise parish). A coterminous Ampthill division would contain Ampthill district ward. A coterminous Flitwick West division would contain Flitwick West district ward. In the south of the district, a coterminous Flitwick East division would contain Flitwick East district ward and Flitton, Greenfield & Pulloxhill district ward. A coterminous Maulden division would contain Maulden & Clophill district ward and Silsoe district ward.

81 Under the County Councils proposals 41% coterminosity would be secured within the district. Potton, Northill & Blunham, Maulden, Ampthill, Cranfield, Marston, Biggleswade Barnett, Stotfold and Haynes divisions would initially contain fewer electors per councillor than the county average, by 2%, 7%, 11%, 5%, 18%, 32%, 5%, 11% and 4% respectively (7%, 10%, 14%, 9%, 16% and 13% fewer and 11%, 19% and 7% more by 2007). Biggleswade Franklyn, Arlesey, Sandy, Shefford, Woburn, Flitwick West and Flitwick East would initially contain more electors per councillor than the county average, by 16%, 9%, 18%, 5%, 25%, 4% and 4% respectively (12%, 5%, 7%, 6%, 12% more and 5% and 4% fewer by 2007). Shillington & Henlow would initially have the same number of electors as the county average, and would be over-represented by 2% by 2007.

82 The District Council proposed 15 divisions. Eight of the proposed divisions (Ampthill, Cranfield, Flitwick East, Flitwick West, Marston, Potton, Shefford and Woburn) would be the same as those proposed by the County Council. A name change for the Woburn division to Russell division was proposed in 'recognition of the long association of the Russell family with the Woburn area. His grace The Duke of Bedford has given his consent to the family name for this purpose'. A Sandy division would contain all of Sandy Ivel district ward less Beeston, and all of Sandy Pinnacle ward less polling district DW3. A Northill & Blunham division would contain Northill district ward, part of Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old Warden district ward (the parishes of Southill and Old Warden) and the remaining parts of Sandy Ivel district ward and Sandy Pinnacle district ward. A Maulden & Houghton Conquest division would contain Maulden & Clophill district ward and part of Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old Warden district ward (the parishes of Houghton Conquest and Haynes). A Silsoe & Shillington division would contain Shillington, Stondon & Henlow Camp district ward, Silsoe district ward and part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst district ward (the parish of Gravenhurst). A Langford & Henlow Village division would contain Langford & Henlow Village district ward and part of Clifton & Meppershall district ward (the parish of Clifton).

83 The District Council also proposed two two-member divisions. A Biggleswade division would contain Biggleswade Holme, Biggleswade Ivel and Biggleswade Stratton district wards. A Stotfold & Arlesey division would contain Arlesey and Stotfold district wards.

84 Under the District Council's proposal 47% coterminosity would be secured within the district. Stotfold & Arlesey and Maulden & Houghton Conquest divisions would initially contain 21% fewer and equal to the county average electors per councillor than the county average respectively, and 7% fewer and 13% more by 2007. Biggleswade, Langford & Henlow Village, Sandy, Southill & Old Warden and Silsoe & Shillington divisions, would initially contain more electors per councillor than the county average, by 6%, 7%, 20%, 14% and 1%, respectively (12%, 1%, 8% and 7% more and 3% fewer by 2007).

85 Councillor Golby proposed a coterminous Harlington division that would contain Harlington, Westoning & Tingrith, Silsoe and Flitton, Greenfield & Pulloxhill district wards. Councillor Golby provided strong argumentation on the grounds of transport and local amenities for his proposed division, stating, for example, that they 'use the same shopping base for the weekly shop' and library services as well as sharing similar travel routes and destinations.

86 We have carefully considered all the representations we received at Stage One. We note that, while both the County Council's and the District Council's proposals facilitate a reasonable level of electoral equality, both provide poor levels of coterminosity within the district. We note the strong argumentation and good electoral variance in Councillor Golby's proposal. However, we are unable to consider any one division in isolation and consider that the proposed Harlington division would not facilitate the best balance of the statutory criteria in the district.

87 We are adopting the County Council's proposals in seven divisions, those of Potton, Sandy, Shefford, Ampthill, Flitwick West, Flitwick East and Marston. We have adopted the District Council's proposals for the south east of the district. While we note that the County Council stated a preference for single-member divisions, we consider that, due to the poor level of coterminosity in the district, adopting the District Council's proposed Biggleswade and Stotfold & Arlesey two-member divisions would facilitate greater coterminosity in the district and across the county. We also note that a two-member Biggleswade division was an option the County Council consulted on. We have also adopted the District Council's proposed Langford & Henlow Village, Silsoe & Shillington and Maulden & Houghton Conquest divisions. We note that these are not coterminous divisions, but consider that they better facilitate good levels of electoral equality and coterminosity in other areas of the district. We have adapted the District Council's proposal for a Northill & Blunham division, by including an additional part of Sandy Ivel district ward, those properties to the west of London Road leading north to include all properties on the Tempsford Road. We note that our proposals would involve the warding of Sandy parish, to make Ivel East, Ivel West Pinnacle North and Pinnacle South parish wards following the proposed division boundaries. However, we consider that this is justified as it would provide a significant improvement in electoral equality and has been locally proposed. Our proposals for the internal electoral arrangements of Sandy Parish Council are discussed later in the report.

88 We have recommended our own proposals for the divisions of Woburn and Cranfield. A coterminous Woburn division would contain Woburn, Westoning & Tingrith and Harlington district wards. A coterminous Cranfield division would contain Cranfield and Aspley Guise district wards. We note that both the County Council and the District Council proposed to keep the parishes of Aspley Guise and Aspley Heath in the same district because of historic connections. However, having visited the area, we do not consider that the argumentation given for the parishes to be contained in the same division strong enough to outweigh the requirement to achieve good levels of coterminosity.

89 Under our draft recommendations the district of Mid Bedfordshire will have 60% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries. Woburn division would initially contain 1% fewer electors per councillor than the county average, and 11% fewer by 2007. Northill & Blunham and Cranfield divisions would initially contain 14% and 8% more electors than the county average respectively (8% and 7% more by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

South Bedfordshire district

90 Under the current arrangements, the district of South Bedfordshire is represented by 16 county councillors serving 16 divisions. Brooklands, Caddington, Houghton Regis North West, Icknield, Linslade, Northfields, Plantation, Priory, Southcott and Watling are over represented with 14%, 17%, 11%, 19%, 27%, 15%, 19%, 31%, 22% and 4% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (15%, 17%, 10%, 19%, 26%, 10%, 20%, 31%, 22% and 5% fewer by 2007). Beaudesert, Dunstable Central, Eaton Bray, Houghton Regis South East and Toddington are under represented, with 2%, 5%, 13%, 17% and 11% more electors per county councillor than the county average respectively (14%, 6%, 15%, 19% and 11% more in 2007). Barton would initially have the same number of electors as the county average and remain the same by 2007.

91 At Stage One we received five submissions in relation to the district of South Bedfordshire. The County Council submitted a district-wide proposal. Bedfordshire South Conservatives Group (the Conservatives) proposed name changes to six of the County Council's proposed divisions. Councillor Heffernan objected to the County Council's proposals to divide All Saints district ward and made an alternative suggestion for the division, based on the number of councillors representing South Bedfordshire remaining at 16, to which it would be entitled under a council size of 52.

92 The County Council proposed 16 single-member divisions, four rural and 12 urban. In the rural areas the County Council proposed two coterminous divisions. A Barton division would contain Barton-Le-Clay district ward and Streatley district ward. A Caddington division would contain Caddington, Hyde & Slip End district ward. Two non-coterminous divisions were proposed. A Toddington division would contain Toddington district ward, Heath & Reach district ward and part of Stanbridge district ward (the parishes of Chalgrave and Eggington). An Eaton Bray division would contain Eaton Bray district ward, Kensworth & Totternhoe district ward and part of Stanbridge district ward (the parishes of Stanbridge, Tilsworth and Old Billington).

93 In the urban areas of the district the County Council proposed a coterminous Houghton North division which would contain Parkside district ward and Tithe Farm district ward. A coterminous Houghton Hall division would contain Houghton Hall district ward. A coterminous Ickniel division would contain Ickniel district ward. A coterminous Northfields division would contain Northfields district ward. A coterminous Watling division would contain Watling district ward. A coterminous Grovebury division would contain Grovebury district ward. A coterminous Plantation division would contain Plantation district ward, and a coterminous Southcott division would contain Southcott district ward.

94 The County Council proposed four non-coterminous divisions in the urban areas in the district of South Bedfordshire. A Planets division would contain Planets district ward and part of All Saints district ward, that part to the east of North Street and the east of the River Ouzel where it runs south to the ward boundary from North Street. A Linslade division would contain Linslade district ward and the remaining part of All Saints district ward. A Chiltern division would contain Chiltern district ward and part of Dunstable Central district ward, that part west of High Street North. A Manshead division would contain Manshead district ward and the remaining part of Dunstable Central ward.

95 Under the County Council's proposals 63% coterminosity would be secured within the district of South Bedfordshire. Barton, Caddington, Ickniel, Northfields, Watling, Chiltern, Manshead, Southcott, Linslade, Plantation, Houghton Hall and Grovebury would initially contain fewer electors per councillor than the county average, by 1%, 12%, 14%, 10%, 7%, 1%, 6%, 6%, 7%, 14%, 11% and 11% respectively (1%, 12%, 14%, 5%, 8%, 1%, 5%, 7%, 6%, 15% and 5% fewer and 2% more by 2007). Toddington, Eaton Bray, Planets and Houghton North would initially contain more electors per councillor than the county average, by 9%, 20%, 1% and 29% respectively (9%, 19%, 1% and 27% more in 2007).

96 The Conservatives proposed name changes to the following divisions proposed by the County Council. Toddington division would be named Toddington Heath, Eaton Bray would be named South West Bedfordshire, Manshead division would be named Priory, Chiltern division would be named Dunstable West, Linslade division would be named Grand Union and Planets would be named Leighton East.

97 Councillor Heffernan proposed an All Saints division that would contain All Saints district ward and part of Planets district ward (polling district PLS2). The remaining part of Planets district ward would be contained in a division with Grovebury district ward.

98 We have carefully considered all the representations we received at Stage One. We note the adequate level of coterminosity and electoral equality (with the exception of Houghton Hall and Eaton Bray) in the divisions proposed by the County Council. We also note the name changes proposed by the Conservatives. While we propose to use one of the Conservatives' proposed names, little evidence of local support was provided for the suggested names, and not all division names are relevant under our proposals. We would welcome views on this at Stage Three. We note Councillor Heffernan's proposed All Saints division. However, we cannot consider any area in isolation and do not consider that this facilitates the best balance of the statutory criteria.

99 We are adopting the County Council's proposals for Barton, Grovebury, Icknield, Northfields, Plantation, Southcott, Toddington and Watling divisions and proposing our own scheme for the remainder of the district. We propose three two-member coterminous divisions in South Bedfordshire. A Houghton Regis division would contain Houghton Hall district ward, Tithe Farm district ward and Parkside district ward. A Dunstable division would contain Chiltern district ward, Dunstable Central district ward and Manshead district ward. A Linslade & Planets division would contain All Saints district ward, Linslade district ward and Planets district ward. We note that the County Council is not in favour of two-member divisions and has not proposed any for the district of South Bedfordshire. However, we also note that the County Council considered these divisions in its submission, and that these were locally proposed by South Bedfordshire District Council. In light of the support from South Bedfordshire District Council we consider that they are the best means of attaining an acceptable level of coterminosity across the county.

100 We are proposing a different scheme for two of the rural areas. A Caddington division would contain Caddington Hyde & Slip End district ward with part of Kensworth and Totternhoe district ward (the parish of Kensworth). A South West Bedfordshire division (as named by the Conservatives) would contain Eaton Bray district ward, part of Kensworth and Totternhoe district ward (the parishes of Totternhoe, Whipsnade and Studham) and part of Stanbridge district ward (the parishes of Old Billington, Stanbridge and Tilsworth). We note our proposed Caddington division was an option considered in the County Council's consultation and that it reported Kensworth Parish gave support to a different option, although no argumentation was provided. We consider that Kensworth being contained in Caddington division would achieve a good level of electoral equality.

101 Under our draft recommendations the district of South Bedfordshire would have 77% coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries. Under our draft recommendations South West Bedfordshire, Linslade & Planets and Dunstable divisions would initially contain fewer electors per councillor than the county average, by 1%, 3% and 3% respectively (1%, 2% and 3% fewer respectively by 2007). Caddington and Houghton Regis divisions would initially contain more electors than the county average, by 9% and 9% respectively (9% and 11% more by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large maps at the back of the report.

Conclusions

102 Having considered all the evidence and submissions received during the first stage of the review, we propose that:

- There should be an increase in council size from 49 to 52.
- The boundaries of all divisions will be subject to change as the divisions are based on district wards which have themselves changed as a result of the district reviews.

103 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on a combination of the proposals submitted by the County Council, Mid Bedfordshire District Council, Bedfordshire South Conservative Group and Councillor Gwynne Jones, but propose to depart from them in the following areas:

- In Bedford Borough we propose to adopt the County Council's and Councillor Gwynne Jones' proposals with amendments in two divisions (one two-member) to facilitate better electoral equality in the borough.
- In Mid Bedfordshire we propose to adopt a combination of the County Council's and Mid Bedfordshire District Council's proposals, with amendments in two divisions to facilitate improved coterminosity in the district, including two two-member divisions.

- In South Bedfordshire we are adopting part of the County Council's scheme, along with our own scheme for the remainder of the district based on local proposals.

104 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2002 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2007.

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2002 electorate		2007 electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	49	52	49	52
Number of divisions	49	46	49	46
Average number of electors per councillor	5,977	5,632	6,237	5,877
Number of divisions with a variance more than 10% from the average	31	18	35	11
Number of divisions with a variance more than 20% from the average	13	4	17	0

105 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Bedfordshire would result in a reduction in the number of divisions with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 31 to 18. By 2007 only 11 divisions are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

Draft recommendation

Bedfordshire County Council should comprise 52 councillors serving 46 divisions, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated in Appendix A and on the large map inside the back cover.

Parish council electoral arrangements

106 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different county divisions it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single division of the county. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Biddenham, Kempston and Sandy to reflect the proposed county divisions in that area.

107 The parish of Biddenham is currently served by nine councillors and is not warded. In order to reflect the county divisions in the area, we propose creating two parish wards, Biddenham North and Biddenham South. We propose Biddenham North should be represented by four parish councillors and Biddenham South by five parish councillors.

Draft recommendation

Biddenham Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Biddenham North (returning 4 councillors) and Biddenham South (returning five councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed county division boundary, as illustrated and named on Map 1 in Appendix A.

108 The parish of Kempston is currently represented by 13 councillors returned from four parish wards. Ampthill Road ward is represented by one councillor, East ward, North ward and South ward are each represented by four councillors. In order to reflect the county divisions detailed previously we propose creating a further parish ward. Ampthill Road, East and South parish wards would remain the same, but the existing North parish ward would be divided to create a revised North ward and a new West ward. We propose North parish ward should be represented by three parish councillors and West parish ward by one parish councillor.

Draft recommendation

Kempston Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Ampthill Road (returning one councillor), East (returning four councillors), South (returning four councillors), North (returning 3 councillors) and West (returning one councillor). The boundary between North and West parish wards should reflect the proposed county division boundary, as illustrated and named on Map 1 in Appendix A.

109 The parish of Sandy is currently represented by 15 councillors returned from two parish wards. Ivel ward is represented by six councillors and Pinnacle by nine councillors. In order to reflect the county divisions we propose creating two further parish wards and providing revised names for the four parish wards. We propose Ivel East ward should be represented by five parish councillors, Ivel West should be represented by one parish councillor, Pinnacle North should be represented by three parish councillors and Pinnacle South should be represented by six parish councillors.

Draft recommendation

Sandy Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four parish wards: Ivel East ward (returning five councillors), Ivel West (returning one councillor), Pinnacle North (returning three councillors) and Pinnacle South (returning six councillors). The boundary between the parish wards should reflect the proposed county division boundary, as illustrated and named on Map 2 in Appendix A.

5 What happens next?

110 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Bedfordshire County Council contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 8 March 2004. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the County Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

111 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

112 In the light of responses 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 Bedfordshire County Council:

Detailed mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed division boundaries for the Bedfordshire County Council area.

Sheet 1 of 2 inserted at the back of this report illustrates in outline form the proposed divisions for Bedfordshire, including constituent district wards and parishes.

Sheet 2 of 2 inserted at the back of this report includes the following maps:

Map 1 illustrates, the proposed boundary in Kempston and Kempston Rural divisions, Kempston North and Kempston West parish wards and Biddenham North and Biddenham South parish wards, in Bedford Borough. The proposed boundary between De Parys, Newnham and Queens Park division, in Bedford Borough.

Map 2 illustrates the proposed boundary of Sandy, in Mid Bedfordshire.

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

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

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

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

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