

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Shropshire

May 2003

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

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

Members of the Committee:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE
Robin Gray
Joan Jones CBE
Anne 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 Shropshire County Council's electoral arrangements on 9 July 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 Shropshire:

- **in 28 of the 44 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 11 divisions vary by more than 20%;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen with the number of electors forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 27 divisions and by more than 20% in 12 divisions.**

Our main draft recommendations for Shropshire County Council's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 125-126) are that:

- **Shropshire should have 48 councillors, four 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, except Albrighton, 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 26 of the proposed 46 divisions the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further with the number of electors per councillor in 27 divisions expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average by 2006.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 28 May 2003. 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 21 July 2003.

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

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

	Division name by District Council	Number of councillors	Constituent district wards
Bridgnorth			
1	Albrighton	1	Albrighton South ward; Donington & Albrighton North ward
2	Bridgnorth East	1	Bridgnorth East ward; Bridgnorth Morfe ward
3	Bridgnorth Rural	1	Alveley ward; Glazeley ward
4	Bridgnorth West	1	Bridgnorth Castle ward; Bridgnorth West ward
5	Broseley	1	Broseley East ward; Broseley West ward
6	Morfe	1	Claverley ward; Harrington ward; Worfield ward
7	Much Wenlock	1	Ditton Priors ward; Moreville ward; Much Wenlock ward
8	Shifnal	1	Shifnal Idsall ward; Shifnal Manor ward; Shifnal Rural ward
9	Stottesdon	1	Highley ward; Stottesdon ward
North Shropshire			
10	Baschurch	1	Baschurch ward; Cockshutt ward; Hordley, Tetchill & Lyneal ward; part of Ellesmere & Welshampton ward (Welshampton parish ward of Welshampton & Lyneal parish)
11	Ellesmere	1	Dudleston Heath ward; part of Ellesmere & Welshampton ward (Ellesmere Urban parish)
12	Market Drayton	2	Market Drayton East ward; Market Drayton North ward; Market Drayton South ward
13	Market Drayton Rural	1	Hinstock ward; Shavington ward; Sutton ward; Woore ward
14	Prees	1	Prees ward; Whitchurch Rural ward; Whitchurch South ward
15	Shawbury	1	Hodnet ward; Shawbury ward
16	Wem	1	Wem East ward; Wem West ward
17	Wem Rural	1	Clive & Myddle ward; Wem Rural ward; Whixall ward
18	Whitchurch	1	Whitchurch North ward; Whitchurch West ward
Oswestry			
19	Oswestry	2	Cabin Lane ward; Cambrian ward; Carreg Llwyd ward; Castle ward; Gatacre ward
20	Ruyton-xi-Towns	1	Kinnerley ward; Llanyblodwel & Pant ward; Ruyton & West Felton
21	St Oswald	1	Maserfield ward; Sweeney & Trefonen ward
22	Weston Rhyn	1	St Martin's ward; Weston Rhyn ward
23	Whittington	1	Gobowen ward; Whittington ward
Shrewsbury & Atcham			
24	Bagley	1	part of Bagley ward; part of Castlefields & Quarry ward
25	Bayston Hill	1	Bayston Hill ward
26	Belle-Vue	1	Belle-Vue ward; part of Sutton & Reabrook ward
27	Burnell	1	Condoover ward; Hanwood & Longden ward; Lawely ward

	Division name by District Council	Number of councillors	Constituent district wards
28	Castlefields & Ditherington	1	part of Battlefield & Heathgates ward; part of Castlefields & Quarry ward
29	Copthorne	1	Bowbrook ward; part of Copthorne ward
30	Harlescott	1	Harlescott ward; part of Bagley ward; part of Battlefield & Heathgates ward
31	Loton	1	Montford ward; Rowton ward
32	Meole-Brace	1	Meole-Brace ward; part of Copthorne ward;
33	Monkmoor	1	part of Column ward; part of Monkmoor ward
34	Porthill	1	Porthill ward; part of Copthorne ward
35	Rea Valley	1	Rea Valley ward
36	Sundorne	1	Sundorne ward; part of Battlefield & Heathgates ward
37	Sutton & Reabrook	1	part of Column ward; part of Sutton & Reabrook ward
38	Tern	1	Haughmond & Attingham ward; Pimhill ward; Severn Valley ward
39	Underdale	1	Underdale ward; part of Monkmoor ward
South Shropshire			
40	Bishop's Castle	1	Bishop's Castle with Onny Valley ward; Chirbury ward; Worthen ward
41	Church Stretton	1	Church Stretton North ward; Church Stretton South ward; Apedale ward
42	Clee	1	Burford ward; Clee ward; Cleobury Mortimer ward
43	Clun	1	Bucknell ward; Clun ward; Clun Forest ward; Kemp Valley ward; Wistanston with Hopesay ward
44	Corvedale	1	Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough ward; Corve Valley ward; Upper Corvedale ward; Craven Arms ward
45	Ludlow	1	Ludlow St Laurence's ward; Ludlow St Peter's ward
46	Ludlow Rural	1	Caynham with Ashford ward; Ludlow Henley ward; Ludlow Sheet with Ludford

Notes:

1. *The constituent district wards are those resulting from the electoral reviews of the five Shropshire districts which were completed in 1999. 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 at the back of the report illustrate some of the proposed boundaries in more detail.*

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Shropshire

Division name by District Council	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Bridgnorth							
1 Albrighton	1	4,874	4,874	5	5,059	5,059	4
2 Bridgnorth East	1	4,896	4,896	6	5,065	5,065	4
3 Bridgnorth Rural	1	3,665	3,665	-21	3,834	3,834	-22
4 Bridgnorth West	1	4,915	4,915	6	5,059	5,059	4
5 Broseley	1	4,412	4,412	-5	4,498	4,498	-8
6 Morfe	1	3,678	3,678	-21	3,805	3,805	-22
7 Much Wenlock	1	5,042	5,042	9	5,452	5,452	12
8 Shifnal	1	5,753	5,753	24	6,003	6,003	23
9 Stottesdon	1	4,051	4,051	-13	4,263	4,263	-13
North Shropshire							
10 Baschurch	1	3,539	3,539	-24	3,860	3,860	-21
11 Ellesmere	1	3,831	3,831	-17	4,119	4,119	-16
12 Market Drayton	2	8,421	4,211	-9	9,026	4,513	-8
13 Market Drayton Rural	1	5,810	5,810	25	6,104	6,104	25
14 Prees	1	5,665	5,665	22	5,994	5,994	23
15 Shawbury	1	4,438	4,438	-4	4,619	4,619	-6
16 Wem	1	4,248	4,248	-8	4,607	4,607	-6
17 Wem Rural	1	4,374	4,374	-6	4,655	4,655	-5
18 Whitchurch	1	4,636	4,636	0	5,012	5,012	3
Oswestry							
19 Oswestry	2	9,930	4,965	7	10,606	5,303	8
20 Ruyton-xi-Towns	1	4,791	4,791	3	5,043	5,043	3
21 St Oswald	1	5,119	5,119	10	5,631	5,631	15
22 Weston Rhyn	1	4,044	4,044	-13	4,314	4,314	-12
23 Whittington	1	5,173	5,173	12	5,320	5,320	9
Shrewsbury & Atcham							
24 Bagley	1	3,835	3,835	-17	4,768	4,768	-2
25 Bayston Hill	1	4,259	4,259	-8	4,283	4,283	-12
26 Belle-Vue	1	4,605	4,605	-1	4,787	4,787	-2
27 Burnell	1	5,512	5,512	19	5,824	5,824	19
28 Castlefields & Ditherington	1	4,278	4,278	-8	4,730	4,730	-3

Division name by District Council	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
29 Cophorne	1	4,820	4,820	4	5,065	5,065	4
30 Harlescott	1	4,681	4,681	1	4,732	4,732	-3
31 Loton	1	3,903	3,903	-16	4,011	4,011	-18
32 Meole-Brace	1	5,134	5,134	11	5,216	5,216	7
33 Monkmoor	1	4,861	4,861	5	4,945	4,945	1
34 Porthill	1	5,136	5,136	11	5,260	5,260	8
35 Rea Valley	1	3,954	3,954	-15	4,113	4,113	-16
36 Sundorne	1	4,994	4,994	8	5,117	5,117	5
37 Sutton & Reabrook	1	4,477	4,477	-3	4,588	4,588	-6
38 Tern	1	5,169	5,169	11	5,619	5,619	15
39 Underdale	1	4,307	4,307	-7	4,522	4,522	-7
South Shropshire							
40 Bishop's Castle	1	4,296	4,296	-7	4,530	4,530	-7
41 Church Stretton	1	4,575	4,575	-1	4,765	4,765	-3
42 Clee	1	5,467	5,467	18	5,830	5,830	19
43 Clun	1	4,789	4,789	3	4,998	4,998	2
44 Corvedale	1	4,996	4,996	8	5,272	5,272	8
45 Ludlow	1	3,980	3,980	-14	4,177	4,177	-15
46 Ludlow Rural	1	5,282	5,282	14	5,519	5,519	13
Totals	48	222,616	-	-	234,619	-	-
Averages	-	-	4,638	-	-	4,888	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on those produced by Shropshire County 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 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 draft recommendations for the electoral arrangements for the county of Shropshire, 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 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. Final recommendations were made for the new electoral arrangements in the districts in Shropshire in August 1999 and we are now embarking on our county review in this area.

3 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.

4 Details of the legislation under which we work are set out in The Electoral Commission's *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reviews*. This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

5 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 Shropshire in May 2000 for the districts of Bridgnorth, North Shropshire and Oswestry, in June 2000 for the borough of Shrewsbury & Atcham and in December 2000 for the district of South Shropshire and we are now embarking on our county review in this area.

6 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. However, we do not expect to recommend large numbers of multi-member divisions other than, perhaps, in the more urban areas of a county.

7 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.

8 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.

9 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.

10 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.

11 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.

12 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 11 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%.

13 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.

14 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.

15 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 electoral equality, coterminosity and the statutory criteria.

16 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 Shropshire

17 We completed the reviews of the five district council areas in Shropshire in August 1999 and orders for the new electoral arrangements have since been made. This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Shropshire County Council. The last such review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in May 1980 (Report No. 382).

18 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

19 Stage One began on 9 July 2002, when we wrote to Shropshire County Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified the five district councils in the county, West Mercia Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Shropshire 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 West Midlands Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Shropshire County Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of submissions (the end of Stage One) was 28 October 2002.

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

21 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 28 May 2003 and will end on 21 July 2003, involves publishing the draft recommendations 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 recommendations.**

22 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.

2 Current electoral arrangements

23 The county of Shropshire comprises the five districts of Bridgnorth, North Shropshire, Oswestry, Shrewsbury & Atcham and South Shropshire. The area has a population of 282,460 with an electorate of 222,616 (December 2001). The Council presently has 44 members, with one member elected from each division.

24 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'.

25 At present, each councillor represents an average of 5,059 electors, which the County Council forecasts will increase to 5,332 by the year 2006 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 28 of the 44 divisions varies by more than 10% from the district average, 11 divisions by more than 20% and five divisions by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Ludlow division where the councillor represents 55% more electors than the county average.

26 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 Shropshire, 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	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Numbers of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Numbers of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Bridgnorth							
1 Albrighton	1	4,874	4,874	-4	5,059	5,059	-5
2 Bridgnorth Rural	1	5,348	5,348	6	5,615	5,615	5
3 Bridgnorth Town	1	5,739	5,739	13	5,896	5,896	11
4 Broseley	1	4,338	4,338	-14	4,420	4,420	-17
5 Morfe	1	5,436	5,436	7	5,600	5,600	5
6 Much Wenlock	1	4,904	4,904	-3	5,306	5,306	0
7 Shifnal	1	5,949	5,949	18	6,204	6,204	16
8 Stottesdon	1	4,698	4,698	-7	4,938	4,938	-7
North Shropshire							
9 Ellesmere	1	5,825	5,825	15	6,260	6,260	17
10 Hodnet	1	5,335	5,335	5	5,593	5,593	5
11 Market Drayton	1	6,197	6,197	22	6,727	6,727	26
12 Myddle	1	5,969	5,969	18	6,427	6,427	21
13 Prees	1	4,528	4,528	-11	4,821	4,821	-10
14 Wem	1	5,585	5,585	10	6,007	6,007	13
15 Whitchurch	1	6,934	6,934	37	7,374	7,374	38
16 Woore	1	4,589	4,589	-9	4,787	4,787	-10
Oswestry							
17 Oswestry East	1	7,333	7,333	45	7,959	7,959	49
18 Oswestry West	1	4,731	4,731	-6	4,958	4,958	-7
19 Ruyton-xi-Towns	1	4,172	4,172	-18	4,422	4,422	-17
20 St Oswald	1	3,604	3,604	-29	3,941	3,941	-26
21 Weston Rhyn	1	4,393	4,393	-13	4,673	4,673	-12
22 Whittington	1	4,824	4,824	-5	4,961	4,961	-7
Shrewsbury & Atcham							
23 Bagley	1	4,243	4,243	-16	4,575	4,575	-14
24 Bayston Hill	1	4,259	4,259	-16	4,283	4,283	-20
25 Belle-Vue	1	4,209	4,209	-17	4,370	4,370	-18
26 Burnell	1	5,111	5,111	1	5,461	5,461	2
27 Castlefields & Ditherington	1	4,036	4,036	-20	4,484	4,484	-16
28 Copthorne	1	7,228	7,228	43	7,539	7,539	41
29 Harlescott	1	3,559	3,559	-30	3,602	3,602	-32

Division name by District Council	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Numbers of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Numbers of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
30 Loton	1	4,525	4,525	-11	4,662	4,662	-13
31 Meole-Brace	1	5,750	5,750	14	5,843	5,843	10
32 Monkmoor	1	4,654	4,654	-8	4,735	4,735	-11
33 Quarry	1	4,083	4,083	-19	4,775	4,775	-10
34 Rea Valley	1	5,433	5,433	7	5,607	5,607	5
35 Sundome	1	3,639	3,639	-28	3,676	3,676	-31
36 Sutton	1	3,957	3,957	-22	4,058	4,058	-24
37 Tern	1	4,824	4,824	-5	5,277	5,277	-1
38 Underdale	1	4,416	4,416	-13	4,633	4,633	-13
South Shropshire							
39 Bishop's Castle	1	4,476	4,476	-12	4,715	4,715	-12
40 Church Stretton	1	5,159	5,159	2	5,370	5,370	1
41 Clee Hill	1	6,877	6,877	36	7,282	7,282	37
42 Clun	1	3,957	3,957	-22	4,137	4,137	-22
43 Corvedale	1	5,064	5,064	0	5,343	5,343	0
44 Ludlow	1	7,852	7,852	55	8,244	8,244	55
Totals	44	222,616	-	-	234,619	-	-
Averages	-	-	5,059	-	-	5,332	-

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

Note: 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 2001, electors in St Oswald division were relatively over-represented by 29%, while electors in Ludlow division were relatively under-represented by 55%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Submissions received

27 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 Shropshire County Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

28 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 15 submissions during Stage One, including a county-wide scheme from the County Council and all of these may be inspected at our offices and those of the County Council.

Shropshire County Council

29 The County Council proposed a council of 48 members, four more than at present, serving 48 divisions. The Council proposed a uniform pattern of single-member divisions across the county. Under the Council's proposals 22 divisions would initially have an electoral variance of more than 10% and 10 divisions would have an electoral variance of more than 20%. This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve by 2006 with 18 divisions having an electoral variance of more than 10% and 11 divisions having variances of more than 20%. The County Council's proposals would provide for a 48% level of coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries.

The Conservative Group

30 The Conservative Group on the County Council (the 'Conservatives') supported the County Council's proposals for the districts of Bridgnorth and South Shropshire, but proposed alternative electoral arrangements for the districts of North Shropshire, Shrewsbury & Atcham and Oswestry. The Conservatives proposed a uniform pattern of single-member divisions in these three districts. Under the Conservatives' proposals 31 divisions would have an electoral variance of more than 10% and 11 divisions would have a variance of more than 20%. This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve by 2006 with 25 divisions having an electoral variance of more than 10% and 13 divisions having a variance of more than 20%.

Parish councils

31 We received submissions from 11 parish councils. The parishes of Astley Abbots, Bayston Hill, Clungunford and Loppington proposed that the current arrangements for their respective areas be retained. The parishes of Chelmarsh, Market Drayton and Selattyn & Gobowen made proposals for their respective areas and Llanyblodwel Parish Council and Oswestry Town Council requested that parish councils are created throughout the County. Alverley Parish Council proposed amendments to its electoral arrangements. Ellesmere Town Council commented on the existing Ellesmere division.

Other submissions

32 We received two further submissions from County Councillor Corston (Ludlow division) and County Councillor Melings (Wem division) who made proposals for their respective areas.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

33 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Shropshire 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.

34 As with our reviews of districts, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Shropshire 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’.

35 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.

36 We have discussed in the Introduction the additional parameters which apply to reviews of county council electoral arrangements and the need to have regard to the boundaries of district wards in order to achieve coterminosity. In addition, our approach is to ensure that, having reached a conclusion 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.

37 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.

38 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.

Electorate forecasts

39 The County Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5% from 222,616 to 234,619 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in the divisions of Castlefields & Ditherington and Quarry in Shrewsbury and in the towns of Market Drayton and Oswestry although a significant amount is also expected in the more rural St Oswald division. 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.

40 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

41 Shropshire County Council presently has 44 members. At Stage One the County Council proposed a council of 48 members, an increase of four councillors. It 'gave serious consideration to the number of members necessary to service the Council's new political arrangements under the Local Government Act 2000'. The Council contended that its proposal 'is a small increase in numbers which will provide a few more members to service the new structures and particularly the scrutiny function, which will free up the time of some members for their local member and representational duties' and 'will consequently increase the ability of members in large divisions to have closer links with their electorate and communities'.

42 We carefully considered the County Council's proposal. However, we judged that we did not receive adequate evidence to enable us to make an informed decision as to whether the current number of councillors is insufficient to execute the Council's functions and whether or not an increase of four members would secure more effective and convenient local government. Therefore we requested that the Council provide further evidence and argumentation in support of its proposal.

43 In its further submission the Council discussed how 'in April 1998, the Telford & Wrekin district area became a Unitary Authority and the number of county councillors consequently reduced by 22 to 44', but as 'the political management structure remained virtually unchanged...this placed a considerable burden on members who had to take up the places on committees that had been vacated' by the members 'from the Telford & Wrekin area'. It discussed how 'following the publication of the Government White Paper to modernise local government, the Council considered new political structure arrangements'. It 'established an informal cabinet and a series of... cabinet committees together with standing and regulatory committees and four scrutiny panels'. However, 'because of the small number of members of the County Council and the burden upon members in attending meetings, the size of the cabinet committees and scrutiny panels were kept small but each member still held a considerable number of committee seats and there were difficulties with member attendance and on some occasions on having a quorum for meetings to take place'.

44 The Council described that it subsequently established a Cabinet and Leader structure and 'the size of the scrutiny panels were kept very small because of the known burden of meeting requirements upon members'. The Council contended that 'such a structure will have been similarly adopted by most other county councils...but those councils in the main will have many more members...to actually service the structure' and that 'whilst the Council is keen to ensure that the non-executive members are fully involved in the working of the Authority through standing and regulatory, overview and scrutiny committees and policy commissions, the Council is aware that this work has to be split across only 34 non-executive members compared to 50-70 in most other councils'.

45 The County Council considered its members' representation roles at the national, regional and local level. It argued that 'these three roles combine to place a heavy burden' on members, some of who 'are having difficulties in fulfilling all three roles as well as they would wish and this is particularly so in the case of members who are in employment and members who are also members of district councils'. As well 'members are not always available to attend regulatory or scrutiny meetings and they also have difficulty in carrying out their local member role'. The Council argued that 'the overall workload is such that it is difficult to recruit and attract a full cross section of the community' and that it has 'experimented with holding meetings at different times of the day or evening but this has

made little difference to the overall situation'. The Council judged that as 'continuing with the present number of members would only prolong the current unsatisfactory situation' an increase in council size would 'enable [it] to secure superior levels of effective and convenient local government and also enable members to better serve their local electorates and communities'.

46 The Council stated that it intends to improve 'its overview and scrutiny process and also its performance management monitoring', but that 'to secure an effective long term overview and scrutiny function' it needs 'to increase the size of the overview and scrutiny committees'. It contended that 'an increase of four in the number of members will therefore enable the regulatory and overview and scrutiny functions to be distributed amongst a larger number of non-executive members' and thereby 'enable [members] to give more time to carrying out their remaining duties' and 'to consult and liaise with their local electors, parish councils and community groups'.

47 We note that the Council had considered whether the current council size has the capacity to fulfil the demands of its political management structure and enables members to perform their representational roles effectively. We considered that the Council had provided significant argumentation and evidence to suggest that the current arrangements are not securing effective and convenient local government. However, we were concerned that the County Council relied on comparisons with other county councils to contend that it had insufficient members for its political management structure. We judged that the Council had not provided detailed evidence discussing how the proposed increase would impact on its political management structure and members' ability to execute their representational roles. Therefore, we requested that the Council provided further evidence regarding this issue.

48 The Council stated that 'the commitment required from councillors to serve [its] structure is very great' as cabinet members are present for '3 to 4 days a week at the Shirehall to fulfil their roles' and non-executive members are present for '2 to 3 days a week to cover their scrutiny, regulatory, working group and joint committee roles'. Members have 'a minimum commitment of 18 to 20 hours a week rising to 50 to 60 hours a week or more for cabinet members, chairs of committee and panels and members who are heavily involved'. Due to 'the difficulties some members have in getting time off work for Council duties they tend to serve on less committees and panels', and therefore 'it is very difficult to get full attendance at many meetings'. This has a significant impact on the Council's overview and scrutiny function. Each of these 'scrutiny committees only have 7 members' which 'only provides a small pool of members to carry out the scrutiny for each function and restricts the ability of members to undertake in-depth research and questioning in respect of detailed service delivery'. The Council proposes 'to increase the size of [the] scrutiny committees' which will require 'an even further commitment from members'. The Council argued that although it is 'keen to ensure that members have sufficient time to exercise their local community role' its experience is that 'the demand made on members for servicing the political structures means their time to undertake their local community work is limited'.

49 Therefore an increase of four councillors 'would assist the Council in carrying out its overview and scrutiny functions by providing more members to serve on overview and scrutiny committees and assist the Council in increasing the size of these committees' and 'provide more members to carry out the specific research and investigate work that is necessary if this function is to be performed better as the Council plans'. It would 'ease the burden across all non-executive members, make attendance at meetings better and also provide a slight easing of the workload on all present members' as well as 'enable members to more fully meet their representational role'.

50 We have considered all the information the Council submitted in support of its proposed increase of council size and we are grateful for the co-operation we have received with our requests for further evidence and argumentation. It should be noted that we do not accept that a reduction in county council's size following an area within the county becoming a

unitary authority is sufficient justification for a subsequent increase in council size during a PER. Nor do we judge that comparisons between local authorities' council sizes is a practical approach in determining the most appropriate council size to secure effective and convenient local government in a particular local authority area.

51 However, the evidence and argumentation the County Council provided persuaded us that it has made a detailed study of the requirements of governance under its new political structure and considered its experience of operating within the new structures to reach a balanced conclusion on the appropriate council size to secure effective and convenient local government for Shropshire.

52 We have been persuaded by the evidence regarding the difficulties the Council is experiencing in developing an effective scrutiny and overview structure, and in members being able to perform an effective representational role; that the current council size is not securing effective and convenient local government. We consider that the County Council has provided substantial evidence to support its argument that an increase of four councillors would alleviate the problems members are experiencing with their workload and would enable members to better fulfil their representative roles, and in particular improve the Council's ability to execute an effective overview and scrutiny processes and performance management monitoring. We note that a 48-member council provides a good allocation of councillors between the five districts in Shropshire. We received no other comments regarding council size at Stage One.

53 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 48 members.

Electoral arrangements

54 We have carefully considered all the representations received. It should be noted that when proposing new division patterns we aim to provide the best balance between achieving a good level of electoral equality while reflecting community identity and interests and securing effective and convenient local government. Therefore we would require justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of more than 10% in any division. Any imbalances of more than 20% should only arise in exceptional circumstances, and will require strong justification. We also recognise that in proposing division patterns that provide the best balance between the statutory criteria, it may not be possible to avoid the creation of county divisions which contain diverse communities, for example, combining urban and rural areas.

55 We have carefully considered the alternative arrangements proposed by the Conservatives. The Conservatives justified the high levels of electoral inequality resulting from their proposed Whitchurch and Oswestry West divisions, in North Shropshire and Oswestry districts respectively, by arguing that they would provide the best reflection of community identities and interests. However, as highlighted above, we would expect significant justification in support of divisions that achieve imbalances of more than 20%. We do not consider that the Conservatives have provided sufficient evidence to persuade us that each division would provide a superior reflection of community identities and interests to the division patterns proposed by the County Council in these areas, especially given the electoral inequality that would result from the Conservatives proposals. In Shrewsbury & Atcham borough the Conservatives proposed a new Bicton division comprising part of the unparished more urban Shrewsbury town and the more rural Bicton parish. They argued that the proposed Bicton division would provide the best reflection of community identities and interests. However, we do not consider that the Conservatives have provided sufficient evidence to persuade us that uniting rural and urban areas in this division would provide the best reflection of community identities and interests. We therefore do not propose adopting

this proposal and as a consequence have been unable to adopt a number of the Conservatives proposed neighbouring divisions in Shrewsbury.

56 The Council expressed the view that in formulating recommendations for future electoral arrangements, 'greater emphasis needs to be given to the need to secure effective and convenient government, to reflect the interests and identities of communities and also rural/urban weightings', and that its proposals have resulted 'in these requirements being balanced against the requirements for electoral equality'. We note that the Council's proposals would secure a better level of electoral equality than the current arrangements, but a low level of coterminosity (48%) between district ward and county division boundaries.

57 In considering county council electoral arrangements, we attach much importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of county divisions and district wards. Where wards or groups of wards are not coterminous with county divisions, it may not be conducive to effective liaison and co-operative working between the two tiers of local government in addressing matters of common concern. We recognise that it will not always be possible to achieve coterminosity, but we expect to receive significant evidence and argumentation in support of proposals for non-coterminous wards.

58 We understand that the low level of coterminosity secured by the County Council scheme is mainly due to the 6% level of coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries secured by the County Council's proposals for the borough of Shrewsbury & Atcham. Even so, we noted that in all the districts the County Council proposed a number of non-coterminous divisions. We were concerned that, especially in the districts of North Shropshire, Oswestry and South Shropshire, it had not provided sufficient justification to make a case that the division of district wards between county divisions would provide the best balance of community identities and interests and secure effective and convenient local government. We also note that a number of the Council's proposed divisions would secure a relatively high level of electoral inequality. By 2006 18 divisions would have an electoral variance of more than 10% and 11 divisions would have variances of more than 20%. We have considered a number of alternatives across the county to improve the levels of electoral equality. In some districts this has been possible. However, in a number of areas we have been unable to improve upon, or have ourselves recommended, relatively high electoral variances. In these areas it has not been possible for us to improve electoral equality while at the same time having regard for community identities and interests and the need to provide effective and convenient local government, especially in relation to coterminosity between district ward and county division boundaries. Therefore, although in certain areas our proposals result in relatively high electoral variances, we are of the opinion that they still provide the best balance between our statutory criteria.

59 As indicated above, we are proposing to adopt a council size of 48, as proposed by the County Council. We are proposing to broadly adopt the County Council's proposals as we judge that they would secure a better balance between electoral equality and coterminosity while having regard to the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. However, we studied alternative options to improve the level of coterminosity and electoral equality. As a result of this analysis we propose modifications in all five districts. In the district of Bridgnorth we propose a minor amendment to provide for a 100% level of coterminosity. In the district of North Shropshire we propose a two-member Market Drayton division and, as a result, an alternative division pattern in the east. In the borough of Shrewsbury & Atcham we propose to adopt the County Council's proposals for Shrewsbury town, but propose an alternative division pattern in the surrounding rural area. In the borough of Oswestry we propose a two-member Oswestry division, combining two of the Council's proposed divisions, and a minor amendment in the south. In the district of South Shropshire we propose three significant amendments to four of the Council's proposed divisions.

60 As just highlighted we are proposing two two-member divisions. Following the commencement of Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000 and, in particular section 89,

the constraints which previously prevented the creation of multi-member county divisions, have been removed. In proposing these two-member divisions we judge that they would provide the best balance between achieving a good level of electoral equality while securing effective and convenient local government.

61 Our proposals would improve electoral equality and coterminosity compared to the current arrangements and the County Council's scheme. We note that, for the county as a whole, our proposals would result in a relatively high level of electoral inequality. We judge that this reflects the geographical nature of the county and, in particular, our aim to provide the best balance between electoral equality, community identities and interests and effective and convenient local government. For county division purposes, the five district areas in the county are considered in turn, as follows:

- i) Bridgnorth district;
- ii) North Shropshire district;
- iii) Oswestry borough;
- iv) Shrewsbury & Atcham borough;
- v) South Shropshire district.

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

Bridgnorth district

63 Under the current arrangements, eight councillors serving eight divisions represent the district of Bridgnorth. The divisions of Albrighton, Broseley and Stottesdon currently have 4%, 14% and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (5%, 17% and 7% fewer by 2006), while Much Wenlock division currently has 3% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (equal to the average by 2006). The divisions of Bridgnorth Rural, Bridgnorth Town, Morfe and Shifnal currently have 6%, 13%, 7% and 18% more electors per councillor than the county average (5%, 11%, 5% and 16% more by 2006).

64 At Stage One the County Council proposed nine single-member divisions, which the district is entitled to under a council of 48. In the north-east of the district it proposed to retain the current Albrighton division (containing the district wards of Donington & Albrighton North and Albrighton South) and proposed a modified Shifnal division (containing the district wards of Shifnal Idsall, Shifnal Manor and Shifnal Rural). In the rest of the district it proposed a revised Bridgnorth Rural division (containing the district wards of Alveley and Glazeley), a revised Broseley division (containing the district wards of Broseley East and Broseley West), a revised Morfe division (containing the district wards of Harrington, Worfield and Claverley) and a revised Much Wenlock division (containing the district wards of Ditton Priors (except for the parish of Farlow) Morville and Much Wenlock). The Council proposed that Ditton Priors district ward be split between its proposed Much Wenlock and Stottesdon divisions. It proposed the parish of Farlow should combine with the district wards of Stottesdon and Highley to comprise the proposed Stottesdon division as it 'has greater links with the Stottesdon area than the Ditton Priors/Much Wenlock area'. The Council also proposed a new Bridgnorth East division (containing the district wards of Bridgnorth East and Bridgnorth Morfe) and a new Bridgnorth West division (containing the district wards of Bridgnorth West and Bridgnorth Castle).

65 Under the County Council's scheme the proposed divisions of Bridgnorth Rural, Broseley, Morfe and Stottesdon would initially have 21%, 5%, 21% and 6% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (22%, 8%, 22% and 6% fewer by 2006). The proposed divisions of Albrighton, Bridgnorth East, Bridgnorth West, Much Wenlock and Shifnal would initially have 5%, 6%, 6%, 2% and 24% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4%, 4%, 4%, 5% and 23% more by 2006).

66 The County Council noted that its proposed Bridgnorth Rural, Morfe and Shifnal divisions would have variances of more than 20%. It argued that its proposed Bridgnorth Rural and Morfe divisions 'are made up of communities and district wards with similar identities and community links'. It argued that due to the position of Shifnal town on the edge of the district, an alternative pattern would mean that Shifnal Manor district ward 'would have had to be allocated to an area to the south which would have broken up its community links with the rest of the Shifnal area'. Therefore, the Council judged that 'to preserve the community links in Shifnal, then all three [district] wards should create one county electoral division'.

67 Ashley Abbots Parish Council stated that it 'would like the parish to remain within a rural [division] and not become part of a town [division]'. Chelmarsh Parish Council commented that it was concerned the current Bridgnorth Rural division does not secure a good level of effective local government due to its combination of rural and urban areas. The Parish Council requested that 'the possibility of linking Glazeley [district] ward with an area covering similar rural [district] wards' be considered.

68 We have carefully considered all the representations we received for this area. We propose to adopt the County Council's proposed Albrighton, Broseley, Bridgnorth East, Bridgnorth Rural, Bridgnorth West, Morfe and Shifnal divisions as we are of the view that they provide the best balance between electoral equality, coterminosity and the reflection of local communities. We also note that the proposed Bridgnorth Rural ward reflects the views expressed by Chelmarsh Parish Council. We were, however, concerned at the high levels of electoral inequality resulting from the Council's proposed Bridgnorth Rural and Morfe divisions and considered alternative options. We noted that the geographical nature of the area limits options to improve electoral equality while maintaining a good reflection of community identities. We concluded that improving electoral equality in this area would have a detrimental effect on the level of coterminosity and would adversely impact on community identities and interests. We therefore propose to adopt these proposed divisions as part of our draft recommendations. We were similarly concerned that the proposed Shifnal division would result in a high level of electoral inequality, but are minded to agree with the County Council that, as the proposed Shifnal division is on the edge of the district, the options for improvements without adversely affecting community identities are limited. We therefore judge that the County Council's proposal is the most appropriate solution.

69 In order to secure a higher level of coterminosity we propose that the whole of Ditton Priors district ward comprise part of the proposed Much Wenlock division. We note that this would worsen electoral equality in this area. However, we have not been persuaded that this ward should be divided between divisions. Subject to this amendment we propose adopting the Council's proposed Much Wenlock and Stottesdon divisions as part of our draft recommendations, as we judge that they provide a good balance between electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests. We also note that our proposed Much Wenlock division reflects the views expressed by Ashley Abbots Parish Council.

70 Our draft recommendations would achieve a 100% level of coterminosity between county division and district ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed divisions of Albrighton, Bridgnorth East, Bridgnorth Rural, Bridgnorth West, Broseley, Morfe, Much Wenlock, Shifnal and Stottesdon would have 5% more, 6% more, 21% fewer, 6% more, 5% fewer, 21% fewer, 9% more, 24% more and 13% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4% more, 4% more, 22% fewer, 4% more, 8% fewer, 22% fewer, 12% more, 23% more and 13% fewer by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

North Shropshire district

71 Under the current arrangements, the district of North Shropshire is represented by eight councillors serving eight divisions. The divisions of Ellesmere, Hodnet, Market Drayton, Myddle, Wem and Whitchurch currently have 15%, 5%, 22%, 18%, 10% and 37% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (17%, 5%, 26%, 21%, 13% and 38% more by 2006). The divisions of Prees and Woore currently have 11% and 9% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (10% and 10% fewer by 2006).

72 At Stage One we received six submissions in relation to the district of North Shropshire including district-wide schemes from the County Council and the Conservatives. The County Council proposed ten single-member divisions, an increase of two in the number of councillors representing North Shropshire, to which the district is entitled to under a council of 48. The Council's proposals would secure a 70% level of coterminosity and, by 2006, four wards would have an electoral variance of more than 20%. It proposed to retain the existing Market Drayton and Woore divisions, which would have 29% more and 3% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (33% more and 3% more by 2006), and would be coterminous with district ward boundaries. The Council stated that Market Drayton North and Market Drayton South district wards 'form a distinct identifiable community within Market Drayton and this justifies continuing with an above average number of electors'. The Council proposed revised arrangements for the existing Whitchurch division to contain Whitchurch North and Whitchurch West district wards. It proposed that Whitchurch South district ward combine with the district wards of Prees and Whitchurch Rural to comprise a revised Prees division.

73 In the west of the district the County Council proposed a modified Ellesmere division (containing the district wards of Dudleston Heath and Ellesmere & Welshampton) and a new Baschurch division (containing the district wards of Baschurch, Cockshutt and Hordley, Tetchill & Lyneal). The Council put forward a new Wem division (containing the district wards Wem East and Wem West) and a new non-coterminous Wem Rural division (containing the district wards of Wem Rural and Whixhall and the parishes of Broughton, Clive, Grinshill and Myddle which comprise part of Clive & Myddle district ward). In the south-east of the district the County Council proposed to divide Hodnet district ward between two new non-coterminous divisions. It proposed a Shawbury division (containing Shawbury district ward, the parish of Hadnall which comprises part of Clive & Myddle district ward, and the parishes of Stanton upon Hine Heath and Weston-under-Redcastle, which comprise part of Hodnet district ward) and a Hodnet division (containing the district wards of Hinstock and Sutton, and the parish of Hodnet and Stoke upon Tern parish ward of Stoke upon Tern parish, which comprise part of Hodnet district ward).

74 Under the County Council's scheme the proposed divisions of Baschurch, Ellesmere, Shawbury, Wem and Wem Rural would initially have 33%, 8%, 24%, 8% and 18% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (30%, 6%, 24%, 6% and 17% fewer by 2006), while the proposed divisions of Hodnet, Market Drayton, Prees and Woore would initially have 6%, 29%, 22% and 4% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (5%, 33%, 23%, 3% more by 2006) and the proposed Whitchurch division would have an equal number of electors to the county average initially (3% more by 2006).

75 In its argumentation the County Council noted that its proposed Baschurch and Shawbury divisions would result in high levels of electoral variance, but argued that they 'recognise community and geographic links'. It noted that by 2006 its proposed Wem Rural division would have an electoral variance of more than 10%, but argued that the division 'recognises areas that community-wise link into the town of Wem'.

76 We received a district-wide proposal from the Conservatives which was broadly similar to the County Council's proposals except for the western and northern areas. In the west the

Conservatives proposed an alternative arrangement, proposing to divide Hordley, Tetchill & Lyneal district ward between two divisions. They proposed that the whole of Welshampton & Lyneal parish combine with Ellesmere Urban parish to comprise a modified Ellesmere division. They proposed that Ellesmere Rural and Hordley parishes combine with the district wards of Dudleston Heath, Cockshutt and Baschurch to comprise a new Baschurch division. In the north of the district, the Conservatives proposed to retain the current Whitchurch division and a new Prees division (to contain the district wards of Prees and Whitchurch Rural).

77 Under the Conservatives' scheme the proposed Baschurch, Ellesmere and Whitchurch divisions would have 13% and 28% fewer, and 50% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (11% fewer, 25% fewer and 51% more by 2006). The Conservatives noted the high levels of electoral variance secured under their scheme, but argued that it maintains 'the principles of keeping communities together'. With regard to the significant level of electoral inequality secured by the proposed Whitchurch division, the Conservatives argued 'that to split the town would be unnecessarily confusing for the people of Whitchurch' and that the proposed division 'covers a relatively small area and has one town council'.

78 Councillor Mellings (Wem division) supported the Council's proposed increase in the number of councillors representing the district of North Shropshire from eight to 10. He proposed a new division containing the district wards of Wem East, Wem Rural and Wem West. He argued that 'Wem Rural [district ward] predominantly looks to Wem as its service centre' and that 'Wem is a market town which serves a hinterland largely based on the make-up of the communities within the Wem Rural [district ward] area'.

79 Ellesmere Town Council commented that the existing 'Ellesmere division is a compact area with a natural boundary'. Market Drayton Town Council argued that population growth in the town 'is justification for an additional county council[or] along district boundaries'. Loppington Parish Council requested that the current Wem division be retained as its communities 'naturally gravitate towards the other parishes within the division', and there is a 'natural affinity' between the constituent communities.

80 We have carefully considered all the submissions for this area. We have not been persuaded by the evidence submitted to us by the Conservatives to accept the very high level of electoral inequality resulting from their proposed Whitchurch division. We propose to adopt the Council's proposed Prees, Wem and Whitchurch divisions, and its proposed Ellesmere, Baschurch and Wem Rural divisions subject to minor amendments. We note the high level of electoral variance resulting from the Council's proposed Prees division and examined an alternative option. We considered the option of a two-member Whitchurch division. However, we noted that this would have to comprise substantial rural and urban areas in order to achieve a good level of electoral equality and would result in Prees district ward being transferred to an adjoining proposed division. We did not consider that, in this instance, including rural and urban areas in the same division would provide a good reflection of community identities and take the view that the Council's proposed Prees and Whitchurch divisions provide the best balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities and interests.

81 We were concerned at the very high level of electoral variance resulting from the Council's proposed Baschurch division. To achieve a better level of electoral equality we propose that Welshampton parish ward of Welshampton & Lyneal parish, which comprises part of Ellesmere & Welshampton district ward, form part of the proposed Baschurch division. We note that, although this amendment would create a non-coterminous division, it would improve electoral equality and would unite the whole of the parish of Welshampton & Lyneal in the proposed Baschurch division.

82 We have considered the County Council's proposal for Clive & Myddle district ward to be separated between the proposed Wem Rural and Shawbury divisions. However, we do not consider that the Council has provided sufficient supporting evidence to justify this and the lower level of coterminosity that would result. We also note that an improved level of electoral equality would be achieved if the whole of Clive & Myddle district ward were contained within the proposed Wem Rural division. Subject to this amendment we propose to adopt the Council's proposed Wem Rural ward as we judge that it would secure a good level of electoral equality and would provide a good reflection of community identities and interests. We considered Councillor Melling's proposal for a modified Wem division but note that this would result in a comparatively high level of electoral variance (more than 18% by 2006) in this area. We do not consider that we have received sufficient supporting evidence to persuade us that Councillor Melling's proposal would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities and interests than the alternative proposals for this area submitted by the County Council and the Conservatives.

83 We have considered the Conservatives' proposed Ellesmere and Baschurch divisions and note that the proposed divisions would provide a better level of electoral equality than the Council's proposals. However, we do not consider that their proposal for Dudleston Heath district ward to combine with the more rural district wards to the south would provide a better reflection of community identities and interests than the County Council's proposals. Therefore, with the amendment outlined above, we are of the view that, due to their close proximity and good transport links, a division comprising Ellesmere urban parish and Dudleston Heath district ward would provide a better reflection of community identities and interests than the Conservatives' proposals.

84 We were concerned at the high level of electoral variance resulting from the Council's and the Conservatives' proposed Market Drayton and Shawbury divisions. We were also concerned at their proposal to divide Hodnet district ward between the proposed Shawbury and Hodnet divisions. We do not consider that we have received sufficient justification to persuade us that Hodnet district ward should be divided between divisions given the resulting lower level of coterminosity. We therefore examined alternative options to improve electoral equality and the level of coterminosity in this area.

85 As a result of our considerations, we propose a coterminous Shawbury division, containing the district wards of Shawbury and Hodnet. We propose a new two-member Market Drayton division, containing the district wards of Market Drayton East, Market Drayton North and Market Drayton South and a new Market Drayton Rural division, containing the district wards of Hinstock, Shavington, Sutton and Woore. We consider that our proposed Market Drayton and Shawbury divisions would achieve a better balance between electoral equality and coterminosity while having regard for community identities and interests. Our proposed two-member Market Drayton division would contain the whole of the town in a single division and would facilitate a separation between urban and rural areas while our proposed Market Drayton Rural division would combine similar rural areas. We note that our proposed Market Drayton Rural division would result in an electoral variance of more than 20%. However, we consider that this high electoral variance is justified by the improvement in the level of electoral equality and coterminosity across the district and the reflection of community identities and interests that our proposals would provide. We also noted the comments of Market Drayton Town Council that the town is entitled to an additional county councillor, our proposal allocates an additional councillor to the town without having to include part of the town in a division with surrounding rural areas.

86 Our draft recommendations would achieve a 78% level of coterminosity between county division and district ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations our proposed divisions of Baschurch, Ellesmere, Market Drayton, Shawbury, Wem and Wem Rural would initially have 24%, 17%, 9%, 4%, 8% and 6% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (21%, 16%, 8%, 6%, 6% and 5% fewer by 2006) and our proposed Market Drayton Rural and Prees divisions would initially have 25% and 22% more electors

per councillor than the county average respectively (25% and 23% more by 2006). Our proposed Whitchurch division would initially have an equal number of electors per councillor to the county average (3% more by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Oswestry borough

87 Under the current arrangements, the borough of Oswestry is represented by six councillors serving six divisions. The division of Oswestry East currently has 45% more electors per councillor than the county average (49% by 2006). The divisions of Oswestry West, Ruyton-xi-Towns, St Oswald, Weston Rhyn and Whittington currently have 6%, 18%, 29%, 13% and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7%, 17%, 26%, 12% and 7% fewer by 2006).

88 We received four submissions for this area, including two borough-wide schemes from the County Council and the Conservatives. The Council proposed to retain the existing number of councillors representing the borough, to which the borough is entitled to under a council of 48 members, and proposed to modify three of the existing divisions. The Council's proposals would result in a 67% level of coterminosity between county division and borough ward boundaries and, by 2006, four divisions would have an electoral variance of more than 10% and two divisions would have variances of more than 20%. The Council proposed to retain the existing coterminous Weston Rhyn division (containing the borough wards of St Martin's and Weston Rhyn) and Whittington division (containing the borough wards of Gobowen and Whittington) in the north of the borough, and the non-coterminous Ruyton-xi-Towns division (containing the borough wards of Kinnerley and Ruyton & West Felton and the parish of Pant, part of Llanyblodwel & Pant borough ward) in the south-east of the borough. The Council argued that these three proposed divisions would 'recognise existing electoral areas, community and road links'.

89 The County Council proposed a reconfigured Oswestry East division (containing the borough wards of Cabin Lane, Cambrian and Carreg Llwyd) and a reconfigured Oswestry West division (containing the borough wards of Castle and Gatacre). The Council noted the high level of electoral variance resulting from its proposed Oswestry East division, but it argued that this is justified 'given the compact nature of the area and the established community and electoral links'. It proposed that Maserfield borough ward combine with Sweeny & Trefonen borough ward and Llanyblodwel parish to comprise an amended St Oswald division. The Council stated that although its proposals would divide Llanyblodwel & Pant borough ward between divisions, this would provide a better reflection of community identities as 'Llanyblodwel parish fits better with [the proposed St Oswald] division because of the road and community links'.

90 The Council's proposed divisions of Oswestry East, Oswestry West, Ruyton-xi-Towns, St Oswald, Weston Rhyn and Whittington would initially have 22% more, 8% fewer, 10% fewer, 24% more, 13% fewer and 12% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (28% more, 11% fewer, 10% fewer, 28% more, 12% fewer and 9% more by 2006).

91 The Conservatives stated their objection 'to the County Council's proposals to increase the size of [St Oswald division], by adding the district ward of Maserfield'. They proposed that Maserfield borough ward combine with the borough wards of Castle and Gatacre to comprise a modified Oswestry West division, and they proposed to retain the existing St Oswald division. Their proposals for the rest of the borough were identical to the Council's scheme. The Conservative's proposed Oswestry West and St Oswald divisions would initially have 38% more and 22% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (37% more and 19% fewer by 2006). They contended that Maserfield borough ward represents a 'compact urban ward', and argued that combining it with the 'predominately rural division' of St Oswald would provide a poor reflection of community

identities. Additionally they argued that the community of Maserfield borough ward contends with issues that are different to and separate from those relevant to the surrounding rural area. In contrast, the borough wards of Maserfield and Gatacre share social characteristics and experience similar issues. Consequentially, the community comprising Maserfield borough ward would receive more effective representation if it were part of an urban division.

92 We received a further two submissions regarding the borough. Selattyn & Gobowen Parish Council requested that the parish be 'wholly contained within one county [division] with its boundaries being coterminous with those of the parish'. Oswestry Town Council requested that 'due to growth of Oswestry...an additional county council representative member should be allocated to the town'.

93 We have carefully considered all the submissions received for this borough. We propose to adopt the proposed Weston Rhyn and Whittington divisions as put forward by both the County Council and the Conservatives as we judge that they would provide for a good level of electoral equality and would provide a good reflection of community identities and interests. We also note that the proposed Whittington division would reflect the views expressed by Selattyn & Gobowen Parish Council.

94 We have carefully considered the Conservatives' alternative proposals for this area. We have noted that under a council size of 48 the town of Oswestry is entitled to 2.6 county councillors by 2006. The Conservatives proposed that Maserfield borough ward combine with the borough wards of Castle and Gatacre to comprise a modified Oswestry West division, and they proposed to retain the existing St Oswald division. Under these proposals they have only allocated two councillors to the town of Oswestry. As a result, their proposed Oswestry West and St Oswald divisions would provide high electoral variances, as outlined earlier. We consider that these electoral variances are unacceptable in light of the alternatives that are available, especially in Oswestry town. We do not, therefore, propose adopting the Conservatives' proposals. Having decided not to adopt their proposals, and in light of the entitlement of the urban area to 2.6 councillors, we considered which part of the urban area should be included in a division with the more rural wards to the south of the borough. We concur with the County Council that its proposed St Oswald division, which comprises the urban Maserfield borough ward and the more rural Sweeney & Trefonen ward, represents the best available balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities. We do not consider that the community of Maserfield borough ward would receive less effective representation if it were included in a division with more rural communities.

95 Having adopted the County Council's proposal for Maserfield borough ward to comprise part of the proposed St Oswald division we considered its proposals for the remainder of Oswestry Town. We were concerned that the County Council's proposed Oswestry East division would result in a high level of electoral inequality (22% initially and 28% by 2006). We do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence to justify this high electoral variance in what is a relatively compact urban area. Therefore, to improve electoral equality we examined alternatives of either dividing borough wards between county divisions or creating a two-member division. Dividing borough wards between the proposed divisions would provide for a lower level of coterminosity and in our opinion a worse reflection of community identities and interests than the creation of a two-member division. Therefore, we are proposing a two-member Oswestry division to comprise the borough wards of Cabin Lane, Cambrian, Carreg Llwyd, Castle and Gatacre. We consider that this would provide a good balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities and interests while facilitating a good level of coterminosity.

96 In the south of the borough, we were concerned by the high level of electoral variance resulting from the Council's proposed St Oswald division (24% initially and 28% by 2006). The Council has not persuaded us that Llanyblodwel & Pant borough ward should be

divided between divisions given the resulting lower level of coterminosity. We therefore propose to transfer Llanyblodwel parish from the proposed St Oswald division into an amended Ruyton-xi-Towns division to unite Llanyblodwel & Pant borough ward in a single division. This amendment would provide for an improved level of electoral equality and coterminosity without, in our opinion, having an adverse effect on community identities and interests.

97 Our draft recommendations would achieve a 100% level of coterminosity between county division and borough ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations our proposed Oswestry, Ruyton-xi-Towns, St Oswald and Whittington divisions would initially have 7%, 3%, 10% and 12% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (8%, 3%, 15% and 9% more by 2006), while our proposed Weston Rhyn division would initially have 13% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (12% fewer by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Shrewsbury & Atcham borough

98 Under the current arrangements, the borough of Shrewsbury & Atcham is represented by 16 councillors serving 16 divisions. In the rural areas of the borough the divisions of Burnell, Loton, Rea Valley and Tern currently have 1% more, 11% fewer, 7% more and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (2% more, 13% fewer, 5% more and 1% fewer by 2006), while Bayston Hill division currently has 16% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (20% fewer by 2006). In the western area of the town, the divisions of Belle-Vue, Copthorne, Meole-Brace and Quarry currently have 17% fewer, 43% more, 14% more and 19% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (18% fewer, 41% more, 10% more and 10% fewer by 2006). In the east of the town the divisions of Castlefields & Ditherington, Monkmoor, Sutton and Underdale currently have 20% fewer, 8% fewer, 22% fewer and 13% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (16% fewer, 11% fewer, 24% fewer and 13% fewer by 2006). In the north of the town the divisions of Bagley, Harlescott and Sundorne currently have 16% fewer, 30% fewer and 28% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (14% fewer, 32% fewer and 31% fewer by 2006).

99 At Stage One we received two borough-wide schemes from the County Council and the Conservatives both of whom proposed 16 single-member divisions, to which the borough is entitled to under a council of 48 members. The Council proposed to retain three of the existing divisions: Bayston Hill, Loton and Rea Valley. Under its scheme only the proposed Bayston Hill division would be coterminous with borough ward boundaries. Its proposals would provide a 6% level of coterminosity between county division and borough ward boundaries and by 2006 two of the proposed divisions would have electoral variances of more than 10%. In the rural area of the borough the County Council proposed to retain the existing Loton division, to contain the borough wards of Montford and Rowton and Yockleton parish ward of Westbury parish (within the current Rea Valley borough ward) and to retain the existing Rea Valley division, to contain the borough ward of Hanwood & Longden and the parishes of Minsterley and Pontesbury within the current Rea Valley borough ward. It proposed a revised Tern division, containing the borough wards of Pimhill, Haughmond & Attingham and the parishes of Wroxeter & Uppington and Leighton & Easton Constantine (within the current Severn Valley borough ward) and a revised Burnell division (to contain the borough wards of Condoover, Lawley and the parishes of Buildwas, Cressage, Harley and Sheinton, within the current Severn Valley borough ward). In its argumentation, the Council contended that the proposed Rea Valley division 'will retain established elector links with the present division and will serve a distinct community that is linked by road, geographical and community links along the Rea Valley'.

100 In Shrewsbury town the County Council proposed 11 non-coterminous divisions 'to reflect local community links and natural boundaries'. In the south-west of the town the

Council proposed to divide Copthorne borough ward between three proposed divisions. It proposed that a northern area broadly north of Mytton Oak Road combine with Bowbrook borough ward to comprise a modified Copthorne division. It proposed that a central area broadly south of Mytton Oak Road and north of Radbrook Road and Ridgebourne Road combine with Porthill borough ward to comprise a new Porthill division. It proposed that the area broadly south of Radbrook Road combine with Meole-Brace borough ward to comprise a modified Meole-Brace division.

101 In the south of the town the Council proposed a modified Belle-Vue division (containing Belle-Vue borough ward and an area broadly north of Hazeldine Way and Pritchard Way that comprises part of Sutton & Reabrook borough ward). In the south-east the Council proposed to divide Column, Monkmoor and Sutton & Reabrook borough wards between divisions. It proposed that an area broadly south of Preston Street, within Column borough ward, unite with an area broadly south of Hazeldine Way and Pritchard Way, within Sutton & Reabrook borough ward, to comprise a new Sutton & Reabrook division. It proposed that the remainder of Column borough ward, north of Preston Street, combine with an area broadly south of Monkmoor Road, within Monkmoor borough ward, to comprise a modified Monkmoor division. It proposed that the remainder of Monkmoor borough ward, broadly north of Monkmoor Road, combine with Underdale borough ward to comprise a modified Underdale division.

102 In the north of the town the Council proposed to divide Battlefield & Heathgates borough ward between three proposed divisions. It proposed that an area broadly east of Battlefield Road combine with Sundorne borough ward to comprise a modified Sundorne division. It proposed that an area broadly south of Old Heath combine with an area broadly north of the Shrewsbury to Llangollen railway line adjacent to Howard Street, within the current Castlefields & Quarry borough ward, to comprise a modified Castlefields & Ditherington division. It proposed that the remainder of Battlefield & Heathgates borough ward combine with Harlescott borough ward to comprise a modified Harlescott division. This proposed division would also include the residential area broadly west of Boscobel Drive within Bagley borough ward. The Council proposed that the remainder of Bagley borough ward combine with an area broadly south of the railway line, within Castlefields & Quarry borough ward, to comprise a modified Bagley division.

103 Under the Council's scheme the proposed divisions of Bagley, Bayston Hill, Belle-Vue, Burnell, Castlefields & Ditherington, Copthorne, Harlescott, Loton, Meole-Brace, Monkmoor, Porthill, Rea Valley, Sundorne, Sutton & Reabrook, Tern and Underdale would initially have 17% fewer, 8% fewer, 1% fewer, 3% more, 8% fewer, 4% more, 1% more, 8% fewer, 11% more, 5% more, 11% more, 17% more, 8% more, 3% fewer, 12% fewer and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (2% fewer, 12% fewer, 2% fewer, 4% more, 3% fewer, 4% more, 3% fewer, 10% fewer, 7% more, 1% more, 8% more, 15% more, 5% more, 6% fewer, 9% fewer and 7% fewer by 2006).

104 The Conservatives also proposed to retain the existing Bayston Hill and Rea Valley divisions. They proposed a modified Tern and Burnell divisions identical to the divisions proposed by the Council. They proposed a similar Loton division to the Council, with the amendment that Bicton parish, within Montford borough ward, combine with Bowbrook borough ward to comprise a new Bicton division to reflect that 'the people of Bicton naturally use the services and shops at Bicton Heath'.

105 In the south-west of Shrewsbury town the Conservatives proposed to divide Porthill and Belle-Vue borough wards between three proposed divisions. They proposed to divide Porthill borough ward between two divisions using Copthorne Road and Hafren Road as a boundary. They proposed that the area broadly north of these roads combine with Copthorne borough ward to comprise a modified Copthorne division. They proposed that the area broadly south of these roads combine with an area within Belle-Vue borough ward, broadly north of the Shrewsbury to Welshpool railway line, to comprise a modified Porthill

division. They proposed that the remaining area of Belle-Vue borough ward combine with Meole-Brace borough ward to comprise a modified Meole-Brace division. In the south-east of the town, the Conservatives proposed to divide Monkmoor and Column borough wards between four proposed divisions, which are similar to the Council's proposals. They proposed that an area broadly south of Preston Street, within Column borough ward, combine with Sutton & Reabrook borough ward to comprise a new Sutton & Reabrook division. They proposed that the area north of Preston Street combine with an area broadly south of Monkmoor Road, within Monkmoor borough ward, to comprise a modified Monkmoor division. As the Council proposed, the Conservatives proposed that the remainder area of Monkmoor borough ward unite with Underdale borough ward to comprise a modified Underdale division.

106 The Conservatives proposed to divide Battlefield & Heathgates borough ward between three proposed divisions, which are similar to the County Council's proposed divisions. They proposed that an area broadly south of Ramsey Meadows combine with Sundorne borough ward to comprise a modified Sundorne division. They proposed the same Castlefields & Ditherington division as the Council, but proposed to name the division Castlefields. They proposed that the remainder of Battlefield & Heathgates borough ward combine with Harlescott borough ward to comprise a modified Harlescott division. They proposed that Bagley borough ward combine with an area broadly south of the railway line adjacent to Howard Street, within Castlefields & Quarry borough ward, to comprise a new Bagley & Town division.

107 The Conservatives' proposals would achieve the same level of coterminosity of 6% as the Council's proposals. The Conservatives' proposed divisions of Bayston Hill, Burnell, Rea Valley and Tern would provide for the same level of electoral equality as the County Council's proposed divisions. Their proposed Bagley, Bicton, Castlefields, Copthorne, Harlescott, Loton, Meole-Brace, Monkmoor, Porthill, Sundorne, Sutton & Reabrook and Underdale divisions would initially have 3% fewer, 1% more, 8% fewer, 7% more, 13% fewer, 23% fewer, 7% fewer, 3% more, 16% more, 8% more, 21% more and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (11% more, 1% more, 3% fewer, 3% more, 17% fewer, 24% fewer, 10% fewer, equal to, 14% more, 5% more, 18% more and 7% fewer by 2006).

108 Bayston Hill Parish Council commented that 'there is great value in the boundary of the county division of Bayston Hill being coterminous with those of the borough ward of Bayston Hill and Bayston Hill Parish Council', and therefore 'the county divisional boundary for Bayston Hill should remain as at present'.

109 We have carefully considered all the submissions for this area. We propose to adopt the Council's and Conservatives' proposed Bayston Hill division as we consider that it would provide for a coterminous division that achieves a good balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities and interests. We also note that the proposed division would reflect the views expressed to us by Bayston Hill Parish Council. However, we were particularly concerned at the extremely low level of coterminosity achieved by both the County Council's and Conservatives' schemes for the rest of the borough. We therefore considered possible options to provide for an improved level of coterminosity. In the town of Shrewsbury we note that the size of the electorate in the two-member borough wards does not facilitate the development of coterminous divisions which provide a good level of electoral equality. We consider that, although the Council's proposals do not produce coterminous divisions in Shrewsbury town, it has proposed a division pattern that provides the best balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities and interests while utilising strong, identifiable boundaries. Therefore, we propose to adopt the Council's proposed Bagley, Belle-Vue, Castlefields & Ditherington, Copthorne, Harlescott, Meole-Brace, Monkmoor, Porthill, Sundorne, Sutton & Reabrook and Underdale divisions as part of our draft recommendations.

110 We considered the Conservatives' proposals, but have not been persuaded by the argumentation provided that the proposal to combine Bicton parish with an urban area of Shrewsbury in their proposed Bicton division would provide a better reflection of community identities and interests than the County Council's proposals. Consequently, we have been unable to adopt the Conservatives' proposed divisions in the surrounding areas. We note that the Council's proposed Bagley and Harlescott divisions would secure a better level of electoral equality than the Conservatives' proposals, and that the Council's boundary between the proposed Monkmoor and Sutton & Reabrook divisions would provide for a more identifiable boundary.

111 We noted that the County Council and the Conservatives put forward identical proposals in the rural area, with the exception of the Conservatives' proposed transfer of Bicton parish into a division with part of Shrewsbury town. As in the urban area we considered alternative options to improve the level of coterminosity provided under the County Council's and Conservatives' proposals in the rural area. As a result of our considerations we propose amendments to the proposed Burnell, Loton, Rea Valley and Tern divisions. We propose that the whole of Severn Valley borough ward comprise part of a coterminous Tern division. We propose that Hanwood & Longden borough ward comprise part of a coterminous Burnell division, and we also propose to transfer Yockleton parish ward of Westbury parish, from the proposed Loton division, into an amended coterminous Rea Valley division (to contain Rea Valley borough ward).

112 We are aware that our proposed divisions would secure an inferior level of electoral equality in comparison to the Council's and Conservatives' proposals for these four divisions. However, we do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence from either the County Council or the Conservatives to persuade us that splitting the borough wards of Severn Valley and Rea Valley between divisions would provide the best reflection of community identities. Accordingly, we consider that an improved level of coterminosity can be achieved without adversely affecting community identities and interests by proposing that both of these wards are contained wholly within divisions. We note that our proposed Rea Valley division would result in an electoral variance of more than 20%. We therefore propose to transfer Hanwood & Longwood borough ward from the proposed Rea Valley division to comprise an amended Burnell division to improve electoral equality. We consider that with these amendments the proposed Burnell, Loton, Rea Valley and Tern divisions would provide a good balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities and interests while facilitating an improved level of coterminosity across the borough.

113 Our draft recommendations would achieve a 31% level of coterminosity between county division and borough ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed divisions of Bayston Hill, Burnell, Loton, Rea Valley and Tern would initially have 8% fewer, 19% more, 16% fewer, 15% fewer and 11% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (12% fewer, 19% more, 18% fewer, 16% fewer and 15% more by 2006). In the west of Shrewsbury town, the divisions of Belle-Vue, Copthorne, Meole-Brace and Porthill would initially have 1% fewer, 4% more, 11% more and 11% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (2% fewer, 4% more, 7% more and 8% more by 2006). In the east of the town the divisions of Castlefields & Ditherington, Monkmoor, Sutton & Reabrook and Underdale would initially have 8% fewer, 5% more, 3% fewer and 7% fewer have electors per councillor than the county average respectively (3% fewer, 1% more, 6% fewer and 7% fewer by 2006). In the north of the town the divisions of Bagley, Harlescott and Sundorne would initially have 17% fewer, 1% more and 8% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (2% fewer, 3% fewer and 5% more by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on the large maps at the back of the report.

South Shropshire district

114 Under the current arrangements, the district of South Shropshire is represented by six councillors serving six divisions. The divisions of Bishop's Castle and Clun have 12% and 22% fewer electors per councillor than the county average both now and by 2006. The divisions of Church Stretton, Clee Hill and Ludlow currently have 2%, 36% and 55% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (1%, 37% and 55% more by 2006), while Corvedale division has an equal number of electors per councillor to the county average both now and by 2006.

115 We received two submissions for this area. The County Council proposed amendments to all the existing divisions resulting in the increase of one division and one councillor, from six to seven, to which the district is entitled to under a council of 48. The Council's proposals would achieve a 57% level of coterminosity between county division and district ward boundaries and by 2006 four divisions would have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the county average and two divisions would have variances of more than 20%. In the west of the district the Council proposed to retain the current Church Stretton division (containing the district wards of Church Stretton North, Church Stretton South and Apedale, and Wistanstow parish within Wistanstow with Hopesay district ward) and to broadly retain the current Clun and Bishop's Castle divisions subject to an amendment to reflect the new district wards. It proposed that the parishes of Colebache and Mainstone comprise part of the proposed Clun division (containing the district wards of Bucknell, Clun, Clun Forest and Kemp Valley), and that the parish of Hopesay comprise part of an amended Corvedale division. This division would also contain the district wards of Stokesay, Corve Valley and Upper Corvedale, and the parishes of Sibdon Carwood, within Wistanstow with Hopesay district ward, and Hopton Cangeford, Stoke St Milborough and Wheathill, within Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough district ward.

116 In the south-east of the district the Council proposed that Bitterley parish, within Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough district ward, combine with the district wards of Caynham with Ashford and Ludlow Sheet with Ludford to comprise a new Ludlow Rural division. It proposed an amended Ludlow division to contain the district wards of Ludlow Henley, Ludlow St Laurence's and Ludlow St Peter's. It proposed a new Clee division to contain the district wards of Burford, Clee and Cleobury Mortimer.

117 The Council stated that although the proposed divisions of Clun and Bishop's Castle would result in a high level of electoral inequality this would reflect that they 'are very large in area and cover a large number of parishes'. It contended that its proposed divisions of Church Stretton and Corvedale reflect both 'community and transport links', while its proposed Clee division 'reflects local community and road links and also the geography of the area being all on the southern slopes of the Clee Hills' and, therefore, 'it would be difficult to link any part of the area with any other division'. The Council explained that it had considered alternative options for the town of Ludlow and the surrounding area and concluded that the best balance between the statutory criteria would be achieved by combining rural and urban areas. It contended that although the proposed Ludlow division would secure a high level of electoral variance 'it is a compact urban area and felt to be serviceable by one member', and that the 'rural areas of [the proposed Ludlow Rural division] link by road into Ludlow and also look to Ludlow for their major services'.

118 Under the Council's scheme the proposed divisions of Bishop's Castle, Clun and Ludlow Rural would have 7%, 20% and 15% fewer electors per councillor than the county average initially (7%, 21%, and 16% fewer by 2006) and the proposed divisions of Church Stretton, Clee, Corvedale and Ludlow would have 11%, 18%, 4% and 29% more electors per councillor than the county average initially (10%, 19%, 4% and 29% more by 2006).

119 Councillor Corston (Ludlow division) opposed the Council's proposal for a modified Ludlow division and new Ludlow Rural division. He proposed that the district wards of

Ludlow St Laurence's, Ludlow St Peter's, Ludlow Henley and Ludlow Sheet with Ludford, which constitute the town of Ludlow, 'should be represented by two county councillors, without the isolation of the proposed extremely rural area being imposed upon it'. Clungunford Parish Council submitted its view 'that the boundaries should stay as they are'.

120 We have carefully considered both of the submissions we received for this area. We propose to adopt the Council's proposed Clee and Bishop's Castle divisions. We note the high level of electoral variance resulting from the proposed Clee division, but are minded to agree with the Council that any alternative proposals in this area would comprise communities that do not share common identities and interests. We also propose to broadly adopt the Council's proposed Church Stretton, Clun, Corvedale, Ludlow and Ludlow Rural divisions. We were, however, concerned at the levels of electoral variance resulting from the Council's proposed Clun and Ludlow divisions. We also considered that that the Council had not provided sufficient evidence to justify dividing Wistanstow with Hopesay and Bitterly with Stoke St Milborough district wards between different divisions. We therefore examined options to improve upon the level of coterminosity and electoral equality resulting from the Council's proposals.

121 As a result of our analysis we propose three amendments. We propose that the whole of Wistanstow with Hopesay district ward comprise part of the proposed Clun division. We note that this would significantly improve the level of electoral equality and coterminosity in the proposed Clun and Church Stretton divisions. We note that this would lead to the creation of a geographically large Clun division. However, we do not accept that the geographical size of a division alone provides justification for significant electoral variances and therefore consider that this amendment would improve electoral equality without adversely affecting the representation of community identities and interests.

122 We were particularly concerned about the high level of electoral equality secured by the Council's proposed Ludlow division. We do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence or argumentation to persuade us to accept the high level of electoral inequality resulting from the Council's proposal. We therefore propose an alternative arrangement for this area. We propose a Ludlow division to contain the district wards of Ludlow St Laurence's and Ludlow St Peter's. Consequentially, we propose to amend the Council's proposed Ludlow Rural division to include Ludlow Henley district ward and to transfer Bitterly parish from the proposed Ludlow Rural division to comprise part of the Council's proposed Corvedale division. We note that these two amendments would improve electoral equality in the proposed Ludlow division while facilitating an improved level of coterminosity in our proposed Corvedale and Ludlow Rural divisions.

123 We have considered Councillor Corston's proposed two-member division. We note that to facilitate Councillor Corston's proposed Ludlow division, Caynham with Ashford district ward would have to comprise part of either the proposed Corvedale division or the proposed Clee division, both of which would result in a variance of more than 20%. We do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence to accept this level of electoral inequality in this area when there are alternatives available which provide better levels of electoral equality. However, having examined Councillor Corston's proposal we note that a two-member division containing the district wards of Ludlow St Laurence's, Ludlow St Peter's, Ludlow Henley, Ludlow Sheet with Ludford and Caynham with Ashford would achieve an electoral variance of 1%. We have carefully considered the balance this division would achieve between electoral equality, the reflection of community identities and interests and the provision of effective and convenient local government. We have concluded that we do not have sufficient evidence, at this stage, to be certain that such a division would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. We note the excellent electoral equality, but at this time judge that it would not provide a better reflection of the communities as it would comprise both the urban and rural areas. Therefore, we would welcome comments regarding this option during Stage Three.

124 Our draft recommendations would achieve a 100% level of coterminosity between county division and district ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Clee, Clun, Corvedale, Ludlow and Ludlow Rural would have 7% fewer, 1% fewer, 18% more, 3% more, 8% more, 14% fewer and 14% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7% fewer, 3% fewer, 19% more, 2% more, 8% more, 15% fewer and 13% more by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Conclusions

125 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 44 to 48;
- the boundaries of all divisions, except Albrighton, will be subject to change as the divisions are based on district wards which have themselves changed as a result of the district reviews.

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

- in Bridgnorth we propose to adopt the division pattern proposed by the County Council's subject to one amendment to provide for an improved level of coterminosity.
- in North Shropshire we propose to adopt six of the County Council's proposed divisions, subject to two amendments as well as putting forward our own proposals for three divisions to improve upon the levels of electoral equality and coterminosity secured under the County Council's scheme;
- in Oswestry we propose to adopt four of the County Council's proposed divisions, subject to one amendment as well as putting forward our own proposal for a two-member Oswestry division to improve upon the levels of electoral equality and coterminosity secured under the Council's scheme;
- in Shrewsbury & Atcham we propose to adopt the division pattern provided by the County Council's scheme in the town of Shrewsbury and Bayston Hill, but we propose three modifications to the four divisions proposed by the County Council in the rural area of the borough to provide for an improved level of coterminosity;
- in South Shropshire we propose three modifications to the County Council's proposals to provide for improved levels of electoral equality and coterminosity.

127 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect 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	44	48	44	48
Number of divisions	44	46	44	46
Average number of electors per councillor	5,059	4,638	5,332	4,888
Number of divisions with a variance more than 10% from the average	28	20	27	19
Number of divisions with a variance more than 20% from the average	11	6	12	6

128 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Shropshire County Council would result in a reduction in the number of divisions with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 28 to 20. By 2006 19 divisions are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

Draft recommendation

Shropshire County Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 46 divisions, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated in Appendix A, and on the large maps inside the back cover.

Parish council electoral arrangements

129 During Stage One Alveley Parish Council requested the creation of a parish ward to comprise the Tuck Hill area. The Parish Council argued that ‘this area has a representative upon Alveley Parish Council by design rather than by officially being recognised as a ward’. We have considered this proposal and judge that we would require further evidence and details as to the structure of the proposed parish ward to enable an informed decision regarding this proposal.

5 What happens next?

130 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Shropshire County Council contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 21 July 2003. 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.

131 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

132 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 Shropshire County Council: detailed mapping

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

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

Sheet 2 of 2 inserted at the back of this report illustrates the proposed electoral divisions in Shrewsbury town.

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.