

# Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Shropshire County Council

Report to The Electoral Commission

*April 2004*

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# What is The Boundary Committee for England?

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

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

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

This report sets out the Committee's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the county of Shropshire.



# Summary

We began a review of Shropshire County Council's electoral arrangements on 9 July 2002. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 28 May 2003, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during consultation on our draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.**

We found that the existing 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 per councillor 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 change only marginally, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 27 divisions and by more than 20% in 12 divisions.**

Our main final recommendations for Shropshire's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 208-209) are:

- **Shropshire County Council 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 28 of the proposed 46 divisions the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the average and no more than 20% in 42 divisions.**
- **By 2006 this level of electoral equality is forecast to improve, with the number of electors per councillor in 30 divisions expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average and by more than 20% in 42.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to The Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 8 June 2004. The information in the representations will be available for public access once the Order has been made.

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Table 1: Final recommendations: Summary

Division name (by district council area)		Number of Councillors	Constituent district wards
<b>Bridgnorth</b>			
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	Morville ward; Much Wenlock ward; part of Ditton Priors ward (the parishes of Aston Botterell, Burwarton, Cleobury North, Ditton Priors and Neenton)
8	Shifnal	1	Shifnal Idsall ward; Shifnal Manor ward; Shifnal Rural ward
9	Stottesdon	1	Highley ward; Stottesdon ward; part of Ditton Priors ward (Farlow parish)
<b>North Shropshire</b>			
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
17	Wem Rural	1	Clive & Myddle ward; Wem Rural ward, Wixhall ward
18	Whitchurch	1	Whitchurch North ward; Whitchurch West ward
<b>Oswestry</b>			
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 ward
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

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**Shrewsbury & Atcham**

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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	Condover ward; Lawely ward; part of Hanwood & Longden ward (Longden parish)
28	Castlefields & Ditherington	1	part of Battlefields & 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;
31	Loton	1	Montford ward; Rowton ward; part of Rea Valley ward (Yockleton parish ward of Westbury parish)
32	Meole-Brace	1	part of Copthorne ward; part of Meole Brace 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	part of Hanwood & Longden ward (Great Hanwood parish); part of Rea Valley ward (Minsterley and Pontesbury parishes)
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	Hauthmond & Attingham ward; Pimhill ward; Severn Valley ward
39	Underdale	1	Underdale ward; part of Monkmoor ward

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**South Shropshire**

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40	Bishop's Castle	1	Bishop's Castle with Onny Valley ward; Chirbury ward; Worthen ward
41	Church Stretton	1	Apedale ward; part of Wistanstow with Hopesay ward (Wistanstow parish); Church Stretton North ward; Church Stretton South ward
42	Clee	1	Burford ward; Clee ward; Cleobury Mortimer ward
43	Clun	1	Bucknell ward, Clun ward, Clun Forest ward, Kemp Valley ward; part of Wistanstow with Hopesay ward (the parishes of Hopesay and Sibdon Carwood)
44	Corvedale	1	Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough ward; Corve Valley ward; Upper Corvedale ward; Stokesay 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 ward

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**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.*

Table 2: Final recommendations for Shropshire

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
<b>Bridgnorth</b>							
1 Albrighton	1	4,874	4,874	5	5,059	5,059	3
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	3
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	4,728	4,728	2	5,128	5,128	5
8 Shifnal	1	5,753	5,753	24	6,003	6,003	23
9 Stottesdon	1	4,365	4,365	-6	4,587	4,587	-6
<b>North Shropshire</b>							
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
<b>Oswestry</b>							
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

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	
<b>Shrewsbury &amp; Atcham</b>								
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	4,667	4,667	1	4,968	4,968	2
28	Castlefields & Ditherington	1	4,279	4,279	-8	4,730	4,730	-3
29	Copthorne	1	4,820	4,820	4	5,065	5,065	4
30	Harlescott	1	4,177	4,177	-10	4,222	4,222	-14
31	Loton	1	4,280	4,280	-8	4,403	4,403	-10
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	4,422	4,422	-5	4,586	4,586	-6
36	Sundorne	1	5,498	5,498	19	5,627	5,627	15
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
<b>South Shropshire</b>								
40	Bishop's Castle	1	4,296	4,296	-7	4,530	4,530	-7
41	Church Stretton	1	5,159	5,159	11	5,370	5,370	10
42	Clee	1	5,467	5,467	18	5,830	5,830	19
43	Clun	1	4,205	4,205	-9	4,393	4,393	-10
44	Corvedale	1	4,996	4,996	8	5,272	5,272	8

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
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
<b>Totals</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>222,616</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>234,619</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4,638</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4,888</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided 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 final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the county of Shropshire. Our review of the county is part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 In making final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

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

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

4 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of electoral divisions. In each two-tier county, our approach is first to complete the PERs of all the constituent districts and, when the Orders for the resulting changes in those areas have been made, then to commence a PER of the county council's electoral arrangements. Orders were made for the new electoral arrangements in the districts in Shropshire in May and June 2000 and we are now conducting our county review in this area.

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

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

7 In the *Guidance*, the Electoral Commission states that we should wherever possible, build on schemes that 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 division configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while also reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.

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

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

10 The *Rules* provide that, in considering county council electoral arrangements, we should have regard to the boundaries of district wards. We attach considerable importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of divisions and wards. The term 'coterminosity' is used throughout the report and refers to situations where the boundaries of county electoral divisions and district wards are the same, that is to say, where county divisions comprise one or more whole district wards. Where wards or groups of wards are not coterminous with county divisions, this can cause confusion for the electorate at local elections, lead to increased election costs and, in our view, may not be conducive to effective and convenient local government.

11 We recognise 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 from 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%. Therefore, we recommend that in formulating schemes, interested parties should seek to secure a level of coterminosity of around 60% to 80%.

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

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

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

15 As a part of this review we may also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the county. However, we made some recommendations for new parish electoral arrangements as part of our district reviews. We therefore expect to put forward such recommendations during county reviews only 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

16 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 February 1989 (Report No.573).

17 This review was in four stages. 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 Shropshire, West Mercia Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Shropshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the borough, 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 representations (the end of Stage One) was 28 October 2002. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

18 Stage Three began on 28 May 2003 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Shropshire County Council*, and ended on 21 July 2003. During this period we sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

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



## 2 Current electoral arrangements

20 The county of Shropshire comprises the five districts of Bridgnorth, North Shropshire, Oswestry, Shrewsbury & Atcham and South Shropshire.

21 Shropshire has a very low population density with an average of one person per hectare across the county. At present 65% of the county's population lives in either Shrewsbury or other market towns such as Market Drayton, Wem and Ludlow, but these urban areas only account for some 2% of the county's geographical area. Shropshire contains great geological and scenic variety, and one third of the county is a designated area of outstanding natural beauty.

22 The electorate of the county was 222,616 in December 2001 and this is forecast to increase by just over 5% to 234,619 by 2006. The Council currently has 44 elected members, each representing a single electoral division, with an average of 5,059 electors per councillor.

23 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 ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the county average. In the text which follows, this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

24 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, with 11 divisions varying by more than 20%. The worst imbalance is in Ludlow division where the councillor represents 55% more electors than the county average.

25 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 faced with a new starting point for considering electoral divisions. Our proposals for county divisions are based on the new district wards as opposed to those which existed prior to the recent reviews. In view of this, and changes in the electorate over the past 20 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 3: Existing electoral arrangements in Shropshire

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

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Variance from average	Electorate (2006)	Variance from average
28 Cophthorne	1	7,228	43	7,539	41
29 Harlescott	1	3,559	-30	3,602	-32
30 Loton	1	4,525	-11	4,662	-13
31 Meole-Brace	1	5,750	14	5,843	10
32 Monkmoor	1	4,654	-8	4,735	-11
33 Quarry	1	4,083	-19	4,775	-10
34 Rea Valley	1	5,433	7	5,607	5
35 Sundorne	1	3,639	-28	3,676	-31
36 Sutton	1	3,957	-22	4,058	-24
37 Tern	1	4,824	-5	5,277	-1
38 Underdale	1	4,416	-13	4,633	-13
<b>South Shropshire</b>					
39 Bishop's Castle	1	4,476	-12	4,715	-12
40 Church Stretton	1	5,159	2	5,370	1
41 Clee Hill	1	6,877	36	7,282	37
42 Clun	1	3,957	-22	4,137	-22
43 Corvedale	1	5,064	0	5,343	0
44 Ludlow	1	7,852	55	8,244	55
<b>Totals</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>222,616</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>234,619</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5,059</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5,332</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided 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. For example, in 2001 electors in St Oswald division in Oswestry were relatively over-represented by 29%, while electors in Ludlow division in South Shropshire were relatively under-represented by 55%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



### 3 Draft recommendations

26 During Stage One we received 15 submissions including a county-wide scheme from the County Council. This proposed a council size of 48 members, an increase of four. The Conservative Group on the Council proposed alternative arrangements for three of the districts.

27 Our draft recommendations were based on the County Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality. However, we proposed amendments to the County's proposals in all five districts to improve coterminosity, and proposed the two-member divisions of Market Drayton and Oswestry. We proposed that:

- Shropshire County Council should be served by 48 councillors;
- there should be 46 electoral divisions, and the boundaries of all of the existing divisions, except Albrighton division, should change.

*Draft recommendation*

Shropshire County Council should comprise 48 councillors, serving 46 divisions.

28 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 26 of the 46 divisions varying by no more than 10% from the county average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with 27 divisions varying by no more than 10% from the average in 2006.



## 4 Responses to consultation

29 At Stage Three we received 28 submissions. The County Council proposed a number of substantial amendments to our draft recommendations and a number of minor ones. Some of these amendments were a reiteration of its Stage One submission, with limited additional community identity argumentation. The Conservative Group also proposed a number of amendments to our draft recommendations.

### Shropshire County Council

30 The County Council put forward a number of amendments to the draft recommendations in order to better reflect community identity, which it argued had been sacrificed by the draft recommendations in favour of coterminosity. It stated that it was opposed to two-member divisions due to the large area and number of electors that councillors in such divisions would have to represent.

### Political groups

31 Shropshire County Council Conservative Group (the Conservatives) expressed support for aspects of our draft recommendations but considered that the draft recommendations placed too much emphasis on coterminosity rather than 'producing divisions that truly represent areas and their community interests'. It therefore put forward a number of amendments that built upon the recommendations in order to better reflect community identity.

32 The Liberal Democrat Group on the County Council expressed concern that its comments submitted at Stage One of the review were not noted in the draft recommendations.

### District and borough councils

33 North Shropshire District Council submitted the responses of the Conservative Group on the Council, Councillor Bate (Chairman of the Council) and Councillor Mellings (Wem division). The Conservative Group broadly supported the draft recommendations, although stated that it would prefer divisions to be either urban or rural and not a mixture of both. It supported a two-member Market Drayton division but opposed the proposed Prees and Whitchurch divisions. Councillor Bate expressed concern regarding the draft recommendations for the Prees area and Whitchurch town and argued that different councillors should represent rural and urban areas. Councillor Mellings expressed concern regarding the proposed Wem Rural division which he considered did not 'reflect the identities and interests of local communities'.

34 Oswestry Borough Council opposed the draft recommendation for a two-member Oswestry division and the recommendation to include part of Oswestry town in a division with the surrounding rural area. It supported the draft recommendation for a coterminous Ruyton-XI-Towns division.

35 Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council expressed concern regarding the low level of coterminosity for the borough under the draft recommendations. It proposed four amendments to the draft recommendations in order to utilise stronger boundaries. It also proposed amendments to Burnell and Rea Valley divisions.

36 South Shropshire District Council welcomed the draft recommendation for an additional county councillor for its area but expressed concerns regarding the continuing high electoral variances. It did not consider that the draft recommendations provided a good reflection of community identity and proposed three amendments to improve this.

## Parish and town councils

37 We received submissions from 14 parish councils. In Bridgnorth, Chelmarsh Parish Council objected to the draft recommendation for its parish to be included in Bridgnorth Rural division. Farlow Parish Council argued that it wished to remain part of the existing division with Stottesdon parish with which it has more in common with than Much Wenlock parish.

38 In North Shropshire, Ellesmere Rural Parish Council opposed the draft recommendation to divide Ellesmere Rural parish between two divisions and stated that the recommendations appeared to have been based on 'numbers' and 'no account has been taken of the geography and economy of the area'. Ellesmere Town Council argued that the existing boundaries between the urban and rural areas of Ellesmere provide more easily recognisable division boundaries and therefore should be retained. Prees Parish Council objected to the draft recommendation to include the urban Whitchurch South ward in its predominantly rural division. It contended that rural and urban areas have 'different needs' to one another. Welshampton & Lyneal Parish Council stated that it objected to the draft recommendation placing the parish in a division with the distant Baschurch ward, and instead wished to remain in a division with Ellesmere. Wem Town Council stated that it did not wish the parish to be divided into parish wards for the next elections as this had caused difficulties during the previous parish council elections. Whitchurch Town Council objected to our draft recommendation to transfer Whitchurch South ward to Prees division.

39 In Oswestry borough, Oswestry Town Council considered the draft recommendations to be 'unsatisfactory' and objected to two-member divisions and the inclusion of rural and urban areas in the same divisions. It also objected to the lack of coterminosity and considered that the draft recommendations did not take sufficient account of the rapidly growing electorate of Oswestry. The Town Council put forward proposals designed to overcome its concerns. Llanyblodwel Parish Council opposed the proposed division name Ruyton-XI-Towns and expressed concern regarding the merger of rural and urban areas within this proposed division.

40 In Shrewsbury & Atcham, Bomere Heath & District Parish Council stated that it was broadly satisfied with the draft recommendations for its area.

41 In South Shropshire, Church Stretton and Wistanstow parish councils opposed the draft recommendation to place Wistanstow parish in a different division to Church Stretton parish. They stated that the two parishes shared many community links and ought to remain within the same division. Clungunford Parish Council supported the County Council's objections to the draft recommendations.

## Other representations

42 A further seven representations were received from councillors in response to our draft recommendations.

43 County Councillor Biggins (Whitchurch division) did not support the proposed increase in council size and the argument that there are currently insufficient councillors for the Council to function efficiently. He also opposed the proposed Whitchurch division, and the draft recommendation to transfer the urban South Whitchurch ward into the rural Prees division. He argued that this recommendation would not reflect community identity or provide clear boundaries and would result in confusion among the electorate and poor electoral equality in the rural divisions. He put forward alternative arrangements and requested that the 290 responses to his survey be considered as 290 individual submissions. However, we only formally consider those submissions that we receive directly and, in this case, Councillor Biggins only attached one copy of his survey and we did not receive any further copies. Therefore while these

submissions will be taken into account as part of Councillor Biggins' submission we are unable to consider them as individual submissions in their own right.

44 District and Town Councillor Robinson (Broseley East ward and Broseley Town Council) supported our draft recommendations for Broseley division in Bridgnorth district. He stated that the recommendation was an improvement on the existing arrangements and would better reflect community identity in the area.

45 County Councillor Mellings (Wem division) opposed the draft recommendation to create Wem Rural and Wem divisions in North Shropshire district, which he considered would not reflect local communities or secure convenient and effective local government. He stated that his Stage One proposals would better reflect the communities and would provide a better balance between rural and urban areas and requested that these be reconsidered.

46 County Councillor Gaskill (Ruyton-XI-Towns division) supported the draft recommendation for a Ruyton-XI-Towns division in Oswestry borough and stated that it would improve electoral equality and better reflect community identity. Borough Councillor Gull (Maserfield ward) objected to the draft recommendations for Oswestry, in particular the recommended divisions for Maserfield and Oswestry towns.

47 County Councillor Nutting (Burnell division) expressed concerns regarding the geographical size and high electoral variance of the proposed Burnell division in Shrewsbury & Atcham borough. Borough Councillor Roberts (Rowton ward) put forward comments regarding the transfer of Yockleton from the existing Loton division, which he considered would not reflect community identity.



## 5 Analysis and final recommendations

48 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) which defines the need to secure effective and convenient local government, reflect the identities and interests of local communities, and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every division of the county'.

49 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.

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

51 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the 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 identities. 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.

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

### Electorate forecasts

53 At Stage One, 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 expected 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.

54 We accept that this is an inexact science, and having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

55 We received no comments on the Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates available.

## Council size

56 As explained earlier, we now require justification for any proposed council size, whether it is an increase, decrease, or retention of the existing council size.

57 Shropshire County Council presently has 44 members. At Stage One the County Council proposed a council of 48 members, an increase of four councillors. In its initial submission and the further evidence that it provided 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'.

58 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.'

59 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.'

60 In relation to members' representational roles, the County 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'.

61 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'.

62 We noted that the Council had considered whether the current council size has the capacity to fulfil the demands of its political management structure and enable 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.

63 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 seven 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 proposed '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.'

64 It argued, therefore, that 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'. It would 'provide more members to carry out the specific research and investigative 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'.

65 We considered all the information the Council submitted in support of its proposed increase of council size. 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.

66 However, the evidence and argumentation the County Council provided persuaded us that it had made a detailed study of the requirements of governance under its new political structure and had 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.

67 We were persuaded by the evidence provided that the Council is experiencing difficulties in developing an effective scrutiny and overview structure, and in its members performing an effective representational role. We considered that the County Council had 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 effective overview and scrutiny processes and performance management monitoring. We noted 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.

68 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.

69 At Stage Three, we received two submissions regarding council size. The County Council expressed support for a council size of 48 members and stated that 'the County Council are pleased that following the submission of further evidence, the Boundary Committee have accepted the Council's proposals for a Council of 48 members and their proposals for how those seats are distributed between Council areas.'

70 At Stage Three Councillor Biggins (Whitchurch division) objected to our proposals for a 48-member council, stating that 'I see this as an unnecessary extra cost to the tax payer. Specifically I do not agree [with] the increase in North Shropshire in the number of seats from eight to ten.' He disagreed with the argument that the increase would help get full attendance at meetings given that a 'very successful "substitute" system operates, whereby if a member is unable to attend ... another member from his/her political group is substituted to fill that position .... [and] full attendance is therefore invariably achieved'. He also argued that he did not find that the current arrangements gave him insufficient time to 'discharge [his] duties'.

71 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note Councillor Biggins' objections to the increase in council size. However, we cannot give consideration to issues of cost that may result from our proposals. In addition to this, we note that Councillor Biggins does not consider that under the current council size, attendance at meetings or councillors having insufficient time to represent the electorate are significant issues. However, we do not consider that Councillor Biggins has provided sufficient evidence against the increased workload that councillors face as a result of changes to the political management structure of the council. We also note the County Council's continued support for a 48-member council. As stated in our draft recommendations, we still consider that the County Council provided strong evidence to support its argument that an increase of four councillors would alleviate the problems members are experiencing with their workload. We consider that this increase would enable members to better fulfil their representative roles and, in particular, would improve the Council's ability to execute an effective overview and scrutiny process and undertake performance management monitoring.

72 We therefore consider that a council of 48 members, as proposed under our draft recommendations, would provide for effective and convenient local government. We also note that Councillor Biggins objected to the allocation of 10 councillors for North Shropshire. However, given our adoption of a 48-member council, this gives the area the correct allocation. If the area only had eight members it would be significantly under-represented on the Council.

We also note that a 48-member council gives a better allocation of councillors between the districts than the existing 44-member council.

73 We have considered the representations received at Stage Three, and given the evidence received, have not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations. We are therefore confirming as final our draft recommendation for a council size of 48.

## Electoral arrangements

74 During the formulation of our draft recommendations we 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, we would expect significant justification in support of divisions that achieve imbalances of more than 20%. We did not consider that the Conservatives 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.

75 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 did not consider that the Conservatives 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 did not therefore adopt this proposal and as a consequence were unable to adopt a number of the Conservatives' proposed neighbouring divisions in Shrewsbury.

76 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 noted that the Council's proposals secured a better level of electoral equality than the current arrangements, but a low level of coterminosity (48%) between district ward and county division boundaries.

77 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, we consider that 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 is not always possible to achieve coterminosity, but we expect to receive significant evidence and argumentation in support of proposals for non-coterminous divisions.

78 We accepted that the low level of coterminosity secured by the County Council scheme was mainly due to the 6% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions 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 between reflecting community identities and interests and securing effective and convenient local government. We also noted 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 therefore considered a number of

alternatives across the county to improve the levels of electoral equality. In some districts this was possible. However, in a number of areas we were unable to improve upon, or have ourselves recommended, relatively high electoral variances. In these areas it was impossible 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 wards and county divisions. Therefore, although in certain areas our proposals resulted in relatively high electoral variances, we were of the opinion that they still provided the best balance between our statutory criteria.

79 Given our adoption of a 48-member council we broadly proposed adopting the County Council's proposals as we considered that they secured 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 proposed modifications in all five districts. In the district of Bridgnorth we proposed a minor amendment to provide for 100% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions. In the district of North Shropshire we proposed a two-member Market Drayton division and, as a result, an alternative division pattern in the east. In the borough of Shrewsbury & Atcham we proposed adopting the County Council's proposals for Shrewsbury town, but proposed an alternative division pattern in the surrounding rural area. In the borough of Oswestry we proposed 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 proposed three significant amendments to four of the Council's proposed divisions.

80 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 judged that they would provide the best balance between achieving a good level of electoral equality while securing effective and convenient local government.

81 At Stage Three, the County Council and Conservatives expressed concerns about our proposals for two-member divisions in North Shropshire and Oswestry. The County Council stated that 'whilst there are two- and even three-member wards at district level, these are of course much smaller in area and in electoral numbers ... the two-member Market Drayton division would by 2006 have in excess of 9,000 electors. Whilst in theory each member would therefore only represent 4,500 electors, this would not be the practical reality [...] The two members could be representatives of different political groups or be independent and would therefore have to service the whole of the ... area ... This would create a massive burden on the members, considerably in excess of those representing single-member divisions and is not felt to be acceptable to the member or to the electorate.'

82 The Conservatives put forward similar argumentation, stating that 'to simply say that dividing the division's electorate into two, thereby justifying two members, escapes the realities of council life. Each of the two members will [...] have been elected by, and have obligations to, the entire division electorate (likely to number around 9,000). If the two members were from different political parties or Independents, they would have to serve the entire ... area, not just the theoretical "half" of it.'

83 We note the objections to our proposals for two-member divisions in North Shropshire and Oswestry. We acknowledge that multi-member divisions are not always popular and only put them forward where we are unable to identify single-member divisions that provide a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity whilst also having regard for community identity. We note that there is concern over whether councillors would be able to represent the electorate effectively in multi-member divisions. However, we do not consider that this is an insurmountable issue, particularly in a relatively compact urban area. We also do not consider

that opposition to multi-member divisions, purely on principle, is particularly persuasive and would look, rather, for specific arguments relating to particular divisions before we would be persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations. Having looked at all the representations received we do not consider that sufficient evidence or argumentation has been provided to persuade us to move away from any of our proposed multi-member divisions and are therefore endorsing as final all those multi-member divisions contained in the draft recommendations.

84 In North Shropshire we consider that our two-member Market Drayton division secures good levels of electoral equality while also reflecting community identity. The County Council's and Conservatives' proposals for a single-member Market Drayton division would create a division with an electoral variance of 33% by 2006 and a rural division containing one of the urban wards from Market Drayton town. We do not consider that sufficient evidence has been provided to justify this high variance or the necessity of mixing urban and rural areas. Where possible we seek to avoid mixing urban and rural areas and the creation of a two-member Market Drayton division enables us to do this. We acknowledge that we have created a Prees division that does mix urban and rural areas, but this has been unavoidable given the alternative of creating a wholly urban Whitchurch division with an electoral variance of 51% by 2006. We did not consider that there was sufficient evidence for such a high variance.

85 In Oswestry we note the County Council and Conservative proposals for a single-member Oswestry East division comprising Gatacre, Cambrian and Cabin Lane wards, a single-member Oswestry West division comprising Castle and Maserfield wards and a single-member St Oswald division comprising the urban Carreg Llywd and rural Sweeney & Trefonen wards. However, the proposed St Oswald division would be 22% under-represented by 2006, while the proposed Oswestry East division would be 16% under-represented by 2006. These variances are significantly worse than those in our draft recommendations. In addition, we consider that the argumentation relates more to objections to multi-member divisions, rather than to why our proposed two-member Oswestry division is not suitable for the local area. We do not consider that any of the respondents have provided sufficient evidence of community identity to justify the levels of electoral inequality resulting from the alternative proposed divisions. We therefore propose adopting our draft recommendations for the Oswestry divisions as final.

86 Given the evidence received we are broadly adopting our draft recommendations as final, subject to a number of minor amendments. In Bridgnorth we propose a minor amendment, transferring Farlow parish to Stottesdon division. We consider that Farlow parish has better links with this division than Much Wenlock division, in which it was included under our draft recommendations.

87 In Shrewsbury & Atcham we note the concerns of the County Council and Conservative Group about the warding of Westbury parish, carried out during the borough review. We would concur with its view that Yockelton parish ward should be reunited with the remainder of Westbury parish in a single division on community identity grounds. In addition to this, we note the concerns about the Rea Valley division and its links with Hanwood & Longden ward. Given the electoral variances that would result from transferring the whole ward to the Rea Valley division, we have not been persuaded to adopt this amendment. However, we have been persuaded to transfer Great Hanwood parish to the Rea Valley division, given the strong links between the two areas. We note that Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council also supported this amendment. However, we also note that it expressed concerns about the low levels of coterminosity under our draft recommendations, yet this amendment worsens it further. Given the support, we consider that this amendment, while reducing coterminosity, is justified on community identity grounds. In Shrewsbury town the Borough Council proposed a number of amendments. It proposed an amendment to the 'town centre' area, to improve coterminosity. We propose adopting a number of the minor amendment as they better reflect community identity. However, we consider that its proposals to amend the 'town centre' do not reflect community identity and do not in fact improve coterminosity.

88 Finally, in South Shropshire we note the County Council's objection to the geographical size of Clun division, but as it states itself, this cannot be a consideration in itself. We also note the comments referring to the transfer of Wistanstow with Hopesay ward to the proposed Church Stretton division. While there is some evidence for the transfer of the whole ward, we do not consider that this is as strong as the evidence for the transfer of only Wistanstow parish, especially given the better electoral equality provided by the transfer of this parish rather than the transfer of the entire ward. This area clearly has strong links with Church Stretton and we propose transferring it into an amended Church Stretton division as part of our final recommendations. We acknowledge that this worsens coterminosity and electoral equality, but consider that it is justified by the better reflection of community identity it provides. In addition, we have not been persuaded by the District Council's argumentation for a two-member division covering Ludlow and Ashford divisions.

89 At Stage Three the Secretary of the Liberal Democrat Group on the County Council stated that it was 'concerned to note that no reference was made in the [draft recommendations] report to the views of my Group.' Due to a clerical error the Liberal Democrats' submission was not mentioned in the draft recommendations report and we would like to apologise to the Liberal Democrat Group for this oversight. Its Stage One submission commented generally about the review process and it considered that 'the size of the Council should not be predetermined' and that 'electoral equality should not be the only factor in determining the make up of electoral divisions.' It also considered that 'divisions should be coterminous with the new borough ward boundaries' and gave the average division electorate that it expected to see in rural and urban areas. The majority of these are factors that are considered when formulating our recommendations although we should point out that we do not accept that a rural division should have a lower electorate than an urban one. Therefore, although its submission was not included in the draft recommendations report, the factors that it mentions were taken into account in the formulation of our draft recommendations.

90 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- i. Bridgnorth district (pages 34 - 37);
- ii. North Shropshire district (pages 37 - 44);
- iii. Oswestry borough (pages 44 - 48);
- iv. Shrewsbury & Atcham borough (pages 48 - 53);
- v. South Shropshire district (pages 53 - 56).

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

## Bridgnorth district

92 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).

93 At Stage One the County Council proposed nine single-member divisions, to which the district is entitled under a council size 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 that 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).

94 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).

95 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'.

96 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 that 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.

97 As part of our draft recommendations we proposed adopting the County Council's proposed Albrighton, Broseley, Bridgnorth East, Bridgnorth Rural, Bridgnorth West, Morfe and Shifnal divisions as we considered that they provided the best balance between electoral equality, coterminosity and the reflection of community identities and interests. We also noted that the proposed Bridgnorth Rural ward reflected 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 adopted 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 were 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 judged that the County Council's proposal was the most appropriate solution.

98 In order to secure a higher level of coterminosity we proposed that the whole of Ditton Priors district ward comprise part of the proposed Much Wenlock division. We noted that this would worsen electoral equality in this area. However, we were not persuaded that this ward should be divided between divisions. Subject to this amendment we proposed adopting the Council's

proposed Much Wenlock and Stottesdon divisions as part of our draft recommendations, as we judged that they provided a good balance between electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests. We also noted that our proposed Much Wenlock division reflected the views expressed by Ashley Abbots Parish Council.

99 Our draft recommendations would achieve 100% 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).

100 At Stage Three, we received five representations regarding this area. The County Council expressed support for our draft recommendations, which broadly reflected its Stage One submission. However, it objected to the inclusion of Farlow parish in Much Wenlock division and considered that it would be better placed in Stottesdon division. It stated that 'Farlow [parish] has no geographic, community identity or interest or shopping or direct road links to the Much Wenlock area. Its links are to Cleobury Mortimer and Bridgnorth'.

101 The Conservatives expressed support for our draft recommendations in Bridgnorth, stating that 'although the Group initially put the parish of Farlow within the division of Stottesdon, they are happy to see it within the division of Much Wenlock, where it currently resides under the present arrangements.'

102 District Councillor Robinson expressed support for our proposed Broseley division, stating that 'your proposal to make the division of Barrow and Broseley parishes makes total sense.' Chelmarsh Parish Council objected to our draft recommendations for Bridgnorth Rural division, arguing that Alveley and Chetton parishes are far apart and that Alveley parish is also divided from the rest of the proposed division by the River Severn. It stated that 'the parishes within the Stottesdon [division] are seen to have far more in common with Chelmarsh and other parishes within Glazeley ward.' Farlow Parish Council argued for its inclusion in Stottesdon division, rather than Much Wenlock division, in which it was placed under our draft recommendations. It stated that our draft recommendations grouped it with areas that are a 'considerable [distance] from this parish'.

103 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note the general support for our draft recommendations. We also note the objections to our proposed Much Wenlock and Stottesdon divisions from the County Council and Farlow parish, in particular concerning our proposals for Farlow parish. We concur with the view that Farlow parish is some distance from the other parishes in the proposed Much Wenlock division and that it has good links with Stottesdon parish in Stottesdon division. We also note that transferring Farlow parish to Stottesdon division improves electoral equality in both Much Wenlock and Stottesdon divisions. We therefore propose adopting this as part of our final recommendations. Our revised Much Wenlock division would comprise Morville and Much Wenlock wards and Aston Botterell, Burwarton, Cleobury North, Ditton Priors and Neeton parishes of Ditton Priors ward. It would be 2% under-represented (5% by 2006). Our revised Stottesdon division would comprise Highley and Stottesdon wards and Farlow parish of Ditton Priors ward. It would be 6% over-represented, both now and in 2006. We acknowledge that this amendment reduces coterminosity from 100% to 78% in the district, but consider that this is acceptable, given the improvement to electoral equality and better reflection of community identity that such an amendment provides.

104 We have also given consideration to the submission from Chelmarsh Parish Council. We note its objections to the proposed Bridgnorth Rural division. We acknowledge that there is some distance between Alveley and Chetton parishes. However, our proposed Bridgnorth Rural division is already considerably over-represented (22% by 2006), and transferring any area of it

to our proposed Stottesdon division would only worsen this. We do not consider that Chelmarsh Parish Council has provided sufficient evidence regarding community identity to justify worsening this already high level of electoral inequality and therefore do not propose moving away from our draft recommendations for Bridgnorth Rural division.

105 We do not propose any amendments to the remaining divisions in Bridgnorth and, therefore, with one amendment to transfer Farlow parish from the proposed Much Wenlock division to an amended Stottesdon division, we are confirming our draft recommendations as final.

106 Under our final 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, 2% more, 24% more and 6% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (3% more, 4% more, 22% fewer, 3% more, 8% fewer, 22% fewer, 5% more, 23% more and 6% fewer by 2006). Coterminosity would be 78% under our final recommendations as opposed to 100% under our draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

## North Shropshire district

107 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).

108 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 10 single-member divisions, an increase of two in the number of councillors representing North Shropshire, to which the district is entitled under a council of 48. The Council's proposals would secure a 70% level of coterminosity and, by 2006, four wards would have electoral variances 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.

109 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 of 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 from 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 from Clive & Myddle district ward, and the parishes of Stanton upon Hine Heath and Weston-under-Redcastle from 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, from Hodnet district ward).

110 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). 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).

111 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 along with a new Prees division (to contain the district wards of Prees and Whitchurch Rural).

112 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).

113 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. 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.

114 We carefully considered all the submissions for this area. As part of our draft recommendations we proposed adopting the Council's proposed Prees, Wem and Whitchurch divisions, and its proposed Ellesmere, Baschurch and Wem Rural divisions subject to minor amendments. We noted 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 took the view that the Council's proposed Prees and Whitchurch divisions provided the best balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities and interests.

115 We were concerned at the very high level of electoral variance (30% by 2006) resulting from the Council's proposed Baschurch division. To improve electoral equality we proposed that Welshampton parish ward of Welshampton & Lyneal parish, which comprises part of Ellesmere & Welshampton district ward, form part of the proposed Baschurch division. We noted 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.

116 We considered the County Council's proposal for Clive & Myddle district ward to be separated between the proposed Wem Rural and Shawbury divisions. However, we did not

consider that the Council had provided sufficient supporting evidence to justify this and the lower level of coterminosity that would result. We also noted that improved 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 proposed adopting the Council's proposed Wem Rural division as we judged that it would secure a good level of electoral equality and would provide a good reflection of community identities and interests.

117 We considered the Conservatives' proposed Ellesmere and Baschurch divisions and noted that the proposed divisions would provide a better level of electoral equality than the Council's proposals. However, we did not consider that their proposal for combining Dudleston Heath district ward 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.

118 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 did not consider that we had 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.

119 As a result of our considerations, we proposed a coterminous Shawbury division, containing the district wards of Shawbury and Hodnet. We proposed 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 noted that our proposed Market Drayton Rural division would result in an electoral variance of more than 20%. However, we considered that this high electoral variance was 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 and our proposal allocates an additional councillor to the town without having to include part of the town in a division with surrounding rural areas.

120 Our draft recommendations would achieve 78% 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).

121 At Stage Three we received 11 submissions regarding this area. The County Council supported much of our draft recommendations for North Shropshire, but objected to our proposals for Baschurch and Market Drayton. It expressed particular concern about the creation

of two-member divisions, stating that 'whilst there are two- and even three-member wards at district level, these are of course much smaller in area and in electoral numbers ... in Market Drayton, the two-member division would by 2006 have in excess of 9,000 electors. Whilst in theory each member would therefore only represent 4,500 electors, this would not be the practical reality [...] The two members could be representatives of different political groups or be independent and would therefore have to service the whole of the Market Drayton Urban area ... This would create a massive burden on the members, considerably in excess of those representing single-member divisions and is not felt to be acceptable to the member or to the electorate.'

122 The County Council also objected to the 'large geographic[al] area' of our proposed Market Drayton Rural division. It added, 'Under the Committee's proposals, you will have a large rural division with a substantially above average number of electors to service. The parishes to the north of this proposed division would have little community identity and interest with those to the south as most of the areas are served by the main centre of Market Drayton whilst shopping links are either to Market Drayton or to Telford in the south or to Market Drayton, Stafford or Stoke in the north.' The County Council asked that we reconsider its Stage One submission for this area.

123 The County Council also objected to our proposals to transfer Welshampton parish ward of Welshampton & Lyneal parish to Baschurch division. It stated that 'this has been proposed purely for electoral equality but will create a non-coterminous division and also sever local community identities and interests.' It highlighted the community and road links between Welshampton and Ellesmere and the lack of links between this area and Baschurch to the south of the proposed division.

124 The Conservatives also objected to our proposals for the Market Drayton area, in particular the creation of a two-member Market Drayton division. They stated that 'to simply say that dividing the division's electorate into two, thereby justifying two members, escapes the realities of council life. Each of the two members will [...] have been elected by, and have obligations to, the entire division electorate (likely to number around 9,000). If the two members were from different political parties or Independents, they would have to serve the entire ... area, not just a theoretical "half" of it.' They also objected to our proposals for Market Drayton Rural division. They argued that 'to represent 1,000 [electors] within an urban area is an easy feat, whilst to serve the same number in a rural area is a much harder task'. It added 'As such, the Group would like to see the Boundary Committee acknowledge such problems and alter their remit accordingly, thereby allowing large urban areas ... to remain as one division.' They also expressed concerns about 'the lack of community links between the areas of the division'.

125 The Conservatives expressed support for our proposals for the Whitchurch area, albeit with reservations. They stated that 'the Group understand[s] the rationale behind the decision to split the three wards between Prees and Whitchurch, however express regret that it is not possible to have one member representing the town.' They objected to our proposals for Baschurch and Ellesmere divisions, expressing concern about the size of Baschurch division and the fact that it includes parishes that have stronger links with Ellesmere. They therefore requested that we reconsider their Stage One submission.

126 North Shropshire District Council put forward the views of all members who responded to its circulation of the draft recommendations. The Conservative Group on the Council supported the proposals for a two-member Market Drayton division, but objected to the inclusion of one of the urban Whitchurch wards in Prees division. District Councillor Bate also objected to the proposed Prees division and was concerned about the inclusion of urban and rural areas in a single division. She considered that 'the area is better left as it is.' Councillor Mellings put forward identical comments to his submission, discussed below.

127 Councillor Biggins objected to the proposed increase in council size and this issue is discussed in the council size section earlier in this chapter. He also objected to the proposals for Whitchurch and Prees wards, in particular, the inclusion of Whitchurch South ward in Prees division, arguing that as a councillor his electorate have never contacted him to raise concerns about electoral equality in Whitchurch. He highlighted the fact that Whitchurch South ward is part of Whitchurch parish and argued that it should form part of an urban division and to remove it would create confusion amongst the electorate. He argued that Whitchurch South ward also takes in large areas of the centre of the town and that this area should not therefore be part of the proposed Prees division. He also objected to the nature of the district ward boundaries, and argued that, where they ran down the centre of roads, they do not reflect communities. He also expressed concerns that electors in Whitchurch South ward would pay higher council tax than those in Prees parish, which has a lower precept than Whitchurch parish.

128 Councillor Biggins stated that he had carried out a survey in Whitchurch South ward and that, of the 290 responses to this survey, 92% objected to our proposals for Whitchurch and Prees divisions. He requested that the 290 responses to this survey be considered as 290 individual submissions. However, as mentioned earlier, we only formally consider those submissions that we receive directly and, in this case, Councillor Biggins only attached one copy of his survey and we did not receive any further copies. Therefore, while these submissions have been taken into account as part of Councillor Biggins' submission, we are unable to consider them as individual submissions in their own right. Finally, he expressed support for the two-member Whitchurch division that we considered and rejected as part of our draft recommendations. This would cover the three Whitchurch town wards and Whitchurch Rural ward to the south.

129 Councillor Mellings (Wem division) objected to our proposals for Wem and Wem Rural divisions, arguing that Wem Rural division is 'a sprawling area with very different community identities and needs'. He stated that 'Whixhall will tend to look towards Whitchurch as its main service centre and to a lesser extent Wem, whilst Hadnall will look to Shrewsbury.' He resubmitted his Stage One proposal for a revised Wem division, comprising Wem East, Wem West and Wem Rural wards.

130 Ellesmere Rural Parish Council objected to our draft recommendations and the 'split' of Ellesmere Rural parish between Baschurch and Ellesmere wards. It stated that 'the Baschurch division will be far too large an area for one county councillor to cover effectively and the [parish] wards of Tetchill and Welsh Frankton in the north have no local shared interests with Baschurch in the south.' It added that 'the members do not wish the wards of Ellesmere Rural [parish] to be split and to have two separate county councillors.' Ellesmere Town Council expressed support for the existing electoral arrangements 'with Ellesmere [town] at the centre and its surrounding hinterland'. It added that 'it would seem that this area is being changed purely because of the effects of change[s] of the Oswestry ... and the Market Drayton division[s].' Prees Parish Council objected to the inclusion of Whitchurch South ward in, and the exclusion of Whixhall parish from, Prees division. It stated that 'Councillors consider that Whitchurch South [ward] is an urban area and the Prees division is rural. There is no comparison in the geographical features of the two areas; as Whitchurch South is very populated and the Prees area is very rural with different needs than that of an urban area.'

131 Welshampton & Lyneal Parish Council objected to its inclusion in Baschurch division, stating that '[it is] too far from Baschurch, there are no links with Baschurch. To change boundaries to even up numbers is impractical in large rural areas, geography has to be considered.' It added that 'councillors representing the Ellesmere area have local knowledge that is relevant to the surrounding villages.' As a consequence, it requested that it remain in Ellesmere division. Wem Town Council made comments about its parish warding arrangements and these are discussed in the parishing section at the end of this chapter. Whitchurch Town Council objected to our proposal to transfer Whitchurch South ward to Prees division.

132 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note the objections to our proposals for the Market Drayton area, in particular the creation of a two-member Market Drayton division, and the requests from the County Council and the Conservatives that we reconsider their Stage One submissions. As stated in our draft recommendations, we consider that the creation of a two-member division in this area enables us to separate the rural and urban areas, something we are keen to ensure. 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 acknowledge the County Council's comments that these rural areas have few community links, but consider that they will share similar rural issues. We also acknowledge 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 (25% by 2006) is justified by the improvement in the level of electoral equality and coterminosity across the district that our proposals in this area would facilitate. We do not consider that either the County Council or the Conservatives have provided sufficient additional evidence to justify the 32% under-representation that would result from their proposed Market Drayton division or the necessity for mixing urban and rural areas. We also note the support for our proposed two-member Market Drayton division from the Conservative Group on North Shropshire District Council.

133 We note the request by the Conservatives for us to alter our remit to account for their comment that 'to represent 1,000 [electors] within an urban area is an easy feat, whilst to serve the same number in a rural area is a much harder task'. However, while we acknowledge the issue of rural/urban weightings, in its *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews*, the Electoral Commission states that 'there is no provision in legislation for the BCFE to apply such a weighting in reaching recommendations'. Therefore, while we may take account of rural/urban weighting in so much as it may affect the ability to provide effective and convenient local government, it is not one of our statutory criteria and we can only take account of it as it affects our statutory criteria.

134 We also note the concerns regarding the ability of councillors to represent the electorate of two-member divisions. We acknowledge that this may be an issue but do not consider it to be an insurmountable one, particularly in a relatively compact urban area such as Market Drayton. We acknowledge that multi-member divisions are not always popular and only put them forward where they have been locally proposed or where we have been unable to identify single-member divisions that would provide a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity while providing a good reflection of community identity. In this area we have been unable to identify any such single-member divisions and we are therefore endorsing our proposed two-member Market Drayton division as final.

135 We note the objections to our proposals for Prees and Whitchurch divisions and the perceived contradiction regarding our proposal for a division with an urban/rural mix here, whilst rejecting such a division in the Market Drayton area. Where possible we seek to avoid mixing urban and rural areas and the creation of a two-member Market Drayton division enables us to do this. We acknowledge that we have created a Prees division that does mix urban and rural areas, but consider that this been unavoidable given the alternative of creating a wholly urban Whitchurch division which would have an electoral variance of 51% by 2006. We do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence to recommend such a high variance. As mentioned earlier, one area of difference between county and district reviews is 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 of the existing county council electoral divisions comprise a number of distinct communities, which is inevitable given the larger number of electors represented by each councillor, and we would expect that similar situations would continue under our recommendations in seeking the best balance between coterminosity and the statutory criteria.

136 We also note Councillor Biggins' request that we reconsider the two-member Whitchurch division that we considered and rejected as part of our draft recommendations. As stated above, we acknowledge that there may appear to be a contradiction in the creation of wholly urban and wholly rural divisions in the Market Drayton area, while rejecting them in the Whitchurch and Prees area. However, we do not consider that there are any alternative division arrangements in this area that provide a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity, whilst also allowing for the provision of a scheme across the rest of the district that reflects the statutory criteria. We have re-examined the option of a two-member Whitchurch division but have concluded that this is not viable given the knock-on effect that this would have on our proposals for the surrounding divisions and, consequently, across the district. Creating a two-member Whitchurch division, comprising Whitchurch North, Whitchurch Rural, Whitchurch South and Whitchurch West wards, would require the remainder of our proposed Prees division, Prees ward, to be transferred to one of the neighbouring divisions. Transferring Prees ward to either Market Drayton, Shawbury or Wem Rural divisions would create electoral variances of 73%, 43%, or 44% by 2006, respectively. We acknowledge the community identity arguments that Councillor Biggins has provided. However, we do not consider that this is sufficient to justify the very high electoral variances that would arise elsewhere due to the knock-on effects of creating either a single-member Whitchurch division covering the three Whitchurch urban wards, or a two-member division covering these and an added Whitchurch Rural ward.

137 We note the objections of Councillor Mellings to our proposed Wem and Wem Rural divisions. We have examined his proposals for a Wem division comprising Wem East, Wem Rural and Wem West wards. However, while his proposed Wem division has a good level of electoral equality, again the knock-on effect to the surrounding divisions is considerable, with the remainder of our proposed Wem Rural division having to be incorporated in the surrounding divisions. We are unable to consider any area in isolation and, as Councillor Mellings did not provide any detailed proposals for the remainder of the district, it has been difficult for us to take account of his proposal.

138 We note the concerns expressed regarding our proposed Baschurch and Ellesmere divisions. We acknowledge the links between Welshampton parish ward of Welshampton & Lyneal parish and Ellesmere town and the fact that the Conservatives' Stage One submission maintains this. However, this then creates problems by removing Ellesmere parish from a division with Ellesmere Urban parish. It also creates a 25% over-representation in Ellesmere division, which is significantly higher than under our draft recommendations. We consider that the links between Ellesmere Rural and Ellesmere Urban are stronger than those between Welshampton parish ward and Ellesmere. We note that Welshampton also has some links towards the south and towards the Baschurch area. We therefore consider that our draft recommendations provide the best solution in this area, while acknowledging that they are not ideal.

139 Having considered all the evidence, on balance, we have not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations in North Shropshire and confirm them as final. We acknowledge the difficulties of developing a scheme in this area that provides a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity while also providing a good reflection of community identity, but remain of the opinion that, on the evidence provided, our proposals provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

140 Our final recommendations would achieve 78% coterminosity between county division and district ward boundaries. Under our final 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 final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

## Oswestry borough

141 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).

142 At Stage One 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 it is entitled under a council of 48 members, and proposed to modify three of the existing divisions. The Council's proposals would result in 67% coterminosity between county division and borough ward boundaries and, by 2006, four divisions would have electoral variances 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'.

143 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.'

144 The Council's proposed Oswestry East, Oswestry West, Ruyton-XI-Towns, St Oswald, Weston Rhyn and Whittington divisions 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).

145 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 proposed to retain the existing St Oswald division. Their proposals for the rest of the borough were identical to the Council's scheme. The Conservatives' 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).

146 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.'

147 We carefully considered all the submissions received for this borough. As part of our draft recommendations we proposed adopting the proposed Weston Rhyn and Whittington divisions as put forward by both the County Council and the Conservatives as we judged that they would provide both good electoral equality and a good reflection of community identities and interests. We also noted that the proposed Whittington division reflected the views expressed by Selattyn & Gobowen Parish Council.

148 We carefully considered the Conservatives' alternative proposals for this area. We 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 proposed retaining the existing St Oswald division. Under these proposals they 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 considered that these electoral variances were unacceptable in light of the alternatives that are available, especially in Oswestry town. We did 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 concurred 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.

149 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 did not consider that we had 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. We therefore proposed a two-member Oswestry division to comprise the borough wards of Cabin Lane, Cambrian, Carreg Llwyd, Castle and Gatacre. We considered 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.

150 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 did not persuade us that Llanyblodwel & Pant borough ward should be divided between divisions given the resulting lower level of coterminosity. We therefore proposed transferring 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 affect on community identities and interests.

151 Our draft recommendations would achieve 100% 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).

152 At Stage Three we received seven submissions in relation to this area. The County Council supported our proposals for part of the district, but objected to our proposed Oswestry and St Oswald divisions. It expressed particular concern about the creation of a two-member Oswestry division, but also considered that Carreg Llwyd ward sits better with the rural Sweeny & Trefonen ward, rather than Maserfield ward. It put forward the same argument against two-member divisions here as in North Shropshire and stated that these reasons 'revolve around the size of the electorate, the unfair burden placed on members in terms of their representational role and in consulting with large numbers of organisations and individual electors in the division'.

153 The County Council therefore put forward alternative arrangements. It proposed a single-member Oswestry East division, comprising Cabin Lane, Cambrian and Gatacre wards; a single-member Oswestry West division, comprising Castle and Maserfield wards; and a single-member St Oswald division, comprising Carreg Llwyd and Sweeney & Trefonen wards. These would be 22% under-represented, 6% over-represented and 16% under-represented by 2006, respectively. It stated that these divisions were proposed 'having looked at local community identities and interests, local links within Oswestry and electorate numbers and projection[s]'.

154 The Conservatives also expressed support for our draft recommendations for part of Oswestry, but objected to our proposed Oswestry and St Oswald divisions. They expressed particular concern about the creation of a two-member Oswestry division, but also considered that Carreg Llwyd ward sits better with the rural Sweeny & Trefonen ward, rather than Maserfield ward. They put forward the same argument against the two-member division as for Market Drayton division, stating that 'to simply say that dividing the division's electorate into two, thereby justifying two members, escapes the realities of council life. Each of the two members will [...] have been elected by, and have obligations to, the entire division electorate (likely to number around 9,000). If the two members were from different political parties or Independents, they would have to serve the entire ... area, not just a theoretical "half" of it.'

155 The Conservatives put forward an identical alternative proposal to that of the County Council, stating that 'whilst there are several coherent arguments to retain certain of the town wards together, there is no such argument as regards which ward would be best placed to become part of the St Oswalds [division], and as such the Conservative Group's proposals are purely to provide the best balance between coterminosity and electoral equality.'

156 Oswestry Borough Council objected to the proposals for Oswestry and St Oswald divisions. It stated that 'there would be [a] difficulty for councillors to cover large areas (the entirety of the town)', adding that 'a wedge from the town married to a rural area went against the principal of coterminous [divisions]'. It expressed support for the proposals put forward by the County Council. Oswestry Town Council also objected to the creation of a two-member Oswestry division, stating that 'two member [divisions] are totally unacceptable [and] voting under the proposed arrangements will create confused patterns, due to the merger of town and rural areas with conflicting interests and aspirations.' It stated that 'the proposals will mean that town and borough [boundaries] will not be coterminous with county boundaries and create further confusion in issues of identity and association.' It went on to request that 'each democratic area of the county of Shropshire be parished', that 'a three-member arrangement based on existing town/borough areas be introduced' and that we 'recognise the division of town and rural interests and, importantly, the rate of expansion of the town itself.'

157 County Councillor Gaskill expressed support for our proposed Ruyton-XI-Towns division. Borough Councillor Gull objected to the inclusion of Maserfield ward in a division with the rural Sweeney & Trefonen ward, stating that 'the people of Maserfield [feel attached] to the town, they would not want to be represented, or indeed feel themselves represented by such a rural [division]'. She also expressed concerns about the ability of councillors to represent a two-member division.

158 Llanyblodwel Parish Council objected to the proposed name Ruyton-XI-Towns division, given that Llanyblodwel & Pant ward is included in the division. It also objected to the draft recommendations, stating that 'the merger will create confused patterns, due to the merger of urban and rural areas with conflicting interests and aspirations in terms of voting.'

159 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note the support for some of our divisions and the objections to our proposals for Oswestry and St Oswald divisions, in particular the concerns about councillors' ability to represent the electorate of two-member divisions. However, as mentioned earlier, while we recognise that this may be an issue we do not consider that it is an insurmountable one, particularly in a relatively compact urban area. We acknowledge that multi-member divisions are not always popular and only put them forward where we consider that they can secure good levels of electoral equality and coterminosity whilst having regard for community identity.

160 We have given consideration to the proposals for two single-member Oswestry East and Oswestry West divisions and an Oswestry Rural division. While there is some evidence to suggest that Maserfield ward should not be included in the proposed St Oswalds division, we do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence to persuade us to move away from the draft recommendations, especially in light of the higher electoral variances that would result from the County Council and Conservatives' alternative proposal. Indeed, we note the comments of the Conservatives who stated that 'whilst there are several coherent arguments to retain certain of the town wards together, there is no such argument as regards which ward would be best placed to become part of the St Oswalds [division], and as such the Conservative Group's proposals are purely to provide the best balance between coterminosity and electoral equality.' However, the Conservatives did not provide examples of what these 'coherent arguments' are.

161 We also note Oswestry Borough Council's objections to a 'wedge' of the town area being transferred to a rural division. However, we note that the alternative proposal from the County Council and the Conservatives does not resolve this problem and transfers Carreg Llwyd ward into a division with Sweeney & Trefonen ward. It gives very little evidence as to why this urban ward has been chosen. In response to the comments about coterminosity, it should be noted that our draft recommendations provide 100% coterminosity between divisions and wards, although not between divisions and parish boundaries in the Oswestry town area. Given the size of the town it has not been possible to keep the whole of it in a single division and one ward has been transferred out, thus decreasing coterminosity between divisions and parishes but not between divisions and wards.

162 We note Oswestry Town Council's wish that 'each democratic area of the county of Shropshire be parished'. However, we are unable to establish new parishes as part of this review and have therefore been unable to have any further regard for this. We also note its comments regarding the expansion of Oswestry but consider that this will have been accounted for in the 2006 electorate projection figures used throughout the review.

163 Finally, we note the concerns of Llanyblodwel parish regarding our proposals for Ruyton-XI-Towns division. However, we do not consider that it provided sufficient evidence to persuade us to change the division name, especially in light of the fact that no alternative name was proposed. We also consider that it provided insufficient evidence to persuade us to move away from the composition of our proposed Ruyton-XI-Towns division.

164 Therefore, having considered the evidence received, we have not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations and confirm them as final. Our final recommendations would achieve 100% coterminosity between county divisions and borough wards. Under our final 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 final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

## Shrewsbury & Atcham borough

165 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).

166 At Stage One we received two borough-wide schemes from the County Council and the Conservatives, both of whom proposed 16 single-member divisions, an allocation 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 6% 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 (from 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 from 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 (from 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, from Severn Valley borough ward).

167 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.

168 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, in Column borough ward, unite with an area broadly south of Hazeldine Way and Pritchard Way, in 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,

in 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.

169 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, in 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 in Bagley borough ward. The Council proposed that the remainder of Bagley borough ward combine with an area broadly south of the railway line, in Castlefields & Quarry borough ward, to comprise a modified Bagley division.

170 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).

171 The Conservatives also proposed to retain the existing Bayston Hill and Rea Valley divisions. They proposed 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, from 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.'

172 In the south-west of Shrewsbury town the Conservatives proposed to divide Porthill and Belle-Vue borough wards between the three proposed Copthorne, Porthill and Meole-Brace divisions. In the south-east of the town, the Conservatives proposed to divide Monkmoor and Column borough wards between the proposed Sutton & Reabrook, Monkmoor and Underdale divisions, which are similar to the Council's proposals. The Conservatives proposed to divide Battlefield & Heathgates borough ward between the proposed Sundorne, Castlefields and Harlescott divisions. They proposed that Bagley borough ward combine with an area broadly south of the railway line adjacent to Howard Street, in Castlefields & Quarry borough ward, to comprise a new Bagley & Town division.

173 The Conservatives' proposals would achieve the same level of coterminosity (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).

174 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 that therefore 'the county divisional boundary for Bayston Hill should remain as at present.'

175 We carefully considered all the submissions for this area. As part of our draft recommendations we proposed adopting the Council's and Conservatives' proposed Bayston Hill division as we considered that it would provide a coterminous division with a good balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities and interests. We also noted 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 noted that the size of the electorate in two-member borough wards does not facilitate the development of coterminous divisions which provide a good level of electoral equality. We considered that, although the Council's proposals do not produce coterminous divisions in Shrewsbury town, it had proposed a division pattern that provided a good balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities and interests while utilising strong, identifiable boundaries. We therefore proposed adopting 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.

176 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. As a result of our considerations we proposed amendments to the proposed Burnell, Loton, Rea Valley and Tern divisions. We proposed that the whole of Severn Valley borough ward comprise part of a coterminous Tern division. We proposed that Hanwood & Longden borough ward comprise part of a coterminous Burnell division, and we also proposed to transfer Yockleton parish ward of Westbury parish from the proposed Loton division into an amended coterminous Rea Valley division (to contain the whole of Rea Valley borough ward).

177 We were aware that our proposed divisions would provide an inferior level of electoral equality in comparison to the Council's and Conservatives' proposals for these four divisions. However, we did not consider that we had 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 considered that an improved level of coterminosity could be achieved without adversely affecting community identities and interests by proposing that both of these wards are contained wholly within divisions. We noted that our proposed Rea Valley division would result in an electoral variance of more than 20%. We therefore proposed transferring Hanwood & Longden borough ward from the proposed Rea Valley division to comprise part of an amended Burnell division to improve electoral equality. We considered 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.

178 Our draft recommendations would achieve 31% coterminosity between county divisions and borough wards. 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 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).

179 At Stage Three we received six submissions in this area. The County Council supported our draft recommendations for the Shrewsbury town area. However, it objected to our proposals in the surrounding rural area, stating that 'the Council do not accept that the Committee's proposals in any way reflect community identities and interests.' It stated that 'Yockleton [parish] ward is an integral part of Westbury parish', adding that 'it is noted that the Yockleton [parish] ward was separated when the new district wards were agreed but that [it] is now accepted in the area as a grave mistake.' It requested that the whole of Westbury parish be placed in an amended Loton division.

180 It also objected to our proposed Rea Valley division, and reiterated its support for its Stage One submission. It stated that this area 'has been a natural linked area for many years and fully reflects all the local links in the area. There are no community identities and interests between Hanwood parish and the Burnell division.' It therefore requested that we reconsider its Stage One proposals for Rea Valley division. Finally, it objected to our proposal to include the whole of Severn Valley in the proposed Tern division. It stated that 'the County Council feel that this area is made up of a group of parishes and villages that have differing community links and interests. ... The Severn Valley borough ward has no distinct community identity or interest that links all the villages together.' It therefore requested that we reconsider its Stage One submission in its entirety.

181 The Conservatives expressed general support for our proposals in Shrewsbury & Atcham, but objected to our proposals in a number of areas. It agreed with the County Council that the creation of a Yockleton parish ward and its subsequent 'split' from the rest of Westbury parish was a mistake. It also supported the County Council's comments that Hanwood & Longden ward 'sits better' within Rea Valley division, rather than in the proposed Burnell division. However, it put forward a compromise to transfer only Great Hanwood parish to Rea Valley division, while retaining Longden parish in Burnell division. It stated that '[we] propose that the Great Hanwood parish would best sit within Rea Valley, due to its position on the orbital routes into Shrewsbury, along the A488, whilst the parish of Longden would sit well with the Burnell division, as it sits on the rural orbital road from Pulverbatch and Church Pulverbatch into Shrewsbury'.

182 Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council objected to the low level of coterminosity that our proposals for the borough secured, and considered that 'the fact that there [is no coterminosity] in the urban area is most disappointing and will lead to confusion in so far as the electorate are concerned.' It also highlighted concerns that this would make them have to review the existing polling districts. It considered that 'because of their close inter-relationship, parish, district ward and county division boundary reviews should be undertaken at the same time which would avoid some of the problems and difficulties as a result of the reviews being carried out separately.' It recommended four boundary amendments in the Shrewsbury town area. Firstly it proposed transferring 400 electors from Harlescott division to Sundorne division to provide a coterminous boundary with the district ward boundary. It also proposed transferring the 'Ditherington area' of Battlefield & Heathgate ward to Bagley division. It also proposed two further amendments transferring Robertsford House (currently in our proposed Sutton & Reabrook division) to Monkmoor division and Flat 1, 1 London Road (currently in our proposed Monkmoor division) to Sutton & Reabrook division.

183 County Councillor Nutting objected to the electoral variances for our proposals for Rea Valley and Burnell divisions and recommended the transfer of Great Hanwood parish to Rea Valley division. Borough Councillor Roberts requested that Yockleton parish ward be reunited with the rest of Westbury parish in a single county division and expressed regret that it had been

divided during the district review. Bomere Heath & District Parish Council expressed support for the existing electoral arrangements.

184 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note the concerns of the County Council, Conservatives and Councillor Roberts regarding the division of Yockleton parish ward from Westbury parish during the district review. Having looked again at this area, we concur with the evidence provided that this area has good links with the rest of Westbury parish and that it would be favourable to reunite the areas. We are therefore transferring Yockleton parish ward from Rea Valley division to an amended Loton division. This would improve electoral equality in Loton division to 10% by 2006, but worsen it in Rea Valley division to 24% by 2006 and would reduce coterminosity to 19% across the district.

185 We also note the concerns about the proposed Rea Valley division and its links with Hanwood & Longden ward. However, given our decision to transfer Yockleton parish ward into an amended Loton division, transferring Hanwood & Longden ward into an amended Rea Valley division as proposed by the County Council would result in high electoral variances in both Burnell and Rea Valley divisions (19% over-represented and 15% under-represented by 2006 respectively). We noted the proposal put forward by the Conservatives to divide Hanwood & Longden ward and transfer Great Hanwood parish into an amended Rea Valley division, while retaining Longden parish in Burnell division. Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council put forward an identical proposal for this area. We concur with the Conservatives' observation that Great Hanwood parish has good links through Rea Valley division via the A488, while Longden parish has links to the south and through Burnell division due to its position on the rural orbital road from Pulverbatch and Church Pulverbatch into Shrewsbury. Therefore, in light of the improved electoral equality, the support of the Borough Council and better reflection of community identity that this proposal would provide, we are transferring Great Hanwood parish from Burnell division into an amended Rea Valley division. Our proposed Burnell division would be 1% under-represented (2% by 2006). Our proposed Rea Valley division would be 5% over-represented (6% by 2006). We note that as a result of this amendment coterminosity would be further reduced to 13% but consider that in this instance this is justified by the better reflection of community identity and improved electoral equality resulting from this amendment.

186 We have given consideration to the County Council's request to reconsider its Stage One proposal to divide the Severn Valley ward between Burnell and Tern divisions. We note that adopting its recommendations would further reduce coterminosity to 6% for the borough and do not consider that the County Council has provided sufficient evidence regarding the lack of links between the parishes in the area to justify a further worsening of coterminosity. In addition to this we did not receive any support for this proposal from parishes in the area and have not been persuaded that this proposal would receive local support.

187 We noted the boundary amendments put forward by the Borough Council for the Shrewsbury town area. We propose adopting its amendments to transfer 400 electors from Harlescott to Sundorne division as we consider this provides clearer boundaries and would reflect community identity without significantly affecting electoral equality. As a consequence of these amendments our proposed Harlescott division would have 10% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (14% by 2006) and our proposed Sundorne division would have 19% more electors per councillor than the county average (15% by 2006). We also propose adopting the very minor amendments to the Monkmoor and Sutton & Reabrook division boundaries, as these provide clearer boundaries. However, we do not propose adopting its proposals to transfer the 'Ditherington area' of Battlefield & Heathgate ward to Bagley division. We note that the Borough Council stated that this amendment would improve coterminosity. However, given our decision to adopt the Borough Council's proposed amendment to the boundary between Harlescott and Sundorne divisions, this amendment does not actually improve coterminosity. In addition to this, the borough council did not provide any evidence of community identity in support of this proposal and we consider that the 'Ditherington area' has far better links with Castlefield & Quarry ward.

188 While we note that our amendments further worsen coterminosity, going against the request of Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council, we consider that these amendments provide a better reflection of community identity than the draft recommendations. We also note that the Borough Council supported the amendment to Burnell and Rea Valley divisions, which reduced coterminosity. We acknowledge the its concerns about the low level of coterminosity in the borough. However, as mentioned in the draft recommendations, one of the reasons for this is that the size of the electorate in the two-member borough wards in Shrewsbury does not facilitate the development of coterminous divisions that provide a good level of electoral equality. As mentioned earlier we attempt to achieve coterminosity of between 60% and 80% across the county but acknowledge that in some counties levels of coterminosity may vary significantly between boroughs and districts.

189 We also noted the Borough Council's comments regarding the difficulties that the non-coterminous divisions would pose in determining new polling districts. However, while we are sympathetic to the problems that may be caused by the need to redefine polling districts, we consider polling districts to be administrative entities and do not consider argumentation based on them to be particularly persuasive.

190 Our final recommendations would achieve 13% coterminosity between county divisions and borough wards. Under our final recommendations the proposed divisions of Bayston Hill, Burnell, Loton, Rea Valley and Tern would initially have 8% fewer, 1% more, 8% fewer, 5% fewer and 11% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (12% fewer, 2% more, 10% fewer, 6% 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 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, 10% fewer and 19% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (2% fewer, 14% fewer and 15% more by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large maps at the back of this report.

## South Shropshire district

191 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.

192 At Stage One we received three 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 under a council of 48. The Council's proposals would achieve 57% coterminosity between county divisions and district wards and by 2006 four divisions would have electoral variances 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 from 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 (also

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, from Wistanstow with Hopesay district ward, and Hopton Cangeford, Stoke St Milborough and Wheathill, from Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough district ward.

193 In the south-east of the district the Council proposed that Bitterley parish, from 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, and a new Clee division to contain the district wards of Burford, Clee and Cleobury Mortimer.

194 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).

195 Councillor Corston (Ludlow division) opposed the Council's proposal for a modified Ludlow division and a 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'.

196 We carefully considered the submissions we received for this area. As part of our draft recommendations we proposed adopting the Council's proposed Clee and Bishop's Castle divisions. We noted the high electoral variance resulting from the proposed Clee division, but agreed with the Council that any alternative proposals in this area would comprise communities that do not share common identities and interests. We also proposed broadly adopting 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 Bitterley 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.

197 As a result of our analysis we proposed three amendments. We proposed that the whole of Wistanstow with Hopesay district ward comprise part of the proposed Clun division. We noted that this would significantly improve the level of electoral equality and coterminosity in the proposed Clun and Church Stretton divisions. We also noted 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.

198 We were particularly concerned about the high electoral variance provided by the Council's proposed Ludlow division and therefore proposed an alternative arrangement for this area. We proposed a Ludlow division to contain the district wards of Ludlow St Laurence's and Ludlow St Peter's. Consequentially, we proposed amending the Council's proposed Ludlow Rural division to include Ludlow Henley district ward and to transfer Bitterley parish from the proposed Ludlow Rural division to comprise part of the Council's proposed Corvedale division. We noted 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.

199 We considered Councillor Corston's proposed two-member division but noted that to facilitate it, 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 did not consider that we had received sufficient evidence to accept this level of electoral inequality in this area when there were alternatives available which provided better levels of electoral equality. However, having examined Councillor Corston's proposal we noted 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 provide an electoral variance of 1%. We carefully considered the balance that this division would achieve between electoral equality, the reflection of community identities and interests and the provision of effective and convenient local government. We concluded that we did not have sufficient evidence to be certain that such a division would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than the other proposals received at Stage One. We noted the excellent electoral equality but, at the time, judged that it would not provide a better reflection of the communities, as it would comprise both urban and rural areas. We did, however, state that we would welcome comments regarding this option during Stage Three.

200 Our draft recommendations would achieve 100% coterminosity between county divisions and district wards. Under our draft recommendations the proposed Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Clee, Clun, Corvedale, Ludlow and Ludlow Rural divisions 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).

201 At Stage Three we received six submissions regarding this area. The County Council expressed some support for our draft recommendations. It expressed some concern about the size of our proposed Clun division, but stated that 'the Council acknowledge that it is below average in terms of electorate and that this should not just be accepted because of [its] large geographic area.' However, it objected to our proposal to transfer Wistanstow with Hopesay ward to Clun division, stating that 'the Council can see no logic to this proposal other than electoral equality. Wistanstow, Hopesay and Sibdon Carwood [parishes] form part of the A49 road and rail corridor. Their natural community identities and interests are with Church Stretton and Craven Arms [parishes] and, as said, the road and rail links are similarly to those towns, and school links are to Church Stretton.' It therefore proposed transferring the whole of Wistanstow with Hopesay ward into an amended Church Stretton division. The County Council expressed support for our proposed Corvedale, Ludlow and Ludlow Rural divisions.

202 The Conservatives expressed broad support for our proposals for South Shropshire, but expressed concerns about our proposed Church Stretton and Clun divisions. It particularly objected to the proposal to transfer Wistanstow with Hopesay ward to Clun division. It highlighted the links that Wistanstow with Hopesay ward has with Church Stretton and Corvedale towns, but acknowledged that transferring the ward to Corvedale division would be unacceptable given the 31% electoral variance that would result. It therefore expressed a preference for transferring Wistanstow with Hopesay ward to an amended Church Stretton division, stating that 'the A49 ... winds its way through South Shropshire, passes through Church Stretton before proceeding into Wistanstow', and added that Wistanstow is 'inherently linked' to the town. It also provided evidence from the Wistanstow Parish Plan, which it suggests highlights that a large number of people in the parish work in either Church Stretton or Corvedale, but not in Clun. In addition to this it provided evidence of bus links between Wistanstow and Church Stretton.

203 South Shropshire District Council expressed support for the allocation of an additional councillor for the district, but was concerned about the high electoral variances in the district. It requested that we create a two-member division covering all the Ludlow wards and Caynham with Ashford ward, and highlighted the comments put forward by Councillor Corston at Stage

One. It also stated that Bitterley parish should form part of Corvedale division and that Wistanstow with Hopesay should be transferred to Church Stretton division due to the lack of community links between it and the remainder of the proposed Clun division.

204 Wistanstow Parish Council objected to its inclusion in Clun division, and highlighted its links with Church Stretton. It stated that 'Wistanstow parish is closely associated with Church Stretton. It shares the axis of the A49 road [...] the village school sends their pupils to the Secondary School in Church Stretton. Services such as doctors and dentists are in Church Stretton.' It added that 'Clun on the other hand is some 10 miles west of the parish, there is no direct link with it or any association with that community.' Church Stretton Town Council expressed support for Wistanstow Parish Council's request to be transferred to a division with Church Stretton. It outlined broadly similar arguments to Wistanstow Parish Council. Clungunford Parish Council expressed support for the County Council's Stage Three submission.

205 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note the objections to the inclusion of Wistanstow with Hopesay ward in Clun division and the preference that all or at least part of it (Wistanstow parish) be transferred to Church Stretton division. We also note that transferring the whole of Wistanstow with Hopesay ward to Church Stretton division would significantly worsen electoral equality. By 2006 Church Stretton division would have 21% more electors per councillor than the county average, while Clun would have 21% fewer. Given the high differential between the electorates in these two neighbouring divisions we do not consider that the proposal to transfer the whole of Wistanstow with Hopesay ward to Church Stretton division is acceptable. However, we do note that both Wistanstow Parish Council and Church Stretton Town Council referred to the transfer specifically of Wistanstow parish into an amended Church Stretton division. We also note that the majority of the evidence regarding community identity related specifically to the links between Wistanstow and Church Stretton. We therefore propose transferring Wistanstow parish to Church Stretton division, while the remainder of Wistanstow with Hopesay ward remains in Clun division. With this amendment Church Stretton division would have 11% more electors per councillor than the county average (10% by 2006), while Clun division would have 9% fewer electors (10% by 2006). As a consequence of this amendment coterminosity would worsen to 71%. We acknowledge that, under this proposal, there is still some differential in electoral variances between neighbouring divisions. However, these variances are significantly lower than under the proposal to transfer the whole of Wistanstow with Hopesay ward into an amended Church Stretton division, and we consider that our proposal provides a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity, while reflecting community identity.

206 We have also given consideration to South Shropshire District Council's proposals to create a two-member division comprising the Ludlow wards and Caynham with Ashford. We note that it referred to the support for this proposal by Councillor Corston at Stage One. However, we note that his proposals referred solely to the Ludlow wards. We acknowledge that we requested the views of local people regarding the creation of a two-member division for this area. However, we do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence or support for this division to adopt it, particularly in light of the knock-on effect it would have across the district and the lack of any detailed alternatives for the rest of the district were it to be adopted. We are therefore not proposing to adopt it and, with the one amendment outlined above, are endorsing the draft recommendations as final.

207 Our final recommendations would achieve 100% coterminosity between county divisions and district wards. Under our final recommendations the proposed Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Clee, Clun, Corvedale, Ludlow and Ludlow Rural would have 7% fewer, 11% more, 18% more, 9% fewer, 8% more, 14% fewer and 14% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7% fewer, 10% more, 19% more, 10% fewer, 8% more, 15% fewer and 13% more by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

## Conclusions

208 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we propose that:

- There should be 48 councillors, an increase of four, representing 46 divisions, an increase of two;
- Changes should be made to 43 of the existing 44 divisions.

209 We have decided to substantially confirm our draft recommendations subject to the following amendments:

- In Bridgnorth, we are proposing amended Much Wenlock and Stottesdon divisions to improve electoral equality.
- In Shrewsbury & Atcham, we are proposing amended Burnell, Loton and Rea Valley divisions to provide a better reflection of community identity and to improve electoral equality. We are also adopting the three amendments in Shrewsbury proposed by the Borough Council.
- In South Shropshire, we are proposing amended Church Stretton and Clun divisions to provide a better reflection of community identity.

210 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

*Table 4: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements*

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final 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	18	27	16
Number of divisions with a variance more than 20% from the average	11	6	12	6

211 As Table 4 shows, our final recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of divisions with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 28 to 18, with six divisions varying by more than 20% from the county average. By 2006, 16 divisions are forecast to vary by more than 10%. However, in only six divisions would the variances exceed 20%. Our final

recommendations are set out in more detail in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps at the back of this report.

*Final recommendation*

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

## Parish council electoral arrangements

212 When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different county divisions, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single division of the county.

213 During Stage One Alveley Parish Council (Bridgnorth district) 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. However at Stage Three we received no further information regarding this and we do not therefore propose creating a new parish ward.

214 At Stage Three Wem Town Council (North Shropshire district) requested that ‘you recommend that the town of Wem does not continue to be warded at the parish level as it was for the elections this year.’ However, as Wem is currently divided between two district wards we are unable to abolish the parish wards. When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that, if a parish is divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. At present Wem is divided into two district and parish wards and we are unable, as part of this review, to propose any changes to district ward boundaries. We therefore do not propose the abolition of the parish wards of Wem Town Council, as this would run contrary to our duty outlined in Schedule 11 of the 1972 Act.

215 Also at Stage Three Oswestry Town Council (Oswestry borough) requested that ‘each democratic area of the County of Shropshire should be parished.’ However, we are unable to establish new parishes as part of this review and we have therefore been unable to have any further regard for this.

216 Also at Stage Three Bomere Heath & District Parish Council (Shewsbury & Atcham district) stated that they had concerns with ‘properties on the boundaries which logically would be better served by moving them into this parish’. They did not supply any further details regarding these properties and, in any case, we are unable to change the external boundaries of parishes as part of a periodic electoral review. If the parish wished to amend its external boundary then we would recommend that it contact Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council as it is within their power to carry out a parish review.

## 6 What happens next?

217 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Shropshire and submitted our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI No. 3692).

218 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether or not to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 8 June 2004, and The Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representations made to them by that date.

219 All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

**The Secretary  
The Electoral Commission  
Trevelyan House  
Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 2HW**

**Fax: 020 7271 0667  
Email: [implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk)  
(This address should only be used for this purpose.)**



# Appendix A

## **Final Recommendations for Shropshire County Council: Detailed mapping**

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

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

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