

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Stafford in Staffordshire

May 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations to the Government on whether there should be changes to the structure of local government, the boundaries of individual local authority areas, and their electoral arrangements.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)
Peter Brokenshire
Kru Desai
Pamela Gordon
Robin Gray
Robert Hughes CBE

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

We are statutorily required to review periodically the electoral arrangements – such as the number of councillors representing electors in each area and the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions – of every principal local authority in England. In broad terms our objective is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, and the number of councillors and ward names. We can also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the borough.

This report sets out the Commission's draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Stafford in Staffordshire.

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CONTENTS

	page
SUMMARY	<i>v</i>
1 INTRODUCTION	<i>1</i>
2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS	<i>5</i>
3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED	<i>9</i>
4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>13</i>
5 NEXT STEPS	<i>33</i>
APPENDICES	
A Draft Recommendations for Stafford: Detailed Mapping	<i>35</i>
B Stafford Borough Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements	<i>39</i>
C The Statutory Provisions	<i>41</i>

A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for the towns of Stafford and Stone is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Stafford on 28 September 1999.

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

We found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Stafford:

- **in 18 of the 30 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough, and nine wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 electoral equality is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 18 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 10 wards.**

Stafford Borough Council has recently undertaken a review of the parishing arrangements in the borough, primarily to provide an identifiable boundary between Stafford town and the surrounding rural area. The orders executing the proposed changes are due to be implemented in two phases in April 2000 and April 2003. The draft recommendations presented here are therefore based on the new parish boundaries.

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 101-102) are that:

- **Stafford Borough Council should have 59 councillors, one less than at present;**
- **there should be 26 wards, instead of 30 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 25 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of four, and five wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

These draft recommendations seek to ensure that the number of electors represented by each borough councillor is as nearly as possible the same, having regard to local circumstances.

- **In 23 of the proposed 26 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average, with one ward varying by more than 20 per cent.**

- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough by 2004, with Seighford ward having 11 per cent fewer electors than the borough average by 2004.**

Recommendations are also made for changes to parish and town council electoral arrangements which provide for:

- **revised warding arrangements and the re-distribution of councillors for the parishes of Stone and Stone Rural.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 9 May 2000. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 3 July 2000:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Barlaston & Oulton	2	Barlaston ward; Oulton ward (part – Moddershall and Oulton parish wards of Stone Rural parish and part of Meaford & Aston parish ward of Stone Rural parish)	Maps 2, A2 and A3
2	Baswich (Stafford town)	2	<i>Unchanged</i>	Large map
3	Beaconside (Stafford town)	2	Common ward (part); Coton ward (part)	Large map
4	Chartley	1	Beaconside ward (part – the parish of Salt & Enson); Chartley ward (part – the parishes of Gayton, Stowe-by-Chartley and Weston)	Map 2
5	Church Eaton	1	Castle ward (part – Bradley parish); Church Eaton ward	Map 2
6	Common (Stafford town)	2	Common ward (part); Coton ward (part)	Large map
7	Coton & Littleworth (Stafford town)	3	Common ward (part); Coton ward (part); Forebridge ward (part); Littleworth ward	Large map
8	Eccleshall	3	Eccleshall ward; Woodseaves ward (part – Adbaston parish)	Map 2
9	Forebridge (Stafford town)	2	Common ward (part); Forebridge ward (part); Penside ward (part); Tillington ward (part)	Large map
10	Fulford	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2
11	Gnosall & Woodseaves	3	Gnosall ward (part – Gnosall parish); Woodseaves ward (part – the parishes of Forton, High Offley and Norbury)	Map 2
12	Haywood & Hixon	3	Chartley ward (part – Hixon parish); Haywood ward	Map 2
13	Highfields & Western Downs (Stafford town)	3	Highfields ward; Rowley ward (part)	Large map
14	Holmcroft (Stafford town)	3	Holmcroft ward; Tillington ward (part)	Large map
15	Manor (Stafford town)	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Large map
16	Milford	2	Beaconside ward (part – the parish of Hopton & Coton); Milford ward	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
17	Milwich	1	Milwich ward; Oulton ward (part – part of Meaford & Aston parish ward of Stone Rural parish)	Maps 2, A2 and A3
18	Penkside (Stafford town)	2	Penkside ward (part)	Large map
19	Rowley (Stafford town)	2	Rowley ward (part)	Large map
20	Seighford	2	Beaconside ward (part – Marston and Whitgreave parishes); Castle ward (part – Hyde Lea parish); Gnosall ward (part – Ellenhall and Ranton parishes); Seighford ward	Map 2
21	Stone North (Stone town)	2	St Michael's ward (part); Stonefield & Christchurch ward	Large map and Map A3
22	Stone South (Stone town)	3	St Michael's ward (part); Walton ward (part)	Large map and Map A3
23	Swynnerton	2	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2
24	Tillington (Stafford town)	2	Tillington ward (part)	Large map
25	Walton (Stone town)	2	Walton ward (part)	Large map, Map A2
26	Weeping Cross (Stafford town)	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Large map

Notes: 1 Stafford town is unparished and comprises the 12 wards indicated above.

2 Stone town covers the parish of Stone and comprises the three wards indicated above.

3 Map 2 and Appendix A, including the large map in the back of the report, illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

4 Stafford Borough Council has recently undertaken a review of the parishing arrangements in the borough. The draft recommendations presented here are based on the new parish boundaries. However, the constituent parts are not reflected in Map 1.

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Stafford

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Barlaston & Oulton	2	3,346	1,673	3	3,294	1,647	3
2	Baswich (Stafford town)	2	3,135	1,568	-4	3,383	1,692	5
3	Beaconside (Stafford town)	2	3,251	1,626	0	3,153	1,577	-2
4	Chartley	1	1,515	1,515	-7	1,570	1,570	-2
5	Church Eaton	1	1,680	1,680	3	1,714	1,714	7
6	Common (Stafford town)	2	3,182	1,591	-2	3,166	1,583	-1
7	Coton & Littleworth (Stafford town)	3	4,637	1,546	-5	4,616	1,539	-4
8	Eccleshall	3	5,148	1,716	6	5,010	1,670	4
9	Forebridge (Stafford town)	2	3,285	1,643	1	3,224	1,612	0
10	Fulford	3	4,731	1,577	-3	4,554	1,518	-6
11	Gnosall & Woodseaves	3	5,105	1,702	5	4,783	1,594	-1
12	Haywood & Hixon	3	4,937	1,646	1	4,740	1,580	-2
13	Highfields & Western Downs (Stafford town)	3	4,964	1,655	2	4,803	1,601	0
14	Holmcroft (Stafford town)	3	5,322	1,774	9	5,035	1,678	4
15	Manor (Stafford town)	3	4,928	1,643	1	4,731	1,577	-2
16	Milford	2	2,990	1,495	-8	2,960	1,480	-8
17	Milwich	1	1,560	1,560	-4	1,506	1,506	-6
18	Penkside (Stafford town)	2	2,447	1,224	-25	3,063	1,532	-5
19	Rowley (Stafford town)	2	3,442	1,721	6	3,331	1,666	4
20	Seighford	2	2,671	1,336	-18	2,875	1,438	-11

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
21 Stone North (Stone town)	2	3,402	1,701	5	3,398	1,699	6
22 Stone South (Stone town)	3	4,906	1,635	1	4,899	1,633	2
23 Swynnerton	2	3,441	1,721	6	3,370	1,685	5
24 Tillington (Stafford town)	2	3,058	1,529	-6	3,299	1,650	3
25 Walton (Stone town)	2	3,314	1,657	2	3,249	1,625	1
26 Weeping Cross (Stafford town)	3	5,449	1,816	12	5,066	1,689	5
Totals	59	95,846	–	–	94,792	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,625	–	–	1,607	–

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

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

2 Stafford town is unparished and comprises the 12 wards indicated above.

3 Stone town covers the parish of Stone and comprises the three wards indicated above.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Stafford in Staffordshire on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the eight districts in Staffordshire and the City of Stoke-on-Trent as 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 be completed by 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Stafford. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in January 1976 (Report No. 139). The electoral arrangements of Staffordshire County Council were last reviewed in July 1980 (Report No. 386). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

3 In undertaking these reviews, we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, ie the need to:

- (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (b) secure effective and convenient local government;

- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (see Appendix C).

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the Borough Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the borough.

5 We also have regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999). This sets out our approach to the reviews.

6 In our *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been prepared locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local interests are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while allowing proper reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

7 The broad objective of PERs is then to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the borough as a whole. Our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable, having regard to our statutory criteria. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the general assumption that the existing council size already secures effective and convenient local government in that borough but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. 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 a borough’s electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a borough council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other boroughs.

9 The review is in four stages (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to the Commission
Two	The Commission’s analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Secretary of State

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the borough and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one half of the borough council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities.

11 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Staffordshire boroughs, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State’s intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals are now being taken forward in the Local Government Bill, published in December 1999, and are currently being considered by Parliament.

12 Stage One began on 28 September 1999, when we wrote to Stafford Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Staffordshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament and the 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 the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 10 January 2000.

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

14 Stage Three began on 9 May 2000 and will end on 3 July 2000. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

15 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to move away from them in any areas, and submit final recommendations to the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to make representations to the Secretary of State. It will then be for him to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Secretary of State accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, he will make an order. The Secretary of State will determine when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 Within its boundaries Stafford borough contains the county town of Stafford, the canal town of Stone and a large rural hinterland comprising 36 parishes. Stafford town itself is unparished and comprises 40 per cent of the borough's total electorate. The borough covers 59,938 hectares and has a population of approximately 124,000.

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

18 The electorate of the borough is 95,846 (February 1999). The Council presently has 60 members who are elected from 30 wards, 15 of which cover the towns of Stafford and Stone, while the remaining area is predominantly rural in profile. Seven of the wards are each represented by three councillors, 16 are each represented by two councillors and seven are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years.

19 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Stafford borough, with around 13 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Castle and St Michael's wards, with approximately 205 per cent and 90 per cent more electors respectively than 20 years ago.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,597 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will fall to 1,580 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 18 of the 30 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, in nine by more than 20 per cent and in five by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Castle ward where the councillor represents 118 per cent more electors than the borough average.

21 Stafford Borough Council has recently undertaken a review of the parishing arrangements in the borough, primarily to provide an identifiable boundary between Stafford town and the surrounding rural area. A number of smaller modifications were proposed to other parishes in the borough. Orders were put in place by the Secretary of State for the Department, Environment and the Regions and are due to be implemented in April 2000 and April 2003. The draft recommendations outlined in this report are based on the newly formed parish boundaries.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Stafford

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Barlaston	2	2,284	1,142	-29	2,230	1,115	-29
2 Baswich (Stafford town)	2	3,062	1,531	-4	3,220	1,610	2
3 Beaconside	1	1,976	1,976	24	2,086	2,086	32
4 Castle	1	3,482	3,482	118	3,581	3,581	127
5 Chartley	1	2,387	2,387	49	2,424	2,424	53
6 Church Eaton	1	1,329	1,329	-17	1,401	1,401	-11
7 Common (Stafford town)	2	2,567	1,284	-20	2,592	1,296	-18
8 Coton (Stafford town)	2	3,338	1,669	4	3,392	1,696	7
9 Eccleshall	3	4,721	1,574	-1	4,588	1,529	-3
10 Forebridge (Stafford town)	2	2,037	1,019	-36	1,944	972	-38
11 Fulford	3	4,731	1,577	-1	4,556	1,519	-4
12 Gnosall	2	4,371	2,186	37	4,108	2,054	30
13 Haywood	2	3,710	1,855	16	3,541	1,771	12
14 Highfields (Stafford town)	2	2,421	1,211	-24	2,357	1,179	-25
15 Holmcroft (Stafford town)	3	3,992	1,331	-17	3,755	1,252	-21
16 Littleworth (Stafford town)	3	4,177	1,392	-13	4,040	1,347	-15
17 Manor (Stafford town)	3	4,813	1,604	0	4,589	1,530	-3
18 Milford	2	2,754	1,377	-14	2,911	1,456	-8
19 Milwich	1	1,257	1,257	-21	1,206	1,206	-24
20 Oulton	1	1,365	1,365	-15	1,366	1,366	-14
21 Penside (Stafford town)	2	3,128	1,564	-2	3,652	1,826	16
22 Rowley (Stafford town)	2	3,390	1,695	6	3,295	1,648	4

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Seighford	2	3,089	1,545	-3	3,172	1,586	0
24 St Michael's (Stone town)	2	4,336	2,168	36	4,136	2,068	31
25 Stonefield & Christchurch (Stone town)	2	2,686	1,343	-16	2,588	1,294	-18
26 Swynnerton	2	3,441	1,721	8	3,371	1,686	7
27 Tillington (Stafford town)	2	3,565	1,783	12	3,700	1,850	17
28 Walton (Stone town)	3	4,600	1,533	-4	4,536	1,512	-4
29 Weeping Cross (Stafford town)	3	5,279	1,760	10	4,946	1,649	4
30 Woodseaves	1	1,558	1,558	2	1,509	1,509	-4
Totals	60	95,846	-	-	94,792	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,597	-	-	1,580	-

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

Notes: 1 The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1999, electors in Forebridge ward were over-represented by 36 per cent, while electors in Castle ward were significantly under-represented by 118 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 Stafford town is unparished and currently comprises the 12 wards indicated above.

3 Stone town covers the parish of Stone and comprises the three wards indicated above.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

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

23 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met with officers and members from the Borough Council. We are most grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 18 representations during Stage One, including a borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the Borough Council and the Commission by appointment.

Stafford Borough Council

24 The Borough Council originally considered three schemes – based on 59-member, 55-member and 49-member councils. The Council undertook wide consultation on the schemes with members, parish and town councils and the general public. After noting the comments received, the Borough Council proposed a council of 59 members, one less than at present, serving 26 wards, compared to the existing 30. The scheme would retain a mix of single- and multi-member wards.

25 The Borough Council proposed that Stafford town be represented by 29 councillors, one more than at present, representing a mix of 12 two- and three-member wards, of which three wards would remain unchanged. Stone town would be represented by two two-member wards and a three-member ward, as at present, utilising the River Trent and Trent & Mersey Canal as a boundary. The surrounding rural area would be represented by 23 members, two fewer than at present, of which two wards would remain unchanged. The proposals would require the re-warding of Stone Rural parish, to allow it to be split between the borough wards of Barlaston & Oulton and Milwich.

26 The scheme would provide improved levels of electoral equality and the correct balance of representation between Stafford town, Stone town and the rural hinterland, and it would also respect the community identities of and between these areas. Twenty-five of the 26 proposed wards would have an electoral variance of no more than 10 per cent by 2004, with only Seighford ward varying by 11 per cent from the average by 2004. No change was proposed to the current cycle of whole-council elections every four years. The Council's proposals are summarised at Appendix B.

Conservative & Independent Group

27 The Conservative & Independent Group on Stafford Borough Council proposed a reduction in council size from 60 to 57, serving 27 wards, three fewer than at present. The scheme would retain a mix of single- and multi-member wards and achieve improved levels of electoral equality. In the Group's opinion, the scheme would best reflect community identities in and between the towns of Stafford and Stone and the rural hinterland. A number of the proposals

reflected those of the Borough Council. Under these proposals three wards would have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent by 2004.

Constituency Conservative Association

28 Stafford Constituency Conservative Association proposed a reduction in council size from 60 to 58. The scheme submitted did not include detailed proposals for warding arrangements in the north of the borough, but focused on Stafford town and the immediate surrounding rural area. The Association's scheme would achieve improved electoral equality, with some of its proposals reflecting those of the Borough Council. The proposals would include a new Doxey ward in Stafford town. Where it provided detailed proposals no ward would vary by more than 8 per cent from the borough average by 2004.

Parish Councils

29 We received representations direct from the Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association and nine parish councils. Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association stated that the majority of its members had expressed support for the Borough Council's 59-member option in Stafford.

30 Barlaston Parish Council supported the Borough Council's 59-member option on the basis that it would provide improved electoral equality, would avoid creating wards of a large geographical size and would reflect community identities in the Barlaston area. Fulford Parish Council also supported the 59-member option, for reasons of community identity. Stone Rural Parish Council supported the Borough Council's 59-member option, but stated that it would prefer the status quo. Swynnerton Parish Council proposed "that option 59 as detailed by the Stafford Borough Council be applied to the rural warding arrangements and that option 55 apply to both Stafford and Stone urban areas".

31 Castlechurch and Creswell Parish Councils expressed a preference for Stafford Borough Council's 55-member option, for reasons of community identity. Castlechurch Parish Council also objected to the use of main roads as ward boundaries. Colwich Parish Council proposed a 57-member council, three fewer than at present, representing 27 wards, with no change to five wards (it exactly reflected the Conservative & Independent Group's proposals). Chebsey Parish Council considered the present arrangements to be satisfactory, and Seighford Parish Council, proposed modifying the numbers of parish councillors representing its Seighford and Doxey parish wards.

Other Representations

32 We received a further five representations. Councillor Kidney, member for Rowley ward, supported the Borough Council's 59-member option, but recommended modifying the proposed Highfields & Western Downs and Rowley wards. Mr Heenan, a resident of Stafford, proposed a 58-member council, serving 26 wards. The scheme would give improved electoral equality, with six wards remaining unchanged from the existing arrangements.

33 A resident of Walton on the Hill supported the Borough Council's 55-member option, on the basis that it would strike the best balance between electoral equality and the reflection of local communities. Another resident proposed that the Borough Council's 59-member option be adopted, but modified to create a new Doxey ward. A third resident expressed general concerns about the Borough Council's consultation process and proposed a modification to the eastern boundary of the Borough Council's Highfields & Western Downs ward, to better reflect community identities.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

34 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Stafford is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

35 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. We must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

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

37 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, the objective 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 start from the standpoint of electoral equality, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

38 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting a decrease in the electorate of some 1 per cent from 95,846 to 94,792 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the reduction in electorate to be in Gnosall and Weeping Cross wards, although the electorate of Penside ward is forecast to increase by 17 per cent over the five-year period. The Council has 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. Advice from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

39 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the Borough Council’s figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

Council Size

40 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates convenient and effective local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case. Stafford Borough Council presently has 60 members.

41 The Borough Council undertook wide local consultation on three schemes, based on 49-member, 55-member and 59-member council sizes. The Borough Council proposed a council size of 59, about which it stated that "the present ward framework could be said to generally reflect the pattern of communities in the Borough. The Council, therefore, supported the approach of not embarking on a radical new structure but to retain the existing ward framework where possible." A number of other Stage One respondents supported the Borough Council's proposal for a 59-member council.

42 The Stafford Constituency Conservative Association and Mr Heenan, a local resident, proposed a reduction in council size from 60 to 58. The Conservative & Independent Group on Stafford Borough Council proposed a 57-member council. These schemes had not been the subject of public consultation, nor did they include any justification or argumentation for their respective council sizes. Creswell Parish Council stated that the "the number of councillors under the new arrangements should be as small as possible to reduce costs". A number of other respondents supported the Borough Council's 55-member option, either in whole or in part.

43 We acknowledge the positive approach taken by all Stage One respondents in putting forward proposals for new electoral arrangements that would improve the severe imbalances which exist across the borough. However, we are concerned that the proposed council sizes of 57 and 58 have not been consulted on locally, and although they have received some support they have not been made widely available for public inspection. Nor were they supported by argumentation and explanation outlining why the respondents had proposed these particular reductions in council size.

44 We note the Borough Council's wish that the new warding arrangements should reflect the existing arrangements, and we judge that its proposed scheme would provide good electoral equality and reflect community identities. The Commission is also minded to agree that the retention of a warding configuration much like the existing arrangements would be preferable, particularly in the light of the recent parish review. We are also pleased to note that this scheme has been the subject of wide consultation with council members, parish and town councils and the general public. Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association stated that "it would seem on the comments received so far that our members would support the recommendation ... that the option for 59 members of the Borough Council should be accepted". Therefore, in the light of a significant level of local support, a wide consultation process undertaken by the Borough Council, the provision of sound justification for the proposed council size and a scheme that would facilitate very good electoral equality, we are adopting the Borough Council's proposal for a council size of 59.

45 In addition, we have considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the arguments outlined above, we have concluded

that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 59 members.

Electoral Arrangements

46 We have carefully considered all the representations received, including the borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council, Stafford Constituency Conservative Association, The Conservative & Independent Group of Stafford Borough Council and a local resident. All schemes would facilitate substantial improvements in electoral equality and in our opinion broadly reflect similar community interests.

47 As outlined above, during Stage One we received a number of schemes and proposals utilising different council sizes (59, 58, 57 and 55). We noted that three of the four borough-wide schemes and a number of other individual proposals would allocate an incorrect number of councillors to the three separate areas of the borough (Stafford, Stone and the rural area). For example, under the 58-member scheme (as proposed by the Conservative Association and Mr Heenan, a resident of Stafford) the electorate of Stafford town would be entitled to 29 members and the rural area would be entitled to 22 members. However, both schemes proposed that only 28 members represent the town and that 23 members represent the rural area. Additionally, the Conservative & Independent Group on Stafford Borough Council proposed a 57-member scheme, under which Stafford town would be entitled to 28 members and the rural area would be entitled to 22 members, but the Group only provided for 27 members in Stafford town and 23 members in the rural area. Therefore each of these schemes is fundamentally flawed, creating a built-in under-representation of Stafford town and an over-representation of electors in the rural area. The Borough Council's scheme was the only scheme that allocated the correct level of representation throughout the borough.

48 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council's proposals, the arguments outlined earlier in the chapter regarding council size, the improvements in electoral equality and the provision of a scheme which would, in our opinion, reflect community identities, we have concluded that we should base our recommendations on the Borough Council's scheme. It is also interesting to note that its scheme was the subject of wide local consultation. However, to improve electoral equality further we have decided to move away from the Borough Council's proposals in the towns of Stafford and Stone. Where appropriate we have made comparisons between the proposed boundaries under each scheme; we have been unable to adopt the Conservative groups' or the local resident's schemes in full because they create built-in electoral inequalities, but we have drawn on the local knowledge of their proposers in considering our draft recommendations. We consider that our draft recommendations would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One.

49 For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

(a) Stafford town

- Common, Holmcroft and Tillington wards
- Coton, Forebridge and Littleworth wards
- Highfields, Manor and Rowley wards
- Baswich, Penkside and Weeping Cross wards

(b) Stone town

- St Michael's, Stonefield & Christchurch and Walton wards

(c) The rural area

- Haywood and Milford wards
- Beaconside, Chartley and Milwich wards
- Barlaston, Fulford and Oulton wards
- Eccleshall and Swynnerton wards
- Gnosall and Woodseaves wards
- Castle, Church Eaton and Seighford wards

50 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Stafford town

51 Stafford Borough Council has recently undertaken a review of the parishing arrangements in the borough. The most significant modifications have been to the boundaries of parishes surrounding Stafford town. The external town boundary has been modified to follow the M6 and A518, to provide a more identifiable boundary between the town and surrounding rural area. The orders of the Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions are due to be implemented in April 2000 and April 2003. In the text following, we refer to the former parish arrangements when describing the existing warding arrangements and to the new parishing arrangements when describing the draft recommendations.

Common, Holmcroft and Tillington wards

52 Common, Holmcroft and Tillington wards are located in the north of Stafford town. Common and Tillington wards are each represented by two members, while Holmcroft ward is represented by three members. The number of electors per councillor is 20 per cent below the borough average in Common ward (18 per cent by 2004), 17 per cent below the average in Holmcroft ward (21 per cent by 2004) and 12 per cent above the average in Tillington ward (17 per cent by 2004).

53 The Borough Council proposed that Common ward continue to be represented by two councillors and that it be extended eastwards to broadly include Fonthill Road, Charnley Road, Chesham Road and Coronation Road (part of the existing Coton ward), while the southern ward boundary would be modified to broadly follow Browning Road. Holmcroft ward would continue to be represented by three councillors, but would be modified in the south-west to include that part of Eccleshall Road south of the Tillington Hall Hotel (part of the existing Tillington ward). A revised Tillington ward would retain its existing level of representation, but be modified in the north-east to exclude part of Eccleshall Road (as outlined above) and in the south-east to exclude the area known as Castletown (to be included in a revised Forebridge ward; see below). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Common ward would be 2 per cent below the average (1 per cent by 2004), 6 per cent above the average in Holmcroft ward (1 per cent by 2004) and 1 per cent below the average in Tillington ward (8 per cent above by 2004).

54 The Conservative & Independent Group proposed a similar arrangement of wards in this area to those proposed by the Borough Council, utilising a number of the same boundaries. However, the Conservative Association's scheme included four wards covering this area, rather than three, to facilitate a new Doxey ward. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider these proposed boundaries in detail, due to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 57- and 58-member councils and the in-built electoral imbalances that would exist under these particular schemes.

55 A local resident proposed that the area known as Doxey form a single-member ward in Stafford town, however, no detailed boundaries for the proposal were submitted.

56 Having considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One we propose basing our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Council's scheme. It would provide generally good electoral equality, and identifiable boundaries and would command some local support, including from the Conservative & Independent Group on Stafford Borough Council. However, we propose modifying the boundary between the proposed Holmcroft and Tillington wards, to further improve electoral equality. We propose that a greater number of electors on Eccleshall Road, and the whole of Nash Avenue, Pulteney Drive and Wood Crescent be included in the revised Holmcroft ward. We have considered the proposal for a new Doxey ward, but are concerned that such a proposal would not facilitate good electoral equality in the town under a 59-member council and in the light of our proposals elsewhere in the town. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent below the borough average in Common ward (1 per cent by 2004), 9 per cent above the average in Holmcroft ward (4 per cent by 2004) and 6 per cent below the average in Tillington ward (3 per cent above by 2004). These proposals are detailed on the large map at the back of the report.

Coton, Forebridge and Littleworth wards

57 Coton and Forebridge wards are represented by two councillors each and Littleworth ward is represented by three councillors; all are situated in the east of Stafford town. Coton ward is under-represented by 4 per cent (7 per cent by 2004), Forebridge ward is over-represented by 36 per cent (38 per cent by 2004) and Littleworth ward is over-represented by 13 per cent (15 per cent by 2004).

58 The Borough Council proposed that Coton ward continue to be represented by two members, but recommended that its western boundary be modified to include the area broadly comprising Sandyford Street (part of the existing Common ward) and that its northern boundary follow the boundary of the RAF playing fields, to broadly exclude Fonthill Road, Charnley Road, Chesham Road and Coronation Road. A revised two-member Forebridge ward would include the areas broadly known as Queensville (to its south) and Castletown (to its west), while the northern boundary would broadly follow Browning Street. A revised Littleworth ward would continue to be represented by three members, its western boundary being modified slightly to follow the A518 (Queensway). The number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above the borough average in Coton ward (2 per cent by 2004), 6 per cent below the average in Forebridge ward (7 per cent by 2004) and 8 per cent below the average in Littleworth ward (7 per cent by 2004).

59 Both Conservative Groups' proposals partly reflected those of the Borough Council in this area, broadly retaining the existing ward pattern but with modified boundaries to improve electoral equality. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider these proposed boundaries in detail, due to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 57- and 58-member councils and the in-built electoral imbalances that would exist under these particular schemes.

60 Having considered carefully all the representations received we propose that our draft recommendations be based on the Borough Council's scheme in this area, as it would provide improved electoral equality and command some local support from the Conservative groups. However, we consider that further improvements in electoral equality could be achieved. We propose that Corporation Street and Crooked Bridge Road, Coton Field, St George's Hospital and HM Prison (parts of the proposed Forebridge and Coton wards) be included in the Borough Council's Littleworth ward. We also propose that the revised Forebridge ward be extended southwards to include a further 248 electors from the area known as Queensville (Kent Way, Windsor Road, Warwick Road and York Road). In the light of our proposals in this area, we do not consider that the Borough Council's proposed ward names of Coton and Littleworth best reflect the communities included in the new wards. Therefore we propose that the ward known as Coton under the Borough Council's scheme be renamed Beaconside ward and that Littleworth ward be renamed Coton & Littleworth. The draft recommendations would further improve electoral equality in the wards in this area. Under our proposals the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the borough average in Beaconside ward (2 per cent below by 2004), 5 cent below the borough average in Coton & Littleworth ward (4 per cent by 2004) and 1 per cent above the borough average in Forebridge ward (equal to the average by 2004). These proposals are detailed on the large map at the back of the report.

Highfields, Manor and Rowley wards

61 The three wards of Highfields, Manor and Rowley are situated in the west of Stafford town. Highfields and Rowley wards are each represented by two councillors, while Manor ward is represented by three councillors. The number of electors represented by each councillor is 24 per cent below the borough average in Highfields ward (25 per cent by 2004), equal to the average in Manor ward (3 per cent below by 2004) and 6 per cent above the average in Rowley ward (4 per cent by 2004).

62 The Borough Council proposed a new three-member Highfields & Western Downs ward to include the whole of the existing Highfields ward, Averill Road and a number of electors on West Way (part of the existing Rowley ward). Rowley ward would otherwise remain unchanged. In addition, the Council proposed no change to the existing Manor ward under its proposals. The number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the borough average in Highfields & Western Downs ward (equal to the average by 2004), 1 per cent above the average in Manor ward (2 per cent below by 2004) and 6 per cent above the average in Rowley ward (4 per cent by 2004).

63 The Conservative & Independent Group and Conservative Association both proposed a configuration of wards in this area broadly similar to that of the Borough Council. The Conservative Association proposed a two-member Rising Brook ward, to cover part of the existing Manor ward. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider these proposed boundaries in detail, due to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 57- and 58-member councils and the in-built electoral imbalances that would exist under these schemes.

64 Councillor Kidney, member for Rowley ward, proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between the proposed Highfields & Western Downs and Rowley wards. She proposed that the electors on Averill Road and West Way be included in Rowley ward (as at present), for reasons of community identity. To counteract the resulting electoral inequality, she proposed that the area broadly including Newport Road and Castle Bank be included in Highfields & Western Downs ward. A local resident proposed a new Castlechurch ward, to broadly cover the area known as Highfields & Western Downs ward under the Borough Council's scheme. The proposal was based on a 57-member council.

65 We have considered all the representations received at Stage One and have noted Councillor Kidney's proposal to include Averill Road and part of West Way in Rowley ward and instead include electors broadly around Castle Bank, Castle Way and High Park in Highfields & Western Downs ward. However, we judge that the Borough Council's boundary would provide a better balance between electoral equality and community identities in the area and provide more identifiable boundaries for the ward as a whole. In addition, we have considered the resident's proposal for a Castlechurch ward, but are concerned that such a proposal would worsen electoral equality across the town under a 59-member scheme. We have not been persuaded by the evidence received at Stage One, regarding community identities in this area, that such a proposal would provide a significantly improved scheme or a better reflection of community identities. We therefore propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals for this area without modification, as they would provide good electoral equality, a coherent pattern of borough wards and identifiable boundaries and would command some local support. The electoral variances under this scheme would be the same as those under the Borough Council's scheme. These proposals are detailed on the large map at the back of the report.

Baswich, Penside and Weeping Cross wards

66 Baswich, Penside and Weeping Cross wards are situated in the south of Stafford town. Baswich and Penside wards are each represented by two councillors, while Weeping Cross ward

is represented by three councillors. Baswich ward is over-represented by 4 per cent (2 per cent under-represented by 2004), Penkside ward is over-represented by 2 per cent (16 per cent under-represented by 2004) and Weeping Cross ward is 10 per cent under-represented (4 per cent by 2004).

67 Baswich and Weeping Cross wards would remain unchanged under the Borough Council's scheme, while the north-eastern boundary of Penkside ward would be modified to follow Queensville. All three wards would retain their existing levels of representation. The number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent below the borough average in Baswich ward (5 per cent above by 2004), 17 per cent below the average in Penkside ward (3 per cent above by 2004) and 12 per cent above the average in Weeping Cross ward (5 per cent by 2004).

68 Both Conservative groups proposed no change to the existing wards of Baswich and Weeping Cross, and minor modifications to the ward currently known as Penkside. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider these proposed boundaries in detail, due to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 57- and 58- member councils and the in-built electoral imbalances in the town and rural area that would exist under these schemes.

69 Having considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One we propose that the Borough Council's scheme be adopted without modification for the wards of Baswich and Weeping Cross. The scheme would provide good electoral equality, a coherent pattern of borough wards and identifiable boundaries, and it is also interesting to note that no respondent (including both Conservative groups) proposed modifications to the existing Baswich and Weeping Cross wards. However, we propose modifying the Borough Council's proposed Penkside ward to provide more balanced levels of electoral equality between Penkside and Forebridge wards. We propose that Kent Way, Windsor Road, Warwick Road and York Road and a number of electors on Queensville be transferred from the proposed Penkside ward to the proposed Forebridge ward. Under our draft recommendations the electoral variances for Baswich and Weeping Cross wards would be the same as those under the Borough Council's scheme; however, Penkside ward would initially be 25 per cent over-represented (5 per cent by 2004). These proposals are detailed on the large map at the back of the report.

Stone town

St Michael's, Stonefield & Christchurch and Walton wards

70 These three wards cover the town of Stone and the parish of the same name, which is situated in the north-east of the borough. St Michael's and Stonefield & Christchurch wards are each represented by two councillors, while Walton ward is represented by three councillors. The number of electors represented by each councillor is 36 per cent above the borough average in St Michael's ward (31 per cent by 2004), 16 per cent below the average in Stonefield & Christchurch ward (18 per cent by 2004) and 4 per cent below the average in Walton ward (unchanged by 2004).

71 The Borough Council proposed that Stone continue to be represented by seven councillors, serving three wards, as at present. It proposed a new two-member Stone North ward to include

the whole of the existing Stonefield & Christchurch ward and that part of St Michael's ward broadly north of Altona Close and the cricket ground. The remainder of St Michael's ward would form a new two-member Stone South ward. It proposed no change to the existing Walton ward. None of the proposed wards would straddle the River Trent or Trent & Mersey Canal, as at present. The number of electors per councillor in Stone North ward would be 7 per cent above the average (8 per cent by 2004), 9 per cent above the average in Stone South ward (10 per cent by 2004) and 6 per cent below the average in Walton ward (unchanged by 2004).

72 The Conservative Association made no reference to the proposed warding arrangements for Stone in its submission. The Conservative & Independent Group on Stafford Borough Council proposed that Stone town be represented by three wards, but suggested that the A34 be used as a boundary in the town (rather than the canal and river) to provide improved levels of electoral equality.

73 Having considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One we propose modifying the Borough Council's scheme in this area. We note that the scheme would provide for the correct level of representation in Stone town, but are concerned that the wards within Stone would not provide the best levels of electoral equality presently available. We therefore propose a two-member Walton ward, to include the whole of the existing Walton ward, except polling district IIE, with its eastern boundary following the A34 (south of Scotch Bridge). Polling district IIE would be included in the new three-member Stone South ward, thus creating a ward straddling the river and canal. However, officers from the Commission have recently visited the area and note that a significant crossing point would link the two areas. We have noted the Borough Council's proposal to utilise the River Trent and Trent & Mersey Canal as ward boundaries in the area. However, in the interests of electoral equality we have concluded that the A34, as proposed by the Conservative & Independent Group, could form an alternative ward boundary as it would provide a clear and identifiable boundary in the town, facilitate a better balance of representation between the wards in Stone town and would command some local support. A small number of electors from the proposed Stone North ward would be included in the revised Stone South ward (Abbey Street and Lichfield Street) to improve electoral equality. The scheme would provide good electoral equality and a coherent pattern of borough wards and identifiable boundaries. The number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent above the borough average in Stone North ward (6 per cent by 2004), 1 per cent above the average in Stone South ward (2 per cent by 2004) and 2 per cent above the average in Walton ward (1 per cent by 2004). These proposals are detailed on the large map at the back of the report and Maps A2 and A3 in Appendix A. These proposals would have consequential implications for the parish warding of Stone parish, detailed later in this chapter.

The rural area

74 As outlined earlier, Stafford Borough Council has recently carried out a review of parishing arrangements in Stafford borough. The Secretary of State's orders, which are due to be implemented in April 2000 and April 2003, affect a number of parishes and parish boundaries in the borough. In the text following, we refer to the former parishing arrangements when describing the existing warding arrangements and refer only to the new parishing arrangements when describing our draft recommendations.

Haywood and Milford wards

75 The two two-member wards of Haywood and Milford are situated in the south-east of the borough. Haywood ward is coterminous with the boundaries of Colwich parish, and Milford ward comprises the parishes of Berkswich, Brocton, Ingestre and Tixall. The number of electors represented by each councillor is 16 per cent above the average in Haywood ward (12 per cent by 2004) and 14 per cent below the average in Milford ward (8 per cent by 2004).

76 The Borough Council proposed that the existing Haywood ward be extended northwards to include the new Hixon parish to form a new three-member Haywood & Hixon ward. The existing Milford ward would also be extended northwards, to include Hopton & Coton parish, part of the existing Beaconside ward. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the average in Haywood & Hixon ward (2 per cent below by 2004) and 8 per cent below the borough average in Milford ward (unchanged by 2004). The Conservative & Independent Group's proposals were identical to the Borough Council's in this area.

77 The Conservative Association proposed a different configuration of wards to the Borough Council in this area; including a three-member Trent Valley ward to include 11 parishes. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider these proposed boundaries in detail, due to the difference in ward patterns under a scheme based on a 58- member council and the in-built electoral imbalances that would exist under this scheme. Colwich Parish Council proposed that it be merged with Hixon parish to form a revised Haywood ward.

78 After careful consideration of the evidence received at Stage One, we propose adopting the Borough Council's scheme without modification in this area. We consider that it would strike a good balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities in the area while creating wards of a manageable size. These proposals were also partially supported by the Conservative & Independent Group, Mr Heenan and Colwich Parish Council. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be the same as under the Borough Council's scheme. These proposals are outlined on Map 2.

Beaconside, Chartley and Milwich wards

79 These three single-member wards are situated in the east of the borough. Beaconside ward comprises the parishes of Hopton & Coton, Marston, Salt & Enson and Whitgreave; Chartley ward comprises Gayton, Stowe and Weston parishes; and Milwich ward comprises the parishes of Fradswell, Hilderstone, Milwich and Sandon & Burston. The number of electors represented by each councillor is 24 per cent above the borough average in Beaconside ward (32 per cent by 2004), 49 per cent above the average in Chartley ward (53 per cent by 2004) and 21 per cent below the average in Milwich ward (24 per cent by 2004).

80 The Borough Council proposed modifying the existing Chartley ward to comprise the parishes of Gayton, Salt & Enson, Stowe-by-Chartley and Weston. Milwich ward would be extended westwards to include that part of Meaford & Aston parish ward of Stone Rural parish, south of the Stone to Norton Bridge railway line (including the settlement of Aston-by-Stone). The consequential changes to the parish warding of Stone Rural parish, resulting from these

proposals, was supported by Stone Rural parish itself. The remainder of the parish would be included in a new Barlaston & Oulton ward (see below). The constituent parishes of the existing Beaconside ward would be included in modified Chartley, Milford and Seighford wards detailed above and below. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent below the borough average in Chartley ward (2 per cent by 2004) and 4 per cent below the average in Milwich ward (6 per cent by 2004).

81 Both Conservative groups proposed a different configuration of wards in this area, in part reflecting the Borough Council's proposals, especially for Stone Rural parish, but otherwise utilising different parishes as building blocks to form new or revised borough wards. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider these proposed boundaries in detail, due to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 57- and 58-member councils and the in-built electoral imbalances that would exist under these schemes.

82 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One regarding warding arrangements in this area. The Borough Council's scheme, although dividing a parish between borough wards, would provide good electoral equality, and in our opinion reflect community identities. It is also important to note that the proposed warding of Stone Rural parish commands a substantial amount of local support, including from the parish itself and the local Conservative groups who made representations. We therefore propose adopting the Borough Council's scheme in this area without modification; our proposals would provide the same levels of electoral equality as the Borough Council's. These proposals are outlined on Map 2 and Maps A2 and A3 in Appendix A. The consequential changes to the parish warding of Stone Rural parish are detailed later in the chapter.

Barlaston, Fulford and Oulton wards

83 Barlaston, Fulford and Oulton wards are situated in the north of the borough. Barlaston ward is represented by two members, covers only Barlaston parish and is currently over-represented by 29 per cent (unchanged by 2004). Fulford ward is represented by three members, covers Fulford parish and Rough Close parish ward of Stone Rural parish and is currently 1 per cent over-represented (4 per cent by 2004). Oulton ward is represented by one member, comprises Meaford & Aston, Moddershall and Oulton parish wards of Stone Rural parish, and is currently 15 per cent over-represented (14 per cent by 2004).

84 The Borough Council proposed a new two-member Barlaston & Oulton ward to include the whole of the existing Barlaston ward, Moddershall and Oulton parish wards of Stone Rural parish and that part of Meaford & Aston parish ward north of the Stone to Norton Bridge railway line. This proposal would require the re-warding of Stone Rural parish. The remainder of Stone Rural parish would form part of a revised Milwich ward (see above). The Borough Council proposed that the boundaries of Fulford ward be coterminous with the Fulford parish boundary. Under these proposals Barlaston & Oulton ward would be 3 per cent under-represented (unchanged by 2004) while Fulford ward would be 3 per cent over-represented (6 per cent by 2004). Both Conservative groups' proposals reflected the Borough Council's proposals in this area without exception.

85 Barlaston and Fulford parish councils supported the Borough Council's proposals in this area on the basis that they would reflect community identities and would command local support. Stone Rural Parish Council also supported the Borough Council's proposals in this area.

86 We have considered carefully all the representations received and note that the Borough Council's proposals in this area would provide good electoral equality and command local support. As previously discussed, we were unable to consider in detail all of the proposed boundaries under schemes submitted for 57- and 58-member councils. However, it is interesting to note that the boundaries proposed under the schemes submitted by the Conservative Association, the Conservative & Independent Group on Stafford Borough Council and Mr Heenan would be the same as those proposed by the Borough Council in this area (including the warding of Stone Rural parish). In the light of such support and the much improved levels of electoral equality achieved, we propose adopting the Borough Council's scheme in this area without modification. The electoral variances under our draft recommendations would be the same as under the Borough Council's scheme. These proposals are outlined on Maps 2, A2 and A3. The consequential changes to the parish warding of Stone Rural parish are outlined later in this chapter.

Eccleshall and Swynnerton wards

87 The wards of Eccleshall and Swynnerton are situated in the north-west of the borough. Eccleshall ward is currently represented by three councillors, comprises the parishes of Chebsey, Eccleshall and Standon and is 1 per cent over-represented (3 per cent by 2004). Swynnerton ward is represented by two councillors, is coterminous with Swynnerton parish and is 8 per cent under-represented (7 per cent by 2004).

88 The Borough Council proposed that the existing Eccleshall ward be extended south-westwards, to include Adbaston parish, part of the existing Woodseaves ward. The remainder of Woodseaves ward would be included in a new Gnosall & Woodseaves ward (see below). It proposed no change to the existing Swynnerton ward. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 6 per cent above the borough average in both Eccleshall and Swynnerton wards (4 per cent and 5 per cent respectively by 2004).

89 The Conservative groups proposed no change to the existing Eccleshall and Swynnerton wards. Swynnerton Parish Council supported the Borough Council's 59-member option in the rural area of the borough. Chebsey Parish Council proposed that the existing electoral arrangements be retained, to reflect existing communities ties.

90 Having considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One we propose that the Borough Council's scheme for this area be adopted without modification. It would provide good electoral equality, facilitate a coherent pattern of borough wards and command some local support. Due to the current levels of electoral inequality across Stafford borough and the proposed change in council size, the retention of the existing warding arrangements (as proposed by the two Conservative groups and Chebsey Parish Council) is not an option in this area if good electoral equality is to be achieved. However, it is important to note that the existing Eccleshall ward (of which Chebsey Parish Council is currently a part) would be subject to only minor

modification under these proposals. The electoral variances under our recommendations would be the same as those under the Borough Council's scheme. These recommendations are outlined on Map 2.

Gnosall and Woodseaves wards

91 Gnosall ward currently comprises the parishes of Ellenhall, Gnosall and Ranton, and is served by two members who represent 37 per cent more electors than the borough average (30 per cent by 2004). The single-member Woodseaves ward comprises the parishes of Adbaston, Forton, High Offley and Norbury and is 2 per cent over-represented (4 per cent by 2004). Both wards are situated in the south-west of the borough.

92 The Borough Council proposed that Gnosall parish (part of the existing Gnosall ward) and Forton, High Offley and Norbury parishes (parts of the existing Woodseaves ward) should be merged to form a new three-member Gnosall & Woodseaves ward. The remainder of Gnosall ward, Ellenhall and Ranton parishes, would be included in a modified Seighford ward (see below) and the remainder of Woodseaves ward, Adbaston parish, would be included in a modified Eccleshall ward (see above). Under these proposals Gnosall & Woodseaves ward would be 5 per cent under-represented (1 per cent over-represented by 2004).

93 The Conservative & Independent Group proposed a significantly different configuration of wards in this area to the Borough Council, including the dividing of Gnosall parish between three borough wards. The Conservative Association proposed no change to the existing Woodseaves ward and only a small modification to the existing Gnosall ward. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider these proposed boundaries in detail, due to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 57- and 58-member councils and the in-built electoral imbalances that would exist under these particular schemes.

94 After careful consideration of the evidence received and in the light of our proposal for a 59-member council, we propose adopting the Borough Council's scheme in this area without modification. It would provide for coterminosity between parish boundaries and borough wards, unlike a number of other respondents' proposals in this area, and significant improvements in electoral equality. Our draft recommendations would provide the same levels of electoral equality as the Borough Council's proposals. These recommendations are outlined on Map 2.

Castle, Church Eaton and Seighford wards

95 These three wards are situated in the south of the borough. The member for Castle ward, which currently comprises the parishes of Bradley and Castle Church, represents 118 per cent more electors than the borough average (127 per cent by 2004). Church Eaton ward, which comprises the parishes of Church Eaton and Haughton, is represented by one councillor who represents 17 per cent fewer electors than the borough average (11 per cent by 2004). Seighford ward is served by two borough councillors and includes the parishes of Creswell and Seighford; the number of electors per councillor is currently 3 per cent below the average (equal to the average by 2004).

96 The Borough Council proposed extending the existing Church Eaton ward to include Bradley parish (part of the existing Castle ward). The remainder of Castle ward (the new Hyde Lea parish) would form part of a modified Seighford ward with Seighford and Cresswell parishes (the existing Seighford ward), Ellenhall and Ranton parishes (part of the existing Gnosall ward) and Whitgreave and Martson parishes (part of the existing Beaconside ward). Castle ward would cease to exist. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the borough average in Church Eaton ward (7 per cent by 2004) and 18 per cent below the borough average in Seighford ward (11 per cent by 2004).

97 The Conservative groups proposed very different configurations of wards in the south of the borough to the Borough Council, and due to the differences in council size each utilised different configurations of parishes to improve electoral equality. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider these proposed boundaries in detail, due to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 57- and 58-member councils and the in-built electoral imbalances that would exist under these schemes.

98 Creswell Parish Council expressed support for the Borough Council's 55-member option in this area, on the basis that it would best reflect community identities in the area. The 55-member option would retain the existing Seighford ward. Castlechurch Parish Council also proposed that the Borough Council's proposals under a 55-member scheme be adopted in this area, with the existing Church Eaton ward, Bradley and Hyde Lea parishes and Gnosall and Moreton parish wards of Gnosall parish forming a Gnosall & Church Eaton ward.

99 We have considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One of this review and consider that the Borough Council's scheme would strike the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We considered Castlechurch and Creswell parish councils' proposals, but note that they are based on a significantly different council size (55 members) and would require the dividing of Gnosall parish between borough wards. We have not been persuaded that such a proposal would provide the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities. The Commission has noted that the electoral variance in the Borough Council's proposed Seighford ward would be 11 per cent by 2004. However, after investigating the proposals for this area further and discussing it with officers at the council, it became apparent that only arbitrarily warding, and therefore dividing neighbouring parishes would further improve electoral equality. In the interests of electoral equality, we also considered transferring Hyde Lea parish to Church Eaton ward and Haughton parish to Seighford ward, but this would result in Church Eaton ward being 22 per cent over-represented. Consequently, we recommend that the Borough Council's proposals be adopted without modification in this area. The electoral variances under our draft recommendations would be the same as under the Borough Council's scheme. These recommendations are outlined on Map 2.

Electoral Cycle

100 At Stage One we received no proposals regarding the electoral cycle of the Borough Council. Accordingly, we make no recommendation for change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years.

Conclusions

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

- there should be a reduction in council size from 60 to 59;
- there should be 26 wards, four fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 25 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of four wards;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

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

- (i) in Stafford we propose adopting six of the Borough Council's proposed wards without modification, minimally amending the boundaries of the other six wards, to provide improved levels of electoral equality.
- (ii) in Stone we propose a different configuration of wards and distribution of councillors, to provide improved levels of electoral equality.

103 Figure 5 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 electorate figures and with forecast electorates for the year 2004.

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	60	59	60	59
Number of wards	30	26	30	26
Average number of electors per councillor	1,597	1,625	1,580	1,607
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	18	3	18	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	9	1	10	0

104 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Stafford Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from 18 to three. By 2004 only one ward is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough.

Draft Recommendation

Stafford Borough Council should comprise 59 councillors serving 26 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

105 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Local Government Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, we propose consequential modifications to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Stone and Stone Rural, to reflect the proposed borough wards.

106 The parish of Stone Rural is currently served by 10 councillors representing three wards: Meaford & Aston, Moddershall and Oulton. Under our draft recommendations, Stone Rural parish would be divided between two borough wards. The consequential effect of this proposal would be that the existing Meaford & Aston parish ward would be divided to form two new two-member parish wards: Aston and Meaford. The boundary between the two wards would be the Stone to Norton Bridge railway line. The existing Moddershall and Oulton wards would remain unchanged.

Draft Recommendation

Stone Rural Parish Council should continue to comprise 10 councillors, representing four wards, rather than three as at present: Aston ward (returning two councillors), Meaford ward (returning two councillors) and Moddershall and Oulton wards returning two and four councillors respectively, as at present. The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Maps A2 and A3 in Appendix A.

107 As a part of our draft recommendations we propose modifications to the borough wards in Stone town. We propose that the parish wards of Stone be modified to reflect the borough ward boundaries.

Draft Recommendation

Stone Parish Council should continue to comprise 18 councillors, representing three wards, as at present: Stone North ward (returning five councillors), Stone South ward (returning eight councillors) and Walton ward (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in Stone, as illustrated and named on Maps A2 and A3 in Appendix A.

108 Seighford Parish Council proposed modifying the number of parish councillors representing the parish wards of Doxey and Seighford. However, we note that the statutory orders implementing the recommendations of the recent parish review have superseded the proposed modifications. We therefore propose no change to the new parish wards of Seighford parish, as included in the order.

109 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the borough.

Draft Recommendation

For parish and town councils, whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that of the Borough Council.

110 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Stafford and welcome comments from the Borough Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Stafford

5 NEXT STEPS

111 We are putting forward draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Stafford. Now it is up to the people of the area. We will take fully into account all representations received by 3 July 2000. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the Borough Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

112 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
Stafford Review
Local Government Commission for England
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142

E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk

113 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Secretary of State, who cannot make an order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after he receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Stafford: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Stafford area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in Maps A2 and A3 and the large map at the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Stone Rural parish.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Stone Rural parish.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for the towns of Stafford and Stone.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Stafford: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Stone Rural parish

Map A3: Proposed Warding of Stone Rural parish

APPENDIX B

Stafford Borough Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Borough Council in nine wards, where the Council's proposals were as follows:

Figure B1: Stafford Borough Council's Proposals: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Coton (Stafford town)	Common ward (part); Coton ward (part); Forebridge ward (part)
Forebridge (Stafford town)	Common ward (part); Forebridge ward (part); Penkside ward (part); Tillington ward (part)
Holmcroft (Stafford town)	Holmcroft ward; Tillington ward (part)
Littleworth (Stafford town)	Forebridge ward (part); Littleworth ward
Penkside (Stafford town)	Penkside ward (part)
Stone North (Stone town)	St Michael's ward (part); Stonefield & Christchurch ward
Stone South (Stone town)	St Michael's ward (part)
Tillington (Stafford town)	Tillington ward (part)
Walton (Stone town)	<i>Unchanged</i>

Notes: 1 Stafford town is unparished.

2 Stone town covers the parish of Stone and comprises the three wards indicated above.

Figure B2: Stafford Borough Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Coton (Stafford town)	2	3,372	1,686	4	3,274	1,637	2
Forebridge (Stafford town)	2	3,064	1,532	-6	3,003	1,502	-7
Holmcroft (Stafford town)	3	5,152	1,717	6	4,865	1,622	1
Littleworth (Stafford town)	3	4,489	1,496	-8	4,468	1,489	-7
Penkside (Stafford town)	2	2,695	1,348	-17	3,311	1,656	3
Stone North (Stone town)	2	3,486	1,743	7	3,482	1,741	8
Stone South (Stone town)	2	3,536	1,768	9	3,529	1,765	10
Tillington (Stafford town)	2	3,228	1,614	-1	3,469	1,735	8
Walton (Stone town)	3	4,600	1,533	-6	4,535	1,512	-6

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

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

APPENDIX C

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

1 Section 13(2) of the Local Government Act 1992 places a duty on the Commission to undertake periodic electoral reviews of each principal local authority area in England, and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. Section 13(3) provides that, so far as reasonably practicable, the first such review of any area should be undertaken not less than 10 years, and not more than 15 years, after this Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), submitted an initial electoral review report on the county within which that area, or the larger part of the area, was located. This timetable applies to boroughs within shire and metropolitan counties, although not to South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear¹. Nor does the timetable apply to London boroughs; the 1992 Act is silent on the timing of periodic electoral reviews in Greater London. Nevertheless, these areas will be included in the Commission's review programme. The Commission has no power to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London.

2 Under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, the Commission is required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for any changes to the electoral arrangements within the areas of English principal authorities as appear desirable to it, having regard to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- secure effective and convenient local government.

3 In reporting to the Secretary of State, the Commission may make recommendations for such changes to electoral arrangements as are specified in section 14(4) of the 1992 Act. In relation to principal authorities, these are:

- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
- the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards or divisions);
- the number of councillors to be elected for each electoral area, and the years in which they are to be elected; and
- the name of any electoral area.

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish

¹ The Local Government Boundary Commission did not submit reports on the counties of South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear.

or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

- (a) the number of councillors;
- (b) the need for parish wards;
- (c) the number and boundaries of any such wards;
- (d) the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward or, in the case of a common parish, for each parish; and
- (e) the name of any such ward.

5 In conducting the review, section 27 of the 1992 Act requires the Commission to comply, so far as is practicable, with the rules given in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 for the conduct of electoral reviews.

Local Government Act 1972: Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements

6 By virtue of section 27 of the Local Government Act 1992, in undertaking a review of electoral arrangements the Commission is required to comply so far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. For ease of reference, those provisions of Schedule 11 which are relevant to this review are set out below.

7 In relation to shire districts:

Having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the district likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration (by the Secretary of State or the Commission):

- (a) the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors to be elected shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward in the district;
- (b) in a district every ward of a parish council shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district;
- (c) in a district every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single ward of the borough.

8 The Schedule also provides that, subject to (a)–(c) above, regard should be had to:

- (d) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(e) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

9 The Schedule provides that, in considering whether a parish should be divided into wards, regard shall be had to whether:

(f) the number or distribution of electors in the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and

(g) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

10 Where it is decided to divide any such parish into parish wards, in considering the size and boundaries of the wards and fixing the number of parish councillors to be elected for each ward, regard shall be had to:

(h) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration;

(i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(j) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

11 Where it is decided not to divide the parish into parish wards, in fixing the number of councillors to be elected for each parish regard shall be had to the number and distribution of electors of the parish and any change which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the fixing of the number of parish councillors.