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Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body which conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. The broad purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements – the number of councillors and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions – for a specific local authority. We are conducting an electoral review of Northampton Borough Council to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the borough.

The review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same. The Boundary Committee for England commenced the review in 2009. However, on 1 April 2010, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee and is now conducting the review. It therefore falls to us to complete the work of the Boundary Committee.

This review was conducted in four stages:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	27 October 2009	Submission of proposals to the Boundary Committee
Two	19 January 2010	Boundary Committee's analysis and deliberation
Three	25 May 2010	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	19 July 2010	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Draft recommendations

We proposed a pattern of 24 single-member wards, nine two-member wards and one three-member ward based on a council size of 45. The proposals were broadly based on Northampton Borough Council's Stage One proposals with some modification. The draft recommendations would provide good levels of electoral equality.

Submissions received

During Stage Three, we received 47 submissions. In particular we received comments in relation to the proposed Briar Hill and Delapre wards. Elsewhere in the borough, the draft recommendations were broadly well-received. All submissions can be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

Northampton Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for December 2013, a period five years on from the December 2008 electoral roll which is the basis for this review. These forecasts projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% over this period. Although we had some concern that this level of growth appeared somewhat high, the Council provided a robust methodology to support this increase. We were therefore content to accept the Council's electorate forecasts as the basis of our draft recommendations.

Following recent changes in legislation, we also need to have regard to a five-year forecast from the date of the publication of our final recommendations. We therefore requested that the Council provide a forecast for 2015. Having noted that the projected electorate forecasts would not alter the initial forecasts on which the draft recommendations were based, we remain satisfied that they provide the best estimate that can be made at this time.

Council size

The Boundary Committee proposed a council size of 45 elected members. During Stage Three, four respondents including the Council and the Independent Group commented on the proposed council size of 45. The Council supported the proposed council size. The Independent Group and two local residents also supported the proposed council size of 45. We have therefore confirmed the draft recommendations for a council size of 45 as final.

General analysis

Having considered the submissions received during Stage Three, we propose a number of minor modifications to our draft recommendations to better reflect communication links and shared community identities. We have also moved away from the draft recommendations in the Briar Hill and Delapre area. A number of respondents stated that the draft recommendations would not provide a direct access route for residents in the Buckingham Fields area into the proposed Briar Hill ward. Consequently, we propose a three-member Delapre & Briar Hill ward which addresses the issues raised by some local residents. We also propose three ward name changes as part of our final recommendations.

We consider our proposals will provide good electoral equality while providing an accurate reflection of community identities and interests.

What happens next?

We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for Northampton Borough Council. A draft Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements for the Council to be implemented at the next elections for Northampton Borough Council, in 2011.

We are grateful to all those organisations and individuals who have contributed to the review through expressing their views and advice. The full report is available to download at www.lgbce.org.uk.

1 Introduction

1 The Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee for England to conduct a review of the electoral arrangements for Northampton Borough Council on 11 March 2009. The review commenced on 27 October 2009. The Boundary Committee wrote to Northampton Borough Council as well as other interested parties, inviting the submission of proposals on the council size and warding arrangements for the Council.

2 On 1 April 2010, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee. It therefore falls to us to complete the work of the Boundary Committee.

3 The submissions received during Stage One of this review informed our *Draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Northampton Borough Council*, which were published on 25 May 2010. We then undertook a further period of consultation which ended on 19 July 2010. We have now reconsidered the draft recommendations in the light of the further evidence received.

What is an electoral review?

4 The main aim of an electoral review is to try to ensure ‘electoral equality’, which means that all councillors in a single authority represent approximately the same number of electors. Our objective is to make recommendations that will improve electoral equality, while also trying to reflect communities in the area and provide for effective and convenient local government.

5 Our three main considerations – equalising the number of electors each councillor represents; reflecting community identity; and providing for effective and convenient local government – are set out in legislation¹ and our task is to strike the best balance between them when making our recommendations.

6 Our powers, as well as the guidance we have provided for electoral reviews and further information on the review process, can be found on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Why are we conducting a review in Northampton?

7 In March 2009, the Electoral Commission directed the review because, based on the December 2008 electorate figures, 35% of wards in the borough had variances of over 10% from the average. Most notably, the existing Nene Valley ward had 38% more electors per councillor than the borough average.

How will the recommendations affect you?

8 Our recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the council. They will also determine which ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward and, in some instances, which parish council wards you vote in. Your ward name

¹ Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

may change, as may the names of parish or town council wards in the area. If you live in a parish, the name or boundaries of that parish will not change.

What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

9 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Members of the Commission are:

Max Caller CBE (Chair)
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL (Deputy Chair)
Jane Earl
Joan Jones CBE
Professor Colin Mellors

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill
Director of Reviews: Archie Gall

2 Analysis and final recommendations

10 We have now finalised our recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Northampton Borough Council.

11 As described earlier, our prime aim when recommending new electoral arrangements for Northampton is to achieve a level of electoral fairness – that is, each elector’s vote being worth the same as another’s. In doing so we must have regard to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009,² with the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government
- provide for equality of representation
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities, in particular:
 - the desirability of arriving at boundaries that are easily identifiable
 - the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties

12 Legislation also states that our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on the existing number of electors in an area, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of electors likely to take place over a five-year period. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for the wards we put forward at the end of the review.

13 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral fairness is unlikely to be attainable and there must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach is to keep variances in the number of electors each councillor represents to a minimum. We therefore recommend strongly that, in formulating proposals for us to consider, local authorities and other interested parties should also try to keep variances to a minimum, making adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. As mentioned above, we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral fairness over a five-year period.

14 These recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of Northampton Borough Council or the external boundaries or names of parish councils, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that the recommendations will have an adverse effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. The proposals do not take account of parliamentary constituency boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Submissions received

15 Prior to the initial stage of the review, members and officers of the Boundary Committee visited Northampton Borough Council and met with members, officers and parish councils. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. Seven submissions were received during Stage One and 47 submissions were received during Stage Three. All submissions may be inspected at both our offices and those of the Council. All representations received can also be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

² Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

16 We take the evidence received during consultation very seriously and the submissions received were carefully considered before we formulated our final recommendations. Officers from the Commission have also been assisted by officers at Northampton Borough Council who have provided relevant information throughout the review. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance.

Electorate figures

17 As part of this review, Northampton Borough Council ('the Council') submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2013, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% over the five-year period from 2008–13.

18 During Stage One, the Independent Group on Northampton Borough Council ('the Independent Group') expressed concern that these figures may have underestimated the likely growth for the borough and asserted that a larger increase may have resulted had the projections been 'in line with regional growth plans rather than the Council's own estimate'. However, the Independent Group did not provide further evidence to support their views.

19 We had some concerns about whether a rate of 7% growth would be realised. However, the Council provided a robust methodology to support this increase, citing planning forecasts, factoring in the expected level of void properties and having regard to inward and outward migration levels for the borough.

20 Noting the Council's supporting methodology, and the lack of evidence to contradict the electorate forecasts, we were content to accept the Council's forecasts as the basis of our draft recommendations.

21 Following recent changes in legislation, we are required to have regard to a five-year forecast from the date of the publication of our final recommendations. We therefore requested that the Council provide a further electorate forecast for 2015.

22 In response the Council considered that there would be little or no change in the electorate between 2013 and 2015, particularly given the changed economic outlook over the last two years. The Council stated that the development sites it identified in 2008 are still the ones that it expects to commence first, but over a longer period. It concluded that the best approach with regards to an extension of the electorate forecast was to re-schedule the projected 2013 figures as the new 2015 forecast.

23 Having considered the evidence provided by the Council, we are content that their approach to the revised 2015 electorate forecast is a reasonable one and are content to use these figures as the basis of our final recommendations.

Council size

24 Northampton Borough Council currently has 47 councillors. During Stage One, the Boundary Committee received three comments in relation to council size. However, of these respondents, only the Council submitted a specific proposal.

25 The Council took an evidence-based approach in its consideration of council size and proposed a council size of 45, a reduction of two from the current number.

26 The Council's proposal outlined a Leader and Cabinet political management structure with a cabinet of seven members which meets every three weeks. In supporting its proposal for a council size of 45 members, the Council set out an allocation of members to committees under its political management structure and set out the frequency of meetings. In addition, the Council considered member commitments to outside bodies, as nominated by the Council.

27 The Independent Group accepted the Council's proposal for a council size of 45 'in principle' but made additional comments on the Council's assertions in formulating its proposed council size. A local resident also made non-specific comments in relation to this matter.

28 The Boundary Committee considered the Council's proposals provided a comprehensive rationale for a council size of 45. The Council detailed its governance structure in addition to providing commentary on the roles, responsibilities and workload of members within the context of its committee structure. Consequently, the Boundary Committee adopted the proposed council size of 45 members as the basis of consultation on overall warding arrangements for the borough.

29 During Stage Three, four respondents commented on the issue of council size. The Council, the Independent Group and two local residents supported the proposed council size of 45.

30 Based on the evidence received during Stage One and the representations received during Stage Three we have decided to confirm a council size of 45 elected members for Northampton Borough Council as part of our final recommendations. We are of the view that a council size of 45 members would provide for effective and convenient local government in the context of the Council's internal political management structure and will effectively facilitate the representational role of councillors.

Electoral fairness

31 As discussed in the introduction to this report, the prime aim of an electoral review is to achieve electoral fairness within a local authority.

32 Electoral fairness, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. It is expected that our recommendations should provide for electoral fairness whilst ensuring that we reflect communities in the area, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

33 In seeking to achieve electoral fairness, we work out the average number of electors per councillor. The average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough (151,504 in December 2008 and 162,061 by December 2015) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 45 under our final recommendations. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 3,367 in 2008 and 3,601 by 2015.

34 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor varies by fewer than 10% from the average in all but one of the 33 wards by 2015. We are therefore satisfied that we have achieved reasonably good levels of electoral fairness under our final recommendations for Northampton Borough Council.

Draft recommendations

35 During Stage One, seven submissions were received, including borough-wide schemes from Northampton Borough Council and the Independent Group. Northamptonshire County Councillor Winston Strachan (St Crispin) and a local resident endorsed the Independent Group's proposals. Both borough-wide schemes were based on a council size of 45.

36 The Council's proposals were based on a pattern of single and multi-member wards and provided evidence of community identity. Its scheme had also been consulted on locally prior to its submission. The Council's proposals provided good electoral equality with only one ward having an electoral variance of greater than 10% by 2015.

37 The Independent Group proposed a uniform pattern of single-member wards which it asserted reflected 'identifiable communities'. However, it did not provide evidence of community identity to support this contention. While the Independent Group's proposals would provide reasonable electoral equality, a notable exception to this was its proposed Nene Valley ward. This ward, based on the information provided in the submission, would have a variance of 36% by 2015.

38 Overall, we considered the Council's scheme provided clear ward boundaries and a reasonable reflection of communities in the borough. We therefore broadly based our proposals on the Council's scheme. However, we proposed a number of modifications to provide clearer ward boundaries and better reflect communication links.

39 The draft recommendations would result in 24 single-member wards, nine two-member wards and one three-member ward.

General analysis

40 During Stage Three, we received borough-wide comments from the Council and the Independent Group. The Council broadly supported the draft.

41 The Independent Group reiterated its support for a uniform pattern of single-member wards for the borough. Where multi-member wards had been proposed as part of the draft recommendations, the Independent Group proposed they be split to achieve a uniform pattern of single-member wards. However, the Independent Group did not provide sufficient evidence to support its proposals which, if adopted, would represent a significant departure from the draft recommendations. We were therefore not persuaded to adopt its proposals as part of the final recommendations.

42 The Buckingham Fields Community Action Group and a local resident made general comments and, broadly speaking, opposed the draft recommendations.

43 Overall, the draft recommendations were broadly well-received. However, we received some opposition to the draft recommendations, most notably in relation to the proposed wards of Briar Hill and Delapre. Given the evidence received and our observations after having toured the area during Stage Three, we have decided to move away from the draft recommendations for the Briar Hill and Delapre area.

44 We also received several comments in opposition to the proposed Central ward. Broadly speaking, opposition was based on the allocation of three members for this ward. Respondents, largely echoing the Independent Group's comments, proposed a pattern of single-member wards. However, in the absence of evidence to support an alternative warding pattern in this area, and the consequential effect it would have on adjoining wards, we have decided against adopting a modification to the proposed Central ward as part of our final recommendations.

45 The Council proposed a number of minor modifications during Stage Three. Typically, these proposals built on the draft recommendations, seeking clearer boundaries and/or providing a better reflection of access routes and shared community identities. We have adopted a number of the Council's proposed modifications as part of the final recommendations. We have not, however, adopted its alternative proposals for St David's and Sunnyside wards which, in our view, would not improve the warding pattern in these areas.

46 In the remainder of Northampton, we have confirmed most of the draft recommendations as final with the exception of a modification in the St James area and a number of ward name changes. These modifications are based on comments and evidence received during Stage Three. We have also noted the responses to the consultation on the Council's proposals.

47 Our final recommendations are for a pattern of 23 single-member wards, eight two-member wards and two three-member wards. We consider our proposals provide for good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests.

48 A summary of our proposed electoral arrangements is set out in Table C1 (on pages 31– 33) and Map 1.

Electoral arrangements

49 This section of the report details the submissions we received, our consideration of them, and our final recommendations for each area of Northampton. The following areas are considered in turn:

- North west Northampton (pages 12–15)
- North east Northampton (pages 15–17)
- South Northampton (pages 18–20)

50 Details of the final recommendations are set out in Table C1 on pages 31-33, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

North west Northampton

51 North west Northampton broadly comprises the area of the borough to the north west of the River Nene. The area is largely urban with Duston being the only parish in the area.

52 During Stage One, in addition to the borough-wide proposals discussed in paragraph 35, one specific submission was received in relation to this area. This submission can be viewed on our website. The draft recommendations were based on the Council's proposals in north west Northampton with the exception of a number of minor modifications to provide clearer boundaries and access routes.

Duston and St James

53 In our draft recommendations for Duston town and St James, we adopted the Council's proposals with a minor modification. During Stage Three, we received one submission in relation to this area.

54 The St James Residents' Association ('the Residents' Association') proposed a minor modification to include properties to the south east of the proposed Old Duston ward in the proposed St James ward.

55 The Residents' Association broadly endorsed the proposed St James ward. However, it argued that the properties on Peverel's Way, Abbots Way and part of Weedon Road looked towards St James ward rather than Old Duston ward.

56 The Residents' Association stated this area would be separated from the proposed Old Duston ward by the 'natural boundary of the extremely busy Weedon Road' and stated the 'community centre, Post Office, banks, shops [and] hairdressers' within the proposed St James ward are only half a mile away and used by residents in this area. The Residents' Association also provided a petition of approximately 95 signatures from the affected residents, proposing that the area be included in the proposed St James ward.

57 We considered the Residents' Association had provided good evidence of community identity to support its proposed modification to the draft recommendations. Having considered the proposed boundary, we consider the relevant properties do indeed look toward the proposed St James ward for community facilities and share a sense of identity with this area. We therefore propose including this area within the proposed St James ward as part of our final recommendations.

58 The inclusion of these properties would reflect the shared community identity within the proposed St James ward as evidenced by the Residents' Association during Stage Three. Furthermore, following Weedon Road in its entirety would provide a clearer boundary between the proposed Old Duston and St James wards. Under our final recommendations, the proposed St James and Old Duston wards would have 1% fewer and 5% fewer electors per councillor respectively, than the borough average by 2015.

59 The Residents' Association made a further comment in relation to this area. They argued that the inclusion of The Avenue within the proposed Spencer ward 'does not follow natural boundaries or communities', and suggested this area instead be included

within the proposed St James ward. However, the Residents' Association did not provide evidence of community identities to support its proposal. Furthermore, we consider the draft recommendations provide clear ward boundaries by following the rear of properties on The Avenue before rejoining Harlestone Road. We therefore decided against adopting the Residents' Association's proposed modification to the proposed St James ward.

Northampton town centre

60 In our draft recommendations for Northampton town centre, we adopted the Council's proposals without modification.

61 During Stage Three, we received seven specific submissions in relation to this area. Broadly speaking, respondents opposed the proposed three-member Central ward. We note that several respondents to the Council's own consultation during Stage Three also opposed the draft recommendations for this ward.

62 Respondents argued that the allocation of three members for this ward, as well as its geographic size and the number of electors it would contain, would not facilitate effective and convenient local government. This echoed the sentiments of the Independent Group, with a number of respondents stating their support for the Independent Group's proposals for three single-member wards in this area.

63 We considered the alternative warding pattern for three-single member wards as proposed by the Independent Group and supported by several respondents during Stage Three. However, respondents did not provide evidence of community identity to support an alternative warding pattern of three single-member wards. Most notably, the Independent Group, as the main proponent of this alternative warding pattern, asserted its proposal would 'better reflect identifiable communities' but did not provide evidence to support this statement.

64 We also noted that the Independent Group's proposal in this area would have a consequential effect on adjacent wards for which some support has been received at Stage Three. Indeed, the Independent Group acknowledged that its proposed warding pattern would require 'minor changes to the outer boundary [of the proposed Central ward] to return three single-member seats'.

65 Given the absence of evidence to support a significant departure from the draft recommendations, and the effect on neighbouring wards of adopting the Independent Group's proposals, we have decided not to adopt this alternative warding pattern as part of our final recommendations.

66 The proposed Central ward has clear boundaries, using the railway, the River Nene and the perimeter of the Racecourse Recreation Ground. Residents of the proposed ward would also look to the town centre as a natural community focus. The proposed Central ward would have reasonable electoral equality with 9% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2015.

67 During Stage Three, the Independent Group and four further respondents also opposed the ward name of Central and instead proposed the existing ward name of 'Castle' be retained. In support of this, respondents noted that the area covered by the ward included the former site of Northampton Castle and a local resident stated that the

ward name 'is significant to the heritage of Northampton and its residents'. This was also echoed in responses to the Council's consultation. Conversely, one respondent supported the ward name of Central.

68 Noting the strength of support for the ward name of Castle, we have decided to adopt it as part of our final recommendations.

Kingsthorpe area

69 In our draft recommendations for the Kingsthorpe area, we adopted the Council's proposals, albeit with a number of minor modifications to provide clearer ward boundaries and reflect access routes.

70 During Stage Three, we did not receive any specific comments in relation to the Kingsthorpe area. However, as noted in paragraph 45, the Council proposed a number of minor modifications in this area.

71 The Council broadly supported the draft recommendations for Sunnyside and St David's wards subject to a minor modification to the ward boundary. The draft recommendations proposed the boundary between these wards partly follow the rear of properties on the western side of Eastern Avenue North, thus ensuring the properties on Eastern Avenue North were wholly located within the proposed St David's ward. This was a slight modification of the Council's proposal for this area where the boundary instead followed the middle of Eastern Avenue North.

72 The Council asserted that residents on Boughton Green Road, north of Eastern Avenue North, 'associate more with Sunnyside than St David's'. The Council therefore proposed this area of the boundary between the proposed Sunnyside and St David's wards follow the rear of properties to the east of Eastern Avenue North. This proposal would transfer properties in this section of the road and the four properties to its north on Boughton Green Road into the proposed Sunnyside ward. This would result in the proposed Sunnyside and St David's wards having 3% more and 11% fewer electors per councillor respectively, than the borough average by 2015.

73 We carefully considered the Council's proposed modification in this area. On balance, we consider the draft recommendations for the proposed Sunnyside and St David's wards provide a clearer boundary. Furthermore, the draft recommendations would provide better electoral equality than the variances resulting from the Council's proposed modification. We also note that the draft recommendations ensures Eastern Avenue North is wholly within the proposed St David's ward rather than split between wards as in the Council's proposal.

74 Consequently, we do not consider the Council's proposed modification to Sunnyside and St David's wards would provide a better reflection of the statutory criteria than the draft recommendations. We have therefore decided not to adopt this proposal as part of the final recommendations.

75 The Council also proposed a modification to the boundary between the proposed Trinity and Semilong wards. In our draft recommendations we proposed the boundary between these wards partly follow Cranbrooke Road and the rear of properties on Bunting Road. The Council's modification would ensure properties in the same section of

Balfour Road were wholly within the proposed Semilong ward.

76 The Council proposed that including the properties on Bunting Road, adjacent to this section of the boundary, within the proposed Semilong ward would better reflect community identity. During Stage Three, we toured this area and noted these properties do indeed appear to look toward the proposed Semilong ward and do not appear to associate with properties to the east on Balfour Road. Furthermore, this change would provide a clear ward boundary.

77 Given the small number of electors in this section of Bunting Road, adopting this minor modification would not have any effect on electoral equality. We have therefore decided to adopt this modification as part of our final recommendations, running the revised boundary via the middle of Bunting Road.

78 We received no further comments on the draft recommendations for north west Northampton during Stage Three. We have therefore decided to confirm the remainder of the draft recommendations for this area as final.

79 Table C1 (on pages 31-33) provides details of the electoral variances of the final recommendations for wards in north west Northampton. The final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

North east Northampton

80 North east Northampton broadly comprises the area of the borough north east of the River Nene. The area is largely urban with Billing as the sole parish in the area.

81 During Stage One, we did not receive any specific submissions in relation to this area other than the borough-wide schemes discussed in paragraph 35.

82 We largely based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals, albeit with a number of minor modifications to provide clearer ward boundaries and better reflect access routes.

Rectory Farm

83 In our draft recommendations for the Rectory Farm area, we proposed a modification to the Council's proposals. This amendment was made to facilitate the transfer of the Maidencastle area in the south of the Council's proposed Talavera ward to Rectory Farm ward in order to better reflect communication links. Consequently, the draft recommendations proposed the boundary between these wards partly run via Greatmeadow.

84 During Stage Three, the Council broadly supported the draft recommendations for Rectory Farm and Talavera wards. However, it proposed a minor modification, so that the boundary between the proposed wards would follow Great Billing Way and Blackthorn Road, thereby including the whole of the Greatmeadow area within the proposed Talavera ward.

85 During Stage Three, we toured this area and noted that while vehicular access within Greatmeadow is reasonable, the Council's proposal would also reflect pedestrian

access routes within Greatmeadow via several footpaths. The boundary of Great Billing Way and Blackthorn Road would also provide a strong and clear ward boundary.

86 We consider the Council's proposed modification to provide a clearer ward boundary. The modification would also improve the electoral equality in this area with the proposed Talavera and Rectory Farm wards both having 5% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2015. Consequently, we have decided to adopt this modification as part of our final recommendations.

Abington area

87 In our draft recommendations for the Abington area we adopted the Council's proposals, with a minor modification to its proposed Phippsville and Eastfield wards.

88 During Stage Three, the Council broadly supported the draft recommendations for the Abington area. However, it proposed a modification to the boundary between the proposed Abington and Phippsville wards. A local resident and the Thrift Streets & Vernon Terrace Residents Association ('the Residents Association') also submitted comments in relation to the Abington area.

89 The local resident and the Residents' Association opposed the draft recommendations and instead broadly supported the Independent Group's proposals for two single-member wards, albeit with a minor modification. In support of two single-member wards, the respondents asserted distinct community identities within the proposed Abington ward. However, neither respondent provided evidence to support their preferred warding pattern.

90 The Council proposed that the boundary between the proposed Abington and Phippsville wards follow the rear of properties on the north of Abington Avenue, thereby including the properties in this section of Abington Avenue within the proposed Abington ward. Under the draft recommendations, this section of the boundary would run via the rear of properties on the south of Abington Avenue, thus including these properties in Phippsville ward.

91 During Stage Three, we toured this area and noted that the Council's proposed boundary is strong and identifiable and may better reflect community identities than the draft recommendations. The proposed modification would also provide a clearer boundary by including a further section of Abington Avenue within Abington ward itself. Adopting this modification would result in the proposed Abington and Phippsville wards having 7% fewer and 4% fewer electors per councillor respectively, than the borough average by 2015.

92 Given our observations of this area during Stage Three and the improved electoral equality that would result under the Council's proposal, we have decided to adopt this modification as part of our final recommendations.

93 Elsewhere in the Abington area, the Council suggested that our proposed Weston Vale ward be renamed 'Park'. The Council stated the name Weston Vale 'may be confusing to residents because it combines the names of two distinct communities (Weston Favell and Weston Vale)'. The Council also considered the name potentially confusing due to its similarity with the proposed Westone ward. We also note the

Council's concerns were reflected in submissions to its own consultation during Stage Three.

94 Given the ward name of Park is locally generated and reflects the location of Abington Park within the proposed ward, we have decided to adopt this ward name as part of our final recommendations.

Boothville area

95 In our draft recommendations for the Boothville area, we adopted the Council's proposals subject two minor modifications to provide clearer boundaries and access routes.

96 During Stage Three, the Council broadly supported the draft recommendations in the Boothville area with the exception of the inclusion of Kendal Close within the proposed Westone ward. Under the Council's Stage One scheme, Kendal Close would be wholly within the proposed Boothville ward.

97 The Council reiterated its Stage One submission and disagreed with our view that there was poor access between Kendal Close and the majority of the proposed Boothville ward. It stated that 'access to Kendal close can only be gained from Booth Lane North, which lies to the north of Northampton College [and]... acts as a physical barrier between the distinct communities of Boothville and Westone. The residents who live on Kendal Close do not have links to those communities [to its south]'.

98 Having toured the area, we noted that Northampton College does indeed form a barrier between Kendal Close and the properties to its south. Residents on Kendal Close have reasonable access to the north via the section of Kendal Close parallel with the playing field and Booth Lane North. Consequently, we have decided to move away from the draft recommendations in this area and include Kendal Close within the proposed Boothville ward. This would result in the proposed wards of Boothville and Westone having electoral variances of 3% and 1% fewer electors per councillor respectively, than the borough average by 2015

99 Elsewhere in north east Northampton, the Council proposed that our Standens Barn ward be renamed 'Riverside'. This was supported in the Council's own consultation during Stage Three. We note that this ward includes the River Nene and the Northampton Boat Club, and that a business park within the ward uses the name Riverside. Given the above, we have decided to adopt the Council's ward name change as part of our final recommendations.

100 We received no further comments on the draft recommendations for north east Northampton during Stage Three. We have therefore decided to confirm the remainder of our draft recommendations in this area as final.

101 Table C1 (on pages 31-33) provides details of the electoral variances of the final recommendations for wards in north west Northampton. The final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 3 accompanying this report.

South Northampton

102 South Northampton broadly comprises the area south of the River Nene. In contrast to the north of the borough, the area has a rural/urban mix and contains the parishes of Collingtree, Great Houghton, Hardingstone, Upton and Wootton.

103 During Stage One, we did not receive any specific submissions in relation to this area other than the borough-wide schemes discussed in paragraph 35.

104 We largely based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals. With the exception of its proposed Nene Valley ward, which would have 11% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2015, the Council's proposals would provide good electoral equality. However, given the geographic constraints in this area of the borough, we considered that the Council's proposals provided the best possible warding pattern.

105 The draft recommendations in south Northampton were based on the Council's proposals, subject of a number of minor modifications to provide clearer boundaries and reflect transport links.

Briar Hill and Delapre

106 In our draft recommendations for Briar Hill and Delapre we adopted the Council's proposals without modification.

107 During Stage Three, we received 29 submissions in relation to this area, largely from local residents, wholly opposing the draft recommendations. The Buckingham Fields Community Action Group also made specific representations opposing the draft recommendations in this area. Respondents specifically opposed the inclusion of the area known locally as Buckingham Fields (which centres on Lancaster Way) within the proposed Briar Hill ward and broadly proposed the area be located in Delapre ward, as under the existing arrangements.

108 Respondents unanimously argued that Buckingham Fields looks towards the adjacent Delapre area and refuted any sense of commonality with residents of Briar Hill. Several respondents cited facilities and amenities in Delapre used by Buckingham Fields residents. A local resident stated 'we use all the facilities in Delapre ward including the Post Office, library, doctors' surgery and recreational centre', sentiments which were echoed by several other respondents during Stage Three.

109 Several respondents also mentioned socio-economic factors to support their view that the area should not be warded with Briar Hill. However, in the context of the statutory criteria, this is not a factor we can reasonably take into account. A number of submissions argued that the proposed warding pattern would not reflect clear access and transportation links for residents of Buckingham Fields, noting the limited pedestrian access between Buckingham Fields and the proposed Briar Hill ward.

110 We noted the comments and strength of local opinion in relation to the draft recommendations in this area. We were particularly concerned by the assertions of local residents with regard to restricted access routes between Buckingham Fields and the remainder of our proposed Briar Hill ward. This had not previously been drawn to our

attention.

111 During Stage Three we toured this area and noted that properties in Buckingham Fields can only access the Briar Hill area via the roundabout to its north east and subsequently the dual carriageway on Towcester Road. Pedestrian access is provided via a narrow footpath parallel with the dual carriageway. However, a local resident stated 'much of this path is behind high trees and bushes which hide it from public view' adding, 'logistically, we are not in a good position to gain access to Briar Hill'. We also noted that while local buses are reasonably frequent, public transport between the two areas is also via Towcester Road which follows the boundary between the proposed Briar Hill and Delapre wards.

112 Given our observations, we concurred with respondents that access between the two areas is limited. Taken together with the evidence of community linkages between residents of Buckingham Fields and Delapre, we did not consider the draft recommendations for this area would provide a good reflection of the statutory criteria. We therefore considered an alternative warding pattern.

113 We were faced with a number of constraints in seeking an alternative warding pattern in this area. Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Briar Hill ward would have 10% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2015. A transfer of the Buckingham Fields area to the proposed Delapre ward would therefore require a consequential modification to provide good electoral equality. The ward is also bounded by the River Nene, the railway and the A45, thus presenting further constraints given such strong and clear barriers between the adjacent areas.

114 Given the number of electors in the Buckingham Fields area, transferring it to the proposed Delapre ward would result in a significant electoral imbalance in the proposed Briar Hill ward. However, we noted that the area to the north of Buckingham Fields bounded by Towcester Road, the allotment gardens, Rothersthorpe Road and the railway line, would provide a similar number of electors to transfer into the proposed Briar Hill ward. We therefore explored transferring this area to the proposed Briar Hill ward to facilitate a transfer of Buckingham Fields to Delapre ward.

115 This warding pattern would balance the electorate, with Delapre and Briar Hill wards having electoral variances of 3% more and 10% fewer electors per councillor respectively, than the borough average by 2015. The area transferred to Briar Hill ward would also have good access to the Briar Hill area via Rothersthorpe Road. However, such a warding pattern would present a significant shift from the draft recommendations in this area and was not proposed at any point during the review.

116 The Buckingham Fields Community Action Group proposed alternative warding options to the south affecting the Camp Hill area within our proposed West Hunsbury ward. It argued that Briar Hill has 'obvious links to Camp Hill'. However, it did not provide evidence of community identity to support this contention. We nonetheless explored an alternative warding pattern to the south of Briar Hill.

117 In exploring warding options to the south of Briar Hill we considered a two-member ward comprising the proposed Briar Hill and West Hunsbury wards, minus Buckingham Fields, which would be transferred to the proposed Delapre ward. The two areas would

share good communication links via Hunsbury Hill Road. However, it would have a poor electoral variance (15% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2015), while the resultant variance of the modified Delapre ward would be 12% by 2015. In the absence of strong and persuasive evidence of community identity to support such variances, we have decided against this warding pattern.

118 We also considered a three-member ward comprising the whole of the proposed Delapre and Briar Hill wards. This was also proposed as a possible yet 'less desirable' option by the Buckingham Fields Community Action Group. This ward would have 1% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2015 and would address the issues raised with us at Stage Three. It would also reflect the shared commonality between Buckingham Fields and the wider Delapre area to its east. While respondents in Delapre argued they did not share community identities with the Briar Hill area, this option would avoid dividing communities in this part of the borough.

119 Having considered a number of alternative warding patterns, on balance, we consider a three-member ward would provide the best reflection of the statutory criteria in this area. The three-member ward would have good electoral equality and reflect clear communication links between communities in this area. While this would be a geographically relatively large ward, much of its eastern area is unpopulated containing the Delapre Golf Complex, a lake and an industrial estate.

120 Consequently, we have decided to adopt a three-member ward, comprising the proposed Delapre and Briar Hill wards, as part of our final recommendations. In order to reflect the constituent communities the ward will comprise, we propose the ward be named 'Delapre & Briar Hill'.

121 Elsewhere in south Northampton, we received four specific submissions in relation to the Collingtree and Wootton area. The submissions related to the proposed parish electoral arrangements which are referred to on pages 20-21.

122 We received no further comments on the draft recommendations for south Northampton during Stage Three. We have therefore decided to confirm the remainder of the draft recommendations for this area as final.

123 Table C1 (on pages 31-33) provides details of the electoral variances of the final recommendations for wards in south Northampton. The final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

124 Table 1 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, based on 2008 and 2015 electorate figures.

Table 1: Summary of electoral arrangements

	Final recommendations	
	2008	2015
Number of councillors	45	45
Number of electoral wards	33	33
Average number of electors per councillor	3,367	3,601
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	9	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	0

Final recommendation

Northampton Borough Council should comprise 45 councillors serving 33 wards, as detailed and named in Table C1 and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

125 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

126 During Stage Three, some respondents proposed changes to parish electoral arrangements which were not as a consequence of our proposed borough warding arrangements. Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make such changes as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Northampton Borough Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

127 To meet our obligations under the 2009 Act, we propose consequential parish warding arrangements for the parishes of Collingtree and Duston.

128 The parish of Collingtree is currently unwarded, returning seven members.

129 As a result of our proposed borough ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Collingtree parish.

Final recommendation

Collingtree Parish Council should return seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Collingtree North (returning three members) and Collingtree South (returning four members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 4.

130 The parish of Duston is currently divided into two parish wards: Old Duston (returning six members) and New Duston (returning six members).

131 As a result of our proposed borough ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Duston parish.

Final recommendation

Duston Parish Council should return 12 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Old Duston (returning six members) and New Duston (returning six members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 2.

3 What happens next?

132 We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for Northampton Borough Council. A draft Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements for the Council to be implemented at the next elections for Northampton Borough Council, in 2011.

4 Mapping

Final recommendations for Northampton Borough Council

133 The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Northampton Borough Council:

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Northampton Borough Council.
- **Sheet 2, Map 2** illustrates the proposed wards in north west Northampton.
- **Sheet 3, Map 3** illustrates the proposed wards in north east Northampton.
- **Sheet 4, Map 4** illustrates the proposed wards in south Northampton.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England was a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Boundary Committee's functions were assumed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in April 2010
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever division they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. It regulates party and election finance and sets standards for well-run elections

Electoral fairness	When one elector's vote is worth the same as another's
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. For the purposes of this report, we refer specifically to the electorate for local government elections
Local Government Boundary Commission for England (or LGBCE)	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee for England in April 2010
Multi-member ward or division	A ward or division represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and can be found at www.national-parks.gov.uk
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors

Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents
Parish council	A body elected by electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town Council'
Parish (or Town) Council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by the Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England

Political management arrangements	The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enabled local authorities in England to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from two broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet or a cabinet with a leader
Town Council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at www.nalc.gov.uk
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (November 2000) (http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/consult/code/_consultation.pdf) requires all government departments and agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table B1: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s compliance with Code criteria

Criteria	Compliance/departure
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	We comply with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	We comply with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	We comply with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	We comply with this requirement
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation	We consult at the start of the review and on our draft recommendations. Our consultation stages are a minimum total of 16 weeks.
Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.	We comply with this requirement.
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.	We comply with this requirement.

Appendix C

Table C1: Final recommendations for Northampton Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2015)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Abington	2	6,657	3,329	-1%	6,693	3,347	-7%
2	Billing	2	6,309	3,155	-6%	6,802	3,401	-6%
3	Boothville	1	3,420	3,420	2%	3,478	3,478	-3%
4	Brookside	1	3,630	3,630	8%	3,925	3,925	9%
5	Castle	3	8,289	2,763	-18%	9,793	3,264	-9%
6	Delapre & Briar Hill	3	9,921	3,307	-2%	10,704	3,568	-1%
7	East Hunsbury	2	7,793	3,897	16%	7,802	3,901	8%
8	Eastfield	1	3,719	3,719	10%	3,719	3,719	3%
9	Headlands	1	3,752	3,752	11%	3,752	3,752	4%
10	Kings Heath	1	3,277	3,277	-3%	3,658	3,658	2%
11	Kingsley	1	3,958	3,958	18%	3,972	3,972	10%
12	Kingsthorpe	1	3,623	3,623	8%	3,629	3,629	1%
13	Nene Valley	2	7,722	3,861	15%	7,964	3,982	11%

Table C1 (cont.): Final recommendations for Northampton Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2015)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
14	New Duston	2	7,888	3,944	17%	7,928	3,964	10%
15	Obelisk	1	3,519	3,519	5%	3,519	3,519	-2%
16	Old Duston	2	5,972	2,986	-11%	6,807	3,404	-5%
17	Park	1	3,399	3,399	1%	3,479	3,479	-3%
18	Parklands	1	3,489	3,489	4%	3,700	3,700	3%
19	Phippsville	1	3,445	3,445	2%	3,445	3,445	-4%
20	Rectory Farm	1	3,507	3,507	4%	3,796	3,796	5%
21	Riverside	1	3,318	3,318	-1%	3,339	3,339	-7%
22	Rushmills	1	3,317	3,317	-1%	3,353	3,353	-7%
23	Semilong	1	3,528	3,528	5%	3,596	3,596	0%
24	Spencer	1	3,627	3,627	8%	3,681	3,681	2%
25	Spring Park	1	3,699	3,699	10%	3,730	3,730	4%
26	St David's	1	3,157	3,157	-6%	3,386	3,386	-6%
27	St James	1	3,435	3,435	2%	3,563	3,563	-1%

Table C1 (cont.): Final recommendations for Northampton Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2015)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
28	Sunnyside	1	3,453	3,453	3%	3,549	3,549	-1%
29	Talavera	2	7,463	3,732	11%	7,558	3,779	5%
30	Trinity	1	3,273	3,273	-3%	3,342	3,342	-7%
31	Upton	2	3,273	1,637	-51%	7,386	3,693	3%
32	West Hunsbury	1	3,445	3,445	2%	3,464	3,464	-4%
33	Westone	1	3,227	3,227	-4%	3,549	3,549	-1%
	Totals	45	151,504	-	-	162,061	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,367	-	-	3,601	-

33

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

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

Appendix D

Additional legislation we have considered

Equal opportunities

In preparing this report we have had regard to 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 the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Broads

We have also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by Section 97, Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

