

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Stafford in Staffordshire

Report to the Secretary of State for the
Environment, Transport and the Regions

October 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

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



Local Government Commission for England

10 October 2000

Dear Secretary of State

On 28 September 1999 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Stafford under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in May 2000 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 120) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Stafford.

We recommend that Stafford Borough Council should be served by 59 councillors representing 26 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to hold elections every four years.

The Local Government Act 2000, contains provisions relating to changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as Orders are made implementing those arrangements we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

I would like to thank members and officers of the Borough Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Grant'.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Stafford on 28 September 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 9 May 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during consultation on our draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to the Secretary of State.**

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 ten wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 120-121) 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 24 of the existing wards should be modified and six wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

These 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 22 of the proposed 26 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward, Seighford, expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2004.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for Stone and Stone Rural parishes.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 20 November 2000:

**The Secretary of State
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Local Government Sponsorship Division
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU**

Figure 1: The Commission's Final 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	Chartley	1	Beaconside ward (part – the Salt & Enson parish); Chartley ward (part – the parishes of Gayton, Stowe-by-Chartley and Weston)	Large map
4	Church Eaton	1	Castle ward (part – Bradley parish); Church Eaton ward	Map 2
5	Common (Stafford town)	2	Common ward (part); Coton ward (part)	Large map
6	Coton (Stafford town)	2	Common ward (part); Coton ward (part)	Large map
7	Eccleshall	3	Eccleshall ward; Woodseaves ward (part – Adbaston parish)	Map 2
8	Forebridge (Stafford town)	2	Common ward (part); Forebridge ward (part); Penside ward (part); Tillington ward (part)	Large map
9	Fulford	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2
10	Gnosall & Woodseaves	3	Gnosall ward (part – Gnosall parish); Woodseaves ward (part – the parishes of Forton, High Offley and Norbury).	Map 2
11	Haywood & Hixon	3	Chartley ward (part – Hixon parish); Haywood ward	Map 2
12	Highfields & Western Downs (Stafford town)	3	Highfields ward; Rowley ward (part)	Large map
13	Holmcroft (Stafford town)	3	Holmcroft ward; Tillington ward (part)	Large map
14	Littleworth (Stafford town)	3	Common ward (part); Coton ward (part); Forebridge ward (part); Littleworth ward	Large map
15	Manor (Stafford town)	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Large map
16	Milford	2	Beaconside ward (part – Hopton & Coton parish); 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	St Michael's (Stone town)	2	St Michael's ward (part)	Large map and Map A3
21	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
22	Stonefield & Christchurch (Stone town)	2	St Michael's ward (part); Stonefield & Christchurch ward	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)	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Large map and 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 final 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 Final 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 Chartley	1	1,515	1,515	-7	1,570	1,570	-2
4 Church Eaton	1	1,680	1,680	3	1,714	1,714	7
5 Common (Stafford town)	2	3,182	1,591	-2	3,166	1,583	-1
6 Coton (Stafford town)	2	3,312	1,656	2	3,214	1,607	0
7 Eccleshall	3	5,148	1,716	6	5,010	1,670	4
8 Forebridge (Stafford town)	2	3,285	1,643	1	3,224	1,612	0
9 Fulford	3	4,731	1,577	-3	4,554	1,518	-6
10 Gnosall & Woodseaves	3	5,105	1,702	5	4,783	1,594	-1
11 Haywood & Hixon	3	4,937	1,646	1	4,740	1,580	-2
12 Highfields & Western Downs (Stafford town)	3	4,964	1,655	2	4,803	1,601	0
13 Holmcroft (Stafford town)	3	5,322	1,774	9	5,035	1,678	4
14 Littleworth (Stafford town)	3	4,576	1,525	-6	4,555	1,518	-5
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 Penside (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 St Michael's (Stone town)	2	3,536	1,768	9	3,529	1,765	10

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 Seighford	2	2,671	1,336	-18	2,875	1,438	-11
22 Stonefield & Christchurch (Stone town)	2	3,486	1,743	7	3,482	1,741	8
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)	3	4,600	1,533	-6	4,535	1,512	-6
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 final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Stafford in Staffordshire. We have now reviewed 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 was 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 intend reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

- the statutory criteria contained 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* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

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 have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999), which 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 to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the borough as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. 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 districts.

9 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 district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one half of the district 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.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/00 PER programme, including the Staffordshire districts, 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 have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Orders under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in the two-tier district areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 This review was in four stages. 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 with constituency interests in the borough 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. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 9 May 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Stafford in Staffordshire*, and ended on 3 July 2000. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 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.

14 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'.

15 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.

16 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.

17 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.

18 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 3: 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 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

19 During Stage One we received 18 representations, including borough-wide schemes from Stafford Borough Council, the Conservative & Independent Group on Stafford Borough Council, Stafford Constituency Conservative Association and a local resident, and representations from the Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association, nine parish councils, a borough councillor and three local residents. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Stafford in Staffordshire*.

20 Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's proposals, which achieved substantial improvements in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of single and multi-member wards across the borough. However, we moved away from the Borough Council's scheme in a number of areas, affecting nine wards, to improve electoral equality in the towns of Stafford and Stone. We proposed that:

- Stafford Borough Council should be served by 59 councillors, compared with the current 60, representing 26 wards, four fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 25 of the existing wards should be modified, while five wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for the parishes of Stone and Stone Rural.

Draft Recommendation

Stafford Borough Council should comprise 59 councillors, serving 26 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

21 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in only three of the 26 wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one, Seighford ward (at 11 per cent), varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2004.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

22 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 28 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Stafford Borough Council and the Commission.

Stafford Borough Council

23 In its Stage Three submission the Borough Council did not propose any change to the draft recommendations for the rural area or the town of Stone. However, it did propose a number of minor modifications to ward boundaries in Stafford town, affecting Beaconside, Coton & Littleworth, Forebridge, Highfields & Western Downs, Holmcroft, Rowley and Tillington wards. In its opinion, the modified wards would better reflect community ties and be based on more identifiable boundaries. The modifications would have little impact on the electoral equality of each ward.

The Conservative and Independent Group

24 In its Stage Three submission the Conservative and Independent Group stated that it “would restate our [Stage One] submission” and proposed that Tillington ward be divided into two single-member wards, Doxey and Tillington, to better reflect local community identities.

Stone Branch Labour Party

25 Stone Branch Labour Party supported the proposal to retain seven borough councillors in Stone. However, it stated that “the recommendation to change the boundary of Walton ward is strongly opposed. The washlands of the River Trent presently act as a natural and recognisable physical boundary to Walton and should be reflected in local government boundaries”. It also proposed that the existing ward names of St Michael’s and Stonefield & Christchurch be retained as “the present names reflect local heritage and identity”.

Parish Councils

26 We received representations from Staffordshire Parish Councils’ Association and six parish and town councils. Staffordshire Parish Councils’ Association proposed that the community of Doxey (part of the proposed Tillington ward) form a single-member ward, to better reflect community identities. Fulford, Gnosall and Haughton parish councils each expressed support for our draft recommendations in their areas.

27 Creswell Parish Council opposed the proposed ward name of Tillington, suggesting that it be renamed Marsh or Marshes as an alternative. Stone Town Council supported the draft recommendation to retain seven borough councillors for the town. However, it opposed the boundaries of the proposed Walton ward and the naming of Stone North and Stone South wards, for reasons of community identity. Stowe-by-Chartley Parish Council opposed the recommendation to include it and Hixon parish in separate borough wards.

Other Representations

28 A further 18 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations. The Altona Close Residents' Group opposed the proposed Stone South ward, on the basis that the western ward boundary (with Walton ward) would be detrimental to community identities and the northern boundary would "be a tiny cul-de-sac in a densely built-up part of the town".

29 Councillor McKeown, member for Chartley ward, opposed the proposed Chartley, Haywood & Hixon, Milford and Milwich wards. He proposed an alternative arrangement for the area, including a redistribution of councillors and reconfiguration of wards.

30 County Councillor Wakefield, member for Stone Urban division, Councillor Mrs Wakefield, member for Walton borough and town council ward and Councillor Holmes, member for Walton town council ward, opposed our recommendation to include part of the existing Walton ward in a new Stone South ward. Each argued that such a proposal would not reflect local community ties or provide identifiable boundaries in the town.

31 Thirteen local residents of Stone made representations at Stage Three. Three residents expressed support for our draft recommendations in this area. The other ten residents opposed our proposal to include part of the existing Walton ward in a new Stone South ward, each stating that such a proposal would be detrimental to local community identities and would not provide strong and identifiable boundaries.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

32 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Harrogate is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests 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”.

33 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 also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

34 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.

35 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, such an objective 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 absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

36 At Stage One 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, however the electorate of Penside ward is forecast to increase by 17 per cent over the five-year period. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

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

Council Size

38 As already explained, the Commission’s starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

39 Before submitting its Stage One scheme the Borough Council undertook wide local consultation on three schemes, based on 49-member, 55-member and 59-member council sizes. It proposed a council size of 59, upon which it commented 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.

40 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 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.

41 We acknowledged 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 were concerned that the proposed council sizes of 57 and 58 had not been consulted on locally, and despite receiving some support, had 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.

42 We noted the Borough Council’s wish that the new warding arrangements should reflect the existing arrangements, and judged that its proposed scheme would provide good electoral equality and reflect community identities. We were 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 were also pleased to note that the scheme had 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 adopted the Borough Council’s proposal for a council size of 59.

43 At Stage Three there was general acceptance of the proposed council of 59 members and no proposals for an alternative council size were received. We therefore confirm as final our draft recommendation for a council size of 59.

Electoral Arrangements

44 In formulating our draft recommendations we 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.

45 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 was 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.

46 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 a scheme which would, in our opinion, reflect community identities, we concluded that our recommendations should be based on the Borough Council's scheme. However, to improve electoral equality further we decided to move away from the Borough Council's proposals in the towns of Stafford and Stone. Where appropriate we made comparisons between the proposed boundaries under each scheme. We were unable to adopt the Conservative groups' or the local resident's schemes in full because they created built-in electoral inequalities. We considered 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.

47 At Stage Three the Borough Council proposed only minor modifications to our proposed ward boundaries of Stafford town to better reflect community identities. A number of other comments were received from local interest groups, particularly relating to our proposals for Stone town. We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three and have proposed amendments to the warding arrangements for the towns of Stafford and Stone, to better reflect community identities. 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, Penside 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

48 Details of our final 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

49 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

50 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).

51 At Stage One, 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).

52 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. 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.

53 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.

54 Having considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One we based 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. However, we proposed modifying the boundary between the proposed Holmcroft and Tillington wards to further improve electoral equality. We proposed 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 considered the proposal for a new Doxey ward, but were 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 across 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).

55 At Stage Three the Borough Council generally supported our recommendations in this area. However, it proposed modifying the boundary between Tillington and Holmcroft wards. It proposed that Pulteney Drive and a number of electors on the western side of Eccleshall Road be included in a modified Tillington ward and that an area to broadly include Crab Lane be included in a modified Holmcroft ward. It argued that these proposals would better reflect community ties in the area and provide more identifiable boundaries. The Conservative and Independent Group and Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association proposed that Doxey, a settlement included in the proposed Tillington ward, form a single-member ward. Both respondents asserted that such a proposal would better reflect the community identities of both Doxey and Tillington. Creswell Parish Council proposed that Tillington ward be renamed Marsh or Marshes.

56 We carefully considered the Borough Council's proposals for Holmcroft and Tillington wards. Members of the team visited the area and were not persuaded that, as asserted by the Borough Council in its submission, the modified boundary would be more identifiable than that included in the draft recommendations. The principal concern of the Commission was that, under the Borough Council's scheme, the electors at the southern end of Eccleshall Road would be included in separate wards and we do not consider such an arrangement to best reflect community identities. We noted the proposals for a Doxey ward. However, as outlined at Stage Two we do not consider such a proposal to facilitate a satisfactory electoral scheme across Stafford town, on the basis that it would provide high levels of electoral inequality. We also noted the proposal to rename Tillington ward and Marsh or Marshes; however, we do not consider the alternatives suggested better reflect community identities.

57 We therefore propose endorsing our draft recommendations for the wards of Common, Holmcroft and Tillington as final, without modification. Under our final recommendations, outlined on the large map at the back this report, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations.

Coton, Forebridge and Littleworth wards

58 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).

59 At Stage One, 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).

60 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.

61 Having considered carefully all the representations received we proposed 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 considered that further improvements in electoral equality could be achieved. We proposed 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 proposed 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 did not consider that the Borough Council's proposed ward names of Coton and Littleworth best reflected the communities included in the new wards. Therefore we proposed that the ward known as Coton under the Borough Council's scheme be renamed Beaconside ward and that Littleworth ward be renamed Coton & Littleworth. 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).

62 At Stage Three the Borough Council proposed minor modifications to the boundaries of Beaconside and Coton & Littleworth wards to include 61 electors on Crooked Bridge Road in the new Beaconside ward. These modifications would have little impact on electoral equality. It also proposed that Beaconside ward be renamed Coton and that Coton & Littleworth ward be renamed Littleworth. We received no further comments regarding our proposals in this area.

63 Having considered the Borough Council's submission and supporting evidence we propose modifying our recommendations in this area. It is important to note that we moved away from the Borough Council's proposed ward names (of Coton and Littleworth) at Stage One, as we considered that after the modifications we proposed to its scheme in the area, the names no longer reflected community identities. However, we have been persuaded by the evidence submitted that the Borough Council's Stage Three proposals for boundary modifications and ward name changes, would better reflect local community identities than the draft recommendations. Under our final recommendations, as outlined on the large map at the back of this report, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations.

Highfields, Manor and Rowley wards

64 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).

65 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a new three-member Highfields & Western Downs ward to include the whole of the existing Highfields ward, together with 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).

66 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.

67 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.

68 We considered all the representations received at Stage One and 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 judged 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 considered the resident's proposal for a Castlechurch ward, but were concerned that such a proposal would worsen electoral equality across the town under a 59-member scheme. We were not 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 proposed 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.

69 During Stage Three the Borough Council proposed that the boundary between Highfields & Western Downs and Rowley wards be modified to utilise the length of West Way as a boundary, as proposed by Councillor Kidney at Stage One. This proposal would worsen electoral equality. The number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent below the borough average (4 per cent by 2004) in Highfields & Western Downs ward and 12 per cent above the average in Rowley ward (9 per cent by 2004).

70 We have noted the Borough Council's proposed modifications for this area. However, as outlined in our draft recommendations report, we do not consider this particular modification to provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We have not been convinced by the evidence supplied at Stage Three that the boundary adopted in our draft recommendations would be detrimental to community identities in the area. We therefore propose

no change to our draft recommendations for the wards of Highfields & Western Downs and Rowley. Under our final recommendations, outlined on the large map at the back of this report, the electoral variances would be unchanged from the draft recommendations.

Baswich, Penside and Weeping Cross wards

71 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), Penside 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).

72 At Stage One, Baswich and Weeping Cross wards would remain unchanged under the Borough Council's scheme, while the north-eastern boundary of Penside 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 Penside ward (3 per cent above by 2004) and 12 per cent above the average in Weeping Cross ward (5 per cent by 2004).

73 Both Conservative groups proposed no change to the existing wards of Baswich and Weeping Cross and minor modifications to the ward currently known as Penside. 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.

74 Having considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One we proposed that the Borough Council's scheme be adopted without modification for the wards of Baswich and Weeping Cross. The scheme provided good electoral equality and a coherent pattern of borough wards and identifiable boundaries. 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 proposed modifying the Borough Council's proposed Penside ward to provide more balanced levels of electoral equality between Penside and Forebridge wards. We proposed that Kent Way, Windsor Road, Warwick Road and York Road and a number of electors on Queensville be transferred from the proposed Penside 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, Penside ward would initially be 25 per cent over-represented (5 per cent by 2004).

75 At Stage Three, we received no comments on our proposals for this area. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for the wards of Baswich, Penside and Weeping Cross as final, without modification. Under the final recommendations, outlined on the large map at the back of this report, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations.

Stone town

St Michael's, Stonefield & Christchurch and Walton wards

76 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).

77 At Stage One, 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).

78 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.

79 Having considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One we proposed modifying the Borough Council's scheme in this area. We noted that the scheme would provide for the correct level of representation in Stone town, but were concerned that the wards within Stone would not provide the best levels of electoral equality available. We therefore proposed 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. We noted the Borough Council's proposal to utilise the River Trent and Trent & Mersey Canal as ward boundaries in the area. However, we visited the area during Stage Two and noted that a significant crossing point would link the two areas. In the interests of electoral equality we 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).

80 At Stage Three we received a number of comments regarding our proposals in this area; however, the Borough Council made no comment on our proposals for Stone town. Three residents of Stone supported our draft recommendation to include part of the existing Walton ward in a new Stone South ward and did not consider the proposal to be detrimental to local communities.

81 However, the majority of representations received opposed our recommendations. Stone Branch Labour Party supported the draft recommendation to retain seven borough councillors in Stone. However, “the recommendation to change the boundary of Walton ward is strongly opposed. The washlands of the River Trent presently act as a natural and recognisable physical boundary to Walton and should be reflected in local government boundaries”. It also proposed that the existing ward names of St Michael’s and Stonefield & Christchurch be retained as “the present names reflect local heritage and identity”. Stone Town Council also supported the draft recommendation to retain seven borough councillors for the town and opposed the boundaries of the proposed Walton ward and the naming of Stone North and Stone South wards, for reasons of community identity.

82 County Councillor Wakefield, member for Stone Urban division, opposed our recommendations for Stone town. In his submission he stated that “the present Walton ward is a very rare example, especially in an urban area, of a local government ward which both reflects a local community and has clearly-defined and well-recognised boundaries”. He proposed that the existing Walton ward be retained on the grounds that the proposals “defy geographical, functional and social realities in the area”. Councillor Wakefield, member for Walton borough and town council ward and Councillor Holmes, member for Walton town council ward, also opposed our recommendations, as they would not reflect community ties or utilise the geographical features of the River Trent and Trent & Mersey Canal as boundaries. Both respondents proposed that the status quo be maintained.

83 Altona Close Residents’ Group opposed the proposed Stone South ward on the basis that the western ward boundary (with Walton ward) would be detrimental to community identities and the northern boundary would “be a tiny cul-de-sac in a densely built-up part of the town”. Ten residents of Stone opposed our proposal to include part of the existing Walton ward in a new Stone South ward, each stating that such a proposal would be detrimental to local community identities and would not provide strong, identifiable boundaries.

84 In the light of the persuasive evidence put forward by Stage Three respondents, we propose modifying our draft recommendations for Stone town. We propose that the boundaries put forward by the Borough Council at Stage One be endorsed as part of our final recommendations. We have been convinced by the local interest groups who made representations that this alternative arrangement would better reflect the strong community identities of both Walton and Stone and note that they would utilise the more identifiable boundaries of the River Trent and Trent & Mersey Canal. Additionally, we propose that Stone South ward be renamed St Michael’s ward and that Stone North ward be renamed Stonefield & Christchurch to better reflect community identities and historical ties. Although we have noted the comments made by Altona

Close Residents' Group, regarding the northern boundary of the proposed Stone South ward (to be renamed St Michael's ward), we have been unable to find an alternative boundary in this area which would provide an equally satisfactory balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent above the borough average in Stone North ward (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 in 2004). Although we note that these proposals would not provide as good electoral equality as the draft recommendations, we consider this to be outweighed by the need to reflect community identities in this area. Our final recommendations are outlined on the large map at the back of this report. These proposals would have a consequential effect on the warding arrangements of Stone parish, detailed later in the chapter.

The rural area

85 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

86 The 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).

87 At Stage One, 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.

88 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.

89 After careful consideration of the evidence received at Stage One, we adopted the Borough Council's scheme without modification in this area. We considered 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.

90 At Stage Three the Borough Council made no comment on our proposals in this area. Stowe-by-Chartley Parish Council opposed our proposal to include the parishes of Stowe-by-Chartley and Hixon in separate wards, pointing out that until recently the two settlements had comprised a single parish. It argued, therefore, that our proposal did not reflect community identities. Councillor McKeown, member for Chartley ward, proposed an alternative distribution of members and configuration of parishes to form wards in this area, which he asserted would better reflect community identities.

91 In the light of comments received regarding the draft recommendations in this area, we have reconsidered our proposals. However, we are concerned that any proposal to include Stowe-by-Chartley and Hixon parishes in the same ward (as proposed by Stowe-by-Chartley and Councillor McKeown) would not provide satisfactory levels of electoral equality. For example, a ward comprising Colwich parish only would be 15 per cent under-represented by 2004. We have not been persuaded by the evidence supplied regarding local community identities and ties that such electoral inequality is justified. We therefore propose endorsing our draft recommendations as final, without modification. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be the same as under the draft recommendations. These proposals are outlined on Map 2 later in the chapter.

Beaconside, Chartley and Milwich wards

92 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).

93 At Stage One, 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 were 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).

94 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.

95 We 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 adopted the Borough Council's scheme in this area without modification; our proposals provided the same levels of electoral equality as the Borough Council's.

96 At Stage Three the Borough Council made no comment on our proposals in this area. Councillor McKeown, member for Chartley ward, proposed an alternative distribution of members and configuration of wards in this area, to better reflect community identities. As explained above, we propose endorsing our draft recommendations in this area without modification, as we have not been convinced by the evidence received during Stage Three that the alternatives proposed would strike a more satisfactory balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under the final recommendations the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 later in the chapter and Maps A2 and A3 in Appendix A. These proposals would have a consequential effect on the warding arrangements of Stone Rural parish, detailed later in the chapter.

Barlaston, Fulford and Oulton wards

97 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).

98 At Stage One, 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.

99 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.

100 We considered carefully all the representations received and noted 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 adopted the Borough Council's scheme in this area without modification. The electoral variances under our draft recommendations were the same as under the Borough Council's scheme.

101 At Stage Three the Borough Council made no comment on our proposals for this area and Fulford Parish Council supported our draft recommendations. We therefore propose that our draft recommendations be endorsed as final, without modification, considering them to strike the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under our final recommendations, illustrated on Map 2 later in the chapter and Maps A2 and A3 in Appendix A, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations. These proposals would have a consequential effect on the warding arrangements of Stone Rural parish, detailed later in the chapter.

Eccleshall and Swynnerton wards

102 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).

103 At Stage One, 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).

104 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.

105 Having considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One we adopted the Borough Council's scheme for this area 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 were the same as those under the Borough Council's scheme.

106 At Stage Three the Borough Council made no comment on our proposals in this area. We therefore propose that our draft recommendations be endorsed as final, without modification, as we consider them to strike the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under our final recommendations, outlined on Map 2 later in the chapter, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations.

Gnosall and Woodseaves wards

107 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.

108 At Stage One, 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).

109 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 schemes.

110 After careful consideration of the evidence received and in the light of our proposal for a 59-member council, we adopted the Borough Council's scheme in this area without modification. It provided 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 provided the same levels of electoral equality as the Borough Council's proposals.

111 At Stage Three the Borough Council made no comment on our proposals for this area and Gnosall Parish Council expressed support for our draft recommendations for the area. In the light of this support, we propose that our draft recommendations be endorsed as final, without modification. We consider them to strike the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under our final recommendations, outlined on Map 2 later in the chapter, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations.

Castle, Church Eaton and Seighford wards

112 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).

113 At Stage One, 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 Creswell 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).

114 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.

115 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 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.

116 We considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One and considered 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 noted that they were based on a significantly different council size (55 members) and would require the dividing of Gnosall parish between borough wards. We were not persuaded that such a proposal would provide the best balance available between electoral equality and

community identities. The Commission 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 the dividing of 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 recommended that the Borough Council's proposals be adopted without modification in this area. The electoral variances under our draft recommendations were the same as under the Borough Council's scheme.

117 At Stage Three the Borough Council made no comment on our proposals in this area and Haughton Parish Council expressed support for our draft recommendations. In the light of this support, we propose that our draft recommendations be endorsed as final, without modification. We consider them to strike the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under our final recommendations, outlined on Map 2 later in the chapter, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations.

Electoral Cycle

118 At Stage One we received no proposals in relation to the electoral cycle of the borough. Accordingly, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of whole council elections every four years.

119 At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

120 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided to substantially endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- in Stafford town, we propose that the boundaries of the proposed Beaconside and Coton & Littleworth wards be modified to provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We also propose that Beaconside ward be renamed Coton and that Coton & Littleworth ward be renamed Littleworth;
- in Stone, we propose that the ward boundaries be modified to reflect the Borough Council's Stage One scheme for the town, to better reflect community ties. We also propose that the ward names of Stone North and Stone South be changed to Stonefield & Christchurch and St Michael's respectively.

121 We conclude that, in Stafford:

- 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 24 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

122 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 and 2004 electorate figures.

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final 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 of more than 20 per cent from the average	9	1	10	0

123 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 18 to three, with only one ward varying by more than 20 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2004, with only one ward, Seighford, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, at 11 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final 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. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

124 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 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, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Stone and Stone Rural parishes to reflect the proposed borough wards.

125 The parish of Stone Rural is currently served by 10 councillors representing three wards: Meaford & Aston, Moddershall and Oulton. As part of our draft recommendations we proposed that Stone Rural parish should 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. We received no comments relating to our proposals in this area at Stage Three and therefore confirm our draft recommendations as final, without modification.

Final 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.

126 As part of our draft recommendations we proposed modifications to the borough wards in Stone town. We proposed that the town wards of Stone be modified to reflect the borough ward boundaries. As part of our final recommendations we propose changes to our draft recommendations for Stone town, modifying the borough ward boundaries in this area (detailed earlier in the Chapter) and therefore the proposed town ward boundaries should be modified to reflect the new borough wards.

Final Recommendation
Stone Town Council should continue to comprise 18 councillors, representing three wards, as at present: Stonefield & Christchurch ward (returning five councillors), St Michael’s ward (returning five councillors) and Walton ward (returning eight councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in Stone, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report and Maps A2 and A3 in Appendix A.

127 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the borough, and are confirming this as final.

<p>Final Recommendation For parish councils, whole Council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that of the Borough Council.</p>

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Stafford

6 NEXT STEPS

128 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Stafford and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

129 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made before 20 November 2000.

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

The Secretary of State
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Local Government Sponsorship Division
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

APPENDIX A

Final 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 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 proposed warding arrangements for the towns of Stafford and Stone.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Stafford: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed warding of Stone Rural parish

Map A3: Proposed warding of Stone Rural parish

APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for Stafford

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of five wards, where our draft proposals are set out below.

Figure B1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Beaconside (Stafford town)	Common ward (part); Coton ward (part)
Coton & Littleworth (Stafford town)	Common ward (part); Coton ward (part); Forebridge ward (part); Littleworth ward
Stone North (Stone town)	St Michael's ward (part); Stonefield & Christchurch ward
Stone South (Stone town)	St Michael's ward (part); Walton ward (part)
Walton (Stone town)	Walton ward (part)

Figure B2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: 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 %
Beaconside (Stafford town)	2	3,251	1,626	0	3,153	1,577	-2
Coton & Littleworth (Stafford town)	3	4,637	1,546	-5	4,616	1,539	-4
Stone North (Stone town)	2	3,402	1,701	5	3,398	1,699	6
Stone South (Stone town)	3	4,906	1,635	1	4,899	1,633	2
Walton (Stone town)	2	3,314	1,657	2	3,249	1,625	1

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

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

