

Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wolverhampton

Report to The Electoral Commission

May 2003

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

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

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

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

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the city of Wolverhampton.

Summary

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of the electoral arrangements for Wolverhampton on 4 December 2001. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us to complete the work of the LGCE. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 22 October 2002, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation. We now submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.

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

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

- **in five of the 20 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the city;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in five wards and by more than 20% in one ward.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 107–108) are that:

- **Wolverhampton City Council should have 60 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 20 wards, as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified and four wards should retain their existing boundaries.**

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each city councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- **In 18 of the proposed 20 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the city average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 8% from the average for the city by 2006.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to The Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 24 June 2003. The information in the representations will be available for public access once the Order has been made.

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Table 1: Final recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Large map reference
1	Bilston East	3	Bilston East ward; part of Bilston North ward; part of Ettingshall ward	2
2	Bilston North	3	Part of Bilston North ward; part of East Park ward	2
3	Blakenhall	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	2
4	Bushbury North	3	Part of Bushbury ward; part of Oxley ward	1
5	Bushbury South and Low Hill	3	Part of Bushbury ward; part of Low Hill ward; part of St Peter's ward	1
6	East Park	3	Part of Bilston North ward; part of East Park ward; part of St Peter's ward	1 & 2
7	Ettingshall	3	Part of Ettingshall ward; part of St Peter's ward; part of Spring Vale ward	2
8	Fallings Park	3	Fallings Park ward; part of Bushbury ward; part of Low Hill ward	1
9	Graiseley	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	2
10	Heath Town	3	Part of Heath Town ward; part of St Peter's ward; part of Wednesfield South ward	1 & 2
11	Merry Hill	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	2
12	Oxley	3	Part of Oxley ward; part of Tettenhall Regis ward	1
13	Park	3	Part of Park ward; part of St Peter's ward	1 & 2
14	Penn	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	2
15	St Peter's	3	Part of Oxley ward; part of St Peter's ward	1 & 2
16	Spring Vale	3	Part of Ettingshall ward; part of Spring Vale ward	2
17	Tettenhall Regis	3	Part of Tettenhall Regis ward; part of Tettenhall Wightwick ward	1
18	Tettenhall Wightwick	3	Part of Park ward; part of Tettenhall Wightwick ward	1 & 2
19	Wednesfield North	3	Wednesfield North ward; part of Wednesfield South ward	1
20	Wednesfield South	3	Part of Heath Town ward; part of Wednesfield South ward	1 & 2

Notes: 1 The city contains no civil parishes.

2 The wards in the above table are illustrated on Map 2 and the large maps.

3 We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Final recommendations for Wolverhampton

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bilston East	3	9,293	3,098	1	9,518	3,173	4
2 Bilston North	3	9,388	3,129	2	9,407	3,136	3
3 Blakenhall	3	8,966	2,989	-2	8,867	2,956	-3
4 Bushbury North	3	9,310	3,103	2	9,011	3,004	-1
5 Bushbury South and Low Hill	3	9,160	3,053	0	9,088	3,029	-1
6 East Park	3	9,125	3,042	0	9,330	3,110	2
7 Ettingshall	3	9,681	3,227	6	9,896	3,299	8
8 Fallings Park	3	9,555	3,185	4	9,301	3,100	2
9 Graiseley	3	9,134	3,045	0	9,289	3,096	2
10 Heath Town	3	7,843	2,614	-14	8,784	2,928	-4
11 Merry Hill	3	9,631	3,210	5	9,319	3,106	2
12 Oxley	3	9,378	3,126	2	9,110	3,037	0
13 Park	3	8,842	2,947	-4	8,681	2,894	-5
14 Penn	3	10,034	3,345	9	9,785	3,262	7
15 St Peter's	3	8,128	2,709	-11	8,429	2,810	-8
16 Spring Vale	3	8,923	2,974	-3	9,120	3,040	0
17 Tettenhall Regis	3	9,400	3,133	3	9,152	3,051	0
18 Tettenhall Wightwick	3	9,318	3,106	2	9,148	3,049	0
19 Wednesfield North	3	9,388	3,129	2	9,034	3,011	-1
20 Wednesfield South	3	8,809	2,936	-4	8,631	2,877	-6
Totals	60	183,306	-	-	182,900	-	-
Averages	-	-	3,055	-	-	3,048	-

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.

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our final recommendations for the electoral arrangements for the City of Wolverhampton. We are reviewing the seven metropolitan districts in the West Midlands as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. The programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Wolverhampton. Wolverhampton's last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in June 1979 (Report no. 340).

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Wolverhampton was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reviews*. This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

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

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

8 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 there is no limit to the number of councillors which can be returned from each metropolitan city ward. However, the figure must be divisible by three. In practice, all metropolitan city wards currently return three councillors. Where our recommendation is for multi-member wards, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could lead to an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

9 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 4 December 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Wolverhampton City Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also

notified West Midlands Police Authority, the Local Government Association, West Midlands Local Councils Association, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the city, Members of the European Parliament for the West Midlands Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Wolverhampton City Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 8 April 2002. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our final recommendations.

10 Stage Three began on 22 October 2002 with the publication of the report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wolverhampton*, and ended on 16 December 2002. During this period comments were sought from the public and any other interested parties on the preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four the draft recommendations were reconsidered in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations.

2 Current electoral arrangements

11 The City of Wolverhampton is situated in the north-west of the West Midlands, to the east of the county of Staffordshire, and is one of the principal manufacturing centres of the area. The city benefits from strong communication and transport links with the East and West Midlands, as well as the rest of the country.

12 Since 1975 there has been a decrease in electorate of some 4%, from 191,455 to the current electorate of 183,306. The electorate is forecast to decrease further, to 182,900, by 2006. The Council presently has 60 members who are elected from 20 wards, all of which are relatively urban. All wards are three-member wards. The city contains no civil parishes.

13 At present, each councillor represents an average of 3,055 electors, which the City Council forecasts will decrease to 3,048 by the year 2006 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 five of the 20 wards varies by more than 10% from the city average. The worst imbalances are in Bilston North and East Park wards, where each councillor represents 16% more and 16% fewer electors than the city average, respectively.

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 city average in percentage terms. In the text which follows, this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

Map 1: Existing wards in Wolverhampton

Table 3: Existing electoral arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bilston East	3	8,432	2,811	-8	8,672	2,891	-5
2 Bilston North	3	10,664	3,555	16	10,646	3,549	16
3 Blakenhall	3	8,966	2,989	-2	8,867	2,956	-3
4 Bushbury	3	8,787	2,929	-4	8,681	2,894	-5
5 East Park	3	7,672	2,557	-16	7,919	2,640	-13
6 Ettingshall	3	8,580	2,860	-6	8,866	2,955	-3
7 Fallings Park	3	8,231	2,744	-10	8,018	2,673	-12
8 Graiseley	3	9,134	3,045	0	9,289	3,096	2
9 Heath Town	3	8,104	2,701	-12	8,201	2,734	-10
10 Low Hill	3	8,643	2,881	-6	8,401	2,800	-8
11 Merry Hill	3	9,631	3,210	5	9,319	3,106	2
12 Oxley	3	9,602	3,201	5	9,335	3,112	2
13 Park	3	10,306	3,435	12	10,151	3,384	11
14 Penn	3	10,034	3,345	9	9,785	3,262	7
15 St Peter's	3	10,264	3,421	12	11,630	3,877	27
16 Spring Vale	3	10,102	3,367	10	9,770	3,257	7
17 Tettenhall Regis	3	9,276	3,092	1	8,994	2,998	-2
18 Tettenhall Wightwick	3	9,101	3,034	-1	8,927	2,976	-2
19 Wednesfield North	3	8,897	2,966	-3	8,559	2,853	-6
20 Wednesfield South	3	8,880	2,960	-3	8,870	2,957	-3
Totals	60	183,306	-	-	182,900	-	-
Averages	-	-	3,055	-	-	3,048	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Wolverhampton City 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 city. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in East Park ward were relatively over-represented by 16%, while electors in Bilston North ward were relatively under-represented by 16%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Draft recommendations

15 During Stage One, 31 representations were received, including a borough-wide scheme from Wolverhampton City Council. The Council also submitted alternative options for the west, north-east and east of the city, which were supported by the Conservative Group on the Council. 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 Wolverhampton*.

16 Our draft recommendations were based on the City Council's main proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality. However, we moved away from the Council's scheme in a number of areas, affecting six wards, in order to better reflect communities and secure improved boundaries. We proposed that:

- Wolverhampton City Council should be served by 60 councillors, representing 20 wards;
- the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified, and four wards should retain their existing boundaries.

Draft recommendation

Wolverhampton City Council should comprise 60 councillors, serving 20 wards.

17 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 18 of the 20 wards varying by no more than 10% from the city average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no wards varying by more than 8% from the average by 2006.

4 Responses to consultation

18 During the consultation on the draft recommendations report, 77 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Wolverhampton City Council.

Wolverhampton City Council

19 The Council supported our draft recommendations, but proposed two boundary amendments (in Tettenhall and Ettingshall) and reiterated its opposition to 'all-out' elections in 2004. It further stated that it would leave the separate political groups on the Council to make representations direct to the Committee.

Political Groups on the Council

20 The Labour Group on the Council supported our draft recommendations, but urged the Committee to reconsider its proposals to depart from the Council's Stage One main proposals in St Peter's, Ettingshall and Bilston wards. The Conservative Group on the Council strongly opposed our draft recommendations, arguing that we did not give equal weight to the alternative options submitted at Stage One. It further queried the electorate forecasts provided by the Council, and argued that the boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards was 'obscure'. It urged the Committee to reconsider the alternative options proposed during Stage One. The Liberal Democrat Group on the Council supported our draft recommendations, but also proposed an amendment to the boundary between Bushbury ward and Oxley ward.

Other representations

21 A further 73 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local political groups, organisations, councillors and residents. Rob Marris, Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West, generally supported our draft recommendations. However, he voiced concern over the boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards. He supported the Council's Stage Three amendment to this boundary. He further argued that the area around Linden Lea and Compton Street should be transferred from Park ward into Tettenhall Wightwick ward, a suggestion supported by three local residents. The three councillors representing Tettenhall Wightwick ward made representations opposing our draft recommendations, stating that they were divisive toward the Tettenhall Wood area, and used indistinct boundaries. Tettenhall & Tettenhall Wood Tenants & Residents Association, Tettenhall Community Network and a further four local residents opposed the draft recommendations for Tettenhall in general.

22 Wolverhampton South East Liberal Democrats supported our recommendations for Ettingshall ward, but proposed a minor amendment to the boundary with Bilston East ward. Ettingshall Ward Labour Party opposed the draft recommendations for Ettingshall, Bilston and the All Saints area to the south of the city centre. Four residents of Oxley ward opposed our draft recommendation to transfer the area to the south of Oxley Golf Course into St Peter's ward.

23 We received 39 representations regarding the Elston Hall area of Bushbury ward, which would be transferred into Low Hill ward under our draft recommendations. All representations were united in opposing this recommendation, claiming that house prices, insurance rates and council tax would all increase and school catchment areas would alter. Many residents also opposed any change of address or postcode. A further resident of Bushbury Road proposed being transferred into Oxley ward, stating that the area shared more identity with Oxley than with Bushbury.

24 One of the city councillors representing Wednesfield South ward, eight local residents and Wednesfield Village Traders Association all supported our recommendations for Wednesfield. Three of the residents further stated that they would have preferred for the rest of Nordley Hill to be in a Wednesfield ward. A councillor for Fallings Park ward supported our draft recommendations for this ward, but a local resident stated that the houses on Old Fallings Lane should remain in Bushbury ward. A local resident of Tettenhall Wightwick questioned the reliability of the Council's electorate figures. Two residents opposed the draft recommendation to transfer the Dovecotes Estate from Tettenhall Regis ward into Oxley ward.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

25 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Wolverhampton is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended): the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'.

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

27 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in 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.

28 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 minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate forecasts

29 Since 1975 there has been a 4% decrease in the electorate of Wolverhampton. At Stage One, the City Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting a further slight decrease in the electorate, from 183,306 to 182,900, over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to unitary development plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Having accepted that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

30 We received a number of comments regarding the Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three, from the Conservative Group on the Council, three Conservative councillors and some residents. All stated that the figures provided by the Council at the start of the review were incorrect, citing the fact that the Council's unitary development plan was out of date, and that insufficient planning consent had been given to certain developments.

31 In light of these representations, we approached the Council during Stage Four in order to clarify the situation with regard to its electorate forecasts. The Council duly replied, stating that it 'confirmed that the electorate forecasts provided are and remain the Council's best estimate'. It confirmed that its original forecast contained a number of development sites which, at the time, were expected to be confirmed and have since received planning permission. Given the confirmation of its forecasts from the Council, we are content that the figures provided are the

council's best estimate, and we have based our final recommendations for Wolverhampton on them.

Council size

32 Wolverhampton City Council presently has 60 members. At Stage One, the City Council proposed retaining a council of 60 members. In its original submission, the City Council stated that 'all three political groups on the Council are firmly of the view that 60 Councillors elected from 20 wards represents the most effective and convenient means of delivering the Council's functions in the future'. Two further submissions regarding council size were received during Stage One. Tettenhall Wood Network stated that it 'formally reserved its position, at this time, with regard to the ratio of councillors and wards per elector'. Tettenhall and Tettenhall Wood Tenants' and Residents' Association stated that it also wished to 'pass by without comment the number of councillors remaining at 60', although it added that 'comparison with similarly populated MBCs [metropolitan borough councils] show this may be on the high side especially with a Cabinet Structure and Local Area Forums'.

33 After carefully considering the City Council's argumentation regarding the retention of a council size of 60, the Committee requested further evidence as to why the retention of 60 councillors would provide more effective and convenient local government than any other council size. Accordingly, the Council supplied more thorough details of the new decision-making system in operation in Wolverhampton, and the attendance details for councillors on local committees and partnership agenda bodies, and in scrutiny roles.

34 Having considered all proposals regarding council size received during Stage One, we were content to recommend the retention of 60 councillors to represent Wolverhampton as part of our draft recommendations. We acknowledged the consensus from the three political groups represented on the City Council, and the broad local support shown in the Council's consultation feedback provided with its submission. Although we noted the representations from Tettenhall Wood Network and Tettenhall and Tettenhall Wood Tenants' and Residents' Association, they proposed no alternative council size. We further clarified that, as stated in the *Guidance*, 'in considering the issue of council size, we are of the view that each area should be considered on its own merits and that The Boundary Committee for England should not aim for equality of council size between authorities of similar types and populations'. We therefore could not consider Tettenhall and Tettenhall Wood Tenants' and Residents' Association's comment regarding council size.

35 In its Stage Three submission, the Council supported the retention of 60 councillors serving Wolverhampton. Two further representations were received regarding council size. Tettenhall & Tettenhall Wood Tenants' & Residents' Association stated that 'retaining 60 councillors seems excessive', while a local resident of Tettenhall argued that five councillors should represent each area forum, resulting in a council size of 40 members.

36 Having considered the representations regarding council size received during Stage Three, we are content to recommend the retention of 60 councillors serving Wolverhampton. Although we note the two submissions proposing a reduction in council size, we do not believe that there is sufficient argumentation or local support to justify any reduction. Given the general levels of support received for our draft recommendations, we confirm a council size of 60 for Wolverhampton.

Electoral arrangements

37 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council's proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we based our draft recommendations on the City Council's main proposals. We noted the consensus between the

three political groups on the City Council for 10 of the proposed wards and adopted the City Council's proposed wards as part of our draft recommendations, subject to two amendments to better reflect communities. After considering the submissions received regarding the alternative options submitted by the City Council on behalf of the Conservative Group on the Council, we were not persuaded by the evidence provided that they would secure a better balance between the statutory criteria. We were concerned that there may have been a political dimension in relation to the conflicting arguments received, in particular for the Wednesfield area, noting that submissions received regarding this area were contradictory in nature, with residents of the Nordley Hill area suggesting that they more readily identify with Wednesfield, and political and community groups suggesting that the area around Wednesfield Town centre more readily identifies with Heath Town ward.

38 In response to our draft recommendations report, the Conservative Group on the Council stated its objection to our proposals, and argued that the alternative schemes provided by the Council (on behalf of the Conservatives) at Stage One should be adopted. However, having reconsidered the alternative options during Stage Four, the Committee remains of the opinion that the Council's main proposals strike a better balance between our statutory criteria than the alternative proposals. We note that a number of representations were received during Stage Three which argued that our draft recommendation for the boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards followed an indistinct path to the rear of properties in the Tettenhall Wood area. However, the Council has proposed an amendment to this boundary in its Stage Three submission and, officers from the Committee having visited the area, we are of the opinion that this amendment improves upon our draft recommendations, and we propose adopting it as part of our final recommendations.

39 The draft recommendations have been reviewed in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. After considering those representations, we are broadly confirming our draft recommendations as final for Wolverhampton, subject to three boundary amendments. For city warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- i. Park, St Peter's, Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards;
- ii. Bushbury, Fallings Park, Low Hill and Oxley wards;
- iii. Heath Town, Wednesfield North and Wednesfield South wards;
- iv. Bilston East, Bilston North, East Park, Ettingshall and Spring Vale wards;
- v. Blakenhall, Graiseley, Merry Hill and Penn wards.

40 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps

Park, St Peter's, Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards

41 These four wards are situated in the centre and west of the city, and are each represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in both Park and St Peter's wards is 12% above the city average (11% and 27% above the city average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards is 1% above and 1% below the city average (2% below the city average in both wards by 2006).

42 During Stage One, 10 representations were received regarding these wards. As detailed previously, the City Council submitted a western alternative affecting these wards in addition to its main proposal. Both the City Council's main proposal and its western alternative recognised that, although the levels of electoral equality in the Tettenhall wards are acceptable under the existing arrangements, boundary modifications were necessary in order to accommodate revised warding arrangements in Park and St Peter's wards, both of which are forecast to be under-represented by 2006, and in order to facilitate a better balance of representation across

the city as a whole. In its main proposal, the Council proposed the transfer of the area to the south-west of Horden Road and Hunter Street from St Peter's ward into Park ward. The Council also proposed that an area of the existing Park ward be transferred into Tettenhall Wightwick ward. The Council acknowledged that the resultant boundary between Park and Tettenhall Wightwick wards did 'not meet with the Council's aim to use easily identifiable geographic boundaries'. However, it argued that it was desirable to move two whole polling districts 'in order not to split minor roads between wards'.

43 The City Council acknowledged that significant modifications would be necessary to the boundaries of St Peter's ward, as it is forecast to be considerably under-represented by 2006 due to the development planned for the town centre. As a consequence, the Council proposed transferring the area to the south-west of Horden Road and Hunter Street into Park ward and areas to the east of the Ring Road, Stafford Street and Stafford Road into East Park, Heath Town and Low Hill wards. This would utilise the Ring Road, Stafford Street and Stafford Road as easily identifiable boundaries for the east of the revised St Peter's ward. The Council further proposed that the area to the south of Snowdon Way, Logan Close and Leverton Rise be transferred from Oxley ward into St Peter's ward.

44 As part of the City Council's proposals to secure a better balance of representation in the north and east of the city, it proposed transferring the Dovecotes Estate in Pendeford from Tettenhall Regis ward into Oxley ward. Although the Council acknowledged that this provoked 'divided feelings', it recognised that 'it does have the benefit of uniting the two parts of the Pendeford Estate'. The Council further proposed transferring an area of Tettenhall Wood from Tettenhall Wightwick ward into Tettenhall Regis ward. The proposed southern boundary of Tettenhall Regis ward would run along the centre of Wergs Road to the junction with Regis Road, then west along the rear of the properties on the south side of Regis Road to the junction with Woodhouse Road North. The boundary would then run south, to the rear of the properties on the east side of Woodhouse Road North, Regina Crescent, Kinfare Road and Oak Green, before turning west along the rear of the properties on the north side of Woodland Avenue. The boundary would then run north-west along the centre of School Road to meet the city boundary. All electors north-west of this boundary, currently in Tettenhall Wightwick ward, would be transferred into Tettenhall Regis ward. The Council acknowledged that this specific boundary had 'generated a great deal of local feeling and a number of representations have been received from residents who object to this change on the basis that it will divide local communities in the Tettenhall Wood area' and that the proposed boundary 'does not follow easily identifiable geographical boundaries', but that 'these adjustments meet the numerical objective for Tettenhall Regis ward'.

45 As detailed previously, the Council submitted a western alternative, affecting these wards and Oxley ward, on behalf of the Conservative Group on the Council. Under the Council's western alternative, both Tettenhall wards would remain unchanged. In order to address the levels of electoral inequality in St Peter's ward, the Council proposed transferring an area of Dunstall and Whitmore Reans from St Peter's ward into Oxley ward. The remainder of the existing Oxley ward would be retained.

46 As a consequence of the above proposal, and in order to reduce the levels of electoral inequality in Park ward, under the City Council's western alternative those electors to the north of Tettenhall Road and Albert Road and to the west of Clifford Street, currently in Park ward, would be transferred into St Peter's ward. The Council argued that the western alternative 'uses easily identifiable boundaries that follow the centre of roads and dispenses with the indistinct boundaries'. However, it acknowledged that the area transferred from St Peter's ward into Oxley ward, 'has little relationship to the residential areas in the north of [Oxley] ward'.

47 Nine further representations were received regarding these wards during Stage One. As detailed previously, the Conservative Group on the Council supported the City Council's western alternative for these wards, arguing that the existing Tettenhall wards fulfil the electoral equality

criterion and should not be modified. It argued that the Council's main proposal was divisive to the Tettenhall Wood community. It further opposed transferring the Dovecotes Estate from Tettenhall Regis ward into Oxley ward. It concluded that the City Council's western alternative 'reflects the concerns of the public, avoids unnecessary alteration to current wards and preserves community links, while addressing the current electoral imbalance'.

48 Councillor Duhra submitted a petition from local residents of Whitmore Reans and Dunstall, opposing the City Council's western alternative, stating that he 'strongly objects' to the proposal to include these areas with the remainder of Oxley ward. Councillor Jones fully supported the City Council's main proposals for these wards, in particular the transfer of the Dovecotes Estate into Oxley ward. He also opposed the Council's western alternative option, in particular the transfer of the Whitmore Reans and Dunstall areas into Oxley.

49 Tettenhall Wood Network opposed the City Council's main proposal for the Tettenhall wards. It argued that the Council's main proposal moved too many electors in order to balance electoral equality in other areas of the city, and resulted in a boundary which followed a 'tortuous and convoluted path'. Tettenhall & Tettenhall Wood Tenants' & Residents' Association opposed the Council's main proposal for these wards. Tettenhall & District Residents Police Liaison Committee also stated its opposition to the Council's main proposal for these wards, and supported the western alternative.

50 Pendeford Agencies Link Scheme (P.A.L.S.) stated its support for the City Council's main proposal to transfer the Dovecotes Estate from Tettenhall Regis ward into Oxley ward. St John's Urban Village provided information regarding the development of Wolverhampton city centre, although it made no specific comments regarding the Periodic Electoral Review. A local resident of Pendeford opposed the Council's main proposal to transfer the Dovecotes Estate from Tettenhall Regis ward into Oxley ward.

51 Having carefully considered all representations received regarding these wards during Stage One, we acknowledged that, although the existing levels of electoral equality are acceptable in the Tettenhall wards, modifications to their boundaries were required due to the imbalance in Park and St Peter's wards, and in order to secure a better balance of representation across the city as a whole. We noted that consensus had not been achieved between the political groups on the Council with regard to these wards. After carefully considering the representations received during Stage One, we were content to base our draft recommendations for these wards on the City Council's main proposals. We believed that these proposals struck a better balance between our statutory criteria than the existing arrangements or any other proposal received during Stage One. We agreed with the Council's view that those electors in the Whitmore Reans and Dunstall areas share little sense of community identity with the remainder of the proposed Oxley ward, to the north of Oxley Golf Course, and therefore did not adopt this proposal as part of our draft recommendations. As a consequence, our capacity to adopt the remainder of the western alternative was limited. Officers from the Committee, having visited the area, were of the opinion that the Dovecotes Estate shares more community affinity to the remainder of Pendeford, to the north of the Shropshire Union Canal, than to the area to the south of the railway line in Tettenhall Regis ward. We were therefore content to adopt the Council's main proposal for these wards. We acknowledged that the proposed boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards would effectively divide the Tettenhall Wood area. However, we further noted that uniting the Tettenhall Wood area by using the southern edge of Woodthorne and Regis schools would result in the number of electors per councillor in Tettenhall Regis ward being 13% below the city average by 2006. We therefore proposed adopting the Council's main proposals for Park, Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards without modification.

52 When considering the Council's Stage One main proposal for St Peter's ward, we were concerned that the area of All Saints, to the south of the ring road, shared little in common with the remainder of the ward. Officers from the Committee, having visited the area, were of the

opinion that this area more readily identifies with the Ettingshall area immediately to the south. We therefore proposed transferring this area into Ettingshall ward, and therefore utilising the entirety of the southern side of the ring road as the southern boundary of St Peter's ward. As a consequence of this amendment, we proposed a minor modification to the Council's suggested boundary between St Peter's and Oxley wards. We proposed transferring all properties to the south of Oxley Golf Course into St Peter's ward in order to improve the levels of electoral equality, in light of our draft recommendations for the All Saints area. Although the levels of electoral equality would deteriorate slightly under our proposals, we argued that this was justifiable given the better reflection of communities achieved. Subject to these amendments, we adopted the Council's main proposal for St Peter's ward as part of our draft recommendations.

53 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Park, Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards would be 2% above, 2% below and equal to the city average initially (equal to, 4% below and 1% below the city average by 2006, respectively). The number of electors per councillor in St Peter's ward would be 11% below the city average initially (8% below by 2006).

54 During Stage Three, we received 23 representations regarding these wards. The Council proposed an amendment to the boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards in order that the boundary would be more readily identifiable and to unite those areas of the Tettenhall Wood which were divided between wards under our draft recommendations. It proposed transferring that area to the south and east of Wrottesley Road and the path to the rear of the properties on Midhurst Grove and Froyle Close, which was in Tettenhall Regis under our draft recommendations, into Tettenhall Wightwick ward. The Council proposed transferring all properties on Cornwall Road and those properties on the west side of Grange Road from Tettenhall Wightwick ward into Tettenhall Regis ward. It further proposed transferring that area to the north of the properties on the south side of Long Lake Avenue into Tettenhall Regis ward.

55 The Conservative Group on the Council opposed our draft recommendations for the Tettenhall wards. It reiterated its support for the Council's Stage One western alternative, arguing that the Committee had not given full consideration to these proposals during Stage One. It further argued against the 'obscurity' of the boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards, and that the area to be transferred into Tettenhall Wightwick ward from Park ward is 'more closely associated and more extensively served in terms of amenities by areas to the east', in the existing Park ward.

56 The Labour Group on the Council offered general support for these wards, however urged the Committee to reconsider the decision to transfer the All Saints area from St Peter's ward into Ettingshall ward, as this proposal had been given cross-party support. The Liberal Democrat Group on the Council argued that the boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards was 'indistinct', but did not propose any alternative other than to consider recommending a Tettenhall ward, returning six councillors. Rob Marris, Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West, expressed his concern over the boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards. He supported the Council's Stage Three amendment to this boundary, but further proposed extending the eastern boundary of Tettenhall Wightwick ward to encompass Linden Lea, in order to secure improved levels of electoral equality.

57 Three councillors representing Tettenhall Wightwick ward made a joint representation, expressing their concern regarding the draft recommendations for these wards. Two of the councillors also made individual representations to the same effect. All representations argued that the Committee should reconsider the Council's Stage One western alternative for these wards. The councillors stated that the boundaries between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards are 'extremely untidy' and that our recommendations lacked historical, geographic and procedural integrity. Tettenhall & Tettenhall Wood Tenants' & Residents' Association expressed its disappointment at our draft recommendations, and argued that change to the Tettenhall area was unnecessary.

58 Tettenhall Wood Community Network opposed our draft recommendations for the Tettenhall area, arguing that the Committee has had 'no regard whatsoever for the views of local communities'. Four local residents opposed our draft recommendations for the Tettenhall wards. One of these and two further local residents opposed the transferral of the Dovecotes Estate from Tettenhall Regis ward into Oxley ward. One of the residents offered support for our draft recommendation to transfer the All Saints area from St Peter's ward into Ettingshall ward and the use of the ring road as a clear and identifiable boundary. Two local residents offered support for our proposal to transfer the area of Park ward into Tettenhall Wightwick ward. However, both suggested extending the boundary to encompass Linden Lea in Tettenhall Wightwick ward. One of these residents also supported the Council's Stage Three amendments to the boundaries between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards.

59 Springvale Liberal Democrats supported the use of the ring road as a boundary between wards. Ettingshall ward Labour Party opposed our recommendations to transfer the All Saints area into Ettingshall ward. Four local residents opposed our draft recommendation to transfer the area to the south of Oxley Golf Course from Oxley ward into St Peter's ward.

60 We have carefully considered all representations received regarding these wards during Stage Three. We recognise that our proposed boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards could be improved. Having noted the Council's proposed amendment to this boundary and the general levels of support received for it, we intend adopting it as part of our final recommendations, as we concur that it provides for a more identifiable boundary without having a detrimental effect on the levels of electoral equality. We acknowledge the levels of opposition to the general proposals for these wards. However, we note that the only counter proposals offered were the Council's Stage One western alternative. Having reconsidered these proposals, we remain of the opinion that a better balance between our statutory criteria is struck by our draft recommendations than the western alternative and, consequently, we do not intend to alter them substantially.

61 In light of our amendment to the boundary between the two Tettenhall wards, we intend amending the boundary between Park and Tettenhall Wightwick wards in order to improve the levels of electoral equality. Having revisited the area, we concur with Rob Marris MP and the local residents who suggested that Linden Lea also be included in Tettenhall Wightwick ward. We therefore propose transferring all the properties on and to the west of Linden Lea from Park ward into Tettenhall Wightwick ward. We further propose transferring those properties on Compton Hill Drive and Alpine Way into Tettenhall Wightwick ward, in order to better reflect community identity.

62 Having considered the representations received regarding the All Saints area, we intend confirming our draft recommendations as final. We recognise the opposition to the transferral of the All Saints area from St Peter's ward into Ettingshall ward. However, we also note the representations supporting the use of the ring road as a clear and identifiable boundary. We do not intend departing from our draft recommendations for this area, given the strength of this boundary. We have carefully considered the opposition from four local residents to our proposal to transfer the area to the south of Oxley Golf Course into St Peter's ward. This was necessary to improve the levels of electoral equality in both St Peter's and Oxley wards, and we have not been persuaded by the evidence received to move away from our draft recommendations for this area.

63 We therefore propose confirming our draft recommendations for these wards as final, subject to the above amendments to the boundaries between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards, and Tettenhall Wightwick and Park wards.

64 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in St Peter's ward would be the same as under our draft recommendations. The number of electors per councillor

in Park, Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards would be 4% below, 3% above and 2% above the city average initially (5% below, equal to and equal to the city average by 2006).

Bushbury, Fallings Park, Low Hill and Oxley wards

65 These four wards are situated in the north of the city, and are each represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the numbers of electors per councillor in Bushbury, Fallings Park, Low Hill and Oxley wards is 4% below, 10% below, 6% below and 5% above the city average (5% below, 12% below, 8% below and 2% above the city average by 2006).

66 During Stage One, three representations were received regarding these wards. As detailed previously, the City Council submitted a western alternative affecting Oxley ward and a north-east alternative affecting Low Hill and Fallings Park wards, as well as its main proposal for all wards. Under its main proposal, the Council proposed an area of Oxley ward to the south of Oxley Golf Course be transferred into St Peter's ward, as detailed previously. In order to address the inequalities in Bushbury, Low Hill and Fallings Park wards, the Council's main proposal would transfer the Fordhouses area (the area to the north of Marsh Lane and east of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, currently in Oxley ward) into Bushbury ward. As detailed previously, that area to the east of the Stafford Road, currently in St Peter's ward, would be transferred into Low Hill ward. Similarly, the area to the east of Stafford Road and south of Wingfoot Park and Elston Hall Road, currently in Bushbury ward, would be transferred into Low Hill ward.

67 The City Council recognised that Fallings Park is 'the smallest ward based on a projection of the current electorate statistics' and therefore proposed transferring into it two areas from Low Hill ward. The Council proposed moving the western boundary of Fallings Park ward to the centre of Bushbury Road and Old Fallings Lane, thereby transferring all electors to the east of these roads, currently in Low Hill ward, into Fallings Park ward. The Council argued that this would reunite the Scotlands Estate, which 'forms a single community... however it [currently] has a ward boundary dividing it into two parts'. The Council further proposed that the electors to the east of Cannock Road, north of Victoria Road and west of Bushbury Road be transferred from Low Hill ward into Fallings Park ward. The remainder of Fallings Park ward's boundaries would be retained.

68 As detailed previously, the Council proposed a north-east alternative affecting Low Hill and Fallings Park wards, which was supported by the Conservative Group on the Council. The boundary between Low Hill ward and Oxley, St Peter's and Bushbury wards would be the same as under the Council's main proposal. To the east, the area of the Scotlands Estate to be transferred into Low Hill ward from Fallings Park ward under the Council's main proposal, as detailed previously, would remain unchanged. However, the area to the south and east of Park Lane and north of Cannock Road, currently in Low Hill ward, would be transferred into Fallings Park ward.

69 Two further representations were received regarding these wards during Stage One. As detailed previously, the Conservative Group on the Council supported the western alternative option for Oxley ward. It also supported the Council's north-east alternative option for Fallings Park and Low Hill wards on the grounds of electoral equality and community identity. It argued that electors in the area to the north and west of Cannock Road, and east of south of Park Lane, 'have never considered themselves as residents of Low Hill and would see themselves as having greater affinity with Fallings Park'.

70 Wolverhampton North East Liberal Democrats opposed the City Council's proposals for Bushbury ward, arguing that the electors 'south of Elston Hall Lane did not wish to be associated

with Poet's Corner' and that the area south of Stafford Road 'has stronger ties with Oxley than with Bushbury'.

71 After carefully considering all representations received during Stage One regarding these wards, we did not consider that the Council's western alternative for Oxley ward best reflected the local communities and therefore did not adopt it as part of our draft recommendations. Having considered Wolverhampton North East Liberal Democrats' opposition to the Council's proposals for Bushbury ward, we noted that adopting the Liberal Democrats' proposal to transfer the area south of Stafford Road currently in Bushbury ward into Oxley ward would result in the number of electors per councillor in Bushbury and Oxley wards deteriorating to 7% below and 5% above the city average by 2006. We did not consider this amendment to better reflect the communities or provide for more convenient and effective local government, and therefore did not adopt it as part of our draft recommendations. Having considered both the Council's main proposal and its north-east alternative for Fallings Park and Low Hill wards, we were content to recommend the Council's main proposal for these wards, as we believed that it struck the best balance between our statutory criteria. We noted that it used strong boundaries and united the Scotlands Estate in a single ward. We therefore adopted the Council's main proposals for Bushbury, Fallings Park and Low Hill wards without modification, and its main proposal for Oxley ward subject to the amendment to its boundary with St Peter's ward, detailed previously.

72 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Bushbury, Fallings Park and Low Hill wards would be 2% above, 4% above and equal to the city average initially (1% below, 2% above and 1% below the city average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Oxley ward would be 2% above the city average initially (equal to the city average by 2006).

73 During Stage Three, 44 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations for these wards. The Council offered general support for our draft recommendations for this area. The Liberal Democrat Group on the Council proposed that Three Tuns Lane form the boundary between Bushbury ward and Oxley ward, an argument expressed by Wolverhampton North East Liberal Democrats during Stage One, detailed previously. Forty representations were received regarding our draft recommendations for Bushbury, 39 of which were from the Elston Hall Estate area (the area around Elston Hall Lane, Sherborne Road and Bushbury Road). All representations opposed our proposal to transfer this area from Bushbury ward into Low Hill ward. The majority of arguments used were based on concerns over potential changes in addresses and effects on council tax, house prices, house and car insurance rates and school catchment areas. A further representation was received from a resident of Bushbury Lane, stating that the area felt more affinity with Oxley than with Bushbury.

74 One of the councillors representing Fallings Park ward supported our draft recommendations for his ward. However, a local resident of Old Fallings Lane opposed our recommendation to transfer this road into Fallings Park ward, preferring to remain in Low Hill ward.

75 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received during Stage Three. Although we recognise the levels of opposition received in respect of our draft recommendation to transfer the area around Elston Hall Estate into Low Hill, we cannot take account of much of the evidence put forward. Our recommendations have no effect on factors such as address, council tax, house prices, house and car insurance rates or school catchment areas. We therefore cannot alter our draft recommendations on these bases. Furthermore, retaining this area in Bushbury ward would result in unacceptable levels of electoral equality of 13% below the average in Low Hill and 11% above the average in Bushbury, by 2006. However, having visited the area, officers from the Boundary Committee were of the opinion that the ward names of Bushbury and Low Hill did not accurately reflect those areas represented. We agree that the Elston Hall Estate and, indeed, part of the northern area of our proposed Low Hill ward is known locally as Bushbury. We therefore propose renaming Bushbury ward as Bushbury

North ward and Low Hill ward as Bushbury South and Low Hill ward, in order to better reflect local communities and attempt to address some of the concerns raised by local residents.

76 Having considered the representation from the Liberal Democrat Group on the Council, we remain of the view that the detrimental effect to electoral equality in Bushbury and Oxley wards could not be justified. Therefore, subject to the amendments to the ward names, we are content to confirm our draft recommendations for these wards as final.

77 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Bushbury North and Bushbury South and Low Hill wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations for Bushbury and Low Hill wards, respectively. The number of electors per councillor in Fallings Park ward would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Heath Town, Wednesfield North and Wednesfield South wards

78 These three wards are situated in the north-east of the city, and are each represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Heath Town, Wednesfield North and Wednesfield South wards is 12%, 3% and 3% below the city average (10%, 6% and 3% below the city average by 2006).

79 During Stage One, 22 representations were received regarding these wards. The City Council submitted an eastern alternative affecting all three wards, as well as its main proposal. As detailed previously, an area to the east of Stafford Street and the Ring Road and south of Cannock Road would be transferred from St Peter's ward into Heath Town ward. The Council further proposed transferring the Bentley Bridge development from Wednesfield South ward into Heath Town ward and the area to the east of Wednesfield Park, north of the Wryley and Essington Canal and south of Amos Lane, from Heath Town ward into Wednesfield South ward. As a consequence of this proposal, and to improve the level of electoral equality in Wednesfield North ward, the Council proposed to transfer the Wood End area into Wednesfield North ward.

80 The City Council's eastern alternative option for these wards would also use the Ring Road and Stafford Street as the boundary between Heath Town ward and St Peter's ward. However, the Wryley and Essington Canal would be utilised as the boundary between both Heath Town and Wednesfield North wards and Wednesfield South ward, thus retaining the Bentley Bridge development in Wednesfield South ward. The Council further proposed transferring the area to the east of Amos Lane from Wednesfield South ward into Wednesfield North ward, and transferring the area of Wednesfield North ward bounded by the city boundary, Lichfield Road and the Wryley and Essington Canal into Wednesfield South ward. The boundary between the two Wednesfield wards would therefore run along Lichfield Road from the city boundary to the Wryley and Essington Canal. This would be the only instance of the boundary between these wards departing from the canal.

81 A further 21 representations were received regarding these wards during Stage One. The Conservative Group on the Council supported the Council's eastern alternative option for these wards and further argued that the Bentley Bridge area should remain in Wednesfield South ward. Councillor Jones supported the Council's main proposals for these wards, while Councillor Turner objected to all proposals for Heath Town ward. Wednesfield Conservatives opposed the Council's main proposal for these wards and fully supported the eastern alternative.

82 Moathouse Tenants' & Residents' Association supported the majority of the Council's main proposal for these wards, but argued that the Bentley Bridge area should be in Wednesfield South ward. Heath Town Branch Labour Party proposed retaining a number of roads in Heath Town ward. It further suggested that polling district E1 (the Park Village area) be transferred from Low Hill ward into Fallings Park ward. It also opposed the Council's main proposal for these wards, in particular the transfer of the Bentley Bridge area from Wednesfield South ward into

Heath Town ward. East Fowlers Tenants' & Residents' Association, Eversley Tenants' & Residents' Association, Springfield Community Association, Tithe Road/Wood End Road/Amos Lane Tenants' & Residents' Association and Wolverhampton 54/55/56 Beats Focus Group all echoed these arguments. Eversley Tenants' & Residents' Association, Tithe Road/Wood End Road/Amos Lane Tenants' & Residents' Association and Wolverhampton 54/55/56 Beats Focus Group further proposed that Heath Town ward be renamed New Cross ward, in order to better reflect the diverse communities within the ward. East Fowlers Tenants' & Residents' Association also proposed that polling district EI be transferred from Low Hill ward into Heath Town ward and submitted a petition to this effect.

83 Ten residents of Vicarage Road and East Avenue supported the inclusion of polling district DK (part of the Nordley Hill area) in Wednesfield South ward, but they further argued that the remainder of the Nordley Hill area (the area to the east of New Cross Hospital) be transferred into Wednesfield South ward.

84 After carefully considering all representations received regarding these wards during Stage One, we were concerned by the contradictory nature of the arguments received regarding the Nordley Hill and Wednesfield Village area, in particular the fact that the Council and residents of Vicarage Road and the Nordley Hill areas considered these areas to be part of the Wednesfield community, and yet local political groups and community associations considered those electors immediately to the north of Wednesfield Village to associate more with Heath Town ward. In the light of these submissions, we were concerned that there may have been a political dimension in regard to these wards, as detailed previously. We stated that our draft recommendations took no account of possible political advantage and were based on striking the best balance between our statutory criteria. With this in mind, we were of the opinion that both areas in question share more community identity with Wednesfield Village. We further agreed that all properties to the east of New Cross Hospital would be better reflected within a Wednesfield ward. However, this would result in unacceptable levels of electoral equality in both wards. We also noted the general support for uniting the Wood End area in Wednesfield North ward. We were therefore content to adopt the City Council's main proposal for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

85 In considering the recent Bentley Bridge development, we noted that the geographical boundaries surrounding it are such that it does not particularly share community affinity with either Heath Town or Wednesfield. However, as a consequence of our decision to adopt the Council's main proposals for the Wednesfield area, we adopted the Council's main proposal to transfer the Bentley Bridge area into Heath Town ward. We also noted that there is a significant amount of industrial and commercial land separating this area from Wednesfield Village centre, and that some local support had been received for this proposal.

86 In considering the proposals to transfer the area of Park Village from Low Hill and St Peter's wards into Heath Town ward, we noted that the number of electors per councillor in Heath Town, Low Hill and St Peter's wards would deteriorate to 8% above, 9% below and 9% below the city average by 2006 under these proposals. We did not consider that these proposals improved the reflection of community identity enough to justify such a deterioration in the levels of electoral equality, and further noted that the Council's main proposals for these wards use strong, readily identifiable boundaries. We therefore adopted the Council's main proposals for Heath Town, Wednesfield North and Wednesfield South wards, as we were of the view that they struck the best balance between our statutory criteria.

87 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Heath Town, Wednesfield North and Wednesfield South wards would be 14% below, 2% above and 4% below the city average initially (4%, 1% and 6% below the city average by 2006).

88 Eleven representations were received in response to our draft recommendations for these wards. The Council offered general support for our draft recommendations for this area. One of

the councillors representing Wednesfield South ward, eight local residents and Wednesfield Village Traders Association all supported our recommendations for the Wednesfield area, in particular the proposals to transfer the area to the north of Wednesfield town centre (polling district DK) from Heath Town ward into a Wednesfield ward. However, three of the residents further stated that they would have preferred for all of the Nordley Hill area to be in Wednesfield South ward.

89 Having considered the representations received during Stage Three regarding these wards, we intend confirming our draft recommendations as final. We note the support received for the transferral of areas of Wednesfield town centre from Heath Town ward into Wednesfield South ward. Having reconsidered the representations which argued that all of the Nordley Hill area would be better reflected in a Wednesfield ward, we remain of the opinion that this would have too detrimental an effect on electoral equality.

90 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Heath Town, Wednesfield North and Wednesfield South wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Bilston East, Bilston North, East Park, Ettingshall and Spring Vale wards

91 These five wards are situated in the east and south-east of the city, and are each represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the numbers of electors per councillor in Bilston East and Bilston North wards is 8% below and 16% above the city average (5% below and 16% above the city average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in East Park, Ettingshall and Spring Vale wards is 16% below, 6% below and 10% above the city average (13% below, 3% below and 7% above the city average by 2006).

92 During Stage One, two representations were received regarding these wards. The City Council proposed a number of modifications to the existing boundaries. As detailed previously, the Council proposed moving the boundary between St Peter's and East Park wards to follow the Ring Road, recognising that East Park ward has insufficient electors under the existing arrangements. It also proposed transferring the area to the north of Moseley Road, Hill Road, Vaughan Road and Dilloways Lane, currently in Bilston North ward, into East Park ward.

93 The Council proposed one further amendment to the existing boundaries of Bilston North ward, transferring those few electors to the south of Bilston Road, currently in Bilston North ward, into Bilston East ward. It also proposed transferring the entirety of the Ladymoor Estate from Ettingshall ward into Bilston East ward. As a consequence of transferring this area from Ettingshall ward, and in order to improve the levels of electoral equality in Ettingshall and Spring Vale wards, the Council proposed transferring those electors to the north and east of Black Country Route, Birmingham New Road and Spring Road, and to the south of Spring Road Industrial Estate, currently in Spring Vale ward, into Ettingshall ward. The Council further proposed transferring a small area of industrial land in Ettingshall, to the south of Dimmock Street, Attwood Gardens, Bowen Street, Penhallow Drive, Hardon Road and Taylor Road, into Spring Vale ward.

94 One further representation was received regarding these wards. The Conservative Group on the Council fully supported the City Council's main proposals for these wards.

95 Having carefully considered the representations received regarding these wards during Stage One, we noted the consensus received from the three political groups on the Council and therefore based our draft recommendations for these wards on the Council's proposals. However, we departed from its proposals in two areas. As detailed previously, we were concerned that the All Saints area identifies more readily with Ettingshall ward than St Peter's ward and therefore transferred this area from St Peter's ward into Ettingshall ward. We were of the view that this proposal better reflected the communities and provided for more effective and

convenient local government in both Ettingshall and St Peter's wards. As a consequence of this proposal, and to improve the reflection of communities in Bilston, we made a modification to the City Council's proposed boundary between Ettingshall and Bilston East wards. We noted that, under the Council's main proposal, the Ladymoor area of Ettingshall ward would be transferred into Bilston East ward. However, we also noted that access between this area and the remainder of the ward is limited, passing through the boundary with Dudley Borough Council, or through Ettingshall ward. We also noted that the boundary between these two wards dissects Bilston town centre. Therefore, in order to improve access to the Ladymoor area and to better reflect the Bilston community by transferring the majority of Bilston Town Centre into Bilston East ward, we transferred the area to the east of Wolverhampton Street and south of Shale Street, currently in Ettingshall ward, into Bilston East ward. We acknowledged that electoral equality deteriorated slightly in these wards under our draft recommendations. However, we considered that this was justified given the better reflection of communities and more identifiable boundaries achieved under our proposals.

96 Under our draft recommendations, Bilston North, East Park and Spring Vale wards would be 2% above, equal to and 3% below the city average initially (3% above, 2% above and equal to the city average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Bilston East and Ettingshall wards would be 1% and 6% above the city average initially (4% and 8% above the city average by 2006).

97 During Stage Three, three representations were received regarding these wards. The Council offered general support for our draft recommendations for this area, and proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between East Park and Ettingshall wards, to make it run down the length of Bilston Road, rather than along the canal. This would affect no electors. Ettingshall ward Labour Party opposed the transferral of Bilston town centre from Ettingshall ward into Bilston East ward. It argued that the residential area behind the High Street is not seen as part of the town centre, and should remain part of Ettingshall ward. However, the Springvale Liberal Democrats supported our proposal to transfer this area into Bilston East ward, and further proposed that the boundary should be extended to encompass the area around Hickman Park, affecting only a small number of electors.

98 Having considered the representations received regarding these wards, we intend confirming our draft recommendations as final, subject to adopting the Council's minor boundary amendment, which secures a more identifiable boundary. We note the support received from the Springvale Liberal Democrats, but do not consider that their amendment would strike a better balance between our statutory criteria than our draft recommendations. Similarly, given the support received for our recommendations to unite all of Bilston town centre in Bilston East ward, we intend confirming this as final without modification.

99 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Bilston East, Bilston North, East Park, Ettingshall and Spring Vale wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Blakenhall, Graiseley, Merry Hill and Penn wards

100 These four wards are situated in the south and south-west of the city, and are each represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Blakenhall, Graiseley, Merry Hill and Penn wards is 2% below, equal to, 5% above and 9% above the city average (3% below, 2% above, 2% above and 7% above the city average by 2006).

101 During Stage One, two representations were received regarding these wards. The City Council acknowledged that these wards all achieved reasonable levels of electoral equality and used strong, well defined and easily identifiable boundaries under the existing arrangements. It therefore proposed retaining the existing Blakenhall and Graiseley wards as part of its main

proposal. It proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between Merry Hill and Penn wards, transferring the electors living to the south of Springhill Lane and east of Warstones Road, currently in Penn ward, into Merry Hill ward.

102 One further representation was received during Stage One. The Conservative Group on the Council fully supported the City Council's main proposal for these wards.

103 After carefully considering both representations received during Stage One, we adopted the City Council's proposals for these wards, subject to one minor boundary amendment. We noted that the existing arrangements provide for acceptable levels of electoral equality, and that the Council's proposal to retain the majority of these wards in their existing forms received consensual support from the three political groups on the Council. We considered that the existing arrangements currently provide for effective and convenient local government while utilising readily identifiable boundaries, and we therefore adopted them as part of our draft recommendations. However, we made a minor modification to the City Council's proposals for the boundary between Merry Hill and Penn wards as we considered that retaining the entirety of the existing boundary of Warstones Road would provide for a more readily identifiable boundary. We therefore recommended retaining Blakenhall, Graiseley, Merry Hill and Penn wards in their existing forms as part of our draft recommendations.

104 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Blakenhall, Graiseley, Merry Hill and Penn wards would be the same as under the existing arrangements.

105 During Stage Three, the Council offered general support for our draft recommendations for this area. We received no further representations regarding these wards, and therefore intend confirming them as final. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Blakenhall, Graiseley, Merry Hill and Penn wards would be the same as under the existing arrangements.

Electoral cycle

106 Under section 7(3) of the Local Government Act 1972, all metropolitan boroughs have a system of elections by thirds.

Conclusions

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

- we propose modifying the boundary between Tettenhall Regis and Tettenhall Wightwick wards to provide a more identifiable boundary;
- we propose modifying the boundary between Park and Tettenhall Wightwick wards to improve electoral equality and better reflect communities;
- we propose renaming Bushbury and Low Hill wards as Bushbury North and Bushbury South and Low Hill wards, respectively, in order to better reflect their constituent communities.

108 We conclude that, in Wolverhampton:

- a council of 60 members should be retained;
- there should be 20 wards;
- the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified, with four wards retaining their existing boundaries.

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

Table 4: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	60	60	60	60
Number of wards	20	20	20	20
Average number of electors per councillor	3,055	3,055	3,048	3,048
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	5	2	5	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	0	0	1	0

110 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from five to two, with no wards varying by more than 20% from the city average. This level of electoral equality would improve further by 2006, with no wards varying by more than 8% from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the statutory criteria.

Final recommendation

Wolverhampton City Council should comprise 60 councillors serving 20 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A and the large maps.

Map 2: Final recommendations for Wolverhampton

6 What happens next?

111 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Wolverhampton and submitted our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3692).

112 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 24 June 2003, and The Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representations made to them by that date. They particularly welcome any comments on the first draft of the Order, which will implement the new arrangements.

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

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

Fax: 020 7271 0667

**Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk
(This address should only be used for this purpose)**

Appendix A

Final recommendations for Wolverhampton: Detailed mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Wolverhampton area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the ward boundaries within the city and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on the large maps.

The **large maps** illustrate the proposed warding arrangements for Wolverhampton.

Map A1: Final recommendations for Wolverhampton: Key map

Appendix B

Guide to interpreting the first draft of the electoral change Order

Preamble

This describes the process by which the Order will be made, and under which powers. Text in square brackets will be removed if The Electoral Commission decides not to modify the Final Recommendations.

Citation and commencement

This defines the name of the Order and sets the dates on which it will come into force.

Interpretation

This defines terms that are used in the Order.

Wards of the city of Wolverhampton

This abolishes the existing wards, and defines the names and areas of the new wards, in conjunction with the map and the schedule.

Elections of the council of the city of Wolverhampton

This sets the date on which a whole council election will be held to implement the new wards, and the dates on which councillors will retire.

Maps

This requires Wolverhampton City Council to make a print of the map available for public inspection.

Electoral registers

This requires Wolverhampton City Council to adapt the electoral register to reflect the new wards.

Revocation

This revokes the Order that defines the existing wards, with the exception of the article that established the system of election by thirds.

Explanatory note

This explains the purpose of each article. Text in square brackets will be removed if The Electoral Commission decides not to modify the Final Recommendations.

Appendix C

First draft of electoral change Order for Wolverhampton

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

2003 No.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT, ENGLAND

The City of Wolverhampton (Electoral Changes) Order 2003

Made - - - - *2003*

Coming into force in accordance with article 1(2)

Whereas the Boundary Committee for England(a), acting pursuant to section 15(4) of the Local Government Act 1992(b), has submitted to the Electoral Commission(c) recommendations dated May 2003 on its review of the city(d) of Wolverhampton:

And whereas the Electoral Commission have decided to give effect [with modifications] to those recommendations:

And whereas a period of not less than six weeks has expired since the receipt of those recommendations:

Now, therefore, the Electoral Commission, in exercise of the powers conferred on them by sections 17(e) and 26(f) of the Local Government Act 1992, and of all other powers enabling them in that behalf, hereby make the following Order:

Citation and commencement

- 1.—(1) This Order may be cited as the City of Wolverhampton (Electoral Changes) Order 2003.
- (2) This Order shall come into force –
 - (a) for the purpose of proceedings preliminary or relating to any election to be held on 6th May 2004, on 15th October 2003;

-
- (a) The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, established by the Electoral Commission in accordance with section 14 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (c. 41). The Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (S.I. 2001/3962) transferred to the Electoral Commission the functions of the Local Government Commission for England.
- (b) 1992 c.19. This section has been amended by S.I. 2001/3962.
- (c) The Electoral Commission was established by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (c. 41). The functions of the Secretary of State, under sections 13 to 15 and 17 of the Local Government Act 1992, to the extent that they relate to electoral changes within the meaning of that Act, were transferred with modifications to the Electoral Commission on 1st April 2002 (S.I. 2001/3962).
- (d) The metropolitan district of Wolverhampton has the status of a city.
- (e) This section has been amended by S.I. 2001/3962 and also otherwise in ways not relevant to this Order.
- (f) This section has been amended by S.I. 2001/3962.

- (b) for all other purposes, on 6th May 2004.

Interpretation

2. In this Order –

“city” means the city of Wolverhampton;

“existing”, in relation to a ward, means the ward as it exists on the date this Order is made; and

any reference to the map is a reference to the map marked “Map referred to in the City of Wolverhampton (Electoral Changes) Order 2003”, of which prints are available for inspection at –

- (a) the principal office of the Electoral Commission; and
(b) the offices of Wolverhampton City Council.

Wards of the city of Wolverhampton

3.—(1) The existing wards of the city(a) shall be abolished.

- (2) The city shall be divided into twenty wards which shall bear the names set out in the Schedule.
- (3) Each ward shall comprise the area designated on the map by reference to the name of the ward and demarcated by red lines; and the number of councillors to be elected for each ward shall be three.
- (4) Where a boundary is shown on the map as running along a road, railway line, footway, watercourse or similar geographical feature, it shall be treated as running along the centre line of the feature.

Elections of the council of the city of Wolverhampton

4.—(1) Elections of all councillors for all wards of the city shall be held simultaneously on the ordinary day of election of councillors in 2004(b)(c).

- (2) The councillors holding office for any ward of the city immediately before 10th May 2004 shall retire on that date and the newly elected councillors for those wards shall come into office on that date.
- (3) Of the councillors elected in 2004 one shall retire in 2006, one in 2007 and one in 2008.
- (4) Of the councillors elected in 2004 –
- (a) the first to retire shall, subject to paragraphs (6) and (7), be the councillor elected by the smallest number of votes; and
- (b) the second to retire shall, subject to those paragraphs, be the councillor elected by the next smallest number of votes.
- (5) In the case of an equality of votes between any persons elected which makes it uncertain which of them is to retire in any year, the person to retire in that year shall be determined by lot.
- (6) If an election of councillors for any ward is not contested, the person to retire in each year shall be determined by lot.

(a) See the Borough of Wolverhampton (Electoral Arrangements) Order 1980 (S.I. 1980/85).

(b) Article 4 provides for a single election of all the councillors and for reversion to the system of election by thirds, as established by article 8 of S.I. 1980/85.

(c) For the ordinary day of election of councillors of local government areas, see section 37 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (c.2), amended by section 18(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1985 (c.50) and section 17 of, and paragraphs 1 and 5 of Schedule 3 to, the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (c.29).

- (7) Where under this article any question is to be determined by lot, the lot shall be drawn at the next practicable meeting of the council after the question has arisen and the drawing shall be conducted under the direction of the person presiding at the meeting.
- (8) Except as otherwise provided in the foregoing paragraphs of this article the term of office of councillors shall be four years, and all councillors shall retire on the fourth day after the ordinary day of election of councillors of the borough in the year of retirement and the newly elected councillors shall come into office on the day on which their predecessors retire.

Maps

5. Wolverhampton City Council shall make a print of the map marked “Map referred to in the City of Wolverhampton (Electoral Changes) Order 2003” available for inspection at its offices by any member of the public at any reasonable time.

Electoral registers

6. The Electoral Registration Officer(a) for the city shall make such rearrangement of, or adaptation of, the register of local government electors as may be necessary for the purposes of, and in consequence of, this Order.

Revocation

7. The Borough of Wolverhampton (Electoral Arrangements) Order 1980(b) is revoked, save for article 8.

Signed by the members of the Electoral Commission

Date	<i>Pamela Gordon</i> Commissioner
Date	<i>Glyn Mathias</i> Commissioner
Date	<i>Neil McIntosh</i> Commissioner
Date	<i>Karamjit Singh</i> Commissioner
Date	<i>Sam Younger</i> Commissioner
Date	<i>Graham Zellick</i> Commissioner

(a) As to electoral registration officers and the register of local government electors, see sections 8 to 13 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (c.2).
 (b) S.I. 1980/85.

SCHEDULE

article 3

NAMES OF WARDS

Bilston East	Merry Hill
Bilston North	Oxley
Blakenhall	Park
Bushbury North	Penn
Bushbury South and Low Hill	St Peter's
East Park	Spring Vale
Ettingshall	Tettenhall Regis
Fallings Park	Tettenhall Wightwick
Graiseley	Wednesfield North
Heath Town	Wednesfield South

EXPLANATORY NOTE

(This note is not part of the Order)

This Order gives effect, [with modifications], to recommendations by the Boundary Committee for England, a committee of the Electoral Commission, for electoral changes in the city of Wolverhampton.

The modifications are *indicate the modifications*.

The changes have effect in relation to local government elections to be held on and after 6th May 2004.

Article 3 abolishes the existing wards of the city and provides for the creation of 20 new wards. That article and the Schedule also make provision for the names and areas of, and numbers of councillors for, the new wards.

Article 4 makes provision for a whole council election in 2004 and for reversion to the established system of election by thirds in subsequent years.

Article 6 obliges the Electoral Registration Officer to make any necessary amendments to the electoral register to reflect the new electoral arrangements.

Article 7 revokes the Borough of Wolverhampton (Electoral Arrangements) Order 1980, with the exception of article 8.

The areas of the new city wards are demarcated on the map described in article 2. Prints of the map may be inspected at all reasonable times at the offices of Wolverhampton City Council and at the principal office of the Electoral Commission at Trevelyan House, Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2HW.