



New electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council

May 2010

Translations and other formats

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Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body which conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. The broad purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements – the number of councillors and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions – for a specific local authority. We are conducting an electoral review of Central Bedfordshire to ensure that the new unitary authority has appropriate electoral arrangements that reflect its functions and political management structure.

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

This review is being conducted as follows:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
Council size	4 August 2009	Submission of proposals to the Boundary Committee on council size for the authority and its analysis and deliberation
One	27 October 2009	Submission of proposals to the Boundary Committee
Two	12 January 2010	Boundary Committee's analysis and deliberation
Three	17 May 2010	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	13 July 2010	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Submissions received

The Boundary Committee received 20 representations during its initial consultation on council size. During Stage One it received 44 representations on ward arrangements including district-wide schemes from Central Bedfordshire Council, the Central Bedfordshire Labour Party and the Liberal Democrat group on the council. The Committee also received localised evidence of community identity from parish and town councils in the district. All submissions can be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

Central Bedfordshire Council submitted electorate forecasts for December 2013, a period five years on from the December 2008 electoral roll which is the basis for this review. These forecasts projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% over this period. Although we have some concern that this level of growth appears somewhat high, we note that during the five-year period 2003–8, the electorate of the

area covered by Central Bedfordshire increased by approximately 5%. On balance, we are therefore satisfied that they are the most accurate electorate figures that can be provided at this time.

Council size

The Committee received proposals for council size ranging from 48 to 84 members. Central Bedfordshire Council proposed a council size of 66 members and took an evidenced-based approach in its consideration. However, the Committee was of the view that the evidence provided by the Council pointed towards a council size of fewer than 60 members. The Committee outlined its concerns and requested further evidence from the Council to support the proposed council size. Subsequently, the Council submitted a revised proposal for a council size of 60 members. However, the Committee noted that the evidence received pointed towards a council size of 59. The Committee was therefore minded to adopt a council size of 59 and invited representations on warding arrangements for a 59-member council.

General analysis

Having considered the submissions received during Stage One, we have developed proposals which are based broadly on those of the Council. We noted some similarities between the Council's proposals and the other district-wide schemes received. Where we have moved away from the Council's proposals, we have sought to reflect communication links, geographic factors and evidence of community identity received during Stage One.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on the draft recommendations on the proposed electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council contained in the report. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.** We will take into account all submissions received by **12 July 2010**. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We would particularly welcome local views backed up by demonstrable evidence. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

**Review Officer
Central Bedfordshire Review
The Local Government Boundary Commission for England
76–86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG
reviews@lgbce.org.uk**

The full report is available to download at www.lgbce.org.uk.

1 Introduction

1 The Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee for England to conduct a review of the electoral arrangements for the new Central Bedfordshire unitary authority. The review commenced on 4 August 2009. The Boundary Committee wrote to Central Bedfordshire Council as well as other interested parties, inviting the submission of proposals on the council size for the new council. Following the Committee's decision on the appropriate council size, it invited the submission of proposals on the ward arrangements for the new council. The submissions received during these stages of the review have informed the Commission's draft recommendations.

2 On 1 April 2010, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee. The Commission is now conducting a full public consultation on the draft recommendations. Following this period of consultation, we will consider the evidence received and will publish final recommendations for the new electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council in autumn 2010.

What is an electoral review?

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

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

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

Why are we conducting a review in Central Bedfordshire?

6 In December 2007, the Government approved a bid from Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire district councils for a unitary council to take over the responsibility for all local government services in the area which were formerly provided by Bedfordshire County Council and the two district councils. A Statutory Instrument was subsequently approved by Parliament on 25 February 2008, establishing a new Central Bedfordshire unitary authority from 1 April 2009. The Electoral Commission was obliged, by law, to consider whether an electoral review was needed following such a change in local government. Its view was that an electoral review of Central Bedfordshire was appropriate at the earliest opportunity.

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

7 As discussed in paragraphs 1–2, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to conduct an electoral review. However, following the LGBCE assuming the functions of the Boundary Committee, the LGBCE is now conducting the review. It therefore falls to us to complete the work of the Boundary Committee.

How will the recommendations affect you?

8 The recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the council. They will also decide which ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward and, in some instances, which parish or town council wards you vote in. Your ward name may change, as may the names of parish or town council wards in the area. If you live in a parish, the name or boundaries of that parish will not change.

9 It is therefore important that you let us have your comments and views on the draft recommendations. We encourage comments from everyone in the community, regardless of whether you agree with the draft recommendations or not. The draft recommendations are evidence based and we would therefore like to stress the importance of providing evidence in any comments on our recommendations, rather than relying on assertion. We will be accepting comments and views until 12 July 2010. After this point, we will be formulating our final recommendations which we are due to publish in autumn 2010. Details on how to submit proposals can be found on page 25 and more information can be found on our website, www.lgbce.org.uk.

What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill
Director of Reviews: Archie Gall

2 Analysis and draft recommendations

11 Before finalising our recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council we invite views on these draft recommendations. We welcome comments relating to the proposed ward boundaries, ward names, and parish or town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

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

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

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

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

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

Submissions received

16 Prior to and during the initial stage of the review, members and officers of the Boundary Committee visited Central Bedfordshire Council and met with members, officers and parish and town councils. We are grateful to all concerned for their

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

co-operation and assistance. The Committee received 20 submissions during its initial consultation on council size for the new authority, and 44 representations during Stage One, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the Council. All representations received can also be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Electorate figures

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

18 We had some concerns about whether a rate of 7% growth would be realised. However, it was noted that during the five-year period 2003-08, the electorate of the area covered by Central Bedfordshire increased by approximately 5%. We are also satisfied that the methodology provided by the Council to support the electorate figures did not take account of growth in the electorate projected to occur beyond 2013.

19 During Stage One, Central Bedfordshire Labour Party asserted that the Council's projected increase in the electorate was conservative. However, they did not provide evidence to support a larger increase in the electorate than that provided by the Council.

20 Noting the lack of evidence to contradict the Council's forecasts, we are therefore content to accept them as the basis of our draft recommendations.

Council size

21 The Bedfordshire (Structural Changes) Order ('the Order') provided electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council to reflect a 'doubling-up' of members of the former County Council. The Council is therefore currently operating with a council size of 66 members based on former county divisions in the area of the former County Council that it comprises.

22 Central Bedfordshire is a new council, with new functions and responsibilities. It is therefore necessary to consider the number of members required for the authority to provide effective and convenient local government. Furthermore, it is important to consider this in isolation from the former number of county and district councillors for Bedfordshire, and to consider how the new authority is managed and how it intends to engage with and empower its local communities.

23 At the beginning of the electoral review, the Boundary Committee consulted specifically on council size. At that stage, 20 submissions were received with regard to the proposed council size for the new unitary authority. These submissions may be inspected at both our offices and those of the Central Bedfordshire Council. All representations received can also be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

24 The Committee received proposals for four different council sizes ranging from 48 to 84. These included proposals for a council size of 66 (as per the electoral arrangements provided by the Order) from several respondents.

25 The Council took an evidence-based approach in its consideration of council size and outlined the allocation of members to responsibilities. It was the only representation that provided evidence for council size in the context of the proposed political management structure of the new unitary authority.

26 The Council's proposal outlined a Leader and Executive political management structure with an Executive of 10 members which meets formally and informally, the latter with officers on a monthly basis.

27 The Council set out an allocation of members under the proposed political management structure and stated the frequency of meetings and membership of committees would require in 194 committee posts (including those of the Leader and Executive) for the Council to operate effectively.

28 The Council said that the Leader, members of the Executive and members of the Development Management Committee should be discounted from assuming membership of other committees given the workload of the aforementioned posts. The Council's submission stated that 'it is not considered to be reasonable to add to the already heavy workload' of the Executive. Similarly, it added that 'members of [the Development Management] Committee cannot reasonably be expected to assume more than one additional committee per member'.

29 Discounting the Leader and members of the Executive and Development Management Committee would result in 57 committee posts. These posts would not be included in calculating the proposed council size. This would result in the number of committee posts not discounted totalling 137. Applying an average of 3.7 committee posts per member, plus the 29 members comprising the Leader, and those of the Executive and Development Management Committee, the Council proposed a council size of 66 members.

30 The Committee considered the Council's proposal to have merit. However, it felt the evidence provided would suggest a council size of fewer than 66 members. In particular, the Committee felt there was insufficient evidence to support the Council's assertion that the workload of the Development Management Committee would not permit its members to assume more than one additional committee post. The Committee was of the view that the impact of the Planning Act 2008 would reduce the workload of the Development Management Committee with regard to planning applications.

31 Consequently, the Committee requested further information from the Council to supports its proposed council size of 66. Members of the Committee met with members and officers of the Council and outlined their concerns with regard to the proposed 66-member council.

32 In light of those discussions, the Council submitted a revised proposal for a council size of 60 members. The Council's revised proposal did not discount members of the Development Management Committee from assuming more than one additional committee post per member.

33 Based on the Council's approach in calculating a proposed council size, the revised submission would result in a council size of 59 members. However, the

Council proposed a council size of 60, stating the Leader 'believes a Council of 60 members would be a more appropriate number to meet the needs of our towns, parishes and local communities'.

34 The Committee considered the evidence provided clearly supported a council size of 59. The Committee noted the Council's assertion that an additional member would assist the Council in fulfilling its role of community engagement. However, it did not consider the Council had provided sufficient evidence to support an additional member. The Committee was therefore minded to adopt a council size of 59 based on the evidence provided by the Council.

35 Accordingly, during Stage One representations were invited on ward arrangements based on a council size of 59.

36 During Stage One, proposals relating to council size were received from Central Bedfordshire Labour Party ('the Labour Party'), Houghton Regis Town Council and Shefford Town Council. These three respondents argued that a council size of 59 members would be insufficient in the context of member workload. However, they did not provide evidence to support their contentions, or evidence relating to an alternative council size. No further comments on council size were received.

37 In the absence of persuasive evidence to the contrary, we are of the view that a council size of 59 members would provide effective and convenient local government within Central Bedfordshire Council.

Electoral fairness

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

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

40 In seeking to achieve electoral fairness, we work out the average number of electors per councillor. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the county (192,915 in December 2008 and 207,720 by December 2013) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 59 under our draft recommendations. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 3,270 in 2008 and 3,521 by 2013.

41 Under the draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in two of the 31 wards will vary by more than 10% from the average across the district by 2013. However, overall, we are satisfied that we have achieved good levels of electoral fairness under our draft recommendations for Central Bedfordshire.

General analysis

42 During Stage One, three district-wide schemes were received. These were from Central Bedfordshire Council ('the Council'), Central Bedfordshire Labour Party ('the Labour Party') and the Liberal Democrat group. Leighton-Linslade Liberal Democrats, North Bedfordshire Liberal Democrats and a local resident endorsed the Liberal Democrat group's proposals. The district-wide schemes were all based on a council size of 59, as proposed by the Boundary Committee. The three schemes all proposed a pattern of multi-member wards and would provide for good levels of electoral equality.

43 The Council and the Liberal Democrat group provided limited evidence of community identity to support their respective proposals. Both schemes were consulted on prior to being submitted to the Boundary Committee. The Labour Party did not provide evidence of community identity and did not indicate that its proposals had been consulted on.

44 While the three schemes differed, we noted some similarities in the composition of the warding patterns proposed. However, in some instances, the Liberal Democrat group's and the Labour Party's schemes proposed what appeared to be somewhat arbitrary splits of parishes. With the exception of the main towns of Biggleswade, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade, where the division of parishes between wards is unavoidable, the Council's scheme was based on whole parishes as the building blocks of its proposed warding pattern. Overall, we consider that the Council's scheme provides clear ward boundaries and, where not constrained by the geography of the area, provides a good reflection of communities in the district. We have therefore broadly based our proposals on the Council's scheme, subject to a number of modifications which are outlined in this report.

45 The remainder of the submissions received during Stage One were localised comments with several respondents providing evidence of community identities and interests to support the proposals made. We have also noted the responses to the consultation on the Council and the Liberal Democrat group proposals.

46 During Stage One, some respondents submitted proposals for an external boundary review to be undertaken between Central Bedfordshire and adjacent authorities. While the Commission does have the power to conduct external boundary reviews, we consider that for the sake of clarity and to avoid any confusion, any future review of this nature should await the completion and implementation of the current review.

47 Some respondents also proposed changes to external parish boundaries. However, this is not within the remit of the Commission and can only be carried out by Central Bedfordshire Council through the mechanism of a community governance review under the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

48 The Commission's proposals are for a pattern of 12 single-member wards, 10 two-member wards and nine three-member wards. We consider our proposals to provide good electoral equality while providing an accurate reflection of community identities and interests where we have received such evidence.

49 A summary of our proposed electoral arrangements is set out in Table C1 (on pages 34–6) and Map 1.

50 During Stage Three we welcome comments on these draft recommendations, particularly in relation to those areas where we did not receive representations other than the district-wide schemes received during Stage One.

Electoral arrangements

51 This section of the report details the submissions received, the consideration on them, and our draft recommendations for each area of Central Bedfordshire. The following areas are considered in turn:

- North east Central Bedfordshire (pages 10–13)
- Mid Central Bedfordshire (pages 13–18)
- South Central Bedfordshire (pages 18–22)

52 Details of the draft recommendations are set out in Table C1 on pages 34–6, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

North east Central Bedfordshire

53 North east Central Bedfordshire broadly comprises the northern area of the former Mid Bedfordshire District Council. This area is generally rural in character but contains the towns of Biggleswade and Sandy.

54 During Stage One, in addition to district-wide proposals discussed in paragraph 42, the Boundary Committee received seven specific comments in relation to this area from four parish councils, one parish councillor and a local resident. These submissions can be viewed on our website. As discussed in paragraph 44, we have developed proposals which are broadly based on the district-wide scheme of the Council.

55 The Council's proposed wards in this area would provide good electoral equality. The majority of submissions received from respondents in this area were in relation to Sandy town and its hinterland. We have modified the Council's proposals in this area to reflect evidence of community identity received during Stage One. We have also proposed a minor modification in Biggleswade town to provide clearer ward boundaries that reflect access routes.

Sandy town and its hinterland

56 During Stage One, the Council, the Liberal Democrat group and the Labour Party all proposed different ward patterns in Sandy town and its hinterland. However, each proposal seemingly reflected a desire to provide, insofar as is possible, a rural/urban split in the area.

57 The Council's proposed Sandy ward would comprise the majority of Sandy parish. However, it would exclude the Fallowfield and Beeston areas of Sandy, in the west of the parish. Fallowfield and Beeston would instead be warded with the

adjacent Northhill ward. The Council's proposals were endorsed by the Conservatives in North East Bedfordshire ('the local Conservative party association').

58 While the Council's proposals in this area would provide for good electoral equality, respondents opposed the split of Sandy parish. They also opposed the urban areas of Fallowfield and Beeston parish being linked to the otherwise rural Northhill ward. Both the Labour Party and, to a lesser degree, the Liberal Democrat group, sought to avoid this in their proposals.

59 In light of the representations received we examined alternative warding patterns that would avoid the division of Sandy parish between wards and which would reflect the urban/rural split in this area. We initially considered a Sandy ward which would be coterminous with Sandy parish. However, given the electorate of Sandy parish, this would result in a significant electoral imbalance and would have a consequential effect on electoral equality in the proposed Northhill ward.

60 Blunham Parish Council, Moggerhanger Parish Council and Councillor Dan Clark (Temsford Parish Council) proposed warding patterns that would avoid the warding of Sandy town with adjoining rural areas. However, we were not persuaded that sufficient evidence had been provided in support their proposals. Sandy Town Council proposed a ward comprising Sandy parish and the adjacent parish to the north, Blunham, in a three-member ward.

61 A Fallowfield resident provided good evidence of community identity to support the inclusion of Fallowfield in the proposed Sandy ward. The local resident cited several local amenities and facilities in the centre of Sandy used by residents of the Fallowfield area. The local resident stated that families in Fallowfield looked towards Sandy town centre for healthcare facilities, the library, public houses, the post office, banks, churches, clubs, societies and Sandy Railway Station. In contrast, the local resident observed that Fallowfield Estate had only very limited facilities, further supporting the extent to which Fallowfield residents are inclined to look towards the centre of Sandy town for the majority of their services and amenities.

62 Given this evidence of community identity provided by the local resident in support of a Sandy ward that would also comprise Fallowfield, we consider a warding pattern of this nature would provide a good reflection of community identity in the area while ensuring good levels of electoral equality.

63 We noted that the inclusion of the Fallowfield area within the Council's proposed Sandy ward would have a consequential effect on adjoining wards given the electorate in this area. Furthermore, it would result in only the Beeston area of Sandy town being warded separately from the remainder of Sandy town itself.

64 We therefore examined Sandy Town Council's proposals for a three-member ward comprising Sandy and Blunham parishes. We noted Blunham Parish Council's opposition to being linked with Sandy town in a district ward. However, we did not consider that sufficient evidence had been provided to support the council's views. Indeed, we noted that the Parish Council conceded that 'residents of Blunham look primarily to Sandy for the doctors and dentist surgeries', which would suggest that community links exist between Blunham and Sandy parishes.

65 Furthermore, given the evidence provided by the resident of Fallowfield, we considered that, on balance, Sandy Town Council's proposal for warding Blunham and Sandy parishes in a three-member ward would reflect community identities in the area and provide good electoral equality. We have therefore adopted this proposal as part of our draft recommendations. The proposed three-member Sandy ward would have 8% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. The adjacent Northhill ward would have 1% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013.

66 While Blunham Parish Council opposed being linked with Sandy town, we considered our proposed Sandy ward would reflect the communication links in the area as Blunham residents have clear access to Sandy town via the A1.

67 We also noted that our proposed three-member Sandy ward would partially reflect the proposals of the Labour Party in avoiding a split of Sandy parish and, to a lesser degree, those of the Liberal Democrat group, which proposed the inclusion of Fallowfield in its proposed Sandy ward.

68 The local Conservative party association also proposed a community governance review to modify the administrative boundary of Sandy parish. However, as discussed in paragraph 47, this is not within the remit of the Commission. It is open to Central Bedfordshire Council to conduct a community governance review and make a local order to implement any changes.

Biggleswade town

69 Both the Council and the Liberal Democrat group proposed identical warding patterns in Biggleswade town – a two-member Biggleswade North ward and two-member Biggleswade South ward with 5% fewer and equal to the average number of electors per councillor respectively than the district average by 2013. The Labour Party, however, proposed a four-way split of Biggleswade town.

70 We considered the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposals in Biggleswade town provided a clear warding pattern, broadly splitting the town along the A6001 and the B1040. The proposals would also result in good electoral equality. We have therefore adopted the proposals as part of our draft recommendations, albeit with a minor modification.

71 We propose a minor boundary modification to the proposed ward boundaries in the west of Biggleswade town. Under the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposal, the boundary follows the High Street before following St Andrew's Street and subsequently Mill Lane before reaching the River Ivel. We propose the boundary should, instead, continue from the High Street, transferring the tennis court, bowling green and properties on St Andrews Close from the proposed Biggleswade North ward to the proposed Biggleswade South ward, before following the River Ivel and rejoining Mill Lane.

72 This modification ensures that properties on St Andrews Close have direct road access into Biggleswade South ward and provides a clearer boundary by following the River Ivel. It affects only four electors and therefore has no impact on electoral equality.

73 In the remainder of north east Central Bedfordshire, we propose adopting the Council's proposals without modification. These would provide for good levels of electoral equality. With the exception of a submission from Lanford Parish Council, which endorsed the Council's proposals for its area, no other comments on warding arrangements for north east Central Bedfordshire were received.

74 Table C1 (on pages 34–6) provides details of the electoral variances of the draft recommendations for wards in north east Central Bedfordshire. The draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Mid Central Bedfordshire

75 Mid Central Bedfordshire broadly comprises the southern area of the former Mid Bedfordshire District Council. Mid Central Bedfordshire is rural in nature, with several scattered urban settlements.

76 During Stage One, in addition to the district-wide proposals discussed in paragraph 42, the Boundary Committee received 15 specific comments in relation to this area from 14 parish councils and a local resident. These submissions can be viewed on our website.

77 As discussed in paragraph 44, we have developed proposals which are broadly based on the district-wide scheme submitted by the Council. The Council's proposed wards in this area would provide good electoral equality. With the exception of its proposed Barton-le-Clay ward, which is coterminous with the parish of the same name, the Council's proposed wards would all have electoral variances within 10% of the district average by 2013.

78 The Council's proposals in this area were based on whole parishes. The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrat group departed from this principle, most notably in Cranfield where their respective proposals would split Cranfield University and Cranfield Airfield from the remainder of Cranfield village for warding purposes. We were not persuaded that the Labour and Liberal Democrat proposals would provide a clear ward boundary or necessarily reflect community interests in this area. We were therefore not persuaded to adopt this proposal, which was also opposed by Cranfield Parish Council.

79 In the remainder of this area the Boundary Committee received good evidence of community identity. We have therefore given careful consideration to alternative warding patterns put forward by interested parties during Stage One. We gave particular consideration to alternative warding patterns in the Flitwick and Toddington areas.

Flitwick town and its hinterland

80 The Council proposed a three-member Flitwick ward, comprising the parishes of Flitwick and Steppingley. This was endorsed by both parish councils, as noted in Flitwick Town Council's response to the Council's consultation.

81 In the hinterland of Flitwick town, proposals for alternative warding patterns were received from a number of parish councils that opposed the Council's proposals.

82 The parish councils of Pulloxhill and Silsoe both proposed a ward comprising the parishes of Flitton & Greenfield, Pulloxhill and Silsoe. In response to the Council's consultation, we noted that Flitton & Greenfield Parish Council, while preferring no change to its ward, which links the parish with Flitwick, supported the alternative of being warded with Pulloxhill and Silsoe parishes.

83 Both Pulloxhill and Silsoe parish councils provided reasonable evidence of shared community identity, citing shared healthcare services and mentioning the local post office in Silsoe as being the closest for residents in the respective villages. The parish councils added that while public transport in the area is limited, it does provide linkage between the parishes. The churches of both parishes also share a vicar and church benefice, consequently sharing church services and holding joint fundraising events.

84 While both parishes provided evidence in support of a ward comprising the parishes of Flitton & Greenfield, Pulloxhill and Silsoe, this would have a significant knock-on effect on the proposed wards in the wider area. However, Pulloxhill Parish Council stated that 'it would be content to join other parishes as required' to its proposed ward. Given this, we considered the possible inclusion of parishes to the east and west in its proposed ward.

85 We considered a two-member ward comprising the Council's proposed Westoning, Flitton & Greenfield ward and Silsoe & Shillington ward. This ward would comprise the parishes of Flitton & Greenfield, Gravenhurst, Pulloxhill, Shillington, Silsoe, Tingrith and Westoning and have 2% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. This ward would reflect the shared rural geography and community interests of these relatively scattered villages.

86 We noted varying arguments of shared community identity from the parish councils in this area. While Pulloxhill and Silsoe parish councils provided evidence of shared community identities between the parishes of Flitton & Greenfield, Pulloxhill and Silsoe, other parish councils in this area cited their own community of interest.

87 Shillington Parish Council argued that it did not share a community of interest with Silsoe parish. However, it asserted a shared identity with Gravenhurst and Meppershall parishes. In response to the Council's consultation, Westoning Parish Council broadly supported the Council's proposed Westoning, Flitton & Greenfield ward. Neither Shillington Parish Council nor Westoning Parish Council provided substantive evidence of community identity to support their assertions of respective communities of interest.

88 Given the evidence of shared community identity as cited by Pulloxhill and Silsoe parishes, we felt that sufficient evidence had been received to demonstrate a shared community of interest between Pulloxhill, Silsoe and Westoning parishes. However, a clear consensus amongst all the constituent parishes for a wider two-member ward was not apparent.

89 While we considered a two-member ward to have merit, given the lack of evidence, on balance, we are not minded to adopt it as part of the draft recommendations. Instead, we have decided to adopt the Council's proposals in this area. The proposed two single-member wards of Westoning, Flitton & Greenfield and Silsoe & Shillington would have with 4% more and 1% more electors per councillor respectively than the district average by 2013.

90 However, given the balance of views, we would welcome further comment and evidence of community identity in this area during Stage Three, particularly from parish councils, community groups and local residents in the area.

Toddington town and its hinterland

91 The Council proposed a two-member Toddington ward comprising the parishes of Toddington, Chalton, Streatley, Sundon and Harlington. The Council's proposed Toddington ward would have 8% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013.

92 In considering the submissions received in relation to this area during Stage One, we noted a lack of consensus in relation to the Council's proposed Toddington ward. During Stage One, the Boundary Committee received submissions from Harlington Parish Council, Streatley Parish Council and a local resident all opposing the Council's proposals. Chalton Parish Council endorsed the proposed Toddington ward.

93 Harlington Parish Council proposed a ward comprising Harlington, Toddington and Westoning parishes 'as all three villages are located along the A5120 corridor and thus have very similar interests'. However, we did not consider that the Parish Council provided sufficient supporting evidence to demonstrate the similar interests between the parishes. Furthermore, adopting this warding pattern would have an adverse consequential effect on the warding pattern across the wider area.

94 Streatley Parish Council argued it did not share a community of interest with Harlington parish and proposed instead a ward comprising Sundon, Chalton and Streatley parishes. The Parish Council stated 'these three villages have much in common and are of similar size'. However, this proposal would result in a ward with a significant imbalance in electoral equality.

95 Despite Streatley Parish Council's opposition to being warded with Harlington parish, we examined a warding pattern of a single-member ward comprising Chalton, Harlington, Streatley and Sundon parishes and a further single-member ward comprising Toddington parish. This would represent a variation of Streatley Parish Council's proposal. A single-member Toddington ward would have 1% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. However, a single-member ward comprising Chalton, Harlington, Streatley and Sundon parishes would contain 16% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. This ward would have

a higher variance than we would normally be minded to adopt in the absence of strong and persuasive evidence.

96 A local resident initially supported the Liberal Democrat group proposal for a single-member Harlington & Westoning ward, comprising the parishes of the same name. He also cited sports teams and clubs used by residents of both parishes and added that Toddington is separated from Harlington by both the M1 and the railway. However, having had sight of the Council's proposal in this area, the local resident submitted an alternative warding pattern of a single-member ward comprising Harlington, Streatley and Sundon parishes. The local resident provided reasonable evidence of communication links to demonstrate a shared community of interest between these parishes. He stated Junction 12 of the M1 serves residents of the three parishes, as does Harlington Railway Station, as a transport hub in the area.

97 Given the evidence provided by the local resident, we considered the local resident's proposed warding pattern.

98 A single-member ward comprising Harlington, Streatley and Sundon parishes would have 4% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013, while a single-member ward comprising Toddington and Chalton parishes would have 12% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. The latter ward would have a slightly higher variance than we would normally propose. However, this is balanced against the evidence submitted by the local resident.

99 We acknowledge that the local resident's proposal has merit and reflects communication links in this area. However, on balance, we consider that the Council's proposed Toddington ward would provide the best reflection of local opinion based on the submissions received during Stage One, as well as providing for good electoral equality. While there are clearly differing views on the composition of the Council's proposed Toddington ward, we consider it strikes the best balance between the views expressed during Stage One.

100 We have therefore adopted the Council's two-member Toddington ward as part of our draft recommendations. This ward would have 8% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. Nonetheless, we are of the view that the local resident's proposal has merit and would therefore particularly welcome further comments and evidence on that proposal during Stage Three.

Aspley Guise and its hinterland

101 The Council's proposed Aspley & Woburn ward would have 8% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. Aspley Heath Parish Council supported the Council's proposal. However, both Aspley Guise and Woburn parish councils opposed the Council's proposal.

102 Aspley Guise Parish Council proposed a two-member ward comprising the parishes of Aspley Guise, Aspley Heath, Battlesden, Eversholt, Flitton & Greenfield, Husborne Crawley, Milton Bryan, Potsgrove, Pulloxhill, Tingrith, Westoning and Woburn. This ward would effectively combine the Council's Aspley & Woburn and Westoning, Flitton & Greenfield wards.

103 Aspley Guise Parish Council did not provide evidence to support its proposal and asserted an 'affinity' amongst the constituent parishes. Indeed, in response to this proposal, Aspley Heath Parish Council refuted any community of interest with the parishes of Flitton & Greenfield, Pulloxhill and Westoning. Woburn Parish Council proposed a similar warding pattern to that proposed by the Council. The Parish Council's proposal was identical to the Council's with the exception of the Potsgrove parish.

104 We have noted the relatively small electorate of Potsgrove parish would allow this modification to the Council's proposed Aspley & Woburn ward without having an adverse impact on electoral equality. However, we also note that the A5 to the south of Potsgrove parish provides a strong and clear boundary to the south.

105 We also note that Woburn Parish Council's submission was seemingly in response to an earlier version of the Council's warding proposals. This proposal would create a larger two-member ward in this area, which Woburn Parish Council asserted would have a 'lack of commonality between the [constituent] villages'. It would therefore appear that the Council's Stage One submission broadly reflects Woburn Parish Council's proposal.

106 Consequently, we have decided to adopt the Council's proposed Aspley & Woburn ward without modification as part of our draft recommendations.

Amphill town and its hinterland

107 The Council's proposed three-member Amphill ward would have 9% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. This ward would comprise the parishes of Amphill, Clophill and Maulden. During Stage One, both Clophill and Maulden parish councils opposed the Council's proposed Amphill ward on the basis of the urban/rural mix that would result. Maulden Parish Council supported the Liberal Democrat group proposal for this area, which would combine Clophill and Maulden parishes in a single-member ward.

108 We considered the Liberal Democrat group proposal for a single-member ward comprising Clophill and Maulden parishes. This ward would have 7% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. However, the knock-on effect on adjoining areas would result in a two-member ward comprising Amphill parish with 17% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2103. This would be a higher variance than we would normally be minded to adopt in the absence of persuasive evidence.

109 We subsequently considered an appropriate split of Maulden parish to provide good electoral equality while avoiding, so far as possible, an urban rural/mix. This would be similar to the Labour Party proposal. However, it would require the transfer of approximately 500 electors and result in a somewhat arbitrary ward boundary. We are of the view that this would not facilitate effective and convenient local government. We have therefore decided to adopt the Council's proposed warding arrangements for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

110 We did not receive further comment on the warding pattern in mid Central Bedfordshire. As discussed in paragraph 36, Shefford Town Council opposed the

proposed council size of 59. However, the Parish Council did not submit comments on the warding pattern.

111 In the remainder of mid Central Bedfordshire, we have decided to adopt the Council's proposals without modification. Table C1 (on pages 34–6) provides details of the electoral variances of the draft recommendations for wards in mid Central Bedfordshire. The draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

South Central Bedfordshire

112 South Central Bedfordshire broadly comprises the area covered by the former South Bedfordshire District Council. South Central Bedfordshire contains the main towns of Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade. The remaining area is largely rural.

113 During Stage One, in addition to district-wide proposals discussed in paragraph 42, the Boundary Committee received 17 specific comments in relation to this area from two councillors, four parish councils, four local political groups, one community group and six local residents. These submissions can be viewed on our website.

114 As discussed in paragraph 44, we developed proposals which are broadly based on the district-wide scheme of the Council.

115 The Council's proposed wards in this area would provide good electoral equality. With the exception of its proposed Dunstable-Beecroft ward, the Council's proposed wards would all have electoral equality within 10% of the district average by 2013.

116 There was consensus between the Council and Liberal Democrat group proposals for Dunstable and Houghton Regis. The Labour Party proposed an alternative warding pattern in these areas. In Leighton-Linslade, all three district-wide schemes differed.

117 Beyond the towns in south Central Bedfordshire, the Council's and the Labour Party's proposals in the rural areas of south Central Bedfordshire were identical while the Liberal Democrat group's proposals differed.

Leighton-Linslade town and its hinterland

118 During Stage One, the majority of comments received in relation to south Central Bedfordshire focused on the proposals for Heath & Reach parish. Twelve submissions were received in relation to this area, with respondents wholly opposed to both the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposals, each of which would ward Heath & Reach parish separately from Leighton-Linslade town.

119 Respondents argued strongly for no change to the warding pattern in this area, in which Heath & Reach parish is warded with the Plantation area of Leighton Buzzard to its south.

120 Heath & Reach Parish Council, Heath & Reach Women's Institute, local political parties and local residents all provided good evidence of community identity to

support the linkages between Heath & Reach and the Plantation area. Heath & Reach Parish Council stated residents from both settlements commonly use Leighton Buzzard golf club, Stockgrove Park and St Leonard's Church, all within Heath & Reach parish.

121 We noted that four respondents from Leighton-Linslade town, specifically Plantation, echoed these views. In particular, a local resident of Plantation stated that she frequented Heath & Reach for the post office, shopping and recreation and cited her membership of Heath & Reach Women's Institute to demonstrate shared community identities between the two areas. Councillor Alan Shadbolt (Plantation) also proposed retaining the status quo and, as a consequence, submitted a proposal for a revised warding pattern in south Central Bedfordshire.

122 While we acknowledge the evidence of shared community identity and communication links between Heath & Reach and Plantation, the proposal to retain the status quo in this area is not viable based on a council size of 59 and the need to secure good electoral equality. To ward Heath & Reach parish with Plantation under a council size of 59 would have a significant consequential effect beyond Leighton-Linslade town and its hinterland. Furthermore, it would result in an arbitrary split of Leighton-Linslade parish. Taken together, we do not believe that this would provide the best balance between the statutory criteria to which we are required to have regard when considering the area as a whole.

123 Accordingly, notwithstanding the evidence of a shared community identity and communication links between Heath & Reach and Plantation, we have decided against adopting as part of our draft recommendations a ward encompassing these two areas.

124 We have considered the alternative warding patterns submitted for Heath & Reach parish. Both the Council and the Labour Party proposed the parish be warded with parishes to its east while the Liberal Democrat group proposed it be warded with parishes to its north. However, the Liberal Democrat group's proposal would breach the A5, which we consider to be a strong boundary separating Heath & Reach parish from communities to its north. Indeed, we note that while maintaining its opposition to the alternative proposals, Heath & Reach Parish Council stated it would rather be linked with Hockliffe parish (to the east) than with areas to the north.

125 Given this, we consider the Council's and the Labour Party's proposed warding arrangements to provide the best warding pattern at this time and therefore propose adopting them as part of our draft recommendations. Our proposed Heath & Reach ward would have 3% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013.

126 In Leighton-Linslade town itself, in addition to the authority-wide proposals received, we received submissions from Leighton-Linslade Liberal Democrats ('the local Liberal Democrat party') and Leighton-Linslade Town Council. The local Liberal Democrat party supported the Liberal Democrat group's proposals while the Town Council did not comment specifically on the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposals.

127 The Council proposed three three-member wards of Leighton Buzzard North, Leighton Buzzard South and Linslade which would have 9% more, 5% more and 9%

fewer electors per councillor, respectively, than the district average by 2013. Its proposal would also provide clear and strong boundaries that follow the Grand Union Canal and the A4012. In contrast, both the Liberal Democrat group's and the Labour Party's proposals would, in our view, provide insufficiently clear ward boundaries which would not reflect community identities in the town.

128 Consequently, we have decided to adopt the Council's proposed warding pattern in Leighton-Linslade with a minor modification. This modification would ensure the boundary between Linslade and Leighton Buzzard North wards follows the canal in its entirety where this slightly deviates west of Bossington Gardens. This modification does not affect any electors.

129 Elsewhere in Leighton-Linslade town and its hinterland, we have decided to adopt the Council and the Labour Party's proposed Eaton Bray ward without modification. This ward would comprise the parishes of Eaton Bray, Great Billington and Totternhoe.

130 We noted that Totternhoe Parish Council supported the Council's Eaton Bray ward but proposed that it be named South West Bedfordshire. However, given that the ward name of Eaton Bray was consulted on by the Council, we are not minded to adopt Totternhoe Parish Council's proposal as part of our draft recommendations. As Eaton Bray is the largest settlement in this ward, we consider this to be an appropriate ward name. The proposed Eaton Bray ward would have 2% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013.

Dunstable town

131 The Council and the Liberal Democrat group proposed identical warding patterns for Dunstable town and Houghton Regis town. The Labour Party's proposals in this area differed.

132 In Dunstable, the Council and the Liberal Democrat group proposed the following wards: Dunstable-Beecroft; Dunstable-Central; Dunstable-Icknield; Dunstable-Manshead; Dunstable-Northfields; and Dunstable-Watling. These wards would have 11% more, 5% more, 1% more, 9% more, -3% fewer and 10% more electors per councillor, respectively, than the district average by 2013. The proposed wards of Dunstable-Beecroft, Dunstable-Central, Dunstable-Manshead and Dunstable-Northfields are single-member wards. Dunstable-Icknield and Dunstable-Watling are two-member wards.

133 During Stage One, Councillor Julian Murray (Northfields) opposed the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposals for the Beecroft area of Dunstable. Councillor Murray asserted that the proposed warding pattern in this area would result in a split of the Beecroft area. Councillor Murray argued this would divide a clear and cohesive community.

134 Councillor Murray proposed retaining the existing Northfields ward which broadly speaking, would combine the Council's proposed Dunstable-Beecroft and Dunstable-Northfields wards, minus the area of Beecroft east of High Street North and south of Chiltern Road.

135 We considered Councillor Murray's proposed warding pattern in this area, and agree that the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposal would split what appears to be a cohesive community. However, maintaining the status quo, as proposed by Councillor Murray, would have a notable knock-on effect to adjoining wards in Dunstable town. We note that combining the Council and the Liberal Democrat group's proposed Dunstable-Beecroft and Dunstable-Northfields wards would avoid a split of the Beecroft area and limit any consequential effect on the remainder of the town. A two-member ward combining Dunstable-Beecroft and Dunstable-Northfields wards would have 4% more electors per councillor by 2013. This would include the area of Beecroft east of High Street North and south of Chiltern Road.

136 We noted that Councillor Murray asserted that residents within the area covered by the existing Northfields ward have no common identity with communities to the east of High Street North. Councillor Murray added that 'people from that area do not look to shop or worship at the facilities in Westfield Road [within Beecroft]. However, he conceded that should it be necessary to add an adjacent area to facilitate a two-member Northfields ward, the area to east of High Street North and south of Chiltern Road would be 'the most logical' area to include.

137 Given the evidence received, we propose a two-member Dunstable-Northfields ward comprising the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposed Dunstable-Beecroft and Dunstable-Northfields wards. We consider that adopting this warding pattern would provide a clearer ward boundary, better reflect community identities in this area, and provide for reasonable electoral equality.

138 Councillor Murray made further comments in relation to Dunstable. He proposed the area covered by Dunstable return nine district councillors, 'given the potential developments in the town and on its boundaries'. However, we note that under a council size of 59, Dunstable town is only entitled to return eight councillors.

139 Councillor Murray also proposed a modification to the parish boundary between Houghton Regis and Dunstable parishes. However, as stated in paragraph 47, a community governance review, which would facilitate this, is not within the remit of the Commission.

Houghton Regis town

140 In Houghton Regis town, the Council's and the Liberal Democrat Group's proposed wards of Houghton Hall, Parkside and Tithe Farm would have 8% fewer, 2% more and 8% fewer electors per councillor respectively than the district average by 2013. The proposed Houghton Hall ward is a two-member ward, while Parkside and Tithe Farm are single-member wards.

141 As discussed in paragraph 36, Houghton Regis Town Council opposed the proposed overall council size for the district. The Town Council did not submit comments on the warding pattern for the area. However, we note it did not oppose the allocation of councillors within Houghton Regis town, as per the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposals. The Town Council stated that the proposed allocation 'would enable existing local identities and communities to be retained and ward names to remain'. The Town Council also proposed that there should be no change to parish electoral arrangements.

142 We considered that the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposed warding pattern in Houghton Regis town would provide clear boundaries and good electoral equality, and have therefore decided to adopt it as part of our draft recommendations subject to a minor modification.

143 We propose a modification to the boundary between the proposed Houghton Hall and Tithe Farm wards, north of Grove Farm. Under the Council's and the Liberal Democrat group's proposals, the boundary north of Grove Farm continues north until the parish boundary. However, we propose that it should follow the fence to the north-east of Grove Farm which, in our view, would provide a clearer ward boundary that is tied to ground detail. This modification would not affect any electors.

144 The Boundary Committee did not receive further comment on the warding pattern for south Central Bedfordshire.

145 In the remainder of south Central Bedfordshire, we have decided to adopt the Council's proposals without modification. These would provide good levels of electoral equality as well as reflecting community identities in this area.

146 Table C1 (on pages 34–6) provides details of the electoral variances of the draft recommendations for wards in mid Central Bedfordshire. The draft recommendations are shown on Map 1, Map 3 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

147 Table 1 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, based on 2008 and 2013 electorate figures.

Table 1: Summary of electoral arrangements

	Draft recommendations	
	2008	2013
Number of councillors	59	59
Number of electoral wards	31	31
Average number of electors per councillor	3,270	3,521
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	11	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	0

Draft recommendation

Central Bedfordshire Council should comprise 59 councillors serving 31 wards, as detailed and named in Table C1 and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

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

149 During Stage One, some parishes requested changes to parish electoral arrangements where these were not as a consequence of our proposed district warding arrangements. Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make such changes as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Central Bedfordshire Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

150 To meet our obligations under the 2009 Act, we propose consequential parish warding arrangements for the parishes of Biggleswade, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade.

151 We would particularly welcome comments on these proposals from the parish councils concerned and local residents during this consultation stage.

152 The parish of Biggleswade is currently divided into three parish wards: Holme (returning four members), Ivel (returning six members) and Stratton (returning five members).

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

Draft recommendations

Biggleswade Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Holme (returning six members), Ivel (returning six members) and Stratton (returning three members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 2.

154 The parish of Dunstable is currently divided into six parish wards: Chiltern (returning three members), Dunstable Central (returning three members), Icknield (returning four members), Manshead (returning three members), Northfields (returning four members) and Watling (returning four members).

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

Draft recommendations

Dunstable Town Council should comprise 21 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Central (returning three members), Icknield (returning four members), Northfields (returning seven members), Manshead (returning three members) and Watling (returning four members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 4.

156 The parish of Houghton Regis is currently divided into three parish wards: Houghton Hall (returning six members), Parkside (returning four members) and Tithe Farm (returning four members).

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

Draft recommendations

Houghton Regis Town Council should comprise 14 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Houghton Hall (returning six members), Parkside (returning four members) and Tithe Farm (returning four members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 4.

158 The parish of Leighton-Linslade is currently divided into six parish wards: All Saints (returning three members), Grovebury (returning three members), Linslade (returning three members), Planets (returning three members), Plantation (returning four members) and Southcott (returning four members).

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

Draft recommendations

Leighton-Linslade Town Council should comprise 20 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Grovebury (returning five members), Linslade (returning four members), Plantation (returning five members), Planets (returning two members) and Southcott (returning four members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 3.

3 What happens next?

160 There will now be a consultation period of nine weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire Council contained in this report. We will take into account fully all submissions received by 12 July 2010. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

161 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Central Bedfordshire and welcome comments from interested parties relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We would welcome alternative proposals backed up by demonstrable evidence during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

162 Express your views by writing directly to:

Review Officer
Central Bedfordshire Review
The Local Government Boundary Commission for England
76-86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG

reviews@lgbce.org.uk

Submissions can also be made by using the consultation section of our website, www.lgbce.org.uk or by emailing reviews@lgbce.org.uk.

163 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, we make available for public inspection full copies of all representations the Commission takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all Stage Three representations will be placed on deposit locally at the offices of Central Bedfordshire Council and at our offices in Layden House (London) and on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

164 If you are a member of the public and not writing on behalf of a council or organisation we will remove any personal identifiers, such as postal or email addresses, signatures or phone numbers from your submission before it is made public. We will remove signatures from all letters, no matter who they are from.

165 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations and consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, **whether or not** they agree with the draft recommendations. We will then publish our final recommendations.

166 After the publication of our final recommendations, the changes we have proposed must be approved by Parliament. An Order – the legal document which

brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in draft in Parliament. Parliament can either accept or reject our recommendations. If accepted, the new electoral arrangements will come into force at the next elections for Central Bedfordshire Council in 2011.

4 Mapping

Draft recommendations for Central Bedfordshire

167 The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Central Bedfordshire Council.
- **Sheet 2, Map 2** illustrates the proposed wards in Biggleswade town.
- **Sheet 3, Map 3** illustrates the proposed wards in Leighton-Linslade town.
- **Sheet 4, Map 4** illustrates the proposed wards in Dunstable town and Houghton Regis town.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

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

Electoral fairness	When one elector's vote is worth the same as another's
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. For the purposes of this report, we refer specifically to the electorate for local government elections
Local Government Boundary Commission for England or LGBCE	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee for England in April 2010
Multi-member ward or division	A ward or division represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	The 13 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and can be found at www.nationalparks.gov.uk
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents

Parish council	A body elected by electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town Council'
Parish (or Town) Council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by the Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England
Political management arrangements	The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enabled local authorities in England to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from two broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet or a cabinet with a leader
Town Council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at www.nalc.gov.uk
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average

Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

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

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

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

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

Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.

We comply with this requirement.

Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.

We comply with this requirement.

Appendix C

Table C1: Draft recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Ampthill	3	9,151	3,050	-7%	9,613	3,204	-9%
2	Arlesey	3	11,215	3,738	14%	11,382	3,794	8%
3	Aspley & Woburn	1	3,702	3,702	13%	3,792	3,792	8%
4	Barton-le-Clay	1	3,936	3,936	20%	3,991	3,991	13%
5	Biggleswade North	2	5,384	2,692	-18%	6,702	3,351	-5%
6	Biggleswade South	2	6,924	3,462	6%	7,067	3,534	0%
7	Caddington	2	7,440	3,720	14%	7,660	3,830	9%
8	Cranfield & Marston	3	9,242	3,081	-6%	10,302	3,434	-2%
9	Moretaine							
9	Dunstable-Central	1	3,438	3,438	5%	3,712	3,712	5%
10	Dunstable-Icknield	2	5,923	2,962	-9%	7,079	3,540	1%
11	Dunstable-Manshead	1	3,631	3,631	11%	3,842	3,842	9%

Table C1 (cont.): Draft recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12	Dunstable-Northfields	2	6,491	3,246	-1%	7,329	3,665	4%
13	Dunstable-Watling	2	7,614	3,807	16%	7,755	3,878	10%
14	Eaton Bray	1	3,400	3,400	4%	3,436	3,436	-2%
15	Flitwick	3	10,297	3,432	5%	10,347	3,449	-2%
16	Heath & Reach	1	3,253	3,253	-1%	3,408	3,408	-3%
17	Houghton Conquest	1	2,099	2,099	-36%	3,242	3,242	-8%
18	Houghton Hall	2	5,654	2,827	-14%	6,463	3,232	-8%
19	Leighton Buzzard North	3	10,767	3,589	10%	11,556	3,852	9%
20	Leighton Buzzard South	3	8,393	2,798	-14%	11,085	3,695	5%
21	Linslade	3	9,229	3,076	-6%	9,623	3,208	-9%
22	Northhill	1	3,470	3,470	6%	3,540	3,540	1%
23	Parkside	1	3,492	3,492	7%	3,576	3,576	2%
24	Potton	2	6,163	3,082	-6%	6,295	3,148	-11%

Table C1 (cont.): Draft recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
25 Sandy	3	9,592	3,197	-2%	9,672	3,224	-8%
26 Shefford	2	6,569	3,285	0%	6,803	3,402	-3%
27 Silsoe & Shillington	1	3,296	3,296	1%	3,545	3,545	1%
28 Stotfold	3	8,953	2,984	-9%	10,421	3,474	-1%
29 Tithe Farm	1	3,104	3,104	-5%	3,223	3,223	-8%
30 Toddington	2	7,533	3,767	15%	7,613	3,807	8%
31 Westoning, Flitton & Greenfield	1	3,560	3,560	9%	3,646	3,646	4%
Totals	59	192,915	-	-	207,720	-	-
Averages	-	-	3,270	-	-	3,521	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Central Bedfordshire Council.

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

Appendix D

Additional legislation we have considered

Equal opportunities

In preparing this report we have had regard to the general duty set out in Section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to the need to:

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

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

We have also had regard to:

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

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The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament in April 2010. It is independent of Government and political parties, and is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. It is responsible for conducting boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government areas.