

Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Bedfordshire County Council

Report to The Electoral Commission

July 2004

Translations and other formats

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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 No. 3962). 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 the number of councillors elected to the council, division boundaries and division names.

This report sets out the Committee's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the county of Bedfordshire.

Summary

We began a review of Bedfordshire County Council's electoral arrangements on 10 December 2002. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 13 January 2004 after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **In 31 of the 49 divisions, each of which are currently represented by a single councillor, the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the county and 13 divisions vary by more than 20%.**
- **By 2007 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 35 divisions and by more than 20% in 17 divisions.**

Our main final recommendations for Bedfordshire County Council's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 172 –173) are:

- **Bedfordshire County Council should have 52 councillors, three more than at present, representing 46 divisions.**
- **As the divisions are based on district wards which have themselves changed as a result of the recent district reviews, the boundaries of all divisions will be subject to change.**

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

- **In 25 of the proposed 46 divisions the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the county average. Seven divisions would vary by more than 20% from the county average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in 34 divisions expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average by 2007. Two divisions would vary by more than 20% from the county average by 2007.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for Biddenham, Kempston and Sandy parishes**

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 7 September 2004. 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

Division name (by district council area)	Number of Councillors	Constituent district wards
Bedford borough		
1 Brickhill	1	Brickhill ward
2 Bromham	1	Part of Bromham ward (Bromham parish and the proposed Biddenham North parish ward of Biddenham parish)
3 Cauldwell	1	Cauldwell ward
4 Clapham & Oakley	1	Clapham ward; Oakley ward
5 De Parys	1	De Parys ward; part of Castle ward
6 Eastcotts	1	Eastcotts ward; part of Great Barford ward (Cople parish; Great Barford parish; Willington parish)
7 Goldington	1	Goldington ward
8 Harpur	1	Harpur ward
9 Harrold	1	Carlton ward; Harrold ward; Sharnbrook ward
10 Kempston	2	Kempston East ward; part of Kempston North ward (North parish ward of Kempston parish); part of Kempston South ward (South parish ward of Kempston parish)
11 Kempston Rural	1	Turvey ward; part of Bromham ward (the proposed Biddenham South parish ward of Biddenham parish); part of Kempston North Ward (the proposed West parish ward of Kempston parish); part of Kempston South ward (Hardwick parish ward of Kempston Rural parish)
12 Kingsbrook	1	Kingsbrook ward
13 Newnham	1	Newnham ward; part of Castle ward
14 North East Bedfordshire	1	Riseley ward; Roxton ward; part of Great Barford ward (Ravensden parish; Renhold parish)
15 Putnoe	1	Putnoe ward
16 Queens Park	1	Queen's Park Ward; part of Castle ward
17 Wilshamstead	1	Wilshamstead ward
18 Wootton	1	Wootton ward

Division name (by district council area)	Number of Councillors	Constituent district wards	
Mid Bedfordshire district			
19	Amphill	1	Amphill ward
20	Biggleswade	2	Biggleswade Holme ward; Biggleswade Ivel ward; Biggleswade Stratton ward
21	Cranfield	1	Cranfield ward
22	Flitwick East	1	Flitton, Greenfield & Pulloxhill ward; Flitwick East ward
23	Flitwick West	1	Flitwick West ward
24	Langford & Henlow Village	1	Langford & Henlow Village ward; part of Clifton & Meppershall ward (Clifton parish)
25	Marston	1	Marston ward
26	Maulden & Houghton Conquest	1	Maulden & Clophill ward; part of Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden ward (Houghton Conquest parish; Haynes parish)
27	Northill & Blunham	1	Northill & Blunham ward; part of Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden ward (Southill parish; Old Warden parish); part of Sandy Ivel ward (the proposed Beeston & Ivel parish ward of Sandy parish); part of Sandy Pinnacle ward (the proposed Fallowfield & Pinnacle parish ward of Sandy parish)
28	Potton	1	Potton & Wensley ward
29	Sandy	1	Part of Sandy Ivel ward (the proposed Ivel East parish ward of Sandy parish); part of Sandy Pinnacle ward (the proposed Pinnacle South parish ward of Sandy parish)
30	Shefford	1	Part of Clifton & Meppershall ward (Meppershall parish); part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst ward (Shefford parish; Campton & Chicksands parish)
31	Silsoe & Shillington	1	Shillington, Stondon & Henlow Camp ward; Silsoe ward; part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst ward (Gravenhurst parish)
32	Stotfold & Arlesey	2	Arlesey ward; Stotfold ward
33	Woburn & Harlington	1	Aspley Guise ward; Harlington ward; Westoning & Tingrith ward; Woburn ward
South Bedfordshire district			
34	Barton	1	Barton-le-Clay ward; Streatley ward
35	Dunstable Downs	2	Chiltern ward; Dunstable Central ward; Manshead ward
36	Grovebury	1	Grovebury ward

Division name (by district council area)	Number of Councillors	Constituent district wards
37 Houghton Regis	2	Houghton Hall ward; Parkside ward; Tithe Farm ward
38 Icknield	1	Icknield ward
39 Leighton Linlade Central	2	All Saints ward; Linlade ward; Planets ward
40 Northfields	1	Northfields ward
41 Plantation	1	Plantation ward; part of Heath & Reach ward (Heath & Reach parish)
42 South East Bedfordshire	1	Caddington, Hyde & Slip End ward; part of Kensworth & Totternhoe ward (Kensworth parish)
43 South West Bedfordshire	1	Eaton Bray ward; part of Kensworth & Totternhoe ward (Studham parish; Totternhoe parish; Whipsnade parish); part of Stanbridge ward (Great Billington parish, Stanbridge parish, Tilsworth parish)
44 Southcott	1	Southcott ward
45 Toddington	1	Toddington ward; part of Heath & Reach ward (Hockliffe parish); part of Stanbridge ward (Chalgrave parish; Eggington parish)
46 Watling	1	Watling ward

Notes:

1. *The constituent district wards are those resulting from the electoral reviews of the three Bedfordshire districts which were completed in 2001. Where whole district wards do not form the building blocks, constituent parishes and parish wards are listed.*
2. *The large map inserted at the back of the report illustrates the proposed divisions outlined above and the maps in Appendix A illustrate some of the proposed boundaries in more detail.*

Table 2: Final recommendations for Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Bedford borough				
1 Brickhill	1	6,663	6,663	18
2 Bromham	1	5,382	5,382	-4
3 Cauldwell	1	5,785	5,785	3
4 Clapham & Oakley	1	6,032	6,032	7
5 De Parys	1	5,790	5,790	3
6 Eastcotts	1	4,576	4,576	-19
7 Goldington	1	6,232	6,232	11
8 Harpur	1	6,164	6,164	9
9 Harrold	1	6,590	6,590	17
10 Kempston	2	13,426	6,713	19
11 Kempston Rural	1	3,303	3,303	-41
12 Kingsbrook	1	6,457	6,457	15
13 Newnham	1	6,683	6,683	19
14 North East Bedfordshire	1	5,919	5,919	5
15 Putnoe	1	6,680	6,680	19
16 Queens Park	1	6,502	6,502	15
17 Wilshamstead	1	3,634	3,634	-35
18 Wootton	1	4,128	4,128	-27
Mid Bedfordshire				
19 Ampthill	1	5,358	5,358	-5
20 Biggleswade	2	11,877	5,939	5
21 Cranfield	1	4,115	4,115	-27
22 Flitwick East	1	5,838	5,838	4
23 Flitwick West	1	5,864	5,864	4
24 Langford & Henlow Village	1	5,969	5,969	6

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)		Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Bedford borough					
1	Brickhill	1	6,296	6,296	7
2	Bromham	1	6,199	6,199	5
3	Cauldwell	1	5,991	5,991	2
4	Clapham & Oakley	1	6,133	6,133	4
5	De Parys	1	5,507	5,507	-6
6	Eastcotts	1	5,241	5,241	-11
7	Goldington	1	6,004	6,004	2
8	Harpur	1	5,856	5,856	0
9	Harrold	1	6,466	6,466	10
10	Kempston	2	13,055	6,528	11
11	Kempston Rural	1	4,582	4,582	-22
12	Kingsbrook	1	6,191	6,191	5
13	Newnham	1	6,391	6,391	9
14	North East Bedfordshire	1	6,377	6,377	9
15	Putnoe	1	6,304	6,304	7
16	Queens Park	1	6,461	6,461	10
17	Wilshamstead	1	4,852	4,852	-17
18	Wootton	1	5,065	5,065	-14
Mid Bedfordshire					
19	Amphill	1	5,374	5,374	-9
20	Biggleswade	2	13,140	6,570	12
21	Cranfield	1	4,460	4,460	-24
22	Flitwick East	1	5,668	5,668	-4
23	Flitwick West	1	5,555	5,555	-5
24	Langford & Henlow Village	1	5,929	5,929	1

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Mid Bedfordshire				
25 Marston	1	3,853	3,853	-32
26 Maulden & Houghton Conquest	1	5,578	5,578	-1
27 Northhill & Blunham	1	6,420	6,420	14
28 Pottton	1	5,543	5,543	-2
29 Sandy	1	6,641	6,641	18
30 Shefford	1	5,929	5,929	5
31 Silsoe & Shillington	1	5,666	5,666	1
32 Stotfold & Arlesey	2	8,862	4,431	-21
33 Woburn & Harlington	1	7,534	7,534	34
South Bedfordshire				
34 Barton	1	5,551	5,551	-1
35 Dunstable Downs	2	10,899	5,450	-3
36 Grovebury	1	5,037	5,037	-11
37 Houghton Regis	2	12,279	6,140	9
38 Icknield	1	4,856	4,856	-14
39 Leighton Linlade Central	2	10,891	5,446	-3
40 Northfields	1	5,093	5,093	-10
41 Plantation	1	5,933	5,933	5
42 South East Bedfordshire	1	6,146	6,146	9
43 South West Bedfordshire	1	5,561	5,561	-1
44 Southcott	1	5,320	5,320	-6
45 Toddington	1	5,040	5,040	9

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Mid Bedfordshire				
25 Marston	1	5,092	5,092	-13
26 Maulden & Houghton Conquest	1	6,656	6,656	13
27 Northhill & Blunham	1	6,364	6,364	8
28 Potton	1	5,444	5,444	-7
29 Sandy	1	6,288	6,288	7
30 Shefford	1	6,228	6,228	6
31 Silsoe & Shillington	1	5,701	5,701	-3
32 Stotfold & Arlesey	2	10,926	5,463	-7
33 Woburn & Harlington	1	7,026	7,026	20
South Bedfordshire				
34 Barton	1	5,791	5,791	-1
35 Dunstable Downs	2	11,396	5,698	-3
36 Grovebury	1	5,995	5,995	2
37 Houghton Regis	2	13,017	6,509	11
38 Icknield	1	5,030	5,030	-14
39 Leighton Linlade Central	2	11,469	5,735	-2
40 Northfields	1	5,568	5,568	-5
41 Plantation	1	6,125	6,125	4
42 South East Bedfordshire	1	6,379	6,379	9
43 South West Bedfordshire	1	5,795	5,795	-1
44 Southcott	1	5,490	5,490	-7
45 Toddington	1	5,296	5,296	-10

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
South Bedfordshire				
46 Watling	1	5,264	5,264	-7
Totals	52	292,863	-	
Average	-	-	5,632	

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
South Bedfordshire				
46 Watling	1	5,425	5,425	-8
Totals	52	305,616	-	
Average		-	5,877	

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Bedfordshire County 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 county. 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 on the electoral arrangements for the county of Bedfordshire. Our review of the county is part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 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. 3962), 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.
- 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:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and
 - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

3 Details of the legislation under which we work are set out in The Electoral Commission's *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reviews* (Published by the EC in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of electoral divisions. In each two-tier county, our approach is first to complete the PERs of all the constituent districts and, when the Orders for the resulting changes in those areas have been made, then to commence a PER of the County Council's electoral arrangements. Orders were made for the new electoral arrangements in the districts in Bedfordshire in December 2001 and we are now conducting our county review in this area.

5 Prior to the commencement of Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000, each county council division could only return one member. This restraint has now been removed by section 89 of the 2000 Act, and we may now recommend the creation of multi-member county divisions. In areas where we are unable to identify single-member divisions that are coterminous with ward boundaries and provide acceptable levels of electoral equality, we will consider recommending multi-member divisions if they provide a better balance between these two factors. However, we do not expect to recommend large numbers of multi-member divisions other than, perhaps, in the more urban areas of a county.

6 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 sets out the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements*. These statutory *Rules* state that each division should be wholly contained within a single district and that division boundaries should not split unwarded parishes or parish wards.

7 In the *Guidance*, the Electoral Commission states that we should, wherever possible, build on schemes that have been created locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local people are normally in a better position to judge what council size and division configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while also reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.

8 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as possible, equal representation across the local authority 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.

9 Similarly, we will seek to ensure that each district area within the county is allocated the correct number of county councillors with respect to the district's proportion of the county's electorate.

10 The *Rules* provide that, in considering county council electoral arrangements, we should have regard to the boundaries of district wards. We attach considerable importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of divisions and wards. The term "coterminosity" is used throughout the report and refers to situations where the boundaries of county electoral divisions and district wards are the same, that is to say, where county divisions comprise one or more whole district wards. In our view wards or groups of wards that are not coterminous with county divisions can cause confusion for the electorate at local elections, lead to increased election costs and may not be conducive to effective and convenient local government.

11 We recognise that it is unlikely to be possible to achieve absolute coterminosity throughout a county area while also providing for the optimum level of electoral equality. In this respect, county reviews are different from those of districts. We will seek to achieve the best available balance between electoral equality and coterminosity, taking into account the statutory criteria. While the proportion of electoral divisions that will be coterminous with the boundaries of district wards is likely to vary between counties, we would normally expect coterminosity to be achieved in a significant majority of divisions. The average level of coterminosity secured under our final recommendations for the first eleven counties that we have reviewed (excluding the Isle of Wight) is 70%. Therefore, we recommend that in formulating schemes, interested parties should seek to secure a level of coterminosity of between 60% to 80%.

12 Where coterminosity is not possible in parished areas, and a district ward is to be split between electoral divisions, we would normally expect this to be achieved without dividing (or further dividing) a parish between divisions. There are likely to be exceptions to this, however, particularly where larger parishes are involved.

13 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 a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

14 A further area of difference between county and district reviews is that we must recognise that it will not be possible to avoid the creation of some county divisions which contain diverse communities, for example, combining rural and urban areas. We have generally sought to avoid this in district reviews in order to reflect the identities and interests of local communities. Some of the existing county council electoral divisions comprise a number of distinct communities, which is inevitable given the larger number of electors represented by each councillor, and we would expect that similar situations would continue under our recommendations in seeking the best balance between coterminosity and the statutory criteria.

15 As a part of this review, we may also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the county. However, we made some recommendations for new parish electoral arrangements as part of our district reviews. We therefore expect to put forward such recommendations during county reviews only on an exceptional basis. In any event, we are *not* able to review administrative boundaries *between* local authorities or parishes, or consider the establishment of new parish areas as part of this review.

The review of Bedfordshire

16 We completed the reviews of the three district council areas in Bedfordshire in August 2001 and orders for the new electoral arrangements have since been made. This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Bedfordshire County Council. The last such review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in January 1984 (Report No.462).

17 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 10 December 2002, when we wrote to Bedfordshire County Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified the three district councils in the county, Bedfordshire Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Bedfordshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the county, Members of Parliament with constituencies in the county, Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Bedfordshire County Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of submissions, the end of Stage One, was 14 April 2003. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

18 Stage Three began on 13 January 2004 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Bedfordshire County Council* and ended on 8 March 2004. During this period we sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

19 In preparing this report the Committee has had regard to the general duty under section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 to promote racial equality and to the approach set out in BCFE (03) 35, *Race Relations Legislation*, which the Committee considered and agreed at its meeting on 9 April 2003.

2 Current electoral arrangements

20 The county of Bedfordshire comprises the three districts of Bedford, Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire. The electorate of the county is 292,863 (December 2002). The council currently has 49 members, with one member elected from each division.

21 Bedfordshire is traditionally a manufacturing county but also with major employment in agriculture and mineral extraction. It is also an area of natural beauty, with the River Great Ouse running through it. With its southern border lying just 30 miles from London and having close links to London Luton Airport, it is considered the gateway to East Anglia and the Midlands.

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

23 At present, each councillor represents an average of 5,977 electors, which the County Council forecasts will increase to 6,237 by the year 2007 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration over the last two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 31 of the 49 divisions varies by more than 10% from the county average and 13 divisions vary by more than 20%. The worst imbalance is in Flitwick division where the councillor represents 64% more electors than the county average.

24 As explained previously, in considering the County Council's electoral arrangements, we must have regard to the boundaries of district wards. Following the completion of the reviews of district warding arrangements in Bedfordshire, we are therefore faced with a new starting point for considering electoral divisions. Our proposals for county divisions need to be based on the new district wards as opposed to those which existed prior to the recent reviews. The creation of these new district wards, and changes in the electorate over the past twenty years which have resulted in electoral imbalances across the county, mean that changes to most if not all of the existing county electoral divisions are inevitable.

Table 3: Existing electoral arrangements in Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)		Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Variance from average %
Bedford borough				
1	Brickhill	1	5,835	-2
2	Bromham	1	7,701	29
3	Castle	1	4,261	-29
4	Cauldwell	1	6,528	9
5	Clapham	1	4,799	-20
6	De Parys	1	5,008	-16
7	Goldington	1	4,511	-25
8	Great Barford & Wilstead	1	8,700	46
9	Harpur	1	6,165	3
10	Harrold	1	5,970	0
11	Kempston East	1	7,419	24
12	Kempston West	1	6,633	11
13	Kingsbrook	1	5,189	-13
15	Newnham	1	7,468	25
14	North East Bedford	1	6,255	5
16	Putnoe	1	4,629	-23
17	Queens Park	1	6,502	9
18	Wootton	1	6,374	7
Mid Bedfordshire				
19	Ampthill	1	5,564	-7
20	Aspley Guise	1	5,307	-11
21	Biggleswade Ivel	1	5,498	-8
22	Biggleswade Stratton	1	6,379	7
23	Cranfield & Marston	1	6,833	14
24	Flitwick	1	9,816	64

Table 3 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)		Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Variance from average %
Cambridge City				
1	Brickhill	1	5,515	-12
2	Bromham	1	9,434	51
3	Castle	1	4,077	-35
4	Cauldwell	1	6,791	9
5	Clapham	1	4,936	-21
6	De Parys	1	4,758	-24
7	Goldington	1	4,265	-32
8	Great Barford & Wilstead	1	10,557	69
9	Harpur	1	5,856	-6
10	Harrold	1	5,878	-6
11	Kempston East	1	7,092	14
12	Kempston West	1	6,559	5
13	Kingsbrook	1	4,900	-21
15	Newnham	1	7,113	14
14	North East Bedford	1	6,808	9
16	Putnoe	1	4,368	-30
17	Queens Park	1	6,434	3
18	Wootton	1	7,630	22
Mid Bedfordshire				
19	Ampthill	1	8,230	6
20	Aspley Guise	1	5,370	-31
21	Biggleswade Ivel	1	11,970	54
22	Biggleswade Stratton	1	8,980	16
23	Cranfield & Marston	1	9,460	22
24	Flitwick	1	7,440	-4

Table 3 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Variance from average %
Mid Bedfordshire			
25 Harlington	1	6,501	9
26 Langford	1	6,162	3
27 Maulden	1	5,578	-7
28 Northill	1	4,656	-22
29 Potton	1	5,543	-7
30 Sandy	1	8,402	41
31 Shefford & Clifton	1	6,910	16
32 Shillington & Henlow	1	6,856	15
33 Stotfold	1	5,039	-16
South Cambridgeshire			
34 Barton	1	5,978	0
35 Beaudesert	1	6,094	2
36 Brooklands	1	5,140	-14
37 Caddington	1	4,976	-17
38 Dunstable Central	1	6,294	5
39 Eaton Bray	1	6,752	13
40 Houghton Regis North West	1	5,304	-11
41 Houghton Regis South East	1	6,975	17
42 Icknield	1	4,856	-19
43 Linslade	1	4,391	-27
44 Northfields	1	5,093	-15
45 Plantation	1	4,851	-19
46 Priory	1	4,144	-31
47 Southcott	1	4,686	-22
48 Toddington	1	6,613	11

Table 3 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Variance from average %
Mid Bedfordshire			
25 Harlington	1	6,166	-1
26 Langford	1	6,656	7
27 Maulden	1	4,384	-30
28 Northill	1	5,444	-13
29 Potton	1	8,268	33
30 Sandy	1	7,087	14
31 Shefford & Clifton	1	6,979	12
32 Shillington & Henlow	1	7,018	13
33 Stotfold	1	6,166	-1
South Bedfordshire			
34 Barton	1	6,233	0
35 Beaudesert	1	7,121	14
36 Brooklands	1	5,293	-15
37 Caddington	1	5,162	-17
38 Dunstable Central	1	6,618	6
39 Eaton Bray	1	7,146	15
40 Houghton Regis North West	1	5,593	-10
41 Houghton Regis South East	1	7,424	19
42 Icknield	1	5,030	-19
43 Linslade	1	4,622	-26
44 Northfields	1	5,586	-10
45 Plantation	1	5,005	-20
46 Priory	1	4,304	-31
47 Southcott	1	4,837	-22
48 Toddington	1	6,922	11

Table 3 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Variance from average %
South Bedfordshire			
49 Watling	1	5,725	-4
Totals	49	292,863	-
Averages	-	5,977	-

Figure 3 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in Bedfordshire

Division name (by district council area)		Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Variance from average %
South Cambridgeshire				
49	Watling	1	5,899	-5
Totals		49	305,616	-
Averages		-	6,237	-

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

Note: Each division is represented by a single councillor, hence the electorate columns denote the number of electors represented by each councillor. The "variance from average" column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies from the average for the county. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2002, electors in Priory in South Bedfordshire were relatively over-represented by 31%, while electors in Flitwick in Mid Bedfordshire were significantly under-represented by 64%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Draft recommendations

25 During Stage One, we received 13 representations, including a county-wide scheme from Bedfordshire County Council and a district-wide scheme from Mid Bedfordshire District Council. We also received submissions from four local political parties, two parish councils, one town council, three local councillors and one local resident. 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 Bedfordshire County Council*.

26 Our draft recommendations were based on the County Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of single-member divisions throughout the county. However, we moved away from the County Council's scheme in a number of areas in order to improve the balance between coterminosity and electoral equality. Using options generated by local parties during the early stages of the review process, together with some of our own proposals, we proposed that:

- Bedfordshire County Council should be served by 52 councillors;
- there should be 46 electoral divisions, involving changes to the boundaries of all the existing divisions.

Draft recommendation

Bedfordshire County Council should comprise 52 councillors, serving 46 divisions.

27 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 34 of the 52 divisions varying by no more than 10% from the county average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only eleven divisions varying by more than 10% from the average in 2007.

4 Responses to consultation

28 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 84 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Bedfordshire County Council.

Bedfordshire County Council

29 The County Council supported the proposed increase in council size of three from 49 to 52. It made no representations regarding Mid Bedfordshire district, but put forward one amendment in Bedford borough and it accepted our proposed two-member Houghton Regis division in South Bedfordshire, but resubmitted its Stage One proposal for the rest of the district. The County Council also submitted a number of division name changes throughout the county.

District and borough councils

30 We received representations from each of the three borough and district councils. Bedford Borough Council considered that we had struck a good balance between the statutory criteria in our draft recommendations, but proposed two amendments on community identity grounds. It also discussed its General Parish Review in relation to our draft recommendations and suggested a number of changes in relation to this. Mid Bedfordshire District Council broadly supported our draft recommendations, but proposed two amendments. South Bedfordshire District Council fully supported our proposed divisions for the district, but proposed four division name changes.

Political Parties

31 We received six submissions from political parties. Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrat Group fully supported our draft recommendations for Bedford borough. It broadly supported our proposals for Mid Bedfordshire, and opposed Mid Bedfordshire District Council's proposals for Sandy division. However, it did support the alternative division and parish ward names proposed by Sandy Town Council. It also generally supported our proposals for South Bedfordshire, although it opposed our proposed Linslade & Planets division. North East Bedfordshire Constituency Labour Party opposed our proposed Kempston Rural division in Bedford borough and supported the County Council's Stage One proposal for the borough. In Mid Bedfordshire it considered that polling district DW3 should be included in the proposed Sandy division.

32 In South Bedfordshire, Leighton Linslade Liberal Democrats generally supported the draft proposals for the district. However, they opposed our proposed Linslade & Planets division and considered that the County Council's single-member division for the area would be better. Leighton Linslade Labour Party considered that the Leighton Linslade area should be represented by six councillors, rather than five. It also proposed a pattern of single-member divisions for the area based on five councillors. Bedfordshire South Conservatives fully supported our proposed two-member divisions in the district, but suggested alternative names for four divisions. Dunstable Branch Labour Party

opposed the proposed two-member Dunstable division and supported the County Council's Stage One proposal for two single-member divisions.

Parish and town councils

33 We received representations from six town councils and eleven parish councils. In Bedford, Kempston Town Council opposed our proposals relating to the separation of polling district BAQ from the proposed Kempston division. Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parish councils considered that their respective parishes should be transferred into our proposed Harrold & Sharnbrook division. In a separate submission Stevington Parish Council also submitted a petition regarding this.

34 In Mid Bedfordshire, Tempsford Parish Council supported our draft recommendations with regard to their area. Aspley Guise, Husborne Crawley and Woburn parish councils all objected to the inclusion of Aspley Guise district ward in the proposed Cranfield division and argued that there was a strong community identity between Aspley Guise and Woburn district wards. Harlington Parish Council opposed our proposed Woburn division and considered that it shared stronger community links with Flitton & Greenfield and Silsoe parishes. Pulloxhill and Flitton & Greenfield parish councils considered that the existing arrangements should remain in place.

35 Sandy Town Council supported our draft recommendations with regards to Sandy, but was concerned over our proposed parish warding arrangements for Sandy parish. It also proposed two alternative parish ward names and a division name change. Arlesey Town Council objected to our proposed two-member Stotfold & Arlesey division.

36 In South Bedfordshire, Dunstable Town Council supported our draft recommendations with regards to Dunstable. Leighton-Linslade Town Council supported the County Council's submission for South Bedfordshire. Kensworth Parish Council opposed the parish's inclusion in our proposed Caddington division and considered that its community links were with Whipsnade, Totternhoe and Studham parishes. Slip End Parish Council accepted our proposed Caddington division and supported the County Council's proposed name change for the division. Potton Town Council had no comments to make on the draft recommendations.

Other representations

37 A further 57 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local councillors and residents. In Bedford borough, Councillor Gershon (Harrold division) and nine local residents all expressed opposition to Carlton & Chellington parish's inclusion in our proposed Kempston Rural division. Councillor Gershon also submitted another response, in opposition to Stevington parish's inclusion in Kempston Rural division. Sir Alistair Burt MP and 22 local residents also all expressed opposition to this proposal and considered that Stevington parish should be included in an amended Harrold & Sharnbrook division. Another local resident and the clerk of Harrold Community Liaison Forum considered that both Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parishes should be transferred into an amended Harrold & Sharnbrook division.

38 Councillor Oliver (Kempston West division) opposed our proposed Kempston division and considered that polling district BAQ should not be separated from it. He

conducted a survey of local electors to illustrate the general opposition to our proposal. Councillor Burley (Kempston East division) also opposed this proposal along with four local residents from polling district BAQ. Councillor Gwynne Jones (Bromham division) considered that it would be unnecessary to ward Biddenham parish as the Borough Council are proposing to make our proposed parish wards into individual parishes.

39 In Mid Bedfordshire, Councillor Golby (Harlington ward) resubmitted his Stage One proposal for a coterminous single-member Harlington division considering that it was an improvement on our draft recommendations. Councillor McMurdo (Sandy Pinnacle ward) considered that Sandy Ivel and Sandy Pinnacle district wards should be contained in a single division. He also considered that our allocation of parish councillors between the proposed Pinnacle North and South parish wards was unacceptable.

40 Jonathan Sayeed MP and nine local residents all opposed our proposal to include Aspley Guise district ward in our proposed Cranfield division, and considered that this ward had strong links with Aspley Heath parish and Woburn district ward.

41 In South Bedfordshire, Councillor Heffernan (Leighton Buzzard Beaudesert division) considered that Leighton Linlade should be represented by six county councillors rather than the five to which it is entitled to under a council size of 52. Councillor Heffernan proposed the same divisions for the area as Leighton Linlade Labour Party. A local resident considered that Heath & Reach parish should be included in a division with Plantation ward rather than in our proposed Toddington division.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

42 As with our reviews of districts, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Bedfordshire is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) which defines 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 division of the county’.

43 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 over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and maintaining local ties, and to the boundaries of district wards.

44 We have discussed in Chapter One the additional parameters which apply to reviews of county council electoral arrangements and the need to have regard to the boundaries of district wards to achieve coterminosity. In addition, our approach is to ensure that, having reached conclusions on the appropriate number of councillors to be elected to the county council, each district council area is allocated the number of county councillors to which it is entitled. It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every division of a county.

45 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, especially when also seeking to achieve coterminosity in order to facilitate convenient and effective local government. 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. Accordingly, 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 the boundaries of district wards and community identities. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be taken into account and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

46 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not therefore able to take into account any representations that are based on these issues.

Electorate forecasts

47 Since 1975 there has been a 13% decrease in the electorate of Bedfordshire. During Stage One, the County Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2007,

projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 4% from 292,863 to 305,616 over the five-year period from 2002 to 2007. It expects most of the growth to be in South Bedfordshire, although a significant amount is also expected in the other two districts. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. We accept 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.

48 We received one comment regarding the County Council's electorate figures during Stage Three. Councillor McMurdo considered that the electorate figures for Sandy Pinnacle ward in Mid Bedfordshire had excluded a number of electors and that these figures were not 'corrected until April and May 2003'. He had used the 2003 'Voters Lists' to obtain his figures, which he considered to be valid for comparison. However, the figures used in this review are from the December 2002 electoral register rather than the 2003 register. We did, however, contact the County Council regarding this electorate query and asked it to comment. In its response, the County Council confirmed that the current and projected figures are as accurate as possible using the 'published methodology' as detailed above. It considered that unless there is detailed evidence to suggest that the figures are incorrect, there does 'not appear [to be] any grounds to change them.' We were content with the County Council's explanation, and remain satisfied that these figures represent the best estimates currently available.

Council size

49 As explained earlier, we now require justification for any council size proposed, whether it is for an increase, decrease, or retention of the existing council size.

50 Bedfordshire County Council currently has 49 members. At Stage One, we received six submissions regarding council size. The County Council proposed an increase in council size from 49 to 52 members. It considered that the number of councillors representing each district should be commensurate with that district's proportion of the county's electorate, and stated that 'a modest increase in council size is necessary to serve the interests of local residents' and 'provide appropriate representation across the districts of the county'. It explained that in 1999, ahead of the Local Government Act 2000, the county adopted an executive political structure, with a leader and seven executive members, together with select/scrutiny committees, task groups and non-executive committees in place of the previous arrangements.

51 The County Council described in detail the roles and responsibilities of both its executive and non-executive members. It also highlighted that, due to the uneven growth forecast for the county, without a small increase in councillors the two urban areas of Dunstable and Leighton-Linslade in South Bedfordshire (which are projected to have similar electorates by 2007) would have unequal representation. The County Council argued that, if council size remained at 49 equal representation for these areas could only be provided by combining rural and urban areas, something it was keen to avoid.

52 Bedfordshire South Conservatives and Councillor Gwynne Jones supported the argumentation submitted by the County Council regarding council size.

53 Bedford Borough Council Liberal Democrat Group considered that the council size should remain at 49, but provided no justification for this. Odell Parish Council strongly opposed an increase in council size 'on the grounds that a case for change has simply not been made [by Bedfordshire County Council]'. Leighton-Linslade Town council proposed a council size of 56, so that six councillors would represent Leighton Linslade, 'one for each of the existing district wards in the town'.

54 We carefully considered all the alternative proposals and their supporting evidence and argumentation. We considered that we had not received sufficient evidence to enable us to make a decision on the most appropriate council size for Bedfordshire County Council. We therefore requested that all those who had submitted a representation at Stage One submit further evidence and argumentation in support of their proposed council size.

55 We received further evidence from the County Council, Councillor Heffernan and the Bedfordshire South Conservatives.

56 In its further submission, the County Council described in further detail the roles and responsibilities of both its executive and non-executive members and considered 'that a small increase in the number of councillors is necessary to provide for these increased demands' resulting from the new executive political structure. The County Council also provided details regarding the overall number of meetings attended in Bedfordshire which had increased from 242 in 1998 (before the introduction of the new arrangements) to 333 in 2002 (after the introduction of its new constitution). It also gave more precise breakdowns of these increased meetings and number of attendees.

57 The County Council also detailed the duties of the select committees' task groups. In 2002, for example, the Community and Environment select committee used four task groups (comprising 21 members) that met a total of 31 times and the Individual Well Being select committee formed two task groups of four members which met five times during the same period. The County Council also detailed its newly established Corporate Parenting Panel, comprising six members, and estimated that the annual time commitment for each of the six councillors is 41 days. The County Council estimated that each of its meetings lasted on average for half a day, and considered that the proposed increase in council size would enable councillors to 'fulfil better their different roles as envisaged by the Government's modernised arrangements'.

58 Bedfordshire South Conservatives were also of the opinion that councillor workload had increased under the new political structure, in particular that concerning direct consultation with local residents. Councillor Heffernan contended that he envisaged 'no hardship to the citizens represented' if council size remains at 49. He also considered that 'no noticeable increase in [councillor] workload' had occurred.

59 In our draft recommendations report, we adopted the County Council's proposal for a council of 52 members as we considered that the County Council had studied the requirements of governance under its new political structure and considered its experience of operating within the new structure to reach a balanced conclusion on the appropriate council size to secure effective and convenient local government for Bedfordshire. We agreed that members are required to perform a variety of roles and functions and accept the County Council's argument that the new political management

structure had increased councillor workloads. We noted the support for the County Council's proposed increase from Councillor Gwynne Jones and Bedfordshire South Conservatives as well as the opposition to the proposed council size of 52 from Bedford Borough Council Liberal Democrat Group. However, no new evidence was provided following our request for further evidence to persuade us that the existing council size would provide more effective and convenient local government for Bedfordshire than an increase in members. In light of this, and having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we proposed to increase the council size from 49 to 52.

60 During Stage Three, we received two responses in relation to council size. Stevington Parish Council questioned the need for additional councillors. It considered that 'Bedfordshire County Council is already strapped for cash and extra councillors will mean more allowances and expenses leading to further increases in the community charge'. A local resident of Carlton also questioned this, and referred to increasing council tax as a reason why council size should remain at 49.

61 We have considered the representations received at Stage Three, but do not consider cost to be a significant factor in our consideration of what would be the most appropriate council size for Bedfordshire. Therefore, given that we have not received any new evidence relating to a review of internal political management structures or the role of councillors, we have not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendation. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendation for a council size of 52 as final.

Electoral arrangements

62 In our draft recommendations we adopted locally proposed schemes with some amendments in order to improve electoral equality and coterminosity. We were concerned that in all of the submissions we received, there was a lack of good evidence and argumentation supporting the proposals, especially in relation to how these proposals reflected community identities and interests across the county. Under the Local Government Act 1992 we must have regard to the need to reflect the identities and interest of local communities. However, in Bedfordshire this was difficult due to the lack of argumentation and evidence received regarding community identities and interests. For the most part, therefore, we had to base our draft recommendations on proposals that provided a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity with only a limited understanding of community identities and interests in the affected areas.

63 We found obtaining good levels of coterminosity in Bedford and Mid Bedfordshire difficult. The district wards did not easily lend themselves to forming coterminous divisions with acceptable levels of electoral equality. While the achievement of coterminosity will normally be secondary to the achievement of electoral equality, there sometimes have to be exceptions. In a rural area, for example, we may consider that an electoral imbalance in one division might be justified if it facilitated both the appropriate number of county councillors for the district and coterminosity between the boundaries of district wards and electoral divisions throughout the remainder of the district area.

64 In Bedford we adopted a combination of the County Council's proposals and those of Councillor Gwynne Jones, with our own amendments in two divisions. In Mid

Bedfordshire we adopted a combination of the County Council's and Mid Bedfordshire District Council's proposals, with our own amendments to two divisions. We adopted the County Council's proposals for South Bedfordshire, with amendments in five divisions. In each instance these amendments sought to improve on either the level of electoral equality or coterminosity.

65 As stated earlier in the report, following the commencement of Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000, and in particular section 89, the constraints which previously prevented the creation of multi-member county divisions have been removed. At Stage One, two two-member divisions were proposed, which we adopted, along with four more of our own in the urban areas of the three districts. We considered that these two-member divisions provided a better balance between the statutory criteria than either the existing arrangements or any of the proposals received at Stage One. We proposed one two-member division in the urban area of Bedford borough and three in the urban areas of South Bedfordshire district, along with the two proposed by Mid Bedfordshire District Council in Mid Bedfordshire.

66 Our draft recommendations also involved warding the three parishes of Biddenham and Kempston in Bedford borough, and Sandy in Mid Bedfordshire district, in order to improve electoral equality.

67 At Stage Three, we received some general opposition to two-member divisions from local political parties and councils in Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire. The County Council also expressed a 'preference for single-member divisions, but [considered] that proposals for multi-member divisions should be considered where a compelling argument can be made for their establishment.' With regard to the two-member divisions, the County Council therefore only objected to the proposed Dunstable and Linslade & Planets divisions in South Bedfordshire as it considered that a 'case' could not be made in support of these divisions, whereas one could for the remaining four two-member divisions proposed as part of our draft recommendations.

68 Arlesey Town Council considered two-member divisions to be 'a new approach' and was of the opinion that 'for the purposes of accountability and accessibility it would be far better to have one member for each electoral division.' Dunstable Branch Labour Party contended that 'previous experience of multi-member wards suggests that these are not desirable for county seats. The electorate tend to find them confusing when otherwise they are used to single-member district elections in every other year.' The County Council Liberal Democrat Group considered that two-member divisions 'militate against the election of independent and minority party councillors.' However, they recognised the benefits of two-member divisions in some areas where the removal of them at this stage would 'have significant knock on effects on other electoral divisions.'

69 We acknowledge the opposition to our two-member divisions from a number of sources. However, we would point out that we only seek to adopt multi-member divisions where we have been unable to identify an arrangement of single-member divisions that provides a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity, while reflecting community identity. We also do not consider that opposition to multi-member divisions, purely on principle, is particularly persuasive and would look, rather, for specific arguments relating to particular divisions before we would be persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations. This is especially true in Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire where we have, in fact, received some support for our use of

multi-member divisions. Having looked at all the representations received, we do not consider that sufficient evidence or argumentation has been provided to persuade us to move away from any of our proposed multi-member divisions and are therefore endorsing all those multi-member divisions contained in the draft recommendations as final.

70 In county reviews we have the requirement to consider coterminosity between county divisions and borough and district wards. As outlined earlier, we seek to provide between 60% and 80% coterminosity between divisions and wards across the county as a whole. However, the level of coterminosity in each district will vary according to the particular nature of the district.

71 We acknowledge that local people and organisations are in a much better position to provide us with community identity argumentation and, indeed, ask them to do so throughout the review process. However, where we have not received a good level of evidence and argumentation regarding community identity we will place more emphasis on achieving a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity. We consider that every submission should be treated equally, on its respective merits, and do not accept that the submissions of the local authority under review should carry extra weight.

72 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage Three, we are making amendments in all three districts in Bedfordshire. These are predominantly to provide a better reflection of community identity, but in Bedford borough our amendments slightly improve coterminosity and in South Bedfordshire they also slightly improve electoral equality. We are also proposing to amend several division names. Our final recommendations would achieve 61% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions. Our final recommendations would initially produce 21 divisions with electoral variances of more than 10% and seven divisions with electoral variances of over 20% from the county average. This is forecast to improve with 12 divisions having electoral variances of over 10% and only two divisions with variances over 20% from the county average by 2007.

73 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For county division purposes, the following areas are considered in turn:

- i. Bedford borough (pages 42 - 51);
- ii. Mid Bedfordshire district (pages 51 - 58);
- iii. South Bedfordshire district (pages 58 - 64).

74 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Sheets 1 and 2 inserted at the back of this report.

Bedford borough

75 Under the current arrangements, the borough of Bedford is represented by 18 county councillors serving 18 divisions. Brickhill, Castle, Clapham, De Parys, Goldington, Kingsbrook and Putnoe divisions are over-represented with 2%, 29%, 20%, 16%, 25%, 13% and 23% fewer electors per county councillor than the county average respectively (12%, 35%, 21%, 24%, 32%, 21% and 30% fewer by 2007). Bromham,

Cauldwell, Great Barford & Wilstead, Kempston East, Kempston West, North East Bedford, Newnham, Queens Park, Wootton and Harpur divisions are under-represented with 29%, 9%, 46%, 24%, 11%, 5%, 25%, 9%, 7% and 3% more electors per county councillor than the county average respectively (51%, 9%, 69%, 14%, 5%, 9%, 14%, 3%, 22% more and 6% fewer by 2007). Harrold division would initially have the same number of electors per councillor as the county average but would be over-represented by 6% by 2007. Overall, relative to the size of the electorate in the rest of the county, Bedford borough is under-represented on the County Council.

76 Under a council of 52 members, Bedford is entitled to 19 councillors. At Stage One we received five submissions in relation to the borough of Bedford. The County Council submitted a borough-wide scheme based on an increase in the number of councillors representing Bedford from 18 to 19.

77 In the urban area of the borough, the County Council proposed 11 single-member divisions. It proposed Brickhill, Cauldwell, Goldington, Harpur, Kingsbrook and Putnoe divisions using the new borough ward boundaries to form six single-member coterminous divisions. It proposed a Queens Park division containing the borough ward of Queens Park and part of Castle borough ward, that area west of Greyfriars and River Street. It also proposed a De Parys division containing the borough ward of De Parys and part of Castle borough ward, that part to the east of Greyfriars and River Street and to the west of Bushmead Avenue, to include all properties located on Bushmead Avenue. It proposed a Newnham division containing Newnham borough ward with the remaining part of Castle borough ward. The County Council proposed two non-coterminous Kempston divisions, Kempston West and Kempston East. Its proposed Kempston West division would comprise Kempston North borough ward, part of Kempston East borough ward, that part west of Bunyan Road, and part of Kempston South borough ward, that part west of Woburn Road. Its proposed Kempston East division would comprise the remaining part of Kempston East borough ward and the remaining part of Kempston South borough ward.

78 In the rural area of Bedford borough the County Council proposed a non-coterminous North East Bedfordshire division containing Riseley and Roxton borough wards and part of Great Barford borough ward (the parishes of Ravensden and Renhold). In the north-west of the borough it proposed a non-coterminous Harrold & Sharnbrook division containing Harrold and Sharnbrook borough wards and part of Carlton borough ward (the parishes of Carlton & Chellington, Felmersham and Pavenham), and a coterminous Clapham & Oakley division containing Clapham and Oakley borough wards. In the west of the borough it proposed a Bromham division containing part of Bromham borough ward (the parish of Bromham), part of Carlton borough ward (the parish of Stevington) and part of Turvey borough ward (the parish of Turvey). It also proposed a Biddenham division containing part of Bromham borough ward (the parish of Biddenham) and part of Turvey borough ward (the parishes of Stagsden and Kempston Rural).

79 In the south of the borough, the County Council proposed a coterminous Wootton division containing Wootton borough ward, a coterminous Wilshamstead division containing Wilshamstead borough ward, and an Eastcotts and Great Barford division in the south-east of the borough containing Eastcotts borough ward and part of Great Barford borough ward (the parishes of Cople, Great Barford and Willington). Its proposals did not include any strong community identity argumentation. The County

Council's proposed scheme provided 47% coterminosity in the borough with seven divisions having electoral variances of more than 10% by 2007.

80 Councillor Gwynne Jones proposed a rural scheme for the borough of Bedford comprising eight single-member divisions. Five divisions (North East Bedford, Wilshamstead, Wootton, Eastcotts & Great Barford and Clapham & Oakley) were the same as those proposed by the County Council. He proposed a Sharnbrook division containing Harrold and Sharnbrook borough wards and part of Carlton borough ward (the parishes of Felmersham and Pavenham). He also proposed a Bromham division containing part of Bromham borough ward, the parish of Bromham and the northern part of Biddenham parish, that part north of the rear of the properties running west along Biddenham Turn, Vicars Close and Church End. Finally he proposed a Kempston Rural division containing Turvey borough ward, the remainder of Carlton and Bromham borough wards and Hardwick parish ward of Kempston South borough ward.

81 Oakley Parish Council proposed a scheme for four divisions in the rural area of Bedford borough. It proposed a Clapham division containing Clapham borough ward and part of Carlton borough ward (the parishes of Felmersham and Pavenham), and a Harrold & Sharnbrook division containing Harrold and Sharnbrook borough wards. It also proposed a Turvey division containing Turvey borough ward and part of Bromham borough ward (the parish of Biddenham), and an Oakley & Bromham division containing Oakley borough ward and the remainder of Bromham borough ward (the parish of Bromham).

82 We carefully considered the representations we received at Stage One. We noted the reasonable levels of electoral equality in the County Council's proposals and adopted them in the urban area of Bedford in the east and south of the borough. However, we did not consider that its proposals for Kempston town and the west of the borough were satisfactory due to the high electoral variances its divisions provided. We therefore adopted Councillor Gwynne Jones' proposed Sharnbrook and Bromham divisions to provide improved electoral equality. We noted that our proposals would involve warding Biddenham parish, creating Biddenham North and Biddenham South parish wards, following the proposed division boundaries. However, we considered that this was justified as it provided a significant improvement in electoral equality and had been locally proposed.

83 We also adopted Councillor Gwynne Jones' proposed Kempston Rural division with one amendment, the addition of polling district BAQ from Kempston North borough ward. This was to improve electoral equality in both Kempston Rural and our proposed two-member Kempston division comprising the remainder of Kempston North and Kempston East borough wards and South parish ward of Kempston South borough ward. We recognised that our proposed two-member Kempston division was not an ideal solution, but having visited the area and in light of future development in the locality, we considered that it was justified at this stage due to the better electoral equality it facilitated in the rest of the borough. We noted that our proposals would involve the re-warding of Kempston North parish. However, again we considered that this was justified due to the significant improvement in electoral equality it provided.

84 Our draft recommendations provided 50% coterminosity between borough wards and county divisions. Our proposed Brickhill, Cauldwell, Clapham & Oakley, De Parys, Goldington and Harpur divisions would initially have 18%, 3%, 7%, 3%, 11% and 9%

more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7%, 2% and 4% more, 6% fewer, 2% more and equal to the county average by 2007). Our proposed Kempston, Kingsbrook, Newnham, North East Bedford, Putnoe and Queens Park, divisions would initially have 19%, 15%, 19%, 5%, 19% and 15% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (11%, 5%, 9%, 9%, 7% and 10% more, by 2007). Our proposed Bromham, Eastcotts, Harrold & Sharnbrook, Kempston Rural, Wilshamstead and Wootton divisions would initially have 4%, 19%, 4%, 20%, 35% and 27% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (5% more, 11%, 9%, 3%, 17% and 14% fewer by 2007).

85 At Stage Three, we received 51 submissions in relation to our draft recommendations for Bedford. Bedfordshire County Council considered that our proposed Kempston Rural division mixed urban and rural communities and stated that it 'does not appear to meet the identities and interests of the communities concerned'. It therefore proposed that Carlton & Chellington parish be transferred from our proposed Kempston Rural division into Harrold & Sharnbrook division. This proposed amendment would worsen electoral equality slightly (Harrold & Sharnbrook and Kempston Rural divisions would have electoral variances of 2% more and 14% fewer than the county average by 2007 respectively). It proposed that this division be renamed Harrold, the name of the existing division in this area. The County Council also proposed that North East Bedford division be renamed North East Bedfordshire so that it is consistent with other division names in the county.

86 Bedford Borough Council considered that in the draft recommendations 'a balance [had been] struck between the different and sometimes competing issues' of the statutory criteria. However, it considered that we should alter our draft recommendations to take into account its General Parish Review. The Borough Council was also of the opinion that polling district BAQ of Kempston North borough ward should be included in our proposed two-member Kempston division rather than in our proposed Kempston Rural division, arguing that our proposed arrangement 'would create confusion in the minds of electors'. It also considered that Carlton & Chellington parish should be transferred into Harrold & Sharnbrook division to 'recognise the community links that exist between Harrold and Carlton villages.' These two amendments would result in Harrold & Sharnbrook, Kempston and Kempston Rural divisions having electoral variances of 2% above, 16% above and 23% below the county average by 2007 respectively.

87 The Borough Council considered that we should make boundary changes to match those parish amendments it is proposing in Bromham, Kingsbrook, Goldington, North East Bedford and Wilshamstead divisions, so that the parishes would be coterminous with our proposed divisions. However, as the recommendations of the parish review have yet to be implemented by way of an order from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), we would not look to base our divisions simply on the recommendations of the parish review. This is due to the fact that ODPM has the power to reject the recommendations put before it. However, once orders for the proposed new parish arrangements have been made, the Borough Council can write to the Electoral Commission and request consequential changes to alter the boundaries of the borough wards and electoral divisions should it wish to do so. The Borough Council also suggested that rather than creating parish wards in Biddenham parish, we create two new parishes, as this is what the Borough Council is proposing to the Secretary of State. However, it is not within the remit of this review to establish new parishes.

88 North East Bedfordshire Constituency Labour Party also opposed our proposed Kempston Rural division. It supported the County Council's Stage One proposals for the western part of the borough, and put forward its own proposal for Kempston East, Kempston North and Kempston South borough wards to form a two-member coterminous division with an electoral variance of 22% by 2007. However, it did not provide any argumentation in support of these divisions. Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrat Group gave full support to our draft recommendations.

89 Kempston Town Council opposed our proposals to include polling district BAQ of Kempston North borough ward in our proposed Kempston Rural division, and considered that it should be part of Kempston division. It argued that local people 'want to be part of the Kempston town community and not part of the rural wards of Turvey, Stevington, Carlton etc.' It further argued that polling district BAQ is the oldest part of the town and that 'the historical, cultural and social reasons this involves add to the argument for [its] retention within the town.' It also considered that it would be confusing for electors to be represented in an urban area at parish and borough ward level and in a rural division at county council level.

90 Stevington Parish Council submitted two representations in response to our draft proposals. It proposed transferring Stevington parish from our proposed Kempston Rural division into the proposed Harrold & Sharnbrook division and, in order to keep the electoral variance under 10% in Kempston Rural division, proposed transferring around 500 electors from our proposed Kempston division into the amended Kempston Rural division, although it did not give specific details of these 500 electors. It stated that Stevington parish 'naturally identify with the villages of North Bedford which are in the proposed Harrold & Sharnbrook division.' Stevington Parish Council's second submission was a petition containing the signatures of 302 Stevington residents opposing the parish's inclusion in our proposed Kempston Rural division. The petition considered that 'it would be more convenient, suitable and appropriate for Stevington to be included in the proposed Harrold & Sharnbrook' division.

91 Carlton & Chellington Parish Council proposed the same amendment as the County Council. It provided good community identity argumentation outlining the links between the areas of Carlton and Harrold and the many shared facilities such as 'the [fact that the] children go to Sharnbrook Upper school, the surgery that is a vital amenity to both villages, [and the fact that] they share the same vicar and associated groups.' It went on to note that the children's football teams 'are a combined effort from both villages [Carlton & Chellington and Harrold], they have a combined Women's Institute [and] there is a joint community publication called *The Bridge*.'

92 We received representations from Councillor Gershon (Harrold division) and seven local residents regarding the inclusion of Carlton & Chellington parish in Kempston Rural division. All these submissions concurred with the County Council that the parish should be transferred into our proposed Harrold & Sharnbrook division. Councillor Gershon commented on the 'close commonality and community identity between the two villages [of Harrold and Carlton].' She referred to shared churches, vicar, parish magazines and the various sports and community clubs that link the two communities. She also supported the County Council's proposal to rename the proposed Harrold & Sharnbrook division Harrold. In each of the seven submissions from local residents, similar arguments to that of Councillor Gershon were put forward, emphasising the

strong sense of community that exists between the villages of Carlton and Harrold. Each discussed the shared 'village events' and one local resident gave examples of these, such as the 'cricket club, bowls club, historical society, community holidays, football clubs, schools.' Another resident submitted a copy of *The Bridge, News of Harrold & Carlton*, the local magazine covering the two areas which illustrated the strong links between the two communities and contained evidence of these aforementioned clubs and societies. Two local residents also highlighted ties between Carlton village and other areas in the Harrold & Sharnbrook division such as Odell and Sharnbrook, which are linked by 'smaller industries' and employment.

93 We received a further submission from Councillor Gershon, and submissions from Alistair Burt MP and 22 local residents in opposition to the inclusion of Stevington parish in our proposed Kempston Rural division. Each representation considered that the parish should be transferred into our proposed Harrold & Sharnbrook division. Councillor Gershon's submission was similar to her representation relating to Carlton & Chellington parish. She considered that Stevington 'does not have a community identity with urban Kempston and Great Denham' whereas 'Stevington Sailing Club and football club draw membership and support from the surrounding villages [Harrold and Carlton].' Alistair Burt MP gave his support to Stevington Parish Council's submission and considered that 'Stevington [should] not be a part of the Kempston Rural' division. He stated that 'there is little doubt that the village [Stevington] looks towards the north Bedfordshire villages [...] their natural link lies north' and he went on to express concern about dividing a constituency boundary. However, we do not have any regard to constituency boundaries when formulating our recommendations and so were unable to take this point into consideration.

94 In each of the local residents' submissions, the opinion was expressed that Stevington parish looks towards the villages in Harrold & Sharnbrook division rather than those in the Kempston Rural division. One submission from local residents of Stevington provided good argumentation regarding the links between Stevington and Harrold & Sharnbrook and commented that 'our [Stevington village's] children attend Sharnbrook School, our church is in the Sharnbrook deanery and our doctor's surgery is in Harrold.' They continued by discussing the problems Stevington shares with the other north Bedfordshire villages in relation to transport and the 'erosion' of other services. Another local resident gave similar examples of the shared community identities and interest between the areas citing transport, medical services and local facilities as issues in common with Harrold and Odell parishes which they do not have with the areas in our proposed Kempston Rural division, in particular Kempston and Biddenham parishes.

95 We received two submissions proposing that both Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parishes should be transferred from Kempston Rural division into an amended Harrold & Sharnbrook division. The clerk to the Harrold Division Community Liaison Forum expressed support for the views of Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parish councils. A local resident of Stevington explained that Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parishes are separated from the rest of the proposed Kempston Rural division and stated that 'there [are] no direct public transport links from Carlton and Stevington to the other parts of the proposed Kempston Rural division. Effectively, Carlton and Stevington would be isolated physically and culturally from the rest of this division.' He continued that 'the physical infrastructure, social and educational needs of

Stevington are more closely linked with the parishes of this [Harrold & Sharnbrook] division than that of the proposed Kempston Rural division.'

96 We received submissions from two councillors and four local residents in relation to our draft proposals for Kempston North borough ward. Councillor Burley (Kempston East division) opposed our draft recommendation to include polling district BAQ of North Kempston in Kempston Rural division. She considered that 'there are exceptional circumstances [to include polling district BAQ in Kempston division]' and went on to state that these include 'the sense of identity and community, plus the less complicated government situation for residents and councillors.' She also said that 'the Kempston divisions have always been large and [it] has not caused problems.'

97 Councillor Oliver (Kempston West division) also objected to the proposal for Kempston 'largely on the grounds of community identity'. He conducted a survey among the electors living in polling district BAQ to gain the general opinion of the area. In his questionnaire he commented that 'you [the electors] live in the oldest part of Kempston. I believe that you are an integral part of the town and that apart from the whole scenario being a geographical nonsense, the identity of the people is with the town rather than with Turvey or the other villages.' He asked electors if they wished to be part of Kempston town, part of the rural area or if they did not mind (for the purposes of County Council elections). Of the 333 houses in the polling district, he obtained a response rate of 57% of which 85% wished to be in an urban division, 11% didn't mind and 5% wanted to be in a rural division (figures do not total 100% due to rounding). He noted that common reactions from respondents included 'townies and proud of it' and 'nothing against village folk but what have they got in common with us?' He also noted that the most frequent thing heard was akin to 'this is the original village, the oldest part of Kempston and of course we want to remain in Kempston'. Councillor Oliver commented that he can 'make few suggestions' regarding obtaining good electoral equality in Kempston under the proposed council size of 52, but considered that the division would 'put up with being out of sync with other divisions rather than an unnatural rupturing of the town.'

98 Four Kempston residents of polling district BAQ opposed our draft proposal for the division, with three commenting that polling district BAQ is 'the oldest part of the town' and one considering that it is the 'most central part of the Kempston town area.' One said that 'many of the villages are a long way out of Kempston, and while they [the villages] may have much in common with each other, they don't have any common interest with us [the Kempston electorate].'

99 We also received a submission from Councillor Gwynne Jones. He suggested that the Borough Council's proposal for new parishes in Biddenham would make our parish warding proposals unnecessary. He also made comments in response to the objections from Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parish councils, who wished to remain in a division with Harrold borough ward. He commented that these parishes are not in the same borough ward as Harrold currently 'and have not been so for some time.'

100 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received during the consultation period. We note the opposition received regarding the inclusion of Carlton & Chellington parish in our proposed Kempston Rural division and the County Council's proposal to transfer this parish into our proposed Harrold & Sharnbrook division. We also acknowledge the support for this proposal from the

Borough Council, Carlton & Chellington Parish Council, Councillor Gershon, seven local residents and the two submissions relating to both Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parish councils.

101 We do not consider that either the County Council or the Borough Council have provided a persuasive argument to justify transferring Carlton & Chellington parish into an amended Harrold & Sharnbrook division. However, we have been persuaded by the strong evidence and argumentation provided by Carlton & Chellington Parish Council, Councillor Gershon and the local residents of the strong sense of community that exists between Carlton & Chellington parish and Harrold borough ward. The submission by a local resident of the community magazine *The Bridge, News of Harrold & Carlton* further supported the already strong evidence citing shared churches, groups and clubs, shopping facilities and employment that link the two areas.

102 While we acknowledge the support for our draft recommendations from The County Council Liberal Democrats, they did not provide argumentation to persuade us that transferring Carlton & Chellington parish into an amended Harrold & Sharnbrook division would not provide a better representation of the communities in that area. Similarly, while we note Councillor Gwynne Jones's point that Carlton & Chellington parish (and Stevington parish) is not in the same district ward as Harrold, they are currently in the same electoral division and so we did not consider that he had provided a persuasive argument as to why Carlton & Chellington and Harrold should not be contained in the same division given the strong community identity argumentation. We have therefore decided to move away from our draft recommendations and modify our proposed Harrold & Sharnbrook division by adopting the County Council's proposal for Carlton & Chellington parish to be transferred into an amended Harrold & Sharnbrook division. Harrold & Sharnbrook and Kempston Rural divisions would have 2% more and 14% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively by 2007.

103 We carefully considered the extensive opposition to the inclusion of Stevington parish in our proposed Kempston Rural division. We note Stevington Parish Council's petition and alternative proposal for the parish that was supported by Councillor Gershon and Alistair Burt MP. We note that Stevington Parish Council proposed to transfer a further 500 electors from Kempston division to address the electoral inequality that would result from the removal of Stevington parish from our proposed Kempston Rural division. However, given that no specific proposal regarding these 500 electors was provided, and noting the objections from Kempston Town Council and residents to the inclusion of a small area of Kempston North ward in our proposed Kempston Rural division, we did not consider we could propose such a change at this stage.

104 We acknowledge the 22 letters from residents in opposition to our draft recommendations for the Stevington area. While we noted the large-scale opposition to our proposals for Stevington parish, we considered that the community identity evidence and argumentation in the majority of these representations was not as strong as that regarding Carlton & Chellington parish. However, we did consider that the evidence from Councillor Gershon and two of the local residents clearly outlined the commonalities between Stevington and Harrold division. At Stage One, we had little evidence regarding community identity in the area and our recommendations were based more on achieving a balance between electoral equality and coterminosity than on reflecting community identity. We therefore asked for evidence of community

identities and interests at Stage Three. We are satisfied that a strong case has now been made to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations in this area.

105 We note also the evidence in support of transferring both Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parishes into Harrold & Sharnbrook division from a local resident and the Harrold division Community Liaison Forum, who highlighted that these parishes would be isolated from the rest of the Kempston Rural division due to a lack of transport links. We consider that sufficient evidence has been submitted in support of the proposed amendment. We also note that, in light of our decision regarding Carlton & Chellington parish, transferring Stevington parish into an amended Harold and Sharnbrook division would improve coterminosity. We are therefore adopting this proposal as final.

106 We note that transferring both Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parishes into Harrold & Sharnbrook division worsens electoral equality by creating a Harrold & Sharnbrook division and a Kempston Rural division with electoral variances of 10% and 22% from the county average by 2007 respectively. However, we consider that, on balance, the significantly better reflection of community identity and improved coterminosity justifies this deterioration in electoral equality.

107 We have carefully considered the representations received in relation to our draft proposal to include polling district BAQ of Kempston North borough ward in Kempston Rural division. We note the Borough Council and Kempston Town Council's proposal that polling district BAQ be transferred into our proposed Kempston division. Whilst we note that both submissions consider that our proposed division would be confusing to the electorate in that area, and that Kempston Town Council referred to the historical and cultural implications of such a division boundary, we do not consider that sufficient argumentation has been provided to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations. We also note North East Bedfordshire Constituency Labour Party's suggestion for Kempston to become a coterminous two-member division, which would result in the division having an electoral variance of 22% from the county average by 2007. However, given our amendments in the north of Kempston Rural division, this proposal would result in an electoral variance of 29% for Kempston Rural division by 2007. We do not consider that these levels of electoral inequality have been justified by the evidence and argumentation provided.

108 We acknowledge Councillor Oliver's representation, and the results of his survey for polling district BAQ to be included in our proposed Kempston division. However, under his proposal Kempston and Kempston Rural divisions would have electoral variances of 16% and 32% by 2007 respectively, and we do not consider that his submission provided sufficient community identity evidence or argumentation to justify such high electoral inequalities. Similarly we do not consider that the arguments provided by Councillor Burley or the four local residents were strong enough to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations.

109 We do have sympathy for the case that has been made for including polling district BAQ with the rest of Kempston town and we acknowledged at Stage One that this was not an ideal division. We therefore invited further evidence regarding community identity in this area at Stage Three. However, the evidence received regarding Kempston was not as persuasive as that relating to Stevington parish and, in particular, Carlton & Chellington parish. In light of this, and the amendment that we have

adopted in the north of Kempston Rural division, we do not consider that sufficient evidence has been provided to justify the adoption of a proposal with such poor electoral equality.

110 We did look at an alternative division arrangement in the west of the borough that would accommodate the various opposing views with regard to the proposed Kempston Rural division. We considered combining Bromham and Turvey borough wards with Hardwick parish ward of Kempston South borough ward to create a two-member division that would have an electoral variance of 1% by 2007. This would result in a two-member Kempston division with an electoral variance of 16% by 2007. However, this alternative two-member division was not proposed locally and has not been subject to consultation. In view of this and the high electoral variance that would result from uniting Kempston town in a single division, we are proposing to endorse our draft recommendations as final in this area.

111 We considered the County Council's proposal for Harrold & Sharnbrook division to be renamed Harrold (like the existing division) and noted the support this received locally from Councillor Gershon. We are therefore adopting this name change in our final recommendations. We are also recommending the County Council's proposal to rename North East Bedford division as North East Bedfordshire because we consider this name to be more consistent with other division names in the county.

112 We acknowledge the Borough Council's comments regarding its planned amendments to parish ward boundaries in the borough, and the similar comment from Councillor Gwynne Jones regarding our Biddenham North and South parish wards. However, as mentioned earlier, we cannot have regard to boundaries that have not yet been approved by the Secretary of State.

113 We are therefore endorsing our draft recommendations as final with the exception of our revised Harrold and Kempston Rural divisions and two name changes as discussed above. As a consequence of our revised Harrold division, coterminosity will be 56% between county divisions and borough wards. Brickhill, Cauldwell, Clapham & Oakley, De Parys, Goldington and Harpur divisions would initially have 18%, 3%, 7%, 3%, 11% and 9% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7%, 2%, 4% more, 6% less, 2% more and less than 1% by 2007). Harrold, Kempston, Kingsbrook, Newnham, North East Bedfordshire, Putnoe and Queens Park would initially have 17%, 19%, 15%, 19%, 5%, 19% and 15% more electors per councillor than the county average (10%, 11%, 5%, 9%, 9%, 7% and 10% more by 2007). Bromham, Eastcotts, Kempston Rural, Wilshamstead and Wootton division would initially have 4%, 19%, 41%, 35% and 27% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (5% more, 11%, 22%, 17% and 14% fewer by 2007). Our final recommendations are illustrated on map 1 and the large map at the back of this report.

Mid Bedfordshire district

114 Under the current arrangements, the district of Mid Bedfordshire is represented by 15 county councillors serving 15 divisions. Ampthill, Aspley Guise, Biggleswade Ivel, Northill, Potton, Maulden and Stotfold divisions are over-represented, with 7%, 11%, 8%, 22%, 7%, 7% and 16% fewer electors per county councillor than the county average respectively (11%, 16%, 17%, 30% and 13% fewer, and 7% and 13% more by 2007). Biggleswade Stratton, Cranfield & Marston, Flitwick, Harlington, Sandy, Shefford

& Clifton, Shillington & Henlow and Langford divisions are under-represented with 7%, 14%, 64%, 9%, 41%, 16%, 15% and 3% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (28%, 32%, 50%, 1%, 33%, 14% and 12% more and 1% fewer by 2007).

115 Under a council of 52 members, Mid Bedfordshire is entitled to 17 councillors. At Stage One, we received three submissions in relation to Mid Bedfordshire district. The County Council and Mid Bedfordshire District Council submitted district-wide schemes based on an increase in the number of councillors representing Mid Bedfordshire from 16 to 17. Councillor Golby (Harlington ward) submitted a proposal for a single division.

116 The County Council proposed 17 single-member divisions for the district. In the north of the district, it proposed a coterminous Potton division containing Potton & Wensley district ward and a Sandy division containing part of Sandy Ivel district ward, that part to the east of the A1 motorway and north of the River Ivel, and Sandy Pinnacle district ward, less polling district DW3. It also proposed a Northill & Blunham division containing Northill & Blunham district ward with the remaining part of Sandy Ivel district ward and the remaining part of Sandy Pinnacle district ward. It proposed a Biggleswade Barnett division containing Biggleswade Stratton district ward and part of Biggleswade Holme district ward, that part to the east of Dells Lane, and a Biggleswade Franklyn division containing Biggleswade Ivel district ward and the remaining part of Biggleswade Holme district ward. It also proposed a Haynes division containing Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old Warden district ward and part of Clifton & Meppershall district ward (the parish of Clifton).

117 In the southeast of the district, the County Council proposed a coterminous Stotfold division, containing Stotfold district ward, and an Arlesey division containing Arlesey district ward and part of Langford & Henlow Village district ward (the parish of Langford). It proposed a Shillington & Henlow division containing Shillington, Stondon & Henlow Camp district ward with part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst district ward (the parish of Gravenhurst) and part of Langford & Henlow Village district ward (the parish of Henlow Village). It also proposed a Shefford division containing part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst district ward (the parishes of Campton & Chicksands and Shefford) and part of Clifton & Meppershall district ward (the parish of Meppershall).

118 In the west of the district, the County Council proposed a Cranfield division containing Cranfield district ward, part of Aspley Guise district ward (the parish of Husborne Crawley) and part of Woburn district ward (the parish of Ridgemont). It proposed a Woburn division containing Harlington district ward, Westoning & Tingrith district ward, part of Woburn district ward (the parishes of Aspley Heath, Battlesden, Eversholt, Milton Bryan, Potsgrove and Woburn) and part of Aspley Guise district ward (Aspley Guise parish). It also proposed a coterminous Ampthill division containing Ampthill district ward and a coterminous Flitwick West division containing Flitwick West district ward. In the south of the district, it proposed a coterminous Flitwick East division containing Flitwick East and Flitton, Greenfield & Pulloxhill district wards, and a coterminous Maulden division containing Maulden & Clophill and Silsoe district wards.

119 Under the County Councils proposals, 41% coterminosity would be secured across the district and seven divisions would have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average by 2007. The County Council did not provide strong community identity argumentation for its divisions.

120 The District Council proposed 13 single-member and two two-member divisions. Eight of the proposed divisions (Amphill, Cranfield, Flitwick East, Flitwick West, Marston, Potton, Shefford and Woburn) were the same as those proposed by the County Council. It also proposed a Sandy division containing all of Sandy Ivel district ward less Beeston, and all of Sandy Pinnacle ward less polling district DW3. It proposed a Northhill & Blunham division containing Northhill district ward, part of Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old Warden district ward (the parishes of Southill and Old Warden) and the remaining parts of Sandy Ivel and Sandy Pinnacle district wards. It proposed a Maulden & Houghton Conquest division containing Maulden & Clophill district ward and part of Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old Warden district ward (the parishes of Houghton Conquest and Haynes). It also proposed a Silsoe & Shillington division containing Shillington, Stondon & Henlow Camp and Silsoe district wards and part of Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst district ward (the parish of Gravenhurst). It proposed a Langford & Henlow Village division containing Langford & Henlow Village district ward and part of Clifton & Meppershall district ward (the parish of Clifton).

121 The District Council also proposed two two-member divisions. It proposed a Biggleswade division containing Biggleswade Holme, Biggleswade Ivel and Biggleswade Stratton district wards and a Stotfold & Arlesey division containing Arlesey and Stotfold district wards. Under the District Council's proposal, 47% coterminosity would be secured in the district and five divisions would have an electoral variance of more than 10% by 2007. Councillor Golby proposed a single-member coterminous Harlington division containing Harlington, Westoning & Tingrith, Silsoe and Flitton, Greenfield & Pulloxhill district wards.

122 We carefully considered all the representations we received at Stage One. We noted that, while both the County Council and District Council's proposals facilitated a reasonable level of electoral equality, both provided poor levels of coterminosity in the district. We noted the strong argumentation and good electoral variance in Councillor Golby's proposal. However, we are unable to consider any division in isolation and considered that the proposed Harlington division would not facilitate the best balance of the statutory criteria throughout the remainder of the district.

123 We adopted the County Council's proposals in seven divisions (those of Potton, Sandy, Shefford, Amphill, Flitwick West, Flitwick East and Marston) and the District Council's proposals for the southeast of the district. We considered that, due to the poor level of coterminosity in the district, adopting the District Council's proposed two-member Biggleswade and Stotfold & Arlesey divisions would facilitate greater coterminosity in the district and across the county. We also adopted the District Council's proposed Langford & Henlow Village, Silsoe & Shillington and Maulden & Houghton Conquest divisions. We noted that these were not coterminous divisions, but considered that they facilitated the provision of a scheme providing good levels of electoral equality and coterminosity in other areas of the district. We adapted the District Council's proposal for a Northhill & Blunham division, by including an additional part of Sandy Ivel district ward, that part excluded from the County Council's Sandy division. We noted that our proposals involved the warding of Sandy parish to create Ivel East, Ivel West, Pinnacle North and Pinnacle South parish wards following the proposed division boundaries. We considered that this parish warding was justified as it provided a significant improvement in electoral equality and was locally proposed by the County Council.

124 We proposed our own single-member divisions of Woburn and Cranfield to improve coterminosity. We proposed a coterminous Woburn division containing Woburn, Westoning & Tingrith and Harlington district wards and a coterminous Cranfield division containing Cranfield and Aspley Guise district wards.

125 Our draft recommendations would provide 60% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions. Ampthill, Marston, Pottton, Stotfold & Arlesey and Woburn divisions would initially have 5%, 32%, 2%, 21% and 1% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (9%, 13%, 7%, 7% and 11% fewer by 2007). Biggleswade, Cranfield, Langford & Henlow Village, Northill & Blunham, Sandy and Shefford divisions would initially have 5%, 8%, 6%, 14%, 18% and 5% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (12%, 7%, 1%, 8%, 7% and 6% more by 2007). Flitwick East, Flitwick West, Maulden & Houghton Conquest and Silsoe & Shillington divisions would initially have 4% and 4% more, 1% fewer and 1% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4% and 5% fewer, 13% more and 3% fewer by 2007).

126 At Stage Three, we received 24 submissions in response to our draft recommendations. The County Council made no representation regarding Mid Bedfordshire although it acknowledged that other organisations and individuals might do so. Mid Bedfordshire District Council opposed our proposal to include Aspley Guise district ward in our proposed Cranfield division and stated that Aspley Guise and Aspley Heath parishes 'share very strong community ties and interests.' It did not provide detailed community identity argumentation as it considered that Aspley Guise Parish Council had submitted sufficient argumentation and evidence. However, it did comment that the Young Farmers Association links Aspley Guise and Aspley Heath parishes, and that the physical barrier between Aspley Guise and Cranfield district wards was formed by the M1 and the A421 trunk road.

127 Mid Bedfordshire District Council also raised objections regarding the arrangements for Sandy Ivel district ward. It suggested using the division boundary it proposed at Stage One, so that those electors along London Road and Tempsford Road would come under our proposed Ivel East parish ward rather than Ivel West parish ward as in our draft recommendations. It considered that our draft recommendations would cause problems for voters getting to polling stations. It was 'content' with the naming of Northill & Blunham division 'even though the division will contain some parts of Sandy parish.'

128 North East Bedfordshire Constituency Labour Party gave full support to our proposed Biggleswade, Langford & Henlow Village and Pottton divisions. However, it expressed concern over polling district DW3 from Sandy Pinnacle ward being in Northill & Blunham division and considered that 'every effort should be made to integrate it with the rest of the [Sandy] town.' Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrats generally supported our draft recommendations in Mid Bedfordshire. It fully supported our proposed Sandy division and did 'not support Mid Bedfordshire District Council's objection' to the division on the grounds of polling station location. It considered that it would be 'little more difficult for this small number of electors to vote at Beeston than it is for them to vote at their current polling station.' It also proposed renaming Northill & Blunham division Northill & Sandy West and supported Sandy Town Council's revised parish ward names. It also stated its support for Councillor Golby's Stage One

submission. However, it accepted our alternative if his Harlington division could not be incorporated into our proposals. It did not consider that Aspley Guise parish should be transferred into our proposed Woburn division, as it considered that this revised division would be too large to represent. It also proposed to rename this division Woburn & Harlington.

129 Sandy Town Council supported our draft recommendations with regards to the divisions covering Sandy. It proposed that we rename Northhill & Blunham division Northhill & Sandy West, as areas of Sandy were included in the division. It expressed concern over our proposed parish warding arrangements and considered ‘that the current warding arrangements and names Pinnacle and Ivel [should] remain unchanged.’ However, it stated that, if the parishes are to be divided into parish wards, then Pinnacle North and Pinnacle South parish wards should return two and seven council members respectively, and that our ‘recommended member split [of three and six councillors respectively] is in fact wrong.’ It also proposed alternative names for two of the proposed parish wards. It considered that Pinnacle North parish ward should be named Fallowfield & Pinnacle parish ward and that Ivel West parish ward should be named Beeston & Ivel parish ward.

130 We received submissions from eight other parish and town councils. Tempsford Parish Council supported our draft recommendations with regards to their area. Aspley Guise Parish Council expressed opposition to being in the Cranfield division. It considered there to be ‘very strong local ties between [...] Aspley Guise, Aspley Heath and Woburn,’ and provided details of these. It said that the local churches are grouped under a ‘Churches Together’ scheme connecting worshippers. Similarly, sports facilities and clubs are shared between the communities south of the M1, as is schooling and young people’s activities such as scouts and brownies, whose groups are ‘based either in Woburn or Aspley Guise’. It went on to discuss health care based in Woburn and stated that ‘Cranfield residents have their own doctors and surgeries.’ It also noted that ‘residents of Aspley Guise and Woburn, Ridgemont and Husborne Crawley all use Woburn Sands with its full range of shops [...] for all their local shopping needs.’ It noted that ‘regular bus and train services link [the] villages to serve the needs of the elderly and those without personal transport. There are no such links, i.e. no public transport between Aspley Guise and Cranfield – there is not even a main road linking these two areas.’ It also emphasised employment connections relating to the Bedford Estates, and discussed the ‘Woburn Sands and Districts Society’, a registered charity with members from the villages surrounding Woburn, including Aspley Guise, but none from Cranfield.

131 Husborne Crawley Parish Council and Woburn Parish Council submitted almost identical responses to our draft recommendations. They also mentioned the ‘Churches Together’ scheme and considered that ‘they have nothing in common with Cranfield, who have completely different issues and have nothing really to do with these [Husborne Crawley and Aspley Guise] villages.’

132 Harlington Parish Council expressed concern regarding our proposed Woburn division. It considered that ‘Harlington and Westoning would not appear natural bedfellows with the other parishes’ and stated that ‘the current affiliation with Flitton & Greenfield and Silsoe is a much more realistic reflection of local interests and needs. This includes transport issues, schooling and shopping patterns.’ Harlington Parish Council gave its support for Councillor Golby’s submission. Pulloxhill Parish Council and Flitton & Greenfield Parish Council opposed our proposed Flitwick East division in

favour of the existing division citing commonalities with these areas such as schooling, facilities and public transport issues.

133 Arlesey Town Council objected to the proposed two-member Stotfold & Arlesey division and considered that it 'would be far better to have one member for each electoral division.' It proposed two non-coterminous single-member divisions based on transferring 1,683 electors (at 2007) in Fairfield Park from Stotfold district ward into an Arlesey division, resulting in divisions with 4% and 9% fewer electors than the county average respectively by 2007. Arlesey Town Council argued that the new medical centre in Arlesey will be able to serve residents of Fairfield Park and that children will attend the middle school. Potton Town Council reported that it has 'no view' on our draft recommendations.

134 Councillor Golby considered that our draft recommendations for Harlington 'fail' because they 'do not reflect the identity [... and] interests of local communities, they will not secure effective [...and] convenient local government, they will not achieve equality [and] they will not lead to effective or equal representation.' He considered that his Stage One proposal met all the criteria. He also highlighted that, by adopting his proposal, the concerns of Flitton & Greenfield and Pulloxhill parish councils would be resolved. Councillor McMurdo considered that Sandy Ivel and Sandy Pinnacle wards should form one single-member division, despite the fact that this proposed division would be substantially under-represented. He also questioned the number of councillors that we recommended for the parish wards in Sandy Pinnacle. Using figures from the 2003 Voters Lists, he considered that more development would occur in Pinnacle South parish ward and that therefore it should return seven of the nine councillors, rather than the six that we recommended. These parish warding issues are discussed further at the end of this chapter. Jonathan Sayeed MP considered that Aspley Guise district ward should be included in our proposed Woburn division.

135 We also received representations from eight local residents, all in opposition to our draft recommendation to include Aspley Guise district ward in Cranfield division. One resident of Aspley Guise gave examples of 'strong community links' between Aspley Guise district ward and our proposed Woburn division, placing emphasis on churches, medical and dental practices and shops. He also noted that the 'transport links are inclusive of each other [Aspley Guise and Woburn district wards] and not of Cranfield or Brogborough. Indeed travel to those two destinations at most times of the weekday is difficult.' Four local residents highlighted the M1 motorway and A421 as forming a 'considerable barrier' between Aspley Guise and Cranfield district wards, and provided similar community identity argumentation as Aspley Guise Parish Council, citing clubs, leisure facilities and transport as links in common.

136 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received during the consultation period. We note the argumentation both for and against our proposals. We acknowledge the extensive and detailed argumentation against our proposed Cranfield division from Aspley Guise Parish Council highlighting links between Aspley Guise ward and Woburn division such as employment, local amenities and facilities, churches, transport and charities. We also acknowledge its illustration of how such commonalities do not exist between Aspley Guise and Cranfield district ward and the argument that Cranfield does not look to Aspley Guise district ward for any such community needs. We also note that Mid Bedfordshire District Council and Jonathan

Sayeed MP supported the argumentation provided by Aspley Guise Parish Council, and the almost identical submissions of Husborne Crawley and Woburn parish councils.

137 We also note the submissions of eight local residents expressing the same points as Aspley Guise Parish Council and highlighting that the M1 and A421 form a barrier between Aspley Guise and Cranfield district wards. We also note the opposition to expanding Woburn division to include Aspley Guise district ward from Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrats. However, we do not consider that their argumentation was more persuasive than the community identity argumentation and evidence submitted from other sources. Taking all this into consideration, and in light of the widespread opposition to our draft recommendations and strong community identity evidence provided, we are recommending that Aspley Guise district ward be transferred into the proposed Woburn division.

138 We recognise that by transferring Aspley Guise district ward into our proposed Woburn division, we are worsening electoral equality in the district by creating Cranfield and Woburn divisions with variances of 24% and 20% from the county average respectively. However, we have been persuaded by the very strong community identity evidence provided that these variances are justified, given the better reflection of community identity that these amended divisions will provide. We also note that, as the divisions are on the edge of the county, there is little scope to propose divisions with better electoral equality while taking account of the strong community identities and interests in the area. We are therefore recommending that Aspley Guise district ward be included in Woburn division.

139 We acknowledge Councillor Golby's opposition to our draft recommendations for the Harlington area and the support his proposal received from Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrat Group. However, as noted during Stage One, we are unable to consider any one division in isolation and must be able to create divisions that as far as possible meet the statutory criteria in the remainder of the district. While we acknowledge that his proposed Harlington division provides good community identity (as expressed at Stage One), electoral equality and coterminosity, we have been unable to facilitate divisions in the rest of the district that, using his Harlington division as a starting point, we consider provide a better reflection of the statutory criteria than our final proposals. While we also note that adopting Councillor Golby's Harlington division would address the opposition put forward by Harlington, Pulloxhill and Flitton & Greenfield parish councils to our draft proposals, we do not consider that significantly more persuasive arguments have been put forward than those at Stage One. However, we do acknowledge that recognition of Harlington's inclusion in its proposed division should be made and therefore propose to rename this division Woburn & Harlington as suggested by Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrat Group.

140 We have carefully considered the argumentation both for and against our proposals for Sandy and Northill & Blunham divisions. We note the opposition from Mid Bedfordshire District Council and the resubmission of its Stage One proposal for the boundary of Sandy division regarding access to polling stations. We have also considered the similar argumentation put forward by North East Bedfordshire Constituency Labour Party. However, we do not have regard to the location of polling stations when formulating our recommendations and also note the support for our proposal in this area from Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrats. We

therefore do not consider that enough evidence has been provided to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations in this area.

141 We also note Councillor McMurdo's proposal that Sandy Ivel and Sandy Pinnacle district wards should form one coterminous single-member division, and North East Bedfordshire Constituency Labour Party's proposal that polling district DW3, the Fallowfield area, should be included in the Sandy division. However, we do not consider that sufficient argument has been provided to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations which are supported by Sandy Town Council and Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrats. We also note Sandy Town Council's proposal to rename Northhill & Blunham division as Northhill & Sandy West. However, in light of the support for our draft name from Mid Bedfordshire District Council and Tempsford Parish Council's support for the division, we do not consider that a case has been made to recommend this name change at this stage. We do however, propose to recommend Sandy Town Council's proposed parish ward name changes, as they provide a better reflection of the areas represented and are locally supported.

142 We also considered Arlesey Town Council's proposal to divide our proposed two-member Stotfold & Arlesey division into two single-member divisions. However, we did not consider that sufficient argumentation was provided to justify why the electorate of the two-member division could not be represented in a single division. In light of this, and the limited community identity argumentation and reduced coterminosity that Arlesey Town Council's proposal would provide, we have not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations in this area.

143 We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final, with the exception of the amended Cranfield and Woburn & Harlington divisions and the three name changes as discussed above.

144 Our final recommendations would provide 60% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions. Ampthill, Cranfield, Marston, Potton and Stotfold & Arlesey divisions would initially have 5%, 27%, 32%, 2% and 21% fewer electors than the county average respectively (9%, 24%, 13%, 7% and 7% fewer by 2007). Biggleswade Langford & Henlow Village, Northhill & Blunham, Sandy, Shefford, and Woburn & Harlington divisions would initially have 5%, 6%, 14%, 18%, 5% and 34% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (12%, 1%, 8%, 7%, 6% and 20% by 2007). Flitwick East, Flitwick West, Silsoe & Shillington and Maulden & Houghton Conquest divisions would initially have 4%, 4% and 1% more and 1% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4%, 5% and 3% fewer and 13% more by 2007). Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large maps at the back of this report.

South Bedfordshire district

145 Under the current arrangements, the district of South Bedfordshire is represented by 16 county councillors serving 16 divisions. Brooklands, Caddington, Houghton Regis North West, Icknield, Linslade, Northfields, Plantation, Priory, Southcott and Watling divisions are over-represented with 14%, 17%, 11%, 19%, 27%, 15%, 19%, 31%, 22% and 4% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (15%, 17%, 10%, 19%, 26%, 10%, 20%, 31%, 22% and 5% fewer by 2007). Beaudesert, Dunstable Central, Eaton Bray, Houghton Regis South East and Toddington divisions are under-

represented, with 2%, 5%, 13%, 17% and 11% more electors per county councillor than the county average respectively (14%, 6%, 15%, 19% and 11% more in 2007). Barton division would have the same number of electors as the county average, both initially and by 2007.

146 Under a council size of 52, South Bedfordshire is entitled to 16 councillors. At Stage One, we received five submissions in relation to the district of South Bedfordshire. The County Council submitted a district-wide proposal. It proposed 16 single-member divisions, four rural and 12 urban. In the rural areas, the County Council proposed two coterminous divisions, a Barton division containing Barton-le-Clay and Streatley district wards and a Caddington division containing Caddington, Hyde & Slip End district ward. It also proposed a Toddington division containing Toddington and Heath & Reach district wards and part of Stanbridge district ward (the parishes of Chalgrave and Eggington). It proposed an Eaton Bray division containing Eaton Bray and Kensworth & Totternhoe district wards and part of Stanbridge district ward (the parishes of Stanbridge, Tilsworth and Old Billington).

147 In the urban areas of the district, the County Council proposed a coterminous Houghton North division containing Parkside and Tithe Farm district wards and a coterminous Houghton Hall division containing Houghton Hall district ward. It proposed a coterminous Icknield division containing Icknield district ward and a coterminous Northfields division containing Northfields district ward. It also proposed a coterminous Watling division containing Watling district ward and a coterminous Grovebury division containing Grovebury district ward. It proposed a coterminous Plantation division containing Plantation district ward, and a coterminous Southcott division containing Southcott district ward.

148 The County Council also proposed four non-coterminous divisions in the urban areas of the district. It proposed a Planets division containing Planets district ward and part of All Saints district ward, that part to the east of North Street and the east of the River Ouzel where it runs south to the ward boundary from North Street, and a Linslade division containing Linslade district ward and the remaining part of All Saints district ward. It also proposed a Chiltern division containing Chiltern district ward and part of Dunstable Central district ward, that part west of High Street North, and a Manshead division containing Manshead district ward and the remaining part of Dunstable Central ward. The County Council's proposals would secure 63% coterminosity in the district with five divisions having electoral variances of more than 10% by 2007.

149 Bedfordshire South Conservatives proposed name changes to six of the County Council's proposed divisions. Leighton-Linslade Town Council considered that the urban area of Leighton Linslade should be represented by six councillors, rather than the five to which it is entitled to under a council size of 52. Councillor Heffernan proposed an All Saints division containing All Saints district ward and part of Planets district ward (polling district PLS2). The remaining part of Planets district ward would be contained in a division with Grovebury district ward. We also received a submission from a local resident requesting a ward boundary change between Linslade and Planets district wards. However this was not within the remit of this review.

150 We carefully considered all the representations we received at Stage One. We noted the adequate level of coterminosity and electoral equality (with the exception of Houghton Hall and Eaton Bray) provided by the divisions proposed by the County

Council. We also noted the name changes proposed by Bedfordshire South Conservatives. While we adopted one of the proposed names, little evidence of local support was provided for the suggested names, and not all the division names appeared relevant under our proposals. We noted Councillor Heffernan's proposed All Saints division, but we did not consider that it facilitated the best balance between the statutory criteria.

151 We adopted the County Council's proposals for Barton, Grovebury, Icknield, Northfields, Plantation, Southcott, Toddington and Watling divisions and proposed our own scheme for the remainder of the district. We proposed three two-member coterminous divisions. We proposed a Houghton Regis division containing Houghton Hall, Tithe Farm and Parkside district wards. We proposed a Dunstable division containing Chiltern, Dunstable Central and Manshead district wards, and a Linslade & Planets division containing All Saints, Linslade and Planets district wards. We also proposed a different scheme for two of the rural areas. We proposed a Caddington division containing Caddington Hyde & Slip End district ward and part of Kensworth & Totternhoe district ward (the parish of Kensworth) and a South West Bedfordshire division (as named by the Conservatives) containing Eaton Bray district ward, part of Kensworth and Totternhoe district ward (the parishes of Totternhoe, Whipsnade and Studham) and part of Stanbridge district ward (the parishes of Old Billington, Stanbridge and Tilsworth). We considered that these divisions achieved a good level of electoral equality.

152 Our draft recommendations would provide 77% coterminosity between district ward and county divisions. Barton, Dunstable, Grovebury, Icknield, Linslade & Planets, Northfields, Plantation, South West Bedfordshire, Southcott and Watling divisions would initially have 1%, 3%, 11%, 14%, 3%, 10%, 14%, 1%, 6% and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (1%, 3% fewer, 2% more, 14%, 2%, 5%, 15%, 1%, 7% and 8% fewer by 2007). Caddington, Houghton Regis and Toddington divisions would initially have 9%, 9% and 9% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (9%, 11% and 9% more by 2007).

153 At Stage Three, we received 13 submissions in relation to our draft recommendations. The County Council opposed the creation of our proposed Dunstable and Linslade & Planets two-member divisions. With regards to our proposed Dunstable division, the County Council resubmitted its Stage One proposal for two single-member divisions. It considered that, under this proposal, electors in Chiltern and Manshead district wards would have 'some affinity with their wards at County, district and town levels' and that 'confusion over electoral boundaries would be experienced by part only of the electorate for these areas [Dunstable Central district ward] rather than potentially the whole of the electorate.' It also considered that Chiltern and Manshead district wards were distinct communities as Manshead district ward 'contains town centre dwellings and areas of social housing' whereas Chiltern district ward 'mainly comprises areas of owner occupied homes and a more economically advantaged community.'

154 With regards to our proposed Linslade & Planets division, the County Council again resubmitted its Stage One proposal for two single-member divisions and argued that our proposed division would 'combine two communities with separate identities.' It considered the only advantage to our proposed division to be coterminosity. The County Council also proposed three name changes for divisions in South Bedfordshire. It considered that Toddington division should be renamed Toddington Heath to 'reflect the

inclusion within the division of the large parish of Heath & Reach' and that Caddington division should be renamed South East Bedfordshire 'based on the geographical position of the division.' The County Council acknowledged support for this name change from Slip End and Hyde parish councils and the councillor for Caddington division. It considered that, if our proposed Dunstable division was endorsed in the final recommendations, it should be renamed Dunstable Downs, as the name Dunstable 'could imply that the Icknield, Northfields and Watling divisions are not in Dunstable' town.

155 South Bedfordshire District Council supported our proposals. It did, however, suggest a number of name changes. It proposed the same changes as the County Council for Caddington and Dunstable, and also proposed that Linslade & Planets division should be renamed Leighton Linslade Central, as our draft proposal does not acknowledge the inclusion of All Saints ward in the division. It also proposed that South West Bedfordshire division should be renamed Eaton Bray to avoid 'possible confusion with the parliamentary constituency.'

156 Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrat Group generally supported our proposals for South Bedfordshire. However, it opposed our proposed Linslade & Planets division due to its general opposition to two-member divisions and the fact that it considered that the division unites two separate communities. It therefore supported the County Council's proposals for this division. Leighton Linslade Liberal Democrats supported our proposed Grovebury, Plantation and Southcott divisions, but were concerned with our proposed Linslade & Planets division and supported the County Council's proposal for two single-member divisions in this area. They stated that, if a two-member division was retained in our final recommendations, then 'careful consideration [would have to] be given towards the name.' They considered that the proposed division name would 'cause bad feelings between residents living either side of the river' as some 'refuse to be associated with the word Linslade.'

157 Leighton Linslade Labour Party considered that the Leighton Linslade area should be represented by six councillors representing six single-member coterminous divisions, however, the area is only entitled to five councillors under a council size of 52. Leighton Linslade Labour Party also proposed five single-member divisions for the area if we were not persuaded to allocate the area six councillors. It proposed an All Saints division comprising All Saints district ward and part of Plantation ward, that part as far north as Clarence Road, and part of Planets ward, that part as far northeast as Atterbury and Miles Avenues. It also proposed a Plantation division to comprise the remainder of Plantation district ward and the remainder of Planets district ward and a Linslade division to comprise the district ward of Linslade including the 'Browns yard development and the future development west to the existing bypass.' It proposed the same Southcott and Grovebury divisions as in the draft recommendations.

158 Bedfordshire South Conservatives supported our proposed two-member Dunstable and Linslade & Planets divisions, but proposed the same name changes as the County Council along with an alternative name for Linslade & Planets division to be Leighton Linslade Central. Dunstable Branch Labour Party objected to our two-member Dunstable division. It considered that the division 'combines Chiltern district ward, one of the most affluent wards in the entire South Bedfordshire district with Manshead ward, which is the second most deprived ward in the district. There is thus little or no affinity or commonality of interest.' It went on to say it believed that 'boundaries are supposed to

be drawn so that the electoral results, as far as possible, produce a fair reflection of the balance of political views in the area.’ It considered that our division would return two conservative councillors and would ‘deprive the labour majority in Manshead ward of having a county councillor of their choice.’ It went on to say that our proposed Dunstable division was divided into two by the High Street stating ‘that it cannot be crossed except at designated pedestrian crossings.’ It therefore considered that the two single-member divisions proposed by the County Council should be adopted.

159 Dunstable Town Council supported our draft recommendations ‘insofar as they affect Dunstable.’ Leighton-Linslade Town Council gave its support to the County Council’s submission regarding South Bedfordshire. Kensworth Parish Council opposed our proposal to include the parish in Caddington division. It considered that our draft recommendations ‘failed to recognise the closeness [...] between Kensworth, Studham and Whipsnade [parishes].’ It considered that Caddington was a more urban area due to its closeness to Luton whereas Kensworth is ‘more rural than urban’ and felt that our proposal would be of detriment to Kensworth parish. Slip End Parish Council accepted our proposed Caddington division and supported the County Council’s proposed name change to South East Bedfordshire.

160 Councillor Heffernan proposed the same divisions for the Leighton Linslade area as Leighton-Linslade Labour Party. However, he too considered that the area should be represented by six councillors because ‘the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Spatial Strategy seems likely to add yet further growth until 2031.’ He also considered that the proposed two-member division would not support the ‘aims and vision’ of the local police authority and the Home Office consultation regarding ‘community engagement at local division level in policing.’

161 We received one submission from a local resident proposing that we transfer Heath & Reach parish into our proposed Plantation division. He considered that Heath & Reach parish’s ‘geographical link’ is with Plantation division. He argued that the main road used in the village is also that linking it to Plantation ward, and that the ‘traffic problems of Heath & Reach [parish] and Plantation ward are identical. We [Heath & Reach parish] have no similar link with the problems of Toddington which are on a different route line.’ He discussed how the two communities of Heath & Reach and Plantation share schools, churches, community groups such as the Women’s Institute and sports facilities, as well as the effects of planning ‘be it mining or housing.’ Under this resident’s proposals, Plantation and Toddington divisions would have electoral variances of 4% and 10% from the county average respectively by 2007.

162 We have carefully considered the representations we received for South Bedfordshire during the consultation period. We note the opposition to our two-member Dunstable division from the County Council and Dunstable Branch Labour Party. We note the argument that Chiltern and Manshead district wards constitute different communities because of their political make-up and varying affluence. However, we have no regard to political outcomes when formulating our proposals, nor do we consider economic circumstances in their own right to be valid reasons why electors could not be represented in the same division. We also note the County Council’s view that, if single-member divisions were proposed, then only electors in Dunstable district ward would not have affinity at district, county and town level with their ward. However, we consider that our proposed two-member division would actually maintain affinity, as no ward would be divided at county level.

163 We also note the support our proposed Dunstable division received from South Bedfordshire District Council, Dunstable Town Council and Bedfordshire South Conservatives. In light of this and the reduced coterminosity and marginally worse level of electoral equality that the County Council's single-member divisions would provide (1% and 5% from the county average by 2007), we do not propose to move away from our draft recommendations in this area. However, we do note the name change proposed by the County Council and consider that the name Dunstable Downs would provide a more accurate reflection of the area represented in the division. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendation as final for this division with the exception of this name change.

164 We acknowledge the opposition to our proposed two-member Linslade & Planets division from the County Council, Leighton-Linslade Town Council, Bedfordshire County Council Liberal Democrat Group, Leighton Linslade Labour Party and Councillor Heffernan. We also note the consideration that the area should be represented by six councillors rather than five. However, as already mentioned, under a council size of 52, Leighton Linslade is only entitled to five county councillors, Any growth in the area after 2007 is not taken into consideration when formulating our recommendations as we do not consider that accurate electorate predictions can be made for more than five years ahead.

165 We also note the County Council's resubmission of its Stage One single-member divisions for the area, and the alternative single-member divisions proposed by Leighton Linslade Labour Party and Councillor Heffernan. While we note that these submissions consider that our proposed division combines two different communities, we do not consider that persuasive argumentation has been provided to illustrate this or to persuade us why these communities could not be adequately represented in the same division. We also note the support that this division received from South Bedfordshire District Council and Bedfordshire South Conservatives. In light of this and the reduced coterminosity and slightly worse level of electoral equality the County Council's and Leighton Linslade Labour Party's proposed single-member divisions would provide (1% and 6% from the county average by 2007), we have not been persuaded to move away from our proposed two-member division in this area.

166 We acknowledge the proposed name change of the division from Linslade & Planets to Leighton Linslade Central put forward by South Bedfordshire District Council and Bedfordshire South Conservatives. We also note the concern over the proposed name of the division from Leighton Linslade Liberal Democrats. We are therefore proposing to adopt South Bedfordshire District Council's suggested name of Leighton Linslade Central, as we consider that it will provide a better reflection of the areas covered in the division. We are confirming our draft recommendation for this division as final with the exception of this name change.

167 We note Kensworth Parish Council's objections to its inclusion in our proposed Caddington division. We acknowledge its concern that the division combines urban and rural areas. However, as mentioned in paragraph 14 we recognise that, during a county review, it may not be possible to avoid the creation of some county divisions which contain diverse communities, for example, combining urban and rural areas. We also do not consider that it had provided sufficient community identity argumentation to justify the high electoral variance (19% by 2007) that would result from transferring it into our

proposed South West Bedfordshire division, particularly as Slip End Parish Council did not express opposition to our proposed Caddington division.

168 We carefully considered the submission from a local resident with regards to transferring Heath & Reach parish into Plantation division. We consider that he had provided good community identity and evidence regarding the links between Heath & Reach parish and Plantation ward such as transport and social ties. We note that this proposal reduces coterminosity but we consider that this is justified by the improved electoral variance (Plantation and Toddington divisions would have electoral variances of 4% and 10% from the county average by 2007) and better representation of community interests and identities this amendment provides. We are therefore adopting it as part of our final recommendations.

169 We also note the County Council's proposed name changes for Toddington and Caddington divisions. We do not propose adopting the County Council's proposed Toddington Heath division name due to our amendment to divisions in this area that removes Heath & Reach parish from Toddington division. However, we are renaming Caddington division South East Bedfordshire to be consistent with division names elsewhere in the county. We therefore did not adopt South Bedfordshire District Council's proposal to rename South West Bedfordshire as Eaton Bray.

170 We are therefore endorsing our draft recommendations as final with the exception of our amended Plantation and Toddington divisions and the three division name changes listed above.

171 Our final recommendations would provide 69% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions. Our proposed Barton, Dunstable Downs, Grovebury, Icknield, Leighton Linlade Central, Northfields, South West Bedfordshire, Southcott, Toddington and Watling divisions would initially have 1%, 3%, 11%, 14%, 3%, 10%, 1%, 6%, 11% and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (1% and 3% fewer, 2% more, 14%, 2%, 5%, 1%, 7%, 10% and 8% fewer by 2007). Our proposed Houghton Regis, Plantation and South East Bedfordshire divisions would initially have 9%, 5% and 9% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (11%, 4% and 9% more by 2007). Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Conclusions

172 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we propose that:

- There should be 52 councillors, an increase of three, representing 46 divisions, a reduction of three;
- Consequently, changes should be made to all of the existing 49 divisions.

173 We have decided to substantially confirm our draft recommendations subject to the following amendments:

- In Bedford borough, we propose transferring Carlton & Chellington and Stevington parishes into an amended Harrold division to provide a better reflection of

community identity and to improve coterminosity. We are also proposing that Harrold & Sharnbrook and North East Bedford divisions be renamed Harrold and North East Bedfordshire respectively.

- In Mid Bedfordshire district, we propose transferring Aspley Guise district ward into an amended Woburn and Harlington division to provide a better reflection of community identity. We are also proposing that Woburn division be renamed Woburn & Harlington and that the proposed parish wards of Ivel West and Pinnacle North be renamed Beeston & Ivel and Fallowfield & Pinnacle respectively.
- In South Bedfordshire district, we are proposing to transfer Heath & Reach parish into an amended Plantation division to provide a better reflection of community identity and improve electoral equality. We are also proposing that Caddington, Dunstable and Linslade & Planets divisions be renamed South East Bedfordshire, Dunstable Downs and Leighton Linslade Central respectively.

174 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2002 and 2007 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2002 electorate		2007 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	49	52	49	52
Number of divisions	49	46	49	46
Average number of electors per councillor	5,977	5,632	6,237	5,877
Number of divisions with a variance more than 10% from the average	31	21	35	12
Number of divisions with a variance more than 20% from the average	13	7	17	2

175 As Table 4 shows, our final recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of divisions with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 31 to 21, with seven divisions varying by more than 20% from the county average. By 2007, 12 divisions are forecast to vary by more than 10% and only two divisions would have variances of over 20%. Our final recommendations are set out in more detail in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the maps at the back of this report.

Final recommendation

Bedfordshire County Council should comprise 52 councillors serving 46 divisions, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated in Appendix A, and on the large map at the back of the report.

Parish & Town council electoral arrangements

176 When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that, if a parish is to be divided between different county divisions, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single division of the county. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report, we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Biddenham, Kempston and Sandy to reflect the proposed county divisions in those areas.

177 The parish of Biddenham is currently served by nine councillors and is unwarded. In order to reflect the county divisions in the area, we proposed creating two parish wards as part of our draft recommendations, Biddenham North and Biddenham South. We proposed that Biddenham North parish ward should be represented by four parish councillors and that Biddenham South parish ward should be represented by five parish councillors.

178 In response to our consultation report, we received two comments regarding the warding arrangements for Biddenham. Bedford Borough Council and Councillor Gwynne Jones considered that the proposed warding was unnecessary due to the Borough Council's forthcoming parish application for the area. However, as explained previously, we can only consider existing parishes and cannot base recommendations on what the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister may be considering creating. Therefore, having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed divisions in the area, we are confirming our draft recommendations for the warding of Biddenham parish as final.

Final recommendation

Biddenham Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Biddenham North (returning four councillors) and Biddenham South (returning five councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed county division boundary, as illustrated and named on Map 1.

179 The parish of Kempston is currently represented by 13 councillors returned from four parish wards. At present, Ampthill Road ward is represented by one councillor while East, North and South wards are each represented by four councillors. In order to reflect the county divisions, we proposed creating a further parish ward as part of our draft recommendations. We proposed that Ampthill Road, East and South parish wards would remain as at present, but proposed that the existing North parish ward be divided to create a revised North parish ward and a new West parish ward. We proposed that this revised North parish ward should be represented by three parish councillors and that the new West parish ward should be represented by one parish councillor.

180 In response to our consultation report, no comments were received specifically regarding the warding of Kempston parish. Therefore, in light of the confirmation of our proposed divisions in the area, we are confirming our draft recommendation for the warding of Kempston parish as final.

Draft recommendation

Kempston Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Ampthill Road (returning one councillor), East (returning four councillors), South (returning four councillors), North (returning three councillors) and West (returning one councillor). The boundaries between the proposed parish wards are illustrated and named on Map 1 in Appendix A.

181 The parish of Sandy is currently represented by 15 councillors returned from two parish wards. At present, Ivel ward is represented by six councillors and Pinnacle ward is represented by nine councillors. In order to reflect the county divisions in the area, we proposed creating two further parish wards and proposed revised names for the four parish wards in our draft recommendations. We proposed that Ivel East ward should be represented by five parish councillors, Ivel West ward by one parish councillor, Pinnacle North ward by three parish councillors and Pinnacle South ward by six parish councillors.

182 In response to our consultation report, we received two comments regarding the number of councillors for our proposed Pinnacle North and South parish wards. Sandy Town Council and Councillor McMurdo considered that the number of councillors returned in the parish wards of Pinnacle North and Pinnacle South should be two and seven respectively. However, Sandy Town Council did not provide details of how they arrived at the different figures for the new warding arrangements and Councillor McMurdo used the existing figures to calculate warding arrangements, whereas we used those for the forecast electorate at 2007. Bearing this in mind, and having confirmed these forecast projections with the County Council, we are content that our proposals for the distribution of councillors in the draft recommendations are correct, and are therefore confirming them as final.

183 We note that Sandy Town Council wished for the parishes to remain unwarded. However, this is not possible due to the division boundaries that we are recommending in the area, which Sandy Town Council has supported. It is therefore necessary for us to create these parish wards.

184 Sandy Town Council also proposed changing the names of the proposed Ivel West and Pinnacle North parish wards to Beeston & Ivel and Fallowfield & Pinnacle respectively. We consider that these names provide a better reflection of the communities represented in each of the parish wards and are therefore adopting them. Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the support for our proposed divisions in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation for warding Sandy parish as final, with the exception of the name changes outlined above.

Final recommendation

Sandy Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four parish wards: Ivel East ward (returning five councillors), Beeston & Ivel (returning one councillor), Fallowfield & Pinnacle (returning three councillors) and Pinnacle South (returning six councillors). The boundaries between the parish wards are illustrated and named on Map 2.

6 What happens next?

185 Having completed our review of the electoral arrangements in Bedfordshire 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 No. 200/ 3962).

186 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether or not 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 7 September 2004 and The Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representations made to them by that date.

187 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 Bedfordshire County Council:

Detailed mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed division boundaries for Bedfordshire.

The **large map, Sheet 1 of 2** inserted at the back of this report illustrates in outline form the proposed divisions for Bedfordshire, including constituent district wards and parishes.

Sheet 2 of 2 inserted at the back of this report includes the following maps:

Map 1 illustrates the proposed boundary between Kempston and Kempston Rural divisions, North and West parish wards and Biddenham North and Biddenham South parish wards, in Bedford borough. It also shows the proposed boundaries between De Parys, Newnham and Queens Park divisions in Bedford borough.

Map 2 illustrates the proposed boundary of Sandy division and the boundaries between Ivel East, Beeston & Ivel, Fallowfield & Pinnacle and Pinnacle South parish wards in Mid Bedfordshire district.