

Periodic electoral reviews

Guidance and procedural advice

2nd edition, July 2002

The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body that was set up by Parliament. We aim to gain public confidence and encourage people to take part in the democratic process within the United Kingdom by modernising the electoral process, promoting public awareness of electoral matters, and regulating political parties.

On 1 April 2002, The Boundary Committee for England (formerly the Local Government Commission for England) became a statutory committee of The Electoral Commission. Its duties include reviewing local election boundaries.

The Boundary Committee for England

The Committee's principal role is to undertake periodic electoral reviews (PERs). An Electoral Commissioner chairs the Committee. The other six members are Deputy Electoral Commissioners. The Committee submits its recommendations to The Electoral Commission, which is responsible for determining whether to give effect to them and, if so, when.

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Summary

The Electoral Commission is an independent body established by Parliament. Its Boundary Committee for England (BCFE) is responsible for the completion of the rolling programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of each local authority in England, previously undertaken by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE). The LGCE ceased to exist on 1 August 2002.

This *Guidance*, issued by The Electoral Commission, seeks to provide clear and straightforward information on the legislation under which PERs are conducted. It acts as guidance to the BCFE. It is also intended to assist those who wish to make submissions to the BCFE, particularly local authorities and political groups, on any proposed changes to current electoral arrangements.

- Electoral reviews are necessary because of changes in the electorate within the local authority areas.
- In broad terms, the objective of a PER is to ensure that, within each principal local authority area, the number of electors represented by each councillor is as nearly as possible the same.
- The BCFE also takes into account local circumstances, including the need to secure convenient and effective local government, to reflect the identities and interests of local communities, and achieve easily identifiable electoral boundaries.
- Where possible, parish and town council boundaries form the building blocks for principal local authority electoral arrangements.
- As part of the process, the BCFE can recommend changes to the number of councillors, the boundaries of wards and divisions, the councillors representing each ward, and the creation of new wards and divisions.

This *Guidance* sets out the general approach taken to PERs, largely based on the approach previously adopted by the LGCE.

- The BCFE will only seek equality of representation *within* a principal local authority area, not *between* areas.
- The BCFE will make recommendations for either multi- or single-member wards, or a mix, and will continue to put forward schemes which best meet the statutory criteria.
- The BCFE has no power to recommend a change to electoral cycles.

The BCFE has no power to recommend changes to the external, administrative boundaries of local authorities (including parishes) as part of the current programme of PERs. Nor can it recommend the creation of new parishes. There are separate procedures for district councils to undertake reviews of the parishing arrangements in their areas, under the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. However, the BCFE can review parish and town councils' electoral arrangements as part of the PER of a district (Section 4):

- there is no national pattern of electoral arrangements for town and parish councils;
- the legislative requirement is that each should have not less than five councillors, although most tend to have more. There is no upper limit;
- there is no legislative requirement for electoral equality;
- district councils and unitary authorities may wish to undertake a parish review under the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 before a PER takes place. However, it is important that the Order implementing any changes is made in good time before the PER commences.

This guidance sets out the information that the BCFE needs from local authorities and others.

Each review will follow a four-stage process, culminating in the publication of final recommendations from the BCFE to The Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission will consider the recommendations and make decisions in relation to their implementation.

Further copies of this guidance can be obtained from:

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This guidance, together with details of the PER programme, is also available on the BCFE's website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk and The Electoral Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk. It may be copied or otherwise reproduced.

Introduction

1 The Electoral Commission is an independent body established by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA 2000). Section 18 of the Act made provision for the transfer to the Commission of the functions, rights, liabilities and staff of the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE). That transfer took place on 1 April 2002, under the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001/No 3962). The 2001 Order also transferred to The Electoral Commission the bulk of the Secretary of State's functions in relation to local authority electoral arrangements.

2 The Electoral Commission is therefore now responsible for the completion of the rolling programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) previously undertaken by the LGCE and for the implementation of any changes, with or without modification. The reviews will be undertaken by The Boundary Committee for England (BCFE), a statutory committee of The Electoral Commission. The reviews will be conducted by the BCFE which will report to The Electoral Commission with its recommendations. Given the statutory relationship The Electoral Commission has with the BCFE, we have felt it appropriate to adopt a set of protocols intended to safeguard the integrity of the decision-making processes. A copy of these protocols can be viewed on the BCFE's website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk. The protocols will be kept under review in the light of experience, however, and may be subject to change.

3 We are keenly aware that PERs may not be a high priority for some local authorities, given the increasing pressures and calls on resources that they face. Nevertheless, we cannot over-emphasise the desirability of authorities engaging, at an early stage, with the review process, and taking a proactive approach in developing proposals for any changes to electoral arrangements, in consultation with local interests.

4 We recognise that, given the infrequency of electoral reviews, it is likely that few individuals and organisations will have a detailed knowledge of the issues involved and the considerations that the BCFE is obliged to address. We have therefore sought to provide in this Guidance clear and straightforward information on the legislation under which PERs are conducted and the approach the BCFE will take to its work. The guidance is also intended to assist those, particularly local authorities and political groups, who wish to make submissions to the BCFE on any proposed changes to current electoral arrangements.

5 It is our intention to keep the guidance in this document under review, publishing revised editions as necessary. In this respect, we welcome comments on the content, and suggestions as to how it might be improved.

6 The level of resources, particularly staff resources, which local authorities devote to PERs is entirely a matter for them to determine. However, the degree of officer-level input required in the formulation of electoral schemes and the preparation of supporting data, particularly in the early stages of the process, can be considerable, and should not be underestimated. The BCFE can provide details of staff resourcing in other local authorities which have been through the full PER process, or provide contacts in those authorities in order that experience can be shared.

1. Scope of The Boundary Committee's review – The Statutory Provisions

The Local Government Acts 1972 and 1992

1.1 Section 13(4) of the Local Government Act 1992 places a duty on The Electoral Commission to direct the BCFE to undertake electoral reviews of each principal local authority area in England at periodic intervals. The principal local authorities are all the metropolitan and shire district councils (including unitary councils), county councils and London boroughs. A review of a principal authority's area also includes an electoral review of any parish or town councils in that area. In considering electoral arrangements, section 27(2) of the 1992 Act requires the Committee to have regard, so far as is reasonably practicable, to the provisions of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

1.2 The BCFE is not able to review, as part of the PER process, the administrative boundaries *between* local authorities or parishes, or to consider the establishment of new parish areas. It could do this only if the Secretary of State were to request The Electoral Commission to provide advice on such matters and we direct the BCFE to undertake a review. However, under the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, district councils and unitary councils have the power to undertake reviews of parishing arrangements in their areas. The interaction between such reviews and PERs is discussed in Section 4 and Appendix B of this guidance.

The review timetable

1.3 The 1992 Act provided that, so far as reasonably practicable, PERs should be undertaken at intervals of not less than 10 years and not more than 15 years. Under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA 2000) the statutory timetable has been repealed, although we still have a duty to direct the BCFE to conduct electoral reviews at periodic intervals. As a result, The Electoral Commission now has responsibility for the timetabling of PERs. However, we intend to continue with the published review programme, which will be completed in 2004.

1.4 We have no power under section 13(4) to direct the BCFE to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London; we may do so only as part of an administrative boundary review requested by the Secretary of State. An 'administrative boundary review', which is called a 'boundary review' in the legislation, is a review of the *external* boundaries of an authority.

The statutory criteria

1.5 Under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, the BCFE is required, when making recommendations for any changes to the electoral arrangements of English principal local authority areas, to have regard to:

- a. the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
- b. the need to secure effective and convenient local government;
- c. the need to secure equality of representation; and

- d. any scheme for elections specified by order under section 86 of the Local Government Act 2000 (i.e. an electoral cycle scheme).

Scope of the BCFE's recommendations

1.6 When making recommendations to The Electoral Commission, the BCFE may recommend such changes to electoral arrangements as are specified in section 14(4) of the 1992 Act. In relation to principal local authority areas, these are:

- a. the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
- b. the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards or divisions);
- c. the number of councillors to be elected for each electoral area; and
- d. the name of any electoral area.

1.7 The BCFE may also make the following recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements within existing parish and town council areas:

- a. the number of councillors;
- b. the need for parish wards;
- c. the number and boundaries of any such wards;
- d. the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward or, in the case of a common parish (ie where a number of parishes are grouped under a single parish council), for each parish; and
- e. the name of any such ward.

Electoral cycle

1.8 Unlike the LGCE, the BCFE does not have the power to consider or make recommendations for changes to electoral cycles. Responsibility for changes to electoral cycle now rests with the Secretary of State, exercising his powers under section 7 of the Local Government Act 1972 or Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000.

The statutory rules

1.9 Section 27 of the 1992 Act requires both The Electoral Commission and the BCFE to comply, so far as practicable, with Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements). The rules are summarised in the following paragraphs.

1.10 In relation to *county councils*, the Rules provide that, having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the county likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the start of the review:

- a. the number of local government electors shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every electoral division of the county;
- b. every electoral division shall lie wholly within a single district (ie electoral divisions should not cross district administrative boundaries);
- c. every ward of a civil parish having a parish council, whether separate or common, shall lie wholly within a single electoral division (ie no ward of a parish or town council should be divided by an electoral division boundary);
- d. every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single electoral division.

Subject to (a)-(d) above, the Rules provide that regard should be had to:

- a. the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable;
- b. any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular boundary;
and
- c. the boundaries of the wards of the districts in the county.

1.11 In relation to *districts* (metropolitan, shire or unitary) and *London boroughs*, the Rules provide that, having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the district or London borough likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the start of the review:

- a. the number of local government electors represented by each councillor shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district/borough and London borough;
- b. in a district/borough every ward of a parish having a parish council shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district (ie no ward of a parish council should be divided by a district ward boundary);
- c. in a district/borough every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district.

1.12 The Rules also provide that, subject to (a)-(c) above, regard should be had to:

- a. the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- b. any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

1.13 In relation to *parish and town councils*, the Rules provide that, in considering whether a parish should be divided into wards, regard shall be had to whether:

- a. the number or distribution of electors for the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and
- b. it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

1.14 Where it is decided to divide any civil parish into parish wards, in considering the size and boundaries of the wards and in determining the number of parish councillors to be elected for each ward, regard shall be had to:

- a. any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish that is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the start of the review;

- b. the desirability of fixing boundaries that are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- c. any local ties that will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

1.15 In addition, the Rules provide that where it is decided not to divide a parish into parish wards, in determining the number of councillors to be elected for each parish, regard shall be had to the number and distribution of electors of the parish, and any change that is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the fixing of the number of parish councillors. Examples of parish warding are given in Appendix B.

Electoral equality

1.16 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector having a vote of equal weight, is a fundamental democratic principle. Yet the balance this principle implies between electoral areas within a local authority can never be maintained on a basis that is mathematically exact, because local populations change over time. Hence the BCFE's task is to undertake PERs with a view to rectifying imbalances that have developed, having regard to a five-year forecast of electorate, and securing equality of representation across the whole of a principal local authority's area.

1.17 There is some circularity in the legal structure under which both The Electoral Commission and the BCFE work. There is a clear rule as to electoral equality: that the number of electors represented by each councillor to be elected to the authority must be, "as nearly as may be" the same in every ward (which was described by Lord Denning MR in the *Enfield* case as a "mathematical test"¹). This requirement forms part of the statutory criteria. However, the task is not merely arithmetical, for the following reasons:

- recommendations are not to be based purely on current electorates. They must also take account of forecast changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the following five years;
- in undertaking reviews and in considering final recommendations The Electoral Commission and the BCFE must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable electoral area boundaries, and to local ties which might be broken by those boundaries. An approach which is too rigorously mathematical could harm both of those interests. These are issues which are also clearly relevant to our statutory criteria under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, of having regard to the need to reflect the interests and identities of local communities; and
- we must have regard to the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

1.18 The manner in which the BCFE seeks to reconcile these, often conflicting, considerations when undertaking reviews is set out in the following section of this guidance.

¹

In *London Borough of Enfield v Local Government Boundary Commission for England* (1979) 1 A11 ER 950,953 (upheld in the House of Lords [1979] 3 A11 ER 717)

2 The Boundary Committee's approach

The proposition for change

2.1 The purpose of a review is to achieve as good electoral equality as practicable, having regard to the other statutory criteria. The BCFE will only recommend the retention of substantial imbalances where it can be demonstrated that no other option is feasible. Departures from the principle of electoral equality will therefore need to be fully justified.

2.2 The BCFE will rely heavily on local authorities and other interested parties to put forward proposals on how electoral arrangements within their areas might be improved. We believe that the interests of local democracy are best served if the BCFE's recommendations are based on electoral schemes that are generated locally, preferably following consultation with local interests, achieve a high level of electoral equality, and address the other statutory criteria. Experience from earlier PERs has shown that a positive and proactive approach from the outset on the part of the local authorities and other interested parties is far more likely to produce a scheme that not only satisfies the statutory criteria, but also reflects local preferences.

2.3 In order to facilitate locally generated schemes, we will aim to keep to the following timetable:

- **advance publication of our review programme:** the BCFE has published its complete review programme through to 2002/2003, when the BCFE will start the final PERs in the current programme. These last reviews will be completed in 2004. This should enable authorities to budget and otherwise prepare for their reviews. It is particularly important because of the opportunity district and unitary councils have, under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, to conduct a prior review of parishing arrangements in their area. Where they exist, parishes and parish wards provide the building blocks for district wards. It is therefore highly desirable that the two review processes are co-ordinated. This is discussed in more detail in Section 4;
- **advance notice of start date:** the BCFE will aim to provide at least two months' advance notice of the actual start date of a review, to enable authorities to prepare themselves and to assemble and provide the necessary data we will require; and
- **briefing for chief executives, group leaders, members and parish and town councils:** it is important that the BCFE briefs chief officers on the review process, the review timetable and the content of proposals. In addition, the BCFE will wish to brief group leaders and elected members, on a cross-party basis, prior to the commencement of a review. Parish and town councils will also be informed of the review process, particularly as it may affect parish electoral arrangements.

2.4 The BCFE's approach will build upon the experience of the LGCE, which undertook periodic electoral reviews between 1996-2002. While the LGCE found that many local authorities had put forward well-argued proposals, on occasions it received submissions that were not supported by any detailed reasons or evidence. **The lack of cogent argument and evidence reduces the value of the submission**, and can result in the BCFE being required to prepare its own scheme, rather than putting forward draft or final recommendations that are

based on locally derived proposals. To assist local authorities and other interested parties, examples of submissions that have been persuasive in terms of their argumentation and evidence are available from the BCFE.

2.5 Accordingly, it is very important that those making submissions, whether for or against change and whether for the whole or part of a local authority, should set out their arguments and provide evidence based on the relevant considerations. The nature of the evidence which might be relevant in a PER is discussed in Appendix C. Mere assertions will not suffice. In particular, representations and submissions should address the statutory criteria and the Schedule 11 Rules, and consist of three main elements:

- the **proposition** for change or, indeed, against change;
- the **arguments** to support the proposition; and
- the **evidence** which justifies the arguments.

2.6 While the BCFE will have regard to all material submitted, well-argued cases which achieve a high level of electoral equality, address the other statutory criteria, and are backed by evidence are likely to carry more weight, regardless of who submits them. Conversely, propositions that are supported by petitions, but no supporting arguments, are likely to carry less weight.

2.7 Clearly, situations will arise where there are conflicts between the different considerations which have to be taken into account. It is the BCFE's task to recommend how such conflicts should be resolved, exercising its judgement in reaching conclusions on its recommendations. In making such judgements, there are a number of factors to which the BCFE will have regard. These include:

- where electoral imbalances are to remain, is the evidence so persuasive as to warrant perpetuating electoral inequality until the next electoral review?
- if a ward boundary change is proposed, what evidence is there that it will damage/enhance the identities and interests of local communities?
- what evidence is there that a change in the number of councillors will enhance the effectiveness and convenience of the way in which the local authority conducts its business?
- what will be the impact on electors if the number of councillors is changed or the ward boundaries altered?

Non-submission of proposals for change

2.8 There may be occasions where the BCFE receives no proposals for some or all of an area, or where the only proposal put to it is for no change even though imbalances exist. In such circumstances, the BCFE will prepare its own scheme. The BCFE will still require information from the local authority concerned on the community and other considerations in the area that should be taken into account in preparing its recommendations. However, this is the least preferred approach. We consider that it is far better that local authorities and others, who have a detailed knowledge of the review area, should take the lead in developing locally derived electoral schemes in partnership with local interests.

3 Issues arising

3.1 The issues discussed in this section of the guidance, and the BCFE's general approach to them, are derived from the experience of the LGCE. The guidance is intended to provide basic, helpful ground rules for the conduct of reviews. The BCFE will entertain proposals which depart from the approaches set out below, but these will require particular justification, along the lines described in the previous section.

Council size

3.2 Council size is the term used to describe the number of councillors who are elected to a local authority. It is the starting point in any electoral review since it determines the optimum councillor:elector ratio to be achieved across all wards of an authority, against which levels of electoral imbalance are measured.

3.3 There is wide variation in council size across England, not only between the different types of local authority – metropolitan and shire district councils, county councils and London boroughs – but also between authorities of the same type. The current size of metropolitan districts varies from 48 to 117 councillors; shire districts (including unitary districts) from 20 to 80 councillors; county councils from 42 to 84 councillors; and London boroughs from 48 to 71 councillors. However, it should be noted that a number of these ranges will change as a result of the implementation of electoral changes in the future.

3.4 In considering the issue of council size, we are of the view that each area should be considered on its own merits and that the BCFE should not aim for equality of council size between authorities of similar types and populations. Indeed, this view was supported by local government in response to a wide consultation undertaken by the LGCE in 1995, prior to the start of its PER programme. The view of the majority of respondents was that the current diversity in council size by and large reflected the diverse nature of the local authorities themselves. The local authority associations were clear that equality of representation *within* an area was more important than *between* areas, and that diversity was to be welcomed.

3.5 We agree with the view that local government should be as diverse as the communities it serves, providing services, leadership and representation tailored to the characteristics and needs of individual areas. Further, the adoption of new political management structures, under the Local Government Act 2000, is likely to vary from council to council and is likely to have a significant bearing on council sizes recommended as part of the forthcoming PERs.

3.6 This diversity of council size raises a number of questions, not least that of the role of councillors. They have traditionally had three basic functions: to represent the interests of residents on the council, to formulate and monitor the local authority's policies and priorities, and to represent the interests both of residents and the authority on and to a wide range of external bodies. Too few councillors can mean that the interests of residents are not adequately represented; too many can lead to difficulties in the internal management of local authorities. This can be a fine balance.

3.7 In reaching conclusions on council size, we are of the view that it would be wrong for the BCFE to assume that the existing number of councillors elected to serve on a council already secures effective and convenient local government. We recognise that the role of councillors is changing. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 executive styles of political

management are now being introduced in most local authority areas. This is resulting in a move away from the traditional committee structure of management and decision-making, which consumes much of councillors' time. Such changes must raise questions about council size.

3.8 We therefore believe it would be wrong for the BCFE to assume that existing council size should be the benchmark against which any proposals for increases or reductions should be judged. We believe that there is a real case for closer examination of the current and future roles of councillors and, by implication, fresh consideration of the council size appropriate for each local authority area.

3.9 The BCFE will facilitate local authority proposals for developments in different democratic styles and political management structures. A number of authorities initiated changes to their political management structures in advance of the 2000 Act and, as a corollary to implementing their modernisation scheme, have used the opportunity of a PER to consider and propose changes to their council size. In most cases where this has occurred the tendency has been to seek to reduce the number of councillors, sometimes significantly. In a few others, authorities have proposed increases, sometimes to support devolved arrangements.

3.10 We have no particular view on whether the move towards new political management structures should result in increases, reductions or, indeed, no change in council size, although we expect the tendency towards reductions is likely to continue. Nevertheless, whatever council size interested parties may be considering proposing to the BCFE, it will be important that 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 structures. The BCFE will look for clear evidence that this has taken place. **It will be insufficient simply to assert that the implementation of a particular structure requires a particular council size or, indeed, that no change in council size is required.** In the absence of such evidence, the BCFE will have to formulate its own proposals for what is judged to be the most appropriate council size for the area concerned, and use these as the basis of its recommendations.

3.11 The 2000 Act requires local authorities to consult the public and stakeholders on changes to their political management structures. Extensive guidance on the approach to such consultations has been produced by the Local Government Association and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (*New Council Constitutions - Consultation Guidelines for English Local Authorities*, The Stationery Office, October 2000). Such consultations may also provide an opportunity for seeking views on the implications for council size as a consequence of a move towards a new political management structure. As part of a PER, the BCFE will certainly consider the extent to which local consultations on any proposed political management structures have identified and discussed the potential implications for council size. The BCFE will also look for any measure of local consensus underpinning the proposals for council size that are submitted to it. This approach applies as equally to proposals for retaining existing council size as to those for increases or reductions.

3.12 In circumstances where an authority has already implemented a new political management structure and proposes to retain council size, the BCFE will still look for evidence of public consultation and any level of local consensus. In addition, however, it will also seek evidence that the existing council size is achieving effective and convenient local government in the new structure. That is to say it will wish to receive evidence as to how the new arrangements are bedding down with no change to the number of councillors.

3.13 It remains the case that we do not accept that increases in an authority's electorate should automatically result in a commensurate increase in the number of councillors being returned, nor that changes should be made to the size of an authority simply to make it more consistent with that of a neighbouring area.

Electoral equality

3.14 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality, with no imbalances from the average councillor:elector ratio in any ward or division of an authority, is unattainable. Nevertheless, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. Indeed, the achievement of electoral equality now forms part of the statutory criteria to which both we and the BCFE must have regard.

3.15 Accordingly, we strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes for submission to the BCFE, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity. Each such adjustment should be justified, using the approach of **proposition, argument and evidence**. The degree of argument and evidence required will largely depend on the level of electoral imbalance being proposed. For example, the BCFE will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an imbalance of over 10% in any ward. Any imbalances of 20% and over should arise only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and will require the strongest justification. The type of evidence that may be relevant in a PER is discussed in detail in Appendix C. The 10% and 20% figures should not be regarded as thresholds; in practice, we will expect the BCFE's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%.

3.16 The BCFE's aim will be to recommend electoral arrangements that give equality of representation throughout the review area. However, it is occasionally the case that a degree of imbalance in one ward is unavoidable if a reasonable balance is to be achieved elsewhere. This might arise, for example, in a ward which is at the edge of a district, separated by natural features from the rest of the area, or as a consequence of the pattern of communities or the configuration of parish boundaries. We also recognise the particular problems posed by areas that have a relatively small electorate, and where the inclusion or exclusion of a handful of electors can have significant consequences on arithmetic equality.

Current electorates and five-year forecasts

3.17 In reaching conclusions on its recommendations, the BCFE is required by Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act to have regard not only to the current electorate of an area but also to changes in the number and distribution of electors likely to take place over the next five years. This ensures that the BCFE's recommendations do not relate to a single point in time, but take account of expected population movements in the short- to medium-term.

3.18 The current electorate is that contained in the electoral register which is in place at the time a review is commenced. The BCFE will base its work on the register published after the canvass of electors in October each year. That is to say it will be using the December register, a copy of which local authorities will need to retain until the completion of the review.

3.19 Electorate forecasts should be prepared by local authorities as early as possible in the review process, ideally before the formal commencement of the review (the beginning of Stage One), so that both the current and forecast figures can be placed on deposit and made available to local political groups, parish and town councils, and other interested parties who may wish to make representations to the BCFE. *All* such respondents are asked to measure their proposals against current and forecast electorate figures.

3.20 Estimating five-year forecasts of electorate is not an exact science. The task is to identify likely changes, not merely possible changes; this means that the figures should be based on firm evidence and realistic expectations. In two-tier county areas, the most constructive approach has been for all district councils and the county council to agree a protocol to secure a consistent and rigorous approach to electorate forecasts in each district. This will also provide a more consistent basis for the later review of the county council's electoral arrangements. The forecasts should take account of development expected to be completed within the five-year period, in accordance with planning permissions already granted, and having regard to the volume and locations of housing development anticipated in structure plans and local plans. Account should also be taken of expected occupancy levels and population movement data from the Office for National Statistics. The BCFE will need background material illustrating how electorate forecasts were arrived at; BCFE officers can advise further and provide examples of good supporting evidence.

3.21 Figures for the current electorate will necessarily be more reliable than the five-year forecast, but where the BCFE is satisfied that forecasts are reliable, it will seek to recommend a scheme under which electoral equality will improve, rather than deteriorate, over that time. In other words, if the choice is between proposing a scheme that gives good electoral equality, based on the current electoral register, or good electoral equality based on a five-year forecast of electorate, the BCFE will tend to favour those schemes which have adopted the latter approach.

3.22 Nevertheless, those compiling the forecasts are advised to use caution. The LGCE found that the majority of five-year electorate forecasts provided by local authorities in 1996 had over-estimated the potential for electorate growth in their areas. Details of this analysis can be found on the BCFE's website. The clear message, therefore, is that local authorities should take care not to overestimate development and electorate growth.

3.23 It has been suggested that in areas which currently have very low electorates but which are expected to increase significantly, for example, as a consequence of major housing developments or regeneration, there should be a staged increase in the number of councillors representing the area. However, the BCFE has no powers to adopt such an approach. The BCFE is required to take a view on the likelihood of that change taking place within five years, and recommend accordingly.

3.24 An issue often raised in PERs is whether arguments relating to the under-registration of electors in particular wards will be taken into account. The BCFE will take claims of under-registration into account for the purposes of five-year forecasts, but only where credible evidence is provided, both of the existence of under-registration and of the steps that are already being taken which are very likely to increase registration in a particular area. It will not accept assertions that such increases will take place without supporting evidence. Respondents should provide details of the likely effect on five-year forecasts.

Electoral cycles

3.25 The BCFE has no power to consider or to make recommendations for changes to local authority electoral cycle. The responsibility for any such changes rests with the Secretary of State.

3.26 Current legislation provides that English county councils and London boroughs must have whole-council elections once every four years, while metropolitan districts must have elections by thirds. However, attention is drawn to the Government's proposals for more frequent elections, as set out in the White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, and sections 86 – 87 of the Local Government Act 2000. The proposals are summarised in Appendix A.

3.27 Shire district councils (including shire unitary districts) may have either whole-council elections or elections by thirds. Currently, approximately 40% of shire districts have whole-council elections. Under the election-by-thirds system, one third of the councillors in each ward retires or seeks re-election in years one, two and three; there is no election in year four. In two-tier areas, year four is the year in which county council elections are held. However, many local authorities that are subject to elections by thirds have a mix of three, two and single member wards. In such circumstances, the local elections for councillors take place, for two-member wards, in two years out of four, and for single-member wards, one year out of four.

Single and multi-member wards/divisions

3.28 Until the commencement of Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000 there were certain constraints on whether local authorities could have single - and/or multi-member wards or divisions. Each county council division could only return one member. However, that particular constraint has now been removed by section 89 of the 2000 Act and the BCFE may now recommend the creation of multi-member county divisions. The current provisions relating to the number of councillors per electoral area by type of authority are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Single/multi-member electoral areas – statutory provisions

Authority type	Number of councillors per electoral area
Metropolitan district	No limit, but the number of councillors returned from each ward must be divisible by three
London borough	No limit
Shire unitary authority	No limit
Shire district	No limit
County council	No limit

3.29 In practice, however, all wards in metropolitan districts return three councillors and all wards in London boroughs return between one and three councillors. Virtually all shire district and shire unitary authorities also return between one and three councillors; currently, only three district councils in England, on which we have yet to complete PERs, have wards which return more than three councillors (from a total of five wards). Additionally, all county council electoral divisions currently return only one councillor.

3.30 During reviews completed to date, a wide range of arguments were put forward about the advantages and disadvantages of both single-member and multi-member patterns. The LGCE did not adopt a prescriptive approach as to which pattern was better. In practice, it generally made recommendations that provided for a combination of single and multi-member wards. Its recommendations tended to reinforce the overall pattern of multi-member wards in urban areas with more single-member wards in rural areas. We currently see no reason to adopt a prescriptive approach.

3.31 The BCFE will continue to put forward schemes that best meet the need for electoral equality and reflect the other statutory criteria.

3.32 Proposals for an increase in the number of single-member wards in district council areas that are parished will need to have particular regard to their effect on parish boundary and warding arrangements. The BCFE will be concerned to ensure that the creation of new single-member district wards does not unnecessarily increase the number of parish wards in the area, and will need clear evidence of widespread support for such a change.

3.33 In circumstances where the BCFE's recommendation is for multi-member wards, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate. The LGCE found no such circumstances in any of its reviews.

3.34 There have not been any completed reviews of county council areas since the commencement of the 2000 Act, which enables the BCFE to recommend the creation of multi-member divisions. However, subject to the representations and evidence the BCFE receives in conducting PERs of such areas, given their potential geographic size, we do not envisage the BCFE recommending large numbers of multi-member divisions other than, perhaps, in the more urban areas of a county. Even in such areas, we do not believe that the statutory criteria would normally be met by recommendations for divisions that return more than two councillors.

Rural/urban weightings

3.35 An issue that has raised some difficulty in the past is that of achieving equality of representation in local authorities that have one or more urban centres but also have large, more sparsely populated rural hinterlands. Some of these authorities have rural wards that are far larger in area than some whole districts in other parts of the country. Reflecting this, it is commonly the case that, prior to a PER, the electorates in the rural wards tend to be over-represented in arithmetical terms, while those in town wards tend to be under-represented. It has been highlighted in many cases put to the LGCE that this situation reflects the difficulty that councillors experience in adequately representing the interests of electors in rural wards, which often have poor transport links, and that provision should therefore be made for an element of over-representation in such areas.

3.36 There has also been pressure to allow over-representation in urban areas which have particular social characteristics and problems. It has been argued that, in such areas, the representational workload of councillors is particularly high and that allowance for this should be made in a PER.

3.37 There is no provision in legislation for the BCFE to apply such a weighting in reaching recommendations. Nevertheless, we accept that attempts simply to even out the numbers between urban and rural areas can result in increasing the size of already very large rural wards. This may not satisfy elements of the statutory criteria: it may undermine, rather than enhance the effectiveness and convenience (to electors) of local government; and it also might fail to recognise and have regard to the identities and interests of local communities.

3.38 Similar considerations apply in urban areas. The BCFE cannot provide for over-representation in particular wards, for example, on the grounds of councillor workload. However, the role and functions of councillors in the authorities as a whole would be a legitimate consideration for the BCFE, local authorities and other interested parties to take into account in reaching conclusions on council size.

3.39 There is a further difficulty in sparsely populated rural areas. A relatively low councillor:elector ratio means that a small change in electorate has a proportionally greater effect on electoral equality than would be the case in more densely populated areas. In some authorities, an increase or decrease of less than 100 electors in a single-member ward could result in variances in excess of plus or minus 10% from the average. In rural areas, the creation of multi-member wards could result in wards of a size which many might find unacceptable.

3.40 Clearly, where such issues arise, the BCFE needs to consider carefully the extent to which electoral equality can be achieved, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Detached wards

3.41 Proposals are occasionally put forward for a 'detached ward', made up of two geographically separate areas. We have some concerns over the use of detached wards. They lend themselves to the creation of electoral areas that lack community identity and which may owe more to purely political considerations than to community identity and interest. Accordingly, we take the view that the use of detached wards, other than to recognise the particular circumstances of, for example, offshore islands, is undesirable, and that the BCFE should not normally recommend them.

Boundaries

3.42 Proposed new ward boundaries should be easily identifiable on the ground, and be likely to remain so. There can be no set rules on where ward boundaries should be located. Major, permanent topographical features such as rivers, main railway lines and trunk roads are likely to form good ward boundaries and may well also effectively delineate communities. However they do not have to form boundaries; there will frequently be occasions where it will be necessary to contain such features within a single ward in order to meet the objective of good electoral equality, having regard to local circumstances.

3.43 Where large, permanent, topographical features are used as ward boundaries, the line should normally be drawn down their centre. However, while an arterial road in a built-up area may effectively delineate communities, in more suburban areas a road may effectively act as a focus for communities so that a boundary line is best placed behind the houses on one side of the road. There are thus no set rules on ward boundaries. The key issues to remember are that they must relate to firm ground detail, and be capable of being mapped.

Parliamentary constituency boundaries

3.44 The BCFE will take no account of Parliamentary constituency boundaries in recommending new patterns of ward boundaries. In practice, the new ward boundaries which are implemented following a PER are taken into account by the (Parliamentary) Boundary Commission in its reviews of Parliamentary constituencies. The Parliamentary Boundary Commission started its Fifth General Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in February 2000.

3.45 Information on the conduct of reviews of Parliamentary constituencies, and the criteria used, may be obtained from the Boundary Commission for England, 1 Drummond Gate, London SW1V 2QQ (www.statistics.gov.uk/psc).

4 Parish and Town Councils

4.1 A survey by Aston Business School, *Parish and Town Councils in England: A Survey* (HMSO, 1992), found that there were over 10,000 civil parishes in England. Parish councils are sometimes referred to as local councils, as distinct from district councils, which are often described as principal councils. The majority of parishes are in shire county areas, although there are also a number in metropolitan districts. There are no parishes in Greater London, and no legal provision for any to be created. The survey identified 8,159 parish and town councils, which are local authorities in their own right, with over 70,000 councillors, three times the number of district and county councillors. The councils represent populations ranging from less than 100 to over 40,000; the overwhelming majority represent communities at the lower end of that range.

4.2 There is no national pattern of electoral arrangements for parish or town councils. Although some policy guidance has been provided by the National Association of Local Councils, the only legislative requirement is that each parish or town council should have no less than five councillors. In practice, most tend to have more. Local council elections are held on a whole-council basis every four years, in the same years as those of their district councillor(s). The BCFE is able to make recommendations for changes to local council electoral arrangements as part of its PER work.

4.3 Under the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 district councils and unitary councils have the power to conduct reviews and make recommendations direct to the Secretary of State for the creation, abolition and alteration of parish areas. The district council may also propose consequential changes to district and county council electoral arrangements. The Electoral Commission is responsible for considering and implementing any such consequential electoral changes.

4.4 The importance of parishes should not be underestimated given that, where they exist, they normally form the building blocks for district wards. Given this, it is highly desirable that where any district council or unitary council review of parish arrangements is to be undertaken, the Order implementing any administrative boundary changes is made before the BCFE commences a PER of the area. In practice, this means that recommendations to the Secretary of State following the completion of a parish review need to be submitted to him at least six months prior to the start of a PER. If this is unlikely to be practicable, our preference would be for the parish review to be deferred until completion of the PER.

4.5 It has been suggested that the BCFE should defer commencing PERs of areas where district parish reviews are planned but unlikely to be completed before the PER. However, unless there were exceptional reasons, we would not wish to delay the commencement of a scheduled review.

4.6 Very exceptionally, it may be appropriate for a district council to undertake a parish review at the same time as a PER of the area is being conducted. This could enable the BCFE's review to have regard to the considerations of the other and, where there were common objectives, result in a lasting and stable pattern of electoral arrangements within the area. However, it would be important in such circumstances that the objectives of the parish review were clear from the outset, and compatible with those of the PER. Any authority contemplating this approach is strongly advised to discuss in advance with The Boundary Committee the implications of the two types of review being conducted in tandem, as it can

make the PER process considerably more complex and have significant resource implications for the authority concerned.

4.7 The BCFE will generally be content to put forward for consideration a parish or town council's proposals for changes to its existing arrangements in PERs where there is no apparent impact on the district council's electoral arrangements. Nevertheless, the BCFE value the views of the relevant district council or other interested parties on any such proposals submitted by parish or town councils. The BCFE cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of a PER.

4.8 Parish and town councils are also invited to comment on district council proposals. Their involvement in the electoral review process is valuable, and district councils are reminded of the importance of consulting the parish and town councils in their area, and to encourage their active participation. As with other local authorities, it is important that in making representations to the BCFE, parish and town councils provide evidence in support of their views.

4.9 Particularly in rural areas, parishes often represent separate local identities and because of this, grouping parish areas with similar interests to form a district ward will meet opposition in certain circumstances. For example, two parish councils within a National Park area might share a common interest, but not necessarily an identity. In practice, however, it is inevitable that, on occasion, parish areas will have to be brought together, sometimes against their wishes, to form a district ward. In some cases it might also be necessary to establish new parish or town council wards, not necessarily with the blessing of the councils concerned, in order to facilitate new principal authority ward boundaries.

4.10 At Appendix B we have set out answers to some of the questions that are most frequently asked about PERs and parish and town councils, and which we expect to arise in reviews conducted by the BCFE.

5 Metropolitan districts

5.1 PERs of the Metropolitan districts began in December 2001. It was anticipated that the reviews of the metropolitan areas would present a number of complex issues. Accordingly, the review timetable for these areas has been extended by between five and eighteen weeks. However, the BCFE's general approach to the conduct of the reviews of metropolitan councils will be the same as that for district reviews.

Council size

5.2 Council size is a particularly relevant factor in the context of the Metropolitan district PERs, given the high number of councillors elected in certain areas, for example, Birmingham (117), Liverpool, Leeds and Manchester (99), Bradford (90). We make no assumptions about council size. However, in the light of the changes to political management structures in local government, we believe that it is more important than ever to review more closely the current and future roles of councillors and, by implication, the council size appropriate for each local authority area. We believe it would be wrong for us to assume that existing council size will always provide for effective and convenient local government.

5.3 Their PERs will provide the Metropolitan districts with a unique opportunity to consider afresh the appropriate council size for their areas in the light of the new structures of political management which have, or will be, introduced. However, interested parties must be able to demonstrate to the BCFE that such schemes have been fully thought through; how, in detail, they intend to implement their proposals and what new structures they plan to put in place. **The BCFE will place particular importance on proposals for council size being properly developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structures. It will be insufficient simply to assert that the implementation of a particular structure requires a particular council size or, indeed, that no change in council size is required.**

5.4 The issues relating to council size are discussed in detail in Section 3 of this guidance.

Number of councillors per ward

5.5 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 there is no limit on the number of councillors who can be returned or elected from each Metropolitan district ward. However, the figure must be divisible by three. In practice, all Metropolitan district wards currently return three councillors. As previously indicated in this guidance, in circumstances where the BCFE's recommendation is for multi-member wards, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate.

Electoral equality

5.6 As with reviews of shire districts and London boroughs, the primary objective of metropolitan district reviews will be to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. For example, the BCFE will require justification for schemes that

would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward. Any imbalances of 20% or over should only arise in exceptional circumstances, and will require strong justification.

5.7 It is evident from the reviews of the London boroughs that in largely urban areas it is easier to achieve consistently better levels of electoral equality than in more rural areas. However, we recognise that many of the Metropolitan districts have made substantial efforts to engage with local communities. For example, they have established local forums or area committees, often based on existing ward patterns, which are producing a more pro-active interest in local issues. It is anticipated that, in some review areas, the BCFE will receive submissions arguing for the retention of certain ward boundaries, in order to preserve the coverage of those forums and committees, on the grounds that they reflect community identity.

5.8 The BCFE will have due regard to all evidence on the extent to which existing ward patterns may reflect community identity. However, experience suggests that they will have to take account of two factors. First, respondents can often clearly define where the centre of a community lies but not its outer limits. Indeed, in many urban areas communities overlap, or one runs into another. We believe that this will continue to be the case in Metropolitan areas. Second, community identity tends to mean different things to different people, particularly to the different political parties. In the light of these considerations, in the BCFE's reviews of the Metropolitan districts it will continue the practice of seeking to achieve the best possible levels of electoral equality having regard to evidence on community identity and interests.

Five-year forecasts of electorate

5.9 Only nine of the 36 Metropolitan districts have electorates which increased between 1994-2001. With the exception of Birmingham, which saw an increase in electorate of 0.1%, electorates declined in the whole of Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne & Wear and the West Midlands. However, while there has been no substantial growth overall, development instigated by regeneration has resulted in a shift of electors towards the regenerated areas, with the knock-on effect of many wards being substantially under-represented. It will therefore be important for each Metropolitan district to obtain early agreement on the forecast electorate for that data to be made available to all interested parties. We are aware that regeneration efforts in some Metropolitan districts are expected to lead to significant increases in electorate. Given the pattern over the last seven years, such assertions will need to be supported by detailed evidence as to why it is considered that electorate will grow rather than simply being displaced from one area to another.

6 County councils

6.1 As noted earlier in this guidance, 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. No reviews of county council areas have been undertaken since the commencement of Part IV of the 2000 Act. However, subject to the representations and evidence that the BCFE receives in conducting PERs of such areas, given their potential geographic size, we do not envisage the BCFE recommending large numbers of multi-member divisions other than, perhaps, in the more urban areas of a county. Even in such areas, we do not believe that the statutory criteria would normally be met by recommending divisions that return more than two councillors.

6.2 In addition, the statutory rules set out in the Local Government Act 1972 provide that each division should be wholly contained within a single district and that division boundaries should not split unwarded parishes or parish wards.

6.3 The approach to be adopted in PERs of two-tier county areas is to first review the electoral arrangements of each of the district council areas in the county and then, once the necessary electoral change Orders have been made for the districts, to review those of the county council. This ensures that, as required by the statutory rules, the BCFE's recommendations for electoral division boundaries have regard to district ward boundaries, and that these are fixed and not subject to change.

6.4 Previously, it has been suggested that county and district areas should be reviewed together, at the same time, as a means of maximising the level of coterminosity between divisions and wards. In our view, such an approach, involving simultaneous reviews of parish, district and county council electoral arrangements, would introduce a considerable degree of complexity, uncertainty and, potentially, conflict into the review process.

Council size

6.5 The Local Government Act 2000 and the move towards new styles of political management apply as much to county councils as to any other local authority. Accordingly, in county council PERs we will expect interested parties to adopt the approach to council size set out in Section 3 of this guidance. We place particular importance on proposals for council size being properly developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structures. **It will be insufficient simply to assert that the implementation of a particular structure requires a particular council size or, indeed, that no change in council size is required.**

Electoral equality

6.6 As with our reviews of districts, the primary objective of county council reviews is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the county as a whole. For example, the BCFE will require justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any division. Any imbalances of 20% or over should only arise in exceptional circumstances, and will require strong justification.

6.7 Similarly, we anticipate that the BCFE will follow the LGCE's practice of ensuring that the number of county councillors representing each district area within the county is commensurate with the district's proportion of the county's electorate.

Coterminosity

6.8 The rules provide that, in considering county council electoral arrangements, we should have regard to the boundaries of district wards. We attach much importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of divisions and wards. Where wards or groups of wards are not coterminous with county divisions, this can cause confusion for the electorate at local elections and lead to increased election costs. Nor, in some areas, is it conducive to effective liaison and co-operative working between the two tiers of local government in addressing matters of common concern, such as regeneration or social deprivation issues.

6.9 We recognise, however, that it will not always be possible to achieve coterminosity if the objective of electoral equality is to be achieved. While the proportion of electoral divisions that will be coterminous with the boundaries of district wards is likely to vary widely between counties, we would normally expect coterminosity to be achieved in a significant majority of divisions.

6.10 While the achievement of coterminosity will normally be secondary to the achievement of electoral equality, there may be exceptions. For example, in an urban area the BCFE 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 throughout the remainder of the district.

6.11 The average level of coterminosity secured under the final recommendations for the 11 counties that were reviewed by the LGCE (excluding the Isle of Wight, which contains no districts) is 70%. Accordingly, it is recommended that, in formulating electoral schemes for submission to the BCFE, local authorities and other interested parties should seek to secure a level of coterminosity of around 60 to 80%. It should also be noted that the lowest level of coterminosity proposed in any of the LGCE's final recommendations reports was 50%.

6.12 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. These are the only circumstances in which we would normally expect the BCFE to make recommendations in relation to parished areas as part of a county council PER.

Other issues

6.13 We recognise that it will not be possible to avoid the creation of some county divisions which contain diverse communities, for example combining urban and rural areas, something which we generally believe should be avoided in district reviews.

6.14 The BCFE's general approach to county council reviews is the same as that for district reviews. In particular, the BCFE will wish, wherever possible, to build on schemes that have been prepared locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. The BCFE will therefore provide sufficient notice of the commencement of a county review to allow advance

preparation to be undertaken locally. During the preliminary period, we strongly advocate that officers of the BCFE have the opportunity to brief elected members on the review process, in particular because of the additional parameters of coterminosity and ensuring that the number of county councillors representing each division is commensurate with each district's proportion of the county's electorate.

6.15 Our approach to council size in county councils is detailed in Section 3. In particular, we do not accept that a reduction in county council's size following an area within the county becoming a unitary authority is sufficient justification for a subsequent increase in council size during a PER.

7 Process and timetable for the conduct of reviews

Work programme

7.1 The PER work programme is based on three main factors:

- the requirement under the 1992 Act to undertake electoral reviews of all English local authorities at periodic intervals. The last such review of electoral arrangements took place between 1973 and 1983;
- the desirability of according priority to those counties whose districts have, in aggregate, the most significant electoral imbalances; and
- the desirability of undertaking reviews on a county-wide basis, by reviewing all districts within a county at approximately the same time.

7.2 Although the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 has removed the requirement that all areas should be reviewed at intervals of between 10 and 15 years, we aim to complete the current programme of reviews within the timetable previously published by the LGCE. The full programme of PER work is available on the BCFE's website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk

7.3 It should be noted that, in reviewing two-tier county areas, the BCFE will first examine the electoral arrangements of the constituent district councils. Reviews of county council electoral arrangements will take place once decisions have been taken on any recommendations for changes to district warding arrangements.

Local consultation prior to the submission of proposals

7.4 Any changes to local electoral arrangements that may be implemented as a consequence of our work could be in place for 15 years or more. Accordingly, we attach considerable importance to obtaining locally derived proposals that are enduring, have been subject to local consultation and on which there is a measure of local agreement. We look to the local authorities in each area to take the lead in this process, by developing proposals and seeking the views of local interests before they are submitted to the Committee.

Review timetable

7.5 In conducting reviews, the BCFE will follow a four-stage consultation process (Figure 2) and will generally seek to complete each review in a period of around one year, although this will vary depending on the complexity of the issues raised in particular review areas. At any one time, the BCFE will have a large number of reviews in progress, each at different stages in the process.

Figure 2: The Stages of the Review

Stage one	typically 12-15 weeks	Commencement of review and submission of proposals for future electoral arrangements
Stage two	typically 12–16 weeks	The Boundary Committee considers proposals, determines draft recommendations and prepares draft recommendations report
Stage three	typically 8 weeks	The Boundary Committee publishes draft recommendations report and invites representations
Stage four	typically 12–16 weeks	The Boundary Committee considers representations, reaches conclusions on final recommendations and submits a final report to The Electoral Commission

Review procedure

7.6 As indicated in Section 2, at least two months prior to the start of a PER the BCFE will write to the chief executive of the local authority concerned confirming the date on which Stage One of the review process is to commence. The letter will enclose copies of this guidance, with a request that both it and the letter be made available for public inspection locally. The answers to a number of frequently asked questions about PERs are included in Appendix D.

7.7 In this **preliminary period**, officers of the BCFE will wish to brief local authority officers, group leaders and council members on a cross-party basis and representatives of parish and town councils on the review process, and will respond to any queries over their approach to the issues discussed in this guidance. The same facility will be available to other interested parties, on an appropriate representative or area-wide basis, on request. However, it should be emphasised that the focus of these reviews is the local authority, and it is not normally appropriate for meetings to be held between officers of the BCFE and Members of Parliament.

7.8 During this preliminary period for district council reviews, the local authority will be asked to provide a range of material in advance of the start of the review, including:

- a schedule of electoral arrangements based on the current electoral register and a five-year forecast of change in electorate (proforma 1, at Appendix E);
- an explanation of any significant variation between the current year electorate in any ward and the five-year forecast for that ward;
- supporting evidence for electorate projections, such as local plans, Part 2 unitary development plans or economic development plans, whichever might be the most relevant;
- the total electorate figure at the time of the last review;
- a map illustrating wards and polling districts in unparished areas;
- a topographical map of the local authority area illustrating parishes and parish ward boundaries, together with appropriately scaled maps (normally, but not necessarily, 1:10,000) of urban areas showing ward boundaries;
- a copy of the current electoral register for unparished urban areas;
- details of parish electoral arrangements including council size, a breakdown of the parish wards and the number of parish councillors for each parish ward (proforma 2, at Appendix E);

- appropriately scaled maps illustrating parish ward boundaries;
- contact names and telephone numbers of council staff expected to be working on the review; and
- details of residents' associations and similar organisations in the area.

7.9 It is important that the most up-to-date mapping is used throughout. In this respect, local authorities are reminded that their staff have access to current Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping data via a service level agreement negotiated through the former Local Government Management Board and the Local Government Association. The OS data covered includes LandLine, 1:10,000 scale Raster, Oscar, Address-Point, and Boundary Line. Authorities without digital systems are supplied with graphic maps under the same agreement. **Street maps are not suitable**, as they do not contain the level of detail which the BCFE requires. The mapping will need to show property boundary detail, eg fences, field boundaries, etc.

7.10 Local authorities should also provide a profile of their local authority area. This profile should provide a background to the area under review, including an indication of main settlements, and should include a brief summary of:

- significant (recent) changes in population or electorate;
- areas (by ward) of planned population growth and/or anticipated decline; and
- important geographical features.

7.11 For **county council reviews**, the following information will be sought at the start of reviews:

- completion of the attached proforma 4 (Appendix E) for each district in the county; this will provide electorate details of the present county divisions;
- completion of the proforma 5 (Appendix E) for each district in the county; this will provide details of the current (currently December 2001) and projected (currently December 2006) electorate of the new district wards, following the PERs of the district councils. A note should also be provided to explain the basis of the electorate forecasts. It is helpful if the information can be provided on a sub-district ward or a parish basis;
- a map illustrating wards and polling districts in unparished areas;
- topographical map(s) of the county on an appropriate scale showing the current boundaries of divisions, wards and parishes; and
- contact names and telephone numbers of council staff expected to be working on the review.
- details of residents' associations and similar organisations in the area.

7.12 Proposals for future electoral arrangements should follow the format set out in proforma 6 (Appendix E) and should reflect the new district wards. Electorate breakdowns based on the current electoral register and five-year forecast will be required for parts of district wards only where it is proposed to move away from coterminosity.

7.13 For both district and county council reviews it will be important that this pre-submission material is also made available locally at council offices and libraries, and its availability made known to interested parties, including local political groups (including any major parties not represented on the council) and parish and town councils, so that their representations during Stage One of the review can be made on the basis of the same accurate and current data.

7.14 As an aid to local debate, all individuals and organisations submitting representations during Stages One and Three should also copy them to the relevant local authority, which is asked to place them on deposit for public information, together with its own submission. Again, the availability of this material should be made known locally. In addition, district councils in two-tier counties should also ensure that their submissions to us are copied to their county council, in view of the potential effect on electoral division boundaries. Where the proposals involve the warding or re-warding of parish areas, district councils are asked to inform the relevant parish or town council.

Stage one

7.15 Prior to the beginning of Stage One, the BCFE will send a letter giving formal notice of its intention to carry out the review. All interested parties, including the relevant local authority, will be invited to prepare proposals for future electoral arrangements in consultation with local interests, and to submit them to the Committee. Copies of the BCFE's letter will be sent to a range of interested parties, including relevant Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament, parish and town councils in the area, residents associations and similar organisations, the national headquarters of the main political parties, police authorities and the Local Government Association.

7.16 In each area, the BCFE will publicise the commencement of the review by issuing a news release, taking out public notices in local newspapers and providing local authorities with leaflets and posters for display. For areas with high proportions of non-English speaking residents, it will make posters available in the ethnic languages most widely used in those areas, nominated by the local authority. The local authority under review will be asked to take appropriate steps to draw the review to the attention of residents.

7.17 The BCFE letter will request the submission of proposals, together with the information requirements as detailed in this guidance. It will require:

- a. for proposed electoral arrangements, using the format set out in proforma 3 in Appendix E (proforma 6 for county council reviews):
 - names of wards;
 - number of councillors elected from each ward;
 - current year electorate (electoral figures from the electoral register current at the start of the review);
 - percentage variation in electoral balance from the average (ie the extent to which the councillor:elector ratio in each ward varies from the council average);
 - five-year forecast electorate for each ward (ie five years from the date of the current electoral register); and
 - five-year forecast percentage variation in electoral balance from the average.
- a. small-scale map(s) of the entire area under review illustrating both existing ward/division boundaries and proposed changes, supplemented by a set of appropriate larger scale maps detailing any proposed changes. These will often be 1:10,000 but a larger scale (eg 1:5,000) may sometimes be necessary in urban areas in order that existing and proposed boundaries can be identified clearly; and

- b. where local authority schemes are not unanimously supported, an indication of the degree of support for the proposals.

7.18 The BCFE will welcome any proposals for changes to electoral arrangements, which other organisations or individuals might wish to submit. However, it would be of considerable assistance if such proposals affecting ward boundaries were illustrated on a suitable Ordnance Survey map, accompanied by details of current electorates and forecast electorates based on local authority estimates. Proposals for changes affecting individual wards can have a consequential effect on electoral equality across the whole of the review area, and respondents are requested to take account of this in their submissions.

7.19 As previously indicated, to assist local debate, individuals or organisations making submissions to the BCFE should also copy them to the relevant local authority, which is asked to make them available for public inspection as they are received.

7.20 Part of the BCFE's task is to ensure that regard is had to the desirability of fixing boundaries that are and will remain easily identifiable, and to respecting any local ties which would be broken or, indeed, reinforced by the fixing of any particular boundary. Accordingly, to assist in this, respondents making proposals on the future electoral arrangements for their area should provide indications of community links and facilities that have a bearing on their submissions.

7.21 Respondents should not feel constrained from drawing attention to such additional information as they consider relevant in support of their proposals. Indeed, the more background information, argument and evidence which is provided in support of proposals the better. The type of evidence that may be relevant in a PER is discussed in detail in Appendix C.

7.22 After the end of Stage One, all representations will be available for inspection at the BCFE's offices by appointment, and a list of respondents will be made available on request. Copies of the representations will also be made available to the local authority for inspection locally.

Stage two

7.23 Stage Two is a deliberative part of the review, during which the BCFE will carefully consider all proposals received during Stage One and reach conclusions on what its draft recommendations should be, prior to consulting on them. The BCFE will evaluate all the evidence and arguments put to it. Where there are gaps in this material, or where more information is required, the BCFE may wish to meet local authorities and others or to write to them to seek clarification of their proposals. However, it will not meet representatives of individual political parties to avoid the possibility of accusations of lobbying. In any case, only written evidence will form the basis of the BCFE's deliberations.

7.24 The BCFE has no power to hold public local inquiries. However, it may, very occasionally, decide to hold an informal local public meeting to discuss particular issues. From experience to date, public meetings are likely to be the exception rather than the rule. They will normally focus on a particular issue or issues where the BCFE considers that it needs further evidence before reaching conclusions on its draft recommendations. Any such meeting will be chaired by an independent Assessor, who will report back to the BCFE with his or her findings. A note of the meeting will be available on request.

7.25 After fully considering all proposals received, and any other information available to it, the BCFE will prepare and issue a report on its draft recommendations.

Stage three

7.26 This is the stage in the review process during which the BCFE consults on its draft recommendations. The report containing its draft recommendations will usually be sent to all those who received a copy of the review commencement letter and, subject to the number of respondents, to those who submitted representations during Stage One. The availability of the report will be publicised in the local press, and the local authority will be asked to place copies on deposit for public inspection at its offices. Copies will also be available in local libraries and from the BCFE.

7.27 The BCFE's recommendations can change between the draft and final recommendation stages. It is therefore highly important that all interested parties let the BCFE have their views, whether or not they agree with the draft recommendations. The BCFE would also welcome comments on any proposals referred to in the report which we have not adopted as part of the draft recommendations.

7.28 As at Stage One, all representations that the BCFE receives will be made available for inspection by appointment at its offices after the end of the Stage Three consultation period, and a list of respondents will be made available on request. However, as an aid to debate, local authorities should make their Stage Three submissions available locally, together with those of other interested parties (who are asked to copy to the local authority their own Stage Three submissions), and publicise their availability.

Stage four

7.29 This is the final stage in the review process, during which the BCFE will carefully consider all representations received during Stage Three, reach its final recommendations and then submit a report to The Electoral Commission.

7.30 As during Stage Two, depending on the issues raised, the BCFE may decide to hold a public meeting locally. This will take the same form as a Stage Two public meeting, and will normally be chaired by an independent Assessor. However, such meetings will generally only be held in exceptional circumstances.

7.31 The BCFE will advertise in the local press the fact that it is publishing its final recommendations report. Copies of the report will be sent to all consultees and, again subject to the number of respondents, those who made representations during Stage Three. As before, local authorities will be asked to place copies of the final recommendation report on deposit for public inspection, and copies will be available in local libraries and from the BCFE.

7.32 Subject to the decisions of The Electoral Commission, the BCFE's duty in respect of any review is fulfilled once it has submitted its final recommendations report to The Electoral Commission.

Next steps for The Electoral Commission

7.33 There will be an opportunity for interested parties to make representations on the final recommendations direct to The Electoral Commission. In publishing its final recommendations The Boundary Committee for England will indicate the date by which any representations should be received by The Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission can:

- a. agree the recommendations as they stand, without requiring further advice or information;
- b. require more advice or information from the BCFE regarding any or all of the recommendations;
- c. propose modifications to any or all of the recommendations for the agreement of the BCFE;
- d. direct the BCFE to reconsider the recommendations with a view to deciding whether to submit a further report containing different recommendations;
- e. direct the BCFE to conduct a further review of all or part of the area to which the report relates and to make revised recommendations as respects that area.

7.34 *All* matters concerning the implementation of any recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements, and their timing, are entirely for The Electoral Commission, *not* the BCFE. Any queries should be addressed to:

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

Telephone: 020 7271 0500 • Fax: 020 7271 0505
E-mail: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk

Appendix A

The Government's proposals for changes to local authority electoral arrangements

1 The Government's proposals contained in the White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch With The People* (July 1998), provided for elections by thirds – in three years out of four – for all single-tier authorities (London boroughs, Metropolitan districts and shire unitary districts), and elections by halves in alternate years for all two-tier authorities. This would have meant that two-tier districts, whether they had whole council elections or were elected by thirds, would move to a cycle of elections by halves every two years. District council elections would alternate with county council elections.

2 The White Paper explained that the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) would continue with its programme of PERs. In doing so, it would work to its current statutory criteria, as set out in the Local Government Act 1992. However, it outlined that the Secretary of State intended through the new legislation to direct the LGCE to have regard to a further criterion, that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward or division should reflect the authority's electoral cycle. This suggested a move over time towards a pattern of three-member wards in single-tier authorities and two-member wards/divisions in two-tier authorities.

3 Nevertheless, having said that, it remained clear that the Government recognised the problems associated with large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas. The White Paper was specific that single-member wards and divisions would continue to be a feature in many local authorities.

The Local Government Act 2000

4 The Local Government Act 2000 enables the Secretary of State to introduce different types of electoral cycle. Specifically the Secretary of State will be able to introduce by Order elections by whole-council, by thirds or by halves. The Boundary Committee has no power to recommend changes to electoral cycles. The 2000 Act also provides for the introduction of multi-member divisions for county councils. The Government has said that it will need to consider carefully with local government how and when to use the powers in Part IV of the Act.

Recent developments

5 The issue of local authority electoral cycles was touched upon in the Government's White Paper: *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services* (CM5237, December 2001). It commented that:

“the current cycle of local government elections is confusing. Some councils have elections once every four years while others have elections in three years out of four. It is too easy for electors to lose track of when elections are to be held or how many votes they have on any particular election day. And this arrangement can lessen the immediate impact of voters' behaviour on council control. We will therefore invite The Electoral Commission to propose options to simplify the current cycle of local elections.”

6 The Government has suggested that, given the above, it may be preferable if local authorities continue with their current electoral cycle. All queries concerning the Government's proposals should be addressed to: Democracy and Local Leadership Division, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU.

Appendix B

Advice on parish warding as part of a periodic electoral review

1 During the course of a periodic electoral review (PER) there are various rules which affect parish councils. These are set out in Section 1 of our guidance and can be found in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972. The primary aim of a PER is to achieve fair electoral arrangements for the principal authority (i.e. the district or county council). However, the BCFE can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish councils as part of a PER although, under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, district councils also have the power to review and implement changes to parish council electoral arrangements.

2 The broad rules affecting parish councils during a PER, in terms of what the BCFE CAN make recommendations for and what it CANNOT, are set out below:

The BCFE can Propose the creation of parish wards (i.e. subdivide the parish into two or more areas), or amend wards where they already exist.

Make recommendations for changes to the number of parish councillors to be elected in total, or the number to be elected from parish wards where they already exist.

Propose names for new parish wards or change names for existing parish wards (but we cannot change the name of the parish council itself).

The BCFE cannot Propose changes to the boundaries between civil parishes (even if there are obvious anomalies). Under the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, district councils can review parish administrative boundaries and make recommendations for any changes to the Secretary of State.

Propose the creation of new parish councils, or group parishes under common parish councils and we cannot abolish existing parish councils.

3 It is open to the BCFE to propose that whole parishes, or parish wards, should be located in a different district council ward from that which they are currently part. This possibility arises from the important inter-relationship between civil parishes and district wards. Civil parishes usually form the 'building blocks' for district council wards: for example, in rural areas, district council wards will often consist of a number of whole parishes. The BCFE can only propose dividing a parish between different district council wards if it also divides that parish into two parish wards, so that, for example, one parish ward would form part of one district council ward while another parish ward would form part of a different district council ward.

4 There are a number of different circumstances when it might be appropriate to recommend changes to parish council electoral arrangements. These are outlined in the following examples, although they should not be regarded as exhaustive.

At the request of a parish or town council

5 During a PER, a parish or town council can make a request to the BCFE asking it to make recommendations for changes to their electoral arrangements. These may or may not be as a consequence of proposed changes to the principal authority's electoral arrangements. It is helpful if the principal authority agrees with (or does not object to) any proposals put forward, but this is not essential.

Example: Before the PER of Cotswold in Gloucester commenced, Brimpsfield Parish Council had seven parish councillors. Brimpsfield Parish Council requested that Brimpsfield parish be divided into two parish wards in order to provide separate representation for the two villages of Brimpsfield and Caudle Green. It requested that its proposed Brimpsfield parish ward should be represented by five councillors and that its proposed Caudle Green parish ward should be represented by two councillors.

6 Other examples can be found in the PER reports on South Cambridgeshire (the parish of Little Wilbraham), North Shropshire (the parish of Prees) and South Gloucestershire (the parish of Filton) which can be viewed on the BCFE website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk

As part of a district council's proposals

7 As part of a principal authority's proposals for its own electoral arrangements, the authority may propose different warding arrangements than exist at present. As a result, consequential changes may be required for parish council electoral arrangements in order to reflect Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. Any such proposals ideally should be discussed between the principal authority and the affected parish council before proposals are submitted to the BCFE. A principal authority may also forward a request from parish councils regarding changes to their own electoral arrangements, as well as expressing any views that the principal authority may have on such changes.

Example: The town of Newbury, in West Berkshire, has grown beyond its northern boundary as a result of housing development, into the neighbouring parish of Cold Ash. The parish boundary now cuts somewhat arbitrarily between houses. As stated earlier, we CANNOT recommend changes to the boundaries between parishes as part of a PER. As part of its scheme, therefore, the District Council proposed that the parish of Cold Ash be divided into parish wards, such that the "urban" part (with the new housing development) could be included in an urban-based district council ward (named Turnpike) and the "rural" part could form part of a district council ward with another rural parish (named Cold Ash). We agreed with this proposal and it was put forward as part of the draft recommendations for the district.

8 Other examples can be found in the PER reports on Vale of White Horse (the parish of Longworth), Wellingborough in Northamptonshire (the parish of Great Doddington & Wilby) and Peterborough (the parish of Eye).

As a direct consequence of recommendations for a principal authority

9 The BCFE sometimes recommends subdividing a parish council area between different district council wards in order to achieve better electoral equality for the principal authority (even though it may not always receive the support of the affected parish or town council or indeed the principal authority). This often occurs in relatively populous (urban) parish council areas, where parish wards already exist and are usually coterminous with the district ward boundaries in the area. In such cases, the BCFE may recommend re-drawing the parish ward boundaries to reflect the revised district ward boundaries (see Example A).

10 However, in more rural areas parish wards are sometimes created to enable different parts of the same parish to form parts of separate district wards, in order to ensure that electors are more equitably represented on the principal authority (see Example B). Sometimes parishes may need to be warded as a result of dividing the parish between district wards (see Example C).

Example A: Prior to the PER of Bolsover district in Derbyshire, the parish of Old Bolsover which covers the town of Bolsover had 12 councillors representing four parish wards (each returning three councillors) which were coterminous with the four district wards in the area. In order to address the electoral inequality of the district wards, the modification of the district ward configuration was recommended and three new district wards proposed. To maintain coterminosity between district ward and parish ward boundaries, and thereby meet the requirements of Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act, it was recommended that the parish ward boundaries should also be redrawn, to reflect the district ward boundaries. Each of the three new parish wards would return four parish councillors, thereby retaining 12 councillors on the Town Council.

Other examples can be found in the PER reports for Bridgnorth in Shropshire (the parish of Bridgnorth) and Waverley in Surrey (the parishes of Farnham and Godalming).

Example B: In South Bucks in Buckinghamshire, Farnham Royal parish was unwarded and served by a total of 11 councillors. In order to improve the balance of representation on the Borough Council, we recommended warding Farnham Royal parish so that part of the parish would form part of one borough ward and the rest of the parish would form part of a separate borough ward. We recommended that a new Farnham Royal North parish ward should be represented by ten parish councillors and that a new Farnham Royal South parish ward should be represented by one parish councillor.

Other examples can be found in the PER reports for Chester-le-Street in County Durham (the parish of Edmondsley); Waverley in Surrey (the parish of Cranleigh) and Wear Valley in County Durham (the parish of Wolshingham).

Example C: In North Shropshire District, Wem Town was represented by three district councillors. As a result of growth since the last review, it is now entitled to four councillors. It was recommended that two district wards were created for the town, to be represented by two councillors each. Consequently, two town council wards were also formed, each to be represented by seven town councillors.

Other examples can be found in the PER report for South Hams in Devon (the parish of Ivybridge).

11 Copies of the PER reports referred to above can be viewed on the BCFE's website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk

Appendix C

“What do you mean by evidence?”

Background

1 Our guidance makes clear that the BCFE will take all representations into account in reaching conclusions on draft and final recommendations. However, it also emphasises that representations which provide evidence in support of a particular proposition are likely to carry more weight than those which simply assert a point of view.

2 A question often asked, particularly at members’ briefing meetings is, what sort of evidence is required? Examples are often requested. This is far from straightforward since:

- each review area has its own particular characteristics and is reviewed on its own merits;
- accordingly, evidence submitted in support of, or in opposition to, a particular proposition needs to be considered in the context of the review area concerned; and
- the greater the level of electoral imbalance which would result from the proposals, the more persuasive the evidence will need to be.

The nature of evidence

3 So what do we mean by evidence? It can take a number of forms but is it far from clear cut. Arguably, the most straightforward is that which is based on geographic considerations or communication links. Generally speaking, the BCFE will not seek to include areas on either side of a river or canal within the same ward, in particular if there are no bridges, or a railway line which has no crossing points, or areas which have no vehicular transport links. It may be argued that motorways and major roads provide a natural divide between communities, but in some instances they may also link them.

4 Parks and recreation grounds may, on the face of it, provide natural breaks between communities but they can also act as focal points. Similar considerations apply to main roads that are also the location of local shopping centres.

5 Rather more complex is evidence that seeks to persuade the BCFE to a particular view on community identity. Community identity means different things to different people, particularly the political parties. It is occasionally said that the local community is totally opposed to a particular proposal. But what is the community, how representative of the community is the respondent and what consultation has he or she undertaken before writing to the BCFE?

6 Community identity can encompass a number of factors – history, socio-economic make-up and community of interest to name but a few. However, it must be recognised that historical ties may not have such force in an area that has been subject to significant recent development. Also, community identity itself is not static, but can change over time.

7 Rather than relying on assertion that an identifiable sense of community exists in areas, the BCFE needs to know how that sense of community manifests itself. Some pointers might include the presence of active social clubs or residents' associations which draw their membership from a clearly defined area; also, if the area is parished, the existence of an active parish council or parish meeting. The location of libraries, clinics, doctors' surgeries, primary schools and other local services, and the use made of them, could also be relevant.

8 It is sometimes suggested that a change to a ward boundary will also result in a change to residents' post codes and, consequently, will affect their insurance premiums. In practice, post codes are not based on local authority boundaries, even less ward boundaries, and are not affected by any changes the BCFE may recommend. Similarly, it is occasionally said that the existence of other electoral area boundaries, whether Parliamentary constituency or county division, serve to define a community. As such boundaries are themselves subject to periodic review and change, this is not a view to which we necessarily subscribe.

9 In determining the strength of local opinion on an issue, sheer numbers of signatures on petitions, or the number of proforma letters received are not necessarily a true guide. They may say more for the enthusiasm and competence of the organisers than for the real views of the signatories. In practice, a well-argued representation containing detailed evidence is likely to carry more weight with the BCFE.

10 Occasionally, local interests may arrange public meetings in order to gauge the level of support or opposition to a proposal. The outcome of such meetings may be a better guide to public opinion. But even here, large attendances are unlikely to be conclusive; the proportion of the electorate attending, and the breadth of their interests, will be more significant than the absolute number. Moreover, meetings that draw their attendance from a particular political interest group may not express views which are representative of the community as a whole.

11 In summary, the BCFE will wish to know **why** a certain view is being put forward. If a particular road is seen as a barrier between communities, why is this the case? If another road is seen as the focus of the community, why is this the case? However, it is quite common for conflicting evidence to be received on community identity. Where this occurs, the BCFE's task is to make a judgement on which strand of evidence to follow.

Appendix D

Frequently asked questions

- **Can The Boundary Committee recommend changes to external boundaries of local authorities as part of a PER?**

No, it can only recommend changes to the internal ward boundaries of local authorities as part of a PER.

- **Can The Boundary Committee recommend changes to external parish boundaries as part of a PER?**

No. However, district councils may make recommendations to the Secretary of State for such changes as part of a separate parish review (see page 23, paragraph 4.3).

- **Is there a national standard for council size in districts or counties, or for the number of electors which each councillor should represent?**

No. Following the LGCE's 1995 consultation with all local authorities in England, there was general support for each council's electoral arrangements to be considered on an individual basis. Consequently, we do not set a national standard for council size, or for the number of electors per councillor. However, we do seek justification for future council size, which will in turn influence the councillor:elector ratio.

- **Can The Boundary Committee make allowances for rural sparsity, by providing more councillors in sparsely populated rural areas?**

No. Its principal aim is always to achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria (see pages 20 and 21, paragraphs 3.35 – 3.40).

- **Can district ward boundaries cross county division boundaries?**

In reviewing district electoral arrangements the BCFE takes no account of county division boundaries. Nevertheless, under our current timetable, the PER of a county's divisions closely follows our review of district arrangements, and takes account of the new district ward boundaries. Indeed, in undertaking PERs of county divisions the BCFE will place a high value on achieving coterminosity between district ward boundaries and county division boundaries.

- **Can district ward and county division boundaries cross Parliamentary constituency boundaries?**

Yes. The BCFE takes no account of Parliamentary constituency boundaries in recommending patterns of ward or division boundaries (see page 22, paragraph 3.44).

- **How soon after the publication of the Committee’s final recommendations will changes be made?**

Publication of its final recommendations signifies the conclusion of The Boundary Committee’s review. Implementation is entirely a matter for The Electoral Commission; The Electoral Commission may not make an Order to implement recommendations for at least 6 weeks. In practice, it takes between six and eight months (see page 37, paragraphs 7.33 – 7.34).

Appendix E

Electoral arrangements – proformas

For district council reviews:

- Proforma 1 – schedule of electoral arrangements based on current electoral register and a five-year forecast of change in electorate
- Proforma 2 – schedule detailing parish electoral arrangements
- Proforma 3 – schedule detailing proposed electoral arrangements

For county council reviews:

- Proforma 4 – schedule of the existing county divisions, arranged by district, based on current electoral register and a five-year forecast of change in electorate
- Proforma 5 – schedule of district warding arrangements (resulting from the BCFE's most recent district reviews) for each district area in the county based on current electoral register and a five-year forecast of change in electorate
- Proforma 6 – schedule detailing proposed county divisions

These proformas are intended to assist local interests in making representations by indicating the information required by The Boundary Committee. Respondents may supply the information in a different format if they prefer, but are asked to discuss this with The Boundary Committee's staff.

N.B. The proformas are available on disk, by e-mail and on The Boundary Committee's website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk or via The Electoral Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Notes for completion of proformas 1 and 3 - 6

Column	(i)	– Ward/Division No:	Numbers to be allocated to the wards/divisions of the local authority area.
Column	(ii)	– Ward/Division Name:	The name of the ward (district or parish) or division (county).
Column	(iii)	– Councillors:	The number of councillors representing the ward/division.
Column	(iv)	– Parish/Area:	The most appropriate building blocks for the electoral area. Where they exist these will be parishes or parish wards. Otherwise polling districts should be used.
Column	(v)	– Electorate (current):	Current year electorate figures, using data from the most recent Register of Electors applicable at the start of the review.
Column	(vi)	– Electorate (Five-year estimate):	Five-year forecast electorate figures.

Proforma 1: existing electoral arrangements

District:			Contact name:		
County:			Contact number:		
			Date:		
(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	(vi)
Ward no. (1,2,3 etc)	Ward name	No. of Councillors	Constituent areas (parish, parish ward or polling district, as appropriate)	Electorate (current) Year =	Electorate (5 year forecast) Year =
	Totals				
	Totals				
Authority-wide totals					
Please leave blank					

Proforma 2: parishing arrangements

District: County:			Contact name: Contact number: Date:					
Parish or Town Council / Parish Meeting	Number of councillors (none for parish meeting, insert 'Meeting')	Electorate (Year=)	No. of electors per councillor	Parish wards or constituent parishes (where applicable – state if a whole parish or parish ward)	No. of councillors	Electorate	No. of electors per councillor	District ward
Totals								
Please leave blank			Note: the average number of electors per councillor does not apply to parish meetings					

Proforma 2: continued

Unparished wards	Electorate

Total electorate in unparished areas	
% of total electorate	
Total electorate in parished areas	
% of total electorate	
Total electorate	

Proforma 3: proposed electoral arrangements

District:			Contact name:		
County:			Contact number:		
			Date:		
(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	(vi)
Ward no. (1,2,3 etc)	Ward name	No. of Councillors	Constituent areas (parish, parish ward or polling district, as appropriate)	Electorate (current) Year =	Electorate (5-year forecast) Year =
	Totals				
	Totals				
Authority-wide totals					
Please leave blank					

Proforma 4: existing county electoral divisions, by district

District:			Contact name:		
County:			Contact number:		
			Date:		
(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	(vi)
Division (1,2,3 etc)	Division name (alphabetical, by district)	No. of Councillors	Constituent areas (whole, or parts of, NEW district wards, following recent LGC review)	Electorate (current) Year =	Electorate (5-year forecast) Year =
	Totals				
	Totals				
Authority-wide totals					
Please leave blank					

Proforma 5: electorates of new district wards, by district

District:			Contact name:		
County:			Contact number:		
			Date:		
(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	(vi)
Ward no. (1,2,3 etc)	Ward name	No. of Councillors	Constituent areas (parish or parish ward, as appropriate)	Electorate (current) Year =	Electorate (5-year forecast) Year =
	Totals				
	Totals				
Authority-wide totals					
Please leave blank					

Proforma 6: proposed county electoral divisions, by district

District:			Contact name:		
County:			Contact number:		
			Date:		
(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	(vi)
Division (1,2,3 etc)	Division name (alphabetical, by district)	No. of Councillors	Constituent areas (whole, or parts of, NEW district wards, following recent LGC review)	Electorate (current) Year =	Electorate (5-year forecast) Year =
	Totals				
	Totals				
Authority-wide totals					
Please leave blank					