

## Cheshire West and Chester Electoral review briefing

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. The broad purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements – the number of councillors and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions – for a specific local authority. We seek to reflect communities and provide for convenient and effective local government.

Following the creation of the Cheshire West and Chester unitary authority in May 2008, the Electoral Commission has directed that this review be undertaken to provide new electoral arrangements.

### What do you need to know?

#### What we consider

We look at **council size**, including the new council's responsibilities, its representational role, how it 'works' and how the number of councillors proposed relates to the council's style of political management. **Electoral equality** is important: each councillor should represent as close as possible the same number of electors. We look for improvement over a 5-year period. We seek **strong evidence** of community identities and interests and provision of local government. Tell us about community groups, transport links or geographical barriers. We look for divisions with **easily identifiable boundaries** such as rivers, railway lines or parish boundaries.

#### What we don't consider

**Parliamentary constituency boundaries** are controlled by a different organisation. We're completely independent and take no account of **local political implications** of recommendations. Although school areas can

represent community links, the formal **school catchment areas** are set (and can be changed) by the local authority.

Electoral reviews do not change **addresses or postcodes**.

**Polling districts** are also set by the local authority.

Each area is unique and there is no 'one size fits all' ratio: we do not make **comparisons of councillor:elector ratio** with other local authorities.

This is a review of a new unitary council, and so the **existing divisions** are not set in stone.

#### We ask of parishes

Please help us to publicise the review. We can provide parish councils with posters. We are keen to hear from parish councils and local residents. Let us know where your community identities and interests lie. Does your village have strong links with another village? Is your town made up of several distinct neighbourhoods? Your recommendations and evidence help us make our decisions.

For further information contact Jessica Metheringham, who is the review officer for Cheshire West and Chester.  
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## Our powers

We **cannot** alter external boundaries of parishes, nor can we abolish, create or re-name parishes.

We **can** propose revised electoral arrangements for existing parish or town councils, such as the number of parish councillors, names, numbers and boundaries of parish wards.

## Implications for parish and town councils

Under the 1972 Act we divide a parish into wards if it is divided between electoral divisions.

## What we need to know about parishes

Tell us about **proposals for new parishes** or the boundaries of any recently created parishes.

Let us know your **parish electoral arrangements**, including the boundaries, names and number of parish wards and the number of parish councillors.

## What characterises a good review

We look for a scheme which gives good electoral equality, meets statutory criteria, cross-party support and has been locally consulted. If it's not

possible to secure consensus about a scheme, then please tell us where there is agreement.

We believe that it is highly important to involve as many local interests as possible at as early a stage as possible. It is also important that representations made to us are based on evidence, not just assertion. What do particular areas share in common? Are they joined by public transport, or divided by a busy road?

## What should you do now?

**Write to us with your views.**

All representations are treated equally, no matter whether they are from councillors, parish councils or local residents.

Provide **evidence of community identities and interests** by explaining how the proposed division pattern reflects community identity. Tell us how particular schemes or recommendations would affect the community. Help to **publicise the review** by telling your constituents or putting a poster on the parish notice-board.

Most importantly of all, **talk to local residents**. What is the local view?

**The electoral review starts on 24 February 2009.**

## Process of the review

### Before the review starts

The Boundary Committee meet Chief Officers, Members and Parish Councils. We request electorate data and 5-year electoral forecasts, which will be available on our website.

### Stages One and Two

We hold six weeks consultation on council size. We evaluate all representations made to us and propose an appropriate number of councillors.

### Stage Three

During this consultation period we invite submissions and division schemes. These could be division patterns for the whole authority, or a suggestion for just one town or village. We welcome views from councillors, political parties, parish or town councils and local residents.

### Stage Four

We formulate our draft recommendations.

### Stage Five

We publish our draft recommendations and send copies to the council and libraries. In this consultation period everyone who wrote in is informed and invited to comment.

### Stage Six

We formulate final recommendations, which may be different from the draft recommendations.

### Final recommendations

We publish our recommendations and submit them to the Electoral Commission. There is a six-week period for further representations to the Electoral Commission. At this point persuasive new evidence is needed to modify recommendations.

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by the Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.