Recommendations for unitary local government in Northumberland

December 2003
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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

Members of the Committee:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

The Boundary Committee for England’s main area of work to date has been periodic electoral reviews (PERs). We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. The aim of PERs is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances.
Summary

On 16 June 2003 The Boundary Committee for England received a direction from the Deputy Prime Minister to undertake local government reviews in the two-tier areas of three English regions: North West, North East and Yorkshire & the Humber.

We began the review of local government structures in Northumberland on 17 June 2003.

This report sets out draft recommendations on which comments are invited. It summarises the submissions we received during the first stage of the review, and makes proposals for two options for patterns of unitary authorities in Northumberland county.

Our proposals for patterns of wholly unitary authorities are set out in chapter 4 of this report and are illustrated on the maps in appendix A. They are:

- one unitary authority comprising the whole of the Northumberland county area; or
- two unitary authorities based on combinations of the existing districts in Northumberland county (Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Castle Morpeth and Tynedale; and Blyth Valley and Wansbeck).

This report should be read in conjunction with our Local government Overview report (henceforth Overview report), which sets out more fully our approach to formulating our draft recommendations. The Overview report is published separately and copies can be downloaded from our website or by contacting us at the address below.

We will consult on these proposals for 12 weeks from 1 December 2003. We take this consultation very seriously.

- We may refine or vary the proposals and the number of options we put forward as part of our final recommendations in the light of comments received during this consultation period. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence.

After considering local views we will decide which proposals to submit to the Deputy Prime Minister. He will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. Local people will then be asked to vote on the options with or without modifications in a referendum at a later date.

You should express your views by writing to us using an online form, which can be found at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk, or by writing directly to us at the address below by 23 February 2004.

Local Government Review Team
Northumberland county review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW
1 Introduction

1 The Boundary Committee for England has been directed by the Deputy Prime Minister to carry out an independent review of local government structure, as a precursor to a referendum on elected regional assemblies, in the two-tier local government areas of the North West, North East and Yorkshire & the Humber regions. Electors in the two-tier areas will also be asked to vote on which pattern of unitary local government they would prefer.

2 This report contains our draft recommendations for wholly unitary patterns of local government in Northumberland. Our recommendations will inform electors about the structures of local government that could be implemented in the event of a 'yes' vote in the referendum.

3 In carrying out these reviews, we must have regard to:

- Section 14(8) of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003, i.e. the need to:
  - assume that there is an elected assembly for the region;
  - recommend structural change for so much of the area of the region as is comprised of the areas of all of the relevant (i.e. two-tier) local authorities in the region;
  - have regard to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
  - have regard to the need to secure effective and convenient local government; and
  - have regard to guidance issued by the Deputy Prime Minister.

- Section 14 of the Local Government Act 1992, which defines structural change as the replacement, in any non-metropolitan area (i.e. outside Greater London and the six metropolitan county areas), of the two principal tiers of local government with a single-tier. The two principal tiers of local government are district and county councils. Such replacement may take one of two forms, either:
  - the transfer to a county council of the functions of district councils in that area; or
  - the transfer to a district council of the functions of the county council for that area.

- The general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1996 and the Statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
  - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
  - promote equality of opportunity; and
  - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

4 As part of a local government review we may make recommendations for:

- the abolition of a local authority whose functions had been transferred to another authority;
- the creation of new local government areas (i.e. a district or a county);
- alterations to local government areas; and
any joint arrangements which may be required for the exercise of strategic and other functions, particularly in circumstances where it is proposed to transfer county council functions to districts, whether on existing or altered boundaries.

5 Details of the legislation under which we work are set out in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s (ODPM) guidance to the Committee, which is available on the ODPM’s website (www.odpm.gov.uk). Our own guidance document, Guidance and procedural advice for the local government reviews, sets out our approach to the reviews. Copies of the guidance are available to anyone through our website (www.boundarycommittee.org.uk) or by contacting us at the address at the back of this report.

6 Our task is to recommend at least two options for structural change for each two-tier county under review. We are able to review and make recommendations for changes to the boundaries of existing single-tier authorities adjoining two-tier areas, but only with a view to part of an existing two-tier authority area being absorbed into a single-tier area. We cannot review the boundaries of regions as part of these local government reviews. Nor can we recommend retaining the existing two-tier local government structures.

7 The review is divided in to four stages (see Table 1).

Table 1: The stages of the review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage One</td>
<td>17 June 2003 – 8 September 2003</td>
<td>Commencement of review and submission of proposals for wholly unitary patterns of local authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Two</td>
<td>9 September 2003 – 30 November 2003</td>
<td>The Committee considers proposals, determines draft recommendations and prepares draft recommendations report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Three</td>
<td>1 December 2003 – 23 February 2004</td>
<td>The Committee publishes draft recommendations report and invites representations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Four</td>
<td>24 February 2004 – no later than 25 May 2004</td>
<td>The Committee considers representations, reaches conclusions on final recommendations and submits a final report to the Deputy Prime Minister.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Stage One began on 17 June 2003, when we wrote to the district and county councils in Northumberland inviting proposals for unitary patterns of local government. We also notified the adjoining metropolitan authorities of Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside and Gateshead and other key stakeholders in Northumberland, including the Northumbria Police Authority, the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, the county’s parish and town councils, and the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the county. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and asked the local authorities to distribute posters on our behalf. The closing date for receipt of submissions (the end of Stage One) was 8 September 2003. Each two-tier local authority was also requested to provide us with financial information about their authority.

9 We also commissioned public opinion research, carried out by MORI, in each of the districts in Northumberland. This comprised around 300 face-to-face interviews...
10 At Stage Two we considered all the submissions received during Stage One, along with the public opinion research and financial information, and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 1 December 2003 and will end on 23 February 2004, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. In addition, we are sending a leaflet to every household in the two-tier areas under review during Stage Three, inviting comments on our recommendations, and will be undertaking public opinion research on the options. **We take this consultation very seriously. We are consulting on two options which we may refine or vary at final recommendations stage, so it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence.**

12 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to vary the options put forward and submit final recommendations to the Deputy Prime Minister. He will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. Subject to the Deputy Prime Minister’s decision, the Committee’s final recommendations will appear on the ballot paper for the second referendum question for electors in the two-tier areas at a later date.

**Northumberland county**

13 While the borders of the historic county of Northumberland have changed over time, Northumberland as an administrative county was first established in 1889. A pattern of rural and urban district councils followed as a consequence of the Local Government Act 1894.

14 Following the local government reorganisation in 1974, a new Northumberland County Council came into existence with the six new non-metropolitan districts of Alnwick District Council, Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council, Blyth Valley Borough Council, Castle Morpeth Borough Council, Tynedale District Council and Wansbeck District Council. Additionally, the southern part of the historic county was transferred to the metropolitan county of Tyne and Wear. This structure of local government in Northumberland remained the same, apart from minor boundary changes, until the 1990s.

15 A structural review of Northumberland was carried out in 1993-4 by our predecessor, the Local Government Commission for England. It determined that the existing two-tier structure of local government should continue with no change. Currently therefore, Northumberland comprises the county council and the six districts as mentioned above. Map 1 shows the existing local authority boundaries in Northumberland, the main population centres, important geographical features and communication and transport links within the county.

16 Northumberland borders Scotland to the north and Cumbria to the west. County Durham and the metropolitan authorities of Gateshead, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and North Tyneside border Northumberland to the south, and the North Sea lies to the east of the county. More than half the population of the county live in the
predominantly urban south east, in an area that covers less than 5% of the total land area. Most of Northumberland’s large towns – Ashington, Bedlington, Blyth, Cramlington and Morpeth – are located in this area.

17 The large, predominantly rural remainder of the county is served by three main market towns: Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Hexham, while Prudhoe is the population centre for the eastern part of Tynedale district, on the edge of the Tyneside conurbation, and Ponteland lies in the southern part of Castle Morpeth district. Within the largely rural area of the county there are more than 200 villages each with fewer than 500 residents. Northumberland covers 501,307 hectares and, although it is the sixth largest county in England, it has the second smallest population of all the English shire counties.

18 Table 2 shows the 2001 population figures, area in hectares and population density in each district and in Northumberland as a whole.

Table 2: Current local authority structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Population (2001)</th>
<th>Area (hectares)</th>
<th>Population density (pop/ha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland county</td>
<td>307,190</td>
<td>501,307</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alnwick</td>
<td>31,029</td>
<td>107,951</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berwick-upon-Tweed</td>
<td>25,949</td>
<td>97,181</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blyth Valley</td>
<td>81,265</td>
<td>7,036</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castle Morpeth</td>
<td>49,001</td>
<td>61,823</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tynedale</td>
<td>58,808</td>
<td>220,639</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wansbeck</td>
<td>61,138</td>
<td>6,676</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Map 1: Existing local government structure in Northumberland county

Key
1 Alnwick
2 Berwick-upon-Tweed
3 Blyth Valley
4 Castle Morpeth
5 Tynedale
6 Wansbeck
7 Derwentside
8 Gateshead
9 Newcastle-upon-Tyne
10 North Tyneside
11 Wear Valley

Key to Districts
Population Areas
Motorways
Other Main Roads
Railways

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Table 3 indicates the current functions of county and district councils. The new unitary authorities we are proposing would undertake all of these functions.

Table 3: Current functions of county and district councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>District councils</th>
<th>County councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning applications</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport planning</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger transport</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highways</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and recreation</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste collection</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste disposal</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental health</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue collection</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Local Government Association
2 The Committee’s approach

20 The Committee’s approach to formulating its draft recommendations is set out more fully in a separate Overview report. This report should be read in conjunction with the Overview report.

21 The Overview report explains the background to our work and how it differs significantly from the 1990s reviews carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE). The 2003 Act requires us to assume the existence of elected regional assemblies and that the functions of local authorities will remain unchanged except where the Government has subsequently announced changes. Unlike the earlier review, we are required to propose at least two options for patterns of wholly unitary local government in each two-tier county area – the ‘status quo’ is not an option. Our work is guided by the 1992 Act, as was that of the LGCE, however, we must have regard to the guidance issued by the ODPM, which raises issues relating to performance, capacity, community leadership and representation, among others, that we need to address in formulating our recommendations. The Overview report explains our approach to these issues in further detail.

22 We received representations during Stage One from a wide range of stakeholders and other interested parties. These were considered in the development of our draft recommendations. For the most part, including in Northumberland, our proposals are contained within existing county areas. However, in some regions, we have proposed some options that cross county boundaries, including between two-tier and single-tier areas. In considering such changes, we have held firmly to the view that they need to be in the interests of securing the best patterns of unitary local government for the residents of the two-tier areas under review and provide long term, sustainable local authorities. In some cases, we have considered it appropriate to put forward our own proposals which build on the views expressed to us during Stage One. Our detailed draft recommendations for Northumberland appear in chapter 4 of this report.
3 Submissions received

23 The Committee received 171 submissions in relation to Northumberland during Stage One of the review. These included submissions from each two-tier authority under review.

24 Table 4 summarises the preferred options of the existing local authorities in Northumberland.

Table 4: Summary of representations by two-tier authorities in Northumberland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Preferred option</th>
<th>Second preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland County Council</td>
<td>Single unitary authority, based on existing county boundaries</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Blyth Valley, Castle Morpeth, Tynedale and Wansbeck district councils joint submission</td>
<td>Three unitary authorities based on mergers of existing districts: Blyth Valley and Wansbeck; Tynedale and part of Castle Morpeth; and Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed and part of Castle Morpeth.</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25 A county-wide body, three political groups and three regional bodies supported the single unitary authority option. We also received submissions from the North East Ambulance Service and Newcastle International Airport commenting on the advantages of a single county-wide unitary authority. Two parish and town councils supported this option. We also received 37 submissions supporting a unitary county authority from individual respondents in the Northumberland area. However, one Member of Parliament, a parish council and six local residents specifically opposed the proposal (three of these respondents did not put forward proposals of their own).

26 Two Members of Parliament indicated support for the proposal for three unitary authorities, one of whom also indicated support for the creation of two unitary authorities. Twelve parish or town councils supported the proposal for three unitary authorities. We also received 12 submissions from members of the public supporting the three unitary authority proposal, while another suggested a broadly similar three unitary authority proposal to that put forward by the six district councils.

27 A local organisation and a political group supported the joint district councils’ proposal for three unitary authorities. Although the Conservative Party stated that it opposed the concept of an elected regional assembly, it was of the view that, if there must be change, options for either two or three unitary authorities were preferred.

28 Prior to the commencement of the review, Northumberland’s six district councils commissioned consultants KPMG to assess models for unitary government in the county. Reporting in June 2003, KPMG aimed to draw independent conclusions as to the benefits and disadvantages of each of three options, for one, two and three unitary authorities. We received a copy of this report as part of the six district councils’ submission.

29 We received some support for a two unitary authority option based on Blyth Valley and Wansbeck districts forming one unitary authority and the rest of Northumberland forming another. As stated above, a local Member of Parliament
supported the case for two or three unitary authorities. Also as previously noted, the Conservative Party stated that although it opposed the concept of an elected regional assembly, it was of the view that, if there must be change, options for either two or three unitary authorities were preferred.

30 The Northumberland Estates, the company that manages the land, property and business assets of the Duke of Northumberland, stated that it could support two unitary authorities based broadly on a division between urban and rural areas, adding that the town of Morpeth could be placed with an urban authority, with the rural part of the county forming another unitary authority. Two parish councils and three individuals also supported the creation of two unitary authorities.

31 Three other respondents supported proposals for either two or three unitary authorities, including a parish council and a national stakeholder (the Institute of Directors). Four respondents supported proposals for either one or three unitary authorities, including two regional organisations, a regional political party and a parish council. One respondent supported either one or two unitary authorities.

32 We received 10 separate submissions proposing various combinations of areas to form between two and four unitary authorities, including in a number of cases the expansion of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and North Tyneside unitary authorities into the two-tier county area. However, these submissions contained relatively little evidence and were not supported by other respondents.

33 We also received 21 representations from residents opposing the introduction of a regional assembly and/or the introduction of unitary authorities. A further 46 submissions commented upon the review process and the criteria on which they considered the Committee should place the greatest emphasis, but did not put forward specific proposals for structural change.

34 The Northumbria Tourist Board submitted general tourism-related comments, while the Tynedale Community Partnership commented on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of both large and small authorities. Gateshead Metropolitan Council stated that it had no desire to expand its boundaries into the Northumberland county area. No other submissions were received from any adjoining metropolitan councils.

Public opinion research

35 We commissioned MORI to carry out public opinion research on our behalf. This research consisted of around 300 face-to-face, structured interviews within each district, which sought to examine affective community identity (i.e. people’s feelings about their neighbourhood and their sense of belonging) and effective community identity (i.e. patterns identified that reflect residents’ travel to work, shopping and leisure activities).

36 Along with the interviews, one focus group was held in each district. The purpose of the focus groups was to explore more deeply people’s sense of affinity for their local areas and community. Taken together, these two pieces of research provide a useful snapshot of public opinion within each area under review. This research on community identities is one of the many factors we have taken into account in formulating our draft recommendations.

37 The MORI opinion research for Northumberland was published on 17 October 2003 and can be downloaded from our website (www.boundarycommittee.org.uk) and from MORI’s website (www.mori.com).
4 Analysis of proposals

38 This chapter analyses the various proposals put to us during Stage One for Northumberland. For each proposal under consideration, we set out the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed pattern of unitary authorities, based on the information and evidence available to us during the first stage of the review.

39 As stated previously, we may consider proposals that cross county boundaries, including the expansion of existing unitary authorities into two-tier areas. In Northumberland, we received some proposals (from individuals) for the expansion of the metropolitan authorities of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and North Tyneside into part of the neighbouring two-tier county area. These issues are addressed in further detail later in this chapter. We received no proposal for the inclusion of part of Northumberland in a unitary authority with part of the neighbouring two-tier county of County Durham.

40 We are grateful for the cooperation received from local authorities and other key stakeholders throughout the review so far. We acknowledge the time and effort that has been put into preparing the submissions, during an already busy period of time for many councils. We look forward to continuing this cooperation during the next stage of the review.

41 The analysis below informs our draft recommendations for Northumberland, which are set out in Chapter 5.

One unitary authority

Table 5: One unitary authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unitary authority</th>
<th>Constituent parts</th>
<th>Population (2001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>Northumberland County Council</td>
<td>307,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

42 Northumberland County Council proposed a new county-wide unitary authority based upon its existing boundaries. This option received notable support at Stage One from major stakeholders in Northumberland. A county-wide unitary authority also commanded the greatest degree of public support in terms of representations submitted to us during Stage One. However, none of the county’s six district councils supported this proposal, and five respondents and one Member of Parliament at Stage One specifically opposed a single county-wide authority.

43 We have given careful consideration to this proposal and have identified that it would have a number of strengths. We note that a countywide unitary authority would reflect the common economic, social and cultural heritage of Northumberland. This is supported by the MORI opinion research, which found a relatively high level of affinity amongst local people with the county council area (except in Berwick-upon-Tweed borough), although it should be noted that MORI also found that there was often a stronger identification with individual district council areas. These findings would tend to support the view that ‘Northumberland’ to some degree serves as a focus for local identities.

44 A number of submissions argued that a county-wide unitary authority would have a distinct advantage in terms of the continuity of delivery of major services such as education and social services, which are already provided by the County Council.
In its 2002 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) the Council was praised for its strong political leadership. We acknowledge that the County Council’s present performance and capacity to deliver effective services can only provide a broad indicator of the future performance of a county-wide unitary authority. However, we note that it already carries out the majority of local authority services in Northumberland in expenditure terms, and received a ‘good’ rating from the Audit Commission in its CPA. Based on current performance, the proposed county-wide unitary authority would therefore be likely to be able to provide good quality key services.

45 It appears likely to us that a county-wide unitary authority would have sufficient capacity to provide the full range of local government services, incorporating existing district council functions. It has been contended that the retention of county council services in their existing form would be the least disruptive option, thus tending to promote effective and convenient local government.

46 We consider that a county-wide unitary authority with a population base of over 300,000, and therefore possessing significant capacity despite the overall sparsity of the county, would be capable of continuing to provide the economies of scale that may be considered necessary to effectively deliver both larger scale services and specialist functions. The transfer of existing district council services to a county-wide unitary authority may well extend these economies of scale. A county-wide unitary authority would also be large enough to avoid the need for joint arrangements for service provision.

47 We also consider that the proposed authority would be well placed to inherit the position of the County Council in a network of countywide and sub-county partnerships with public and private sector organisations. Indeed, it is probable that this network could be simplified if a unitary authority covering the whole county area was created, by allowing for a smaller number of more effective partnerships. We note that many partners are already coterminous with the county council area, including the Northumberland Care Trust and the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP). Existing sub-county partner organisations, which are often coterminous with a district or pair of districts, would not necessarily need to reconfigure their boundaries under a proposal for a unitary county authority.

48 In terms of community representation and leadership, the County Council proposed to address the issue of engagement with local areas through the establishment of four ‘locality management’ areas for south east, central, north and west Northumberland. These areas would have the same boundaries as Northumberland Care Trust’s four locality groups, with each being administered by an area committee, comprising unitary authority councillors plus local appointees. These bodies, it was suggested, would have significant responsibility for local service management and delivery and serve as a forum for addressing local issues.

49 The County Council considered that its proposal would go some way towards ensuring that local areas within Northumberland would be able to retain their local community representation and maintain a focus on local interests. In addition, the County Council proposed a substantially stronger role for parish and town councils, encouraging them to take responsibility for the delivery of devolved services and expressing support for creating parish and town councils in areas that are currently unparished. It also proposed that the existing six district-based Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) could be replaced with four new area partnerships coterminous with its suggested locality management areas.
50 We have, however, also identified a number of potential drawbacks with the proposal for a county-wide unitary authority. An authority of this geographic size, particularly covering such a large and, outside Blyth Valley and Wansbeck, sparsely populated area may be seen to face difficulties in being fully responsive to its electorate and providing effective representation. Whilst the population of the proposed authority would fall within a range broadly similar to a number of existing unitary authorities, this option would create a geographically very large unitary authority.

51 Given the geographic spread of population and diversity of communities in the area, the impact on the flexibility and responsiveness of customer-facing services that would need to be provided by the new authority is difficult to gauge. Arrangements to ensure accessibility to the unitary authority for local people would be crucial under this option. Dependent on the access solutions instituted, there would be a significant impact on local involvement and feedback to service deliverers. One of the most important challenges facing the proposed authority would therefore be in demonstrating that it would not be too large to provide effectively for the needs of all residents.

52 Equally, the issue of a perceived democratic deficit amongst members of the public may arise. It was proposed by the County Council that local residents would continue to be represented by the current number of county councillors. It did not suggest that the extent of representation by district councillors, whose role would disappear under the county-wide unitary proposal, should be replaced in whole or in part.

53 MORI public opinion research found that whilst residents of five of the six Northumberland districts (except Berwick-upon-Tweed borough) display a relatively high level of affinity with the county council area, they identify most strongly with their local neighbourhood/village or nearest town. Furthermore, affinity with the district council areas is slightly stronger overall than affinity with the county council area, although in Castle Morpeth borough this is not the case. Such evidence does suggest, however, that a county-wide unitary authority may not therefore provide an optimum reflection of community identities and interests.

54 The geographic size of the proposed authority also means that it would encompass a wide variety of communities, from the urban to the highly rural, with very different needs. This could lead to divided priorities and tensions within a single council, making it difficult to focus on the particular issues and priorities facing the different areas, with potential implications for resources. On the other hand it could be argued that it would be incumbent on all councillors to adopt an inclusive approach, recognising and balancing the needs of all the communities they represent.

Two unitary authorities

Table 6: Two unitary authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unitary authority</th>
<th>Constituent parts</th>
<th>Population (2001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North &amp; West Northumberland</td>
<td>Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Castle Morpeth and Tynedale districts</td>
<td>164,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Northumberland</td>
<td>Blyth Valley and Wansbeck districts</td>
<td>142,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
55 This option would see the creation of one, predominantly urban, unitary authority in the south east of the county, and one unitary authority for the predominantly rural remainder of the county. Under this option, the proposed authorities would be named South East Northumberland and North & West Northumberland respectively.

56 A proposal for two unitary authorities was not formally submitted by any of Northumberland’s local authorities. However, the proposal was considered by the six district councils during Stage One of the review process and was analysed, along with other options, following a report commissioned from consultants KPMG. The option was also assessed by the County Council as part of its submission and it was supported by some other respondents.

57 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received concerning this proposal and believe it would have a number of strengths. The proposed South East Northumberland authority is of a compact nature and easily manageable geographic scale. We are of the view that it would be viable and, in terms of population size, the authority would be considerably larger than some other existing unitary authorities in the region such as Darlington and Hartlepool. Although the proposed North & West Northumberland unitary authority would be of a very significant geographic size and thus could face some of the challenges that would be faced by a county-wide unitary authority, it would also be of a reasonable population size and should have the ability to focus on serving a dispersed and largely rural population.

58 The division of the county into two unitary authorities could permit a clear focus for each authority in strategic priorities and decision making on the particular issues facing each area and the communities served. In the long term, this could have a positive impact on the flexibility and appropriateness of service delivery. We consider that the proposed South East Northumberland authority could concentrate on the challenges associated with the urban industrial heritage of the area, and that market towns and rural communities in the rest of the county could benefit from the establishment of a unitary authority specifically focused upon their priorities.

59 The potential for economies of scale would exist to some extent in a two unitary authority option as compared to the creation of three unitary authorities (see following section of the report), although this would be diluted in comparison to a county-wide unitary authority. Both proposed unitary authorities under this option would be likely to have sufficient financial and organisational resources to achieve the economies of scale necessary for sustainability in the provision of services.

60 Two unitary authorities could provide for better local representation of residents in comparison to a single county-wide authority. The geographic compactness of the South East Northumberland authority should provide no bar to councillors effectively serving their communities. Conversely, councillors in the North & West Northumberland authority may have to represent geographically large areas.

61 The MORI opinion research has found that in all of the districts of Northumberland, residents identify most strongly with their local neighbourhood/village and nearest town and show less identity with the administrative areas of the local two-tier councils. This suggests that community identities and focus may not be disrupted either by the division of Northumberland into more than one unit of local government, or by an amalgamation of the district council areas.

62 We have, however, identified a number of drawbacks to the proposal for two unitary authorities. The MORI opinion research shows that there are notable levels of interaction between parts of the proposed South East and North & West
Northumberland authorities. The most striking example of this relates to the districts of Castle Morpeth and Wansbeck. The town of Morpeth in Castle Morpeth district is just a few miles from the town of Ashington in Wansbeck district, and MORI found that 17% of Castle Morpeth residents cited Ashington as the town with which they most associated. The division of Northumberland into the two proposed authorities may not, therefore, provide the best reflection of community ties in this area.

63 We note that many of Northumberland’s key partnerships such as Northumberland Strategic Partnership, Northumberland Care Trust, the Learning & Skills Council and Connexions are organised on a county-wide basis and would not be coterminous with two unitary authorities. This may entail such partner bodies having to re-organise themselves to reflect new local authority boundaries, and may require co-ordination across service delivery boundaries.

64 Given the geography of the county it is possible that the proposed North & West Northumberland authority could face some difficulties in relation to the delivery of large scale and/or specialist services. It may not have the necessary financial resource base that would be required to maintain high quality public services. In addition to the short-term disruption that would result from breaking up the current delivery of major services, there could also be risks that joint arrangements would be required.

65 The North & West Northumberland authority would be likely to face the same challenges arising from the geography of the rural area and its population sparsity as the unitary county option. With a population density of only 0.3 persons per hectare, the authority may be seen to be too large geographically to be ‘local’. The geographic spread of population within the North & West Northumberland authority would necessitate the institution of effective local solutions to address the issue of accessibility, and a flexible and responsive approach to customer facing services would also be required.

66 We note the potential for economies of scale to exist to some extent under a two unitary authority option as compared to the creation of three authorities for the county as discussed below, but this would be diluted in comparison to a county-wide unitary authority.

Three unitary authorities

Table 7: Three unitary authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unitary authority</th>
<th>Constituent parts</th>
<th>Population (2001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Northumberland</td>
<td>Alnwick and Berwick-upon-Tweed districts and part of Castle Morpeth district</td>
<td>89,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Northumberland</td>
<td>Blyth Valley and Wansbeck districts</td>
<td>142,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West Northumberland</td>
<td>Tynedale district and part of Castle Morpeth district</td>
<td>75,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67 This option was proposed jointly by Northumberland’s six district councils. The submission proposed one unitary authority covering the predominantly urban districts of Blyth Valley and Wansbeck, to be named South East Northumberland, and two predominantly rural unitary authorities, South West Northumberland encompassing the current Tynedale district and part of Castle Morpeth district including the town of
Ponteland, and North Northumberland encompassing the current Alnwick and Berwick-upon-Tweed districts with the remainder of Castle Morpeth district, including the town of Morpeth.

68 A considerable number of stakeholders preferred either a smaller number of unitary authorities for Northumberland (i.e. one or two), or specifically opposed the creation of three unitary authorities. The three unitary authorities proposal received significantly less support from stakeholders than did that for a county-wide unitary authority. Nevertheless, it was supported by two Members of Parliament, three organisations, 12 parish and town councils, and 12 members of the public.

69 We have given careful consideration to this proposal and have concluded that the strengths of this option relate largely to community identity and representation. The six district councils argued that the unique nature of Northumberland, with its large geographic area and widespread and diverse community interests, means that it would be best served by three unitary authorities.

70 It was suggested that such a pattern could help address the differing needs and priorities of the urban and rural communities and would enable council responses to residents’ issues to be geared specifically to an area, providing a more local focus and a closer link to the public.

71 The creation of three unitary authorities could provide for good levels of representation in comparison to other proposals by increasing the overall number of councillors proposed for the area. As previously mentioned, the geographic compactness of the South East Northumberland authority should provide no bar to councillors effectively serving their communities. Similarly, the relatively small size of the rural authorities under this proposal would, in all probability, result in better levels of representation for local communities.

72 It could be argued that the geography of Northumberland potentially favours the creation of more than one unitary authority for the rural area. The proposed South West Northumberland authority, encompassing the current Tynedale district and the southern part of Castle Morpeth district, would include communities along the Tyne Valley and a number of commuter settlements on the western edge of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Similarly the proposed North Northumberland authority encompassing Alnwick and Berwick-upon-Tweed districts and the northern part of Castle Morpeth district would unite settlements linked by the A1 and A697 roads and east coast main railway line. Furthermore, there are relatively poor communication links between the proposed South West Northumberland authority and the proposed North Northumberland authority.

73 We take no particular view on the most appropriate population size for proposed unitary authorities. However, we note that the proposed South West Northumberland and North Northumberland authorities would each have a population level lower than virtually all existing unitary authorities in England. Nevertheless, it has been put to us that they would have the capacity to effectively deliver the full range of local government services, with some co-operation on small specialist functions. Based on the evidence available to us, we acknowledge that the district councils may be capable of innovative service delivery and working together (including with other partners) to increase capacity. We also note that some of the districts have acquired Beacon status for certain major services and/or received favourable Best Value inspections.
74 Given the distribution of population and land area as well as the diversity of Northumberland, it may be that three new unitary authorities would enable a more focused perspective to be taken than under one or two authorities. They could be well placed to focus on the needs of specific areas, directing policy and resources accordingly. The six district councils considered that the current decentralisation of larger county council functions such as education (including financial management by schools) and social services might also facilitate the disaggregation of such functions to the three proposed authorities.

75 However, we have also identified significant drawbacks to this proposal. Whilst the proposed South East Northumberland unitary authority falls within a continuum of viable population and geographic size, we have serious concerns regarding the capacity and service delivery capabilities of the proposed authorities of North Northumberland and South West Northumberland.

76 The population size and land area of a unitary authority and the capacity to deliver the ‘modernisation agenda’ are issues that feature throughout the Guidance to us from the ODPM. We were asked to consider the evidence that smaller authorities rely more heavily on joint arrangements to deliver quality public services and that these serve to confuse lines of accountability.

77 The two predominantly rural unitary authorities of North Northumberland and South West Northumberland would have population sizes of only around 90,000 and 75,000 respectively. Given the scattered distribution of population across the areas, it is in our view likely that two such authorities would have difficulty in achieving economies of scale over the long term. It is also likely, in our view, that the limited tax base of two such authorities could potentially place service provision at some risk.

78 We also have concerns over the capacity of the proposed North Northumberland and South West Northumberland authorities in relation to the provision of both large scale and specialist services currently carried out by the County Council. For example, it is accepted that a shortage of suitably qualified and experienced professionals already exists in various disciplines, but especially in the social services field. In our view, the creation of three unitary authorities in Northumberland may exacerbate these difficulties and may require statutory joint arrangements to be established in order for this service to be able to function at the necessary standard.

79 The case for three unitary authorities is not strong in terms of coterminosity with key partnerships in Northumberland. The proposal, as acknowledged by KPMG’s report, would require significant co-ordination and communication across service delivery boundaries. It may also require some form of formal joint management between the proposed authorities and partners, such as the Primary Care Trust, in relation to the delivery of large-scale and specialist services to local communities.

80 While we have received some evidence that the district councils are capable of innovative and strategic policy-making, it does not necessarily follow that the three proposed unitary authorities would be capable of effectively delivering major county council services such as education. It is conceivable that the challenge presented by the disaggregation of major services to sub-county unitary authorities may be underestimated, despite recent moves towards the decentralisation of county council service delivery and financial management.

81 We have some concerns that the proposed division of Castle Morpeth borough carries the risk of short-term disruption to existing service delivery. Since the proposals in this area are only partly based upon existing local authority boundaries,
they would require the re-organisation of both district and county council services, in
order to reflect the new boundaries. Similarly, it is possible that the proposals in this
area may adversely affect district-wide partnership arrangements and the capacity of
local partner organisations to carry out their functions effectively, without significant
changes to their boundaries.

Other proposals

82 Northumberland County Council, for comparative purposes, suggested an option
that would link the districts of Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Wansbeck and part of
Castle Morpeth to form one unitary authority, while the districts of Blyth Valley,
Tynedale and the remaining part of Castle Morpeth district would form a second
unitary authority. However, there was no tangible evidence supporting this proposal
and the combining of urban and rural communities in this way is not one that we
consider would be likely to engender local support.

83 We also received proposals from three members of the public for alternative
unitary structures of two or three authorities, based on mixtures of urban and rural
areas. However, these respondents provided no substantial evidence in support of
their proposals and we do not consider that the division of the communities in
question between proposed new unitary authorities would reflect the identities and
interests of those concerned, nor necessarily provide for effective and convenient
local government.

84 Finally, we received three separate proposals from local residents suggesting
that part of Northumberland could be included in one or more unitary authorities with
parts of metropolitan authorities in Tyne and Wear. Although we have considered
these proposals, we do not believe that they would facilitate effective and convenient
local government for the communities concerned, nor do we believe that such
proposals would engender public support.
Draft recommendations

This chapter contains our draft recommendations for Northumberland.

In formulating our draft recommendations, we have had to ensure that our proposals facilitate a pattern of unitary authorities for the whole of the Northumberland area. We could not look at one local authority area in isolation, but rather have needed to consider the consequential effects of any proposed options across the whole of the county. Our proposals are those which we consider are most likely to provide the setting for high-performing and robust unitary authorities.

We wish to emphasise that we have not finalized our recommendations for patterns of unitary authorities in Northumberland and would welcome views during Stage Three from all interested parties, including local residents, before we submit our final recommendations to the Deputy Prime Minister.

Having examined the County Council’s proposal for a county-wide unitary authority, we consider that this proposal should be put forward for consultation as part of our draft recommendations. We consider that a county-wide unitary authority for Northumberland would appear to reflect a degree of local attachment to the county area, and would command a measure of local support. In our view, it would have sufficient capacity to provide the full range of local government services and would be able to effectively deliver those functions currently performed by the district councils.

A county-wide unitary authority could also facilitate economies of scale, a strategic ‘joined-up’ approach to policy and service areas and potentially the rationalisation of existing partnership arrangements. Due to the fact that the majority of local government services are (in terms of expenditure) already carried out at county council level, establishing a county-wide unitary authority may also be considered to minimise the risk inherent in any change to local government structures.

However, there are conflicting views regarding the extent to which such an authority would be able to effectively represent and engage with the various communities of the county, particularly given its large geographic size. Although we consider that the suggestions outlined by the County Council in its submission to us could go a considerable way towards addressing this concern, we would particularly welcome further views on this issue at Stage Three.

We are also putting forward for consultation an option for two unitary authorities, which we consider goes some way towards addressing a number of our concerns regarding the proposals for three unitary authorities, particularly in relation to the capacity and resource base of the proposed North Northumberland and South West Northumberland authorities (see section below).

The predominantly rural/urban split proposed in the two unitary authority option would enable each of the proposed authorities to focus upon the local priorities of their communities, addressing the challenges of serving a dispersed and largely rural population in the case of the proposed North & West Northumberland authority, and concentrating on the challenges associated with the urban industrial heritage of the area in the case of the South East Northumberland authority.
93 Two councils may be seen as being more accessible and locally accountable than a single county-wide authority would be, thereby promoting public acceptability. The South East Northumberland authority, in particular, would cover a reasonably compact and cohesive area, with a common socio-economic background, and the two unitary authorities under this option would be of broadly similar population sizes.

94 However, we consider that the proposed North & West Northumberland authority would face considerable challenges in balancing the needs of widely scattered, predominantly rural communities across a large geographical area, raising concerns relating to the engagement of residents. We are also concerned that the authority may perhaps lack the necessary capacity required to provide strategic services. We would welcome further evidence on this point.

95 Having carefully considered the joint proposal from Northumberland’s six district councils for three unitary authorities, we have not been persuaded to put this model forward for consultation. We acknowledge that there was consensus amongst all six of the district councils in Northumberland for three new unitary authorities and also that there was evidence of some community support for this proposal. We have also taken into account the unique nature of the geography of Northumberland, including the constraining aspect of the regional boundary and the fact that much of Northumberland is extremely sparsely populated and covers a large area. We recognise the strengths of this option in relation to community identity and representation.

96 However, we have serious concerns about recommending very small rural unitary authorities of the size proposed, given the far-reaching change agenda to which they would be expected to respond with limited scope for flexibility in the deployment of resources. We need to ensure that our proposals provide the setting for sustainable unitary authorities with adequate potential resource bases and capacity to meet varying demands and to respond flexibly and effectively as circumstances and priorities change over time.

97 Based upon the evidence received we have particular concerns relating to the potential of the proposed South West and North Northumberland authorities to effectively deliver the full range of local government services without the need for formal joint arrangements for the exercise of strategic functions such as education and social services. In light of such concerns over the potential resource base and capacity of these authorities, and in keeping with the pattern of recommendations made across all the two-tier areas under review, we consider that alternative proposals for Northumberland would better meet the criteria guiding this review and the guidance provided by the ODPM.

98 We consider that the proposal for three unitary authorities is unlikely to provide for high performing councils in the rural areas of the county. Moreover, we consider that two geographically large, rural, sparsely populated unitary authorities in Northumberland would be unlikely to meet our statutory criteria of effective and convenient local government.

99 As part of our draft recommendations for new structures of unitary local government, we are required to suggest names for new authorities. The table below details the names we are proposing for unitary authorities under each of the options we are putting forward as part of our draft recommendations. Some of the names were proposed to us in submissions but in some cases we have proposed names ourselves. We wish to emphasise that the names put forward are draft proposals at this stage. We would welcome views from all interested parties on the
appropriateness or otherwise of the names put forward for proposed unitary authorities, and would welcome any alternative suggestions. We will revisit our proposals for names of new unitary authorities when we make our final recommendations to the Deputy Prime Minister.

100 We are proposing that two options for patterns of unitary local government in Northumberland be put forward as set out in the table below:

*Table 8: Options for Northumberland*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Unitary authority</th>
<th>Constituent parts</th>
<th>Population (2001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option one: a single unitary authority</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>Northumberland County Council</td>
<td>307,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option two: two unitary authorities</td>
<td>North &amp; West Northumberland</td>
<td>Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Castle Morpeth and Tynedale districts</td>
<td>164,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South East Northumberland</td>
<td>Blyth Valley and Wansbeck districts</td>
<td>142,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

101 We wish to emphasise that we are not dismissing outright those proposals on which we are not consulting. Rather, we are recommending options that we consider based upon the evidence received so far to be most likely to meet the objectives of the review. We welcome further views on our two options or any other aspect of the review at Stage Three.

102 In the light of further evidence received, we may decide that our draft recommendations should be refined or otherwise varied, and we may change the number of options put forward in our final recommendations to the Deputy Prime Minister.

103 An illustrative map of each option is contained in Appendix A.

**Financial model**

104 The ODPM’s guidance provides a financial model for use by the Boundary Committee. This model only addresses the costs of ‘being in business’ and does not consider the total transitional or ongoing costs of change. As such, it differs from financial models used during previous local government reviews. Research on modelling the costs of local government re-organisation is available on the ODPM website: www.odpm.gov.uk.

105 We consider that the model provided by the ODPM provides a useful starting point for comparing different options based on a limited range of well-defined costs. However, we have taken the view that cost estimates cannot be a determining factor in deciding which patterns of wholly unitary structures are appropriate. This is discussed in further detail in the *Overview report*.

106 At the beginning of the review we requested that all local authorities in the two-tier areas under review complete a financial return. The Audit Commission has assisted us in the process by assessing whether the information provided by local authorities had been prepared in accordance with the Committee’s requirements and is consistent with relevant supporting records held by the authority. We also
appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) as our financial consultants for the purposes of this review and to assist us in collecting and analysing the financial data using the financial model.

107 The Audit Commission has found that the returns for Northumberland were prepared in accordance with our requirements, and that the financial and related information contained in the returns is relevant to assessing the cost of 'being in business' and is consistent with the records held by each of the local authorities under review.

108 The table below sets out the costs of 'being in business' of the current local government structure and for each of the options we wish to consult upon. Further information is available on our website.

Table 9: Financial Model – Costs of 'being in business'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Costs (£m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing two-tier structure</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option One</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option Two</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

109 Northumberland County Council’s submission included an assessment of the cost effectiveness of the three principal options for unitary authorities discussed in this report. Its submission referred to an analysis undertaken by consultants KPMG for the purposes of the current review. It stated that the KPMG analysis used the PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) costings model.

110 Northumberland County Council stated that the analysis confirmed that the single unitary authority option for Northumberland is the most cost effective. The figures provided showed that the single unitary authority option had a lower level of transitional costs (£11.83 million) than either two unitary authorities or three unitary authorities, and that the projected annual savings of a single unitary authority (compared to the current two-tier structure) would be greater (£7.24 million) than under either two unitary authorities or three unitary authorities.

111 The figures provided stated that the 'payback period' for the single-unitary-authority option would be 1.63 years, compared to longer periods of time for the two unitary authorities or three unitary authorities proposals. The Boundary Committee has not independently audited this financial information.
6 Other matters

112 In addition to consulting on options for future local government structures in Northumberland, we have also considered the treatment of ceremonial arrangements and the provision of certain services. These are discussed below.

Ceremonial arrangements

113 In strict legal terms, each unitary authority is a county in its own right. That is because Schedule 1 to the Local Government Act 1972 defines local government areas in England and Wales by reference to county areas, not district areas; unitary districts are created by ‘deeming’ the unitary authorities as districts for certain statutory functions. The ‘deeming’ is achieved in the structural change order.

114 Under the Reserve Forces Act 1980 every county is entitled to a Lord Lieutenant. While this is entirely appropriate for unitary county councils, in practical terms there is no need for most unitary district councils to have their own Lord Lieutenant and other ceremonial arrangements.

Option Two

\begin{boxedtext}
\textit{Draft recommendation}

The county of Northumberland should be retained for ceremonial and related purposes, and the unitary authorities of North & West Northumberland and South East Northumberland should be associated with the county for such purposes.
\end{boxedtext}

Public protection

115 Section 14(5)(e) of the Local Government Act 1992 invites us to consider whether, in connection with any recommended structural or boundary change, there should be any change in police areas, including whether there should be an increase or reduction in the number of police areas. Section 17(3)(g) and (h) of the 1992 Act (implementation of recommendations) enables the Deputy Prime Minister to make provision in respect of the constitution, election and membership of public bodies in any area affected by the structural change order, including their abolition or establishment.

116 Under section 17(6) of the 1992 Act, the Deputy Prime Minister is required to ensure that no unitary county or a district (unitary or two-tier) is divided between two or more police areas.

117 With the creation of police authorities under the Police and Magistrates’ Courts Act 1994, the police service is no longer a county function. However, the membership of each police authority is appointed by a committee that draws a high proportion of its membership from local government. In two-tier counties, the local authority element is from the county council.

118 Accordingly, for options that include sub-county patterns of unitary authorities, we must make recommendations in respect of the area and the membership of the committee that appoints members of police authorities. Our recommendations take no account at this stage of proposals for changes to police authority membership on which the Government is currently consulting.
119 While we are aware that the Government has published proposals on the future of the fire service, it is currently a strategic county function for which formal joint arrangements need to be made. It would not be practical for individual unitary districts to run their own service. Nor would it be appropriate for us, given the importance of the function, to rely on the authorities concerned establishing informal partnership arrangements.

120 There are, of course, a number of other public protection agencies in each area under review, such as the Magistrates’ Courts Service, the Probation Service, Local Criminal Justice Boards, Drug Action Teams and Crime & Disorder Partnerships. Certain of these agencies are based on local authority areas, and the creation of unitary authorities will have an impact on them. However, they are not strategic local authority services and, at present, we see no reason to make recommendations in respect of them. Our understanding is that any necessary alterations to their areas or membership will flow automatically from the patterns of any unitary authorities that may be established.

**Option Two**

**Draft recommendation**

There should be a combined authority established in the county area of Northumberland for the fire service, on which representatives of the new unitary authorities should serve. A new police authority should be established in place of Northumbria Police Authority. Representatives of the unitary authorities in the county and the five metropolitan councils in Tyne and Wear should serve on a joint committee to select the local authority membership of the new police authority. No changes are proposed to the areas covered by other public protection agencies in the existing administrative county of Northumberland.

**Strategic planning**

121 Section 14(5)(d) of the 1992 Act invites us, in connection with any structural change, to make recommendations in relation to strategic planning. In particular, we are asked to consider whether new unitary authorities should be structure or unitary development planning (UDP) authorities, and whether they should be waste and mineral planning authorities. We can recommend joint arrangements for the exercise of these functions.

122 Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill makes provision for the introduction of Regional Spatial Strategies in each region, which will replace the structure plan and UDP process. In the meantime, however, we are required to make recommendations in respect of strategic planning.

123 Given the nature of the areas under review, we see no case at this stage for recommending that any new unitary authority become a UDP authority. Accordingly, we are proposing a continuation of the structure planning process, to be undertaken jointly across each county area.
Option One

**Draft recommendation**
For strategic planning, the unitary county council should have responsibility for structure planning for its area. It should have the responsibility for formulating detailed minerals and waste policies for its area in general conformity with the policy framework established by the structure plan, and should be authorised to include such policies in its local plans. Responsibility for local plans will rest with the unitary county council. It will exercise development control functions for its area for all purposes.

Option Two

**Draft recommendation**
For strategic planning, the unitary authorities of South East Northumberland and North & West Northumberland should be structure planning authorities for their areas. The unitary authorities should each have responsibility for minerals and waste planning policies. They should discharge these responsibilities jointly but should also be authorised, if it would secure greater efficiency without prejudicing the county-wide strategic policies, to include such detailed policies in their local plans. Responsibility for local plans will rest with the unitary authorities. They will exercise development control functions for their areas for all purposes.

Other services

124 We believe that the unitary authorities set out in our options will each have the capacity to carry out the other main local government functions, whether this be directly or in partnership with other public or private sector bodies. However, we expect the authorities, particularly those included within the sub-county options, to work together closely to ensure that specialist expertise is not unnecessarily broken up and that existing levels of efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of relatively small-scale but important functions such as trading standards, archive provision and emergency planning are maintained.
7 What happens next?

125 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations for unitary authorities in Northumberland contained in this report. Our draft proposals will be given wide circulation throughout the areas under review and we hope they will stimulate comment and debate – the deadline for responses is **23 February 2004**. We will take fully into account all submissions received by this date. Any received after this date cannot be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices, and a list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

126 Express your views by using the online form on our website (www.boundarycommittee.org.uk), or by writing directly to us:

**Local Government Review Team**
Northumberland review
**The Boundary Committee for England**
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

127 The Committee regrets that it is unable to acknowledge representations.

128 In the light of responses received, we will review and refine our draft recommendations. Based on the information and evidence received, we may vary our recommendations from those in the draft recommendations report. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence by 23 February 2004. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Deputy Prime Minister. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Deputy Prime Minister.
Appendix A

Draft recommendations for Northumberland

The following maps illustrate our draft options for wholly unitary patterns of local government in Northumberland:

**Map A1** illustrates Option One for a single unitary authority.

**Map A2** illustrates Option Two for two unitary authorities.
Map A1: Option One - Single unitary authority for Northumberland

Key

1 Northumberland

Population Areas

Key
Proposed UA boundary

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Map A2: Option Two - Two unitary authorities for Northumberland

Key to UAs
1 North and West Northumberland
2 South East Northumberland

Population Areas

Key
Proposed UA boundary

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Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office’s November 2000 Code of Practice on Written Consultation, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table B1: The Boundary Committee for England’s compliance with Code criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Compliance/departure</th>
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<tr>
<td>Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.</td>
<td>We comply with this requirement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.</td>
<td>We comply with this requirement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.</td>
<td>We comply with this requirement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.</td>
<td>We comply with this requirement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.</td>
<td>We comply with this requirement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.</td>
<td>We comply with this requirement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.</td>
<td>We comply with this requirement.</td>
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