

with other Wychavon District wards, again retaining ties that would be broken by the Commission's proposals.

AC102 Mr Bailey's counter-proposal produces an Evesham constituency which he describes as looking 'a bit odd because it sticks through the gap between Droitwich and Worcester, but that is all part of Wychavon Borough'. We do not see that this would cause any problems with regard to accessibility. His proposal avoids changing the existing Worcester and Wyre Forest constituencies and we consider that this would keep more of the existing Mid Worcestershire, West Worcestershire, and North Herefordshire constituencies together. We consider that overall this counter-proposal strikes the best balance between the statutory factors having regard to local ties and to existing constituency boundaries.

AC103 As a consequence of these changes it is necessary to make adjustments elsewhere in the sub-region to keep all of the proposed constituencies within the electoral quota. Mr Bailey includes the Sutton Walls and Hampton Court wards, which are close to Leominster, in the proposed Ludlow and Leominster constituency from the proposed Malvern and Ledbury constituency. The Backbury ward is included in the Malvern and Ledbury constituency from the proposed Hereford constituency. Having regard to the fact that the grouping of most of these wards in the existing constituencies matches similar groupings in his proposed constituencies, we consider that this is satisfactory.

AC104 Mr Whittaker's counter-proposals are similar to those of Mr Bailey, but he keeps fewer wards together in their existing constituencies. We therefore consider this less desirable.

AC105 Overall, we conclude that Mr Bailey's counter-proposals (with the exception of the inclusion of the Credenhill, and Burghill, Holmer and Lyde wards in his proposed Hereford constituency) strike the best balance in addressing the concerns raised in the representations and having regard to the statutory factors, in particular to avoid breaking local ties.

AC106 We therefore recommend that Mr Bailey's counter-proposals be adopted except for his proposal to place the Credenhill, and Burghill, Holmer and Lyde wards in the Commission's proposed Hereford constituency. For reasons already stated these should form part of the new Ludlow and Leominster constituency.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent sub-region

Introduction

AC107 The sub-region of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent comprises the County of Staffordshire, within which there are a number of district councils, and the City of Stoke-on-Trent, which is a unitary authority.

AC108 The sub-region is made up of areas of differing character. The City of Stoke-on-Trent is the largest urban area, but there are also towns such as Stafford and Tamworth. These centres provide significant employment opportunities and offer substantial services, including shopping facilities. However, in large part the sub-region is rural in character, with smaller towns such as Cheadle and Uttoxeter serving more localised catchments. The settlements in the sub-region differ in terms of their role but their spheres of influence often overlap in one respect or another so that there are local ties in more than one direction. In this context we note that the existence of local ties does not depend on the relationship between a rural area and an urban area; they may – and

do – exist within urban areas, within rural areas and between and within wards. The picture in terms of local ties is therefore sometimes complex.

AC109 The M54 motorway cuts across part of the very southern part of the sub-region, and the M6 runs broadly north to south from Wolverhampton to the west of Stoke-on-Trent, both providing mainly for long-distance travel by motor vehicle but with some opportunities for shorter trips. There are several A roads that provide for more local trips and link many of the settlements. There are rail links too, again following broadly north to south routes, as well as bus services (although these are more limited in the rural areas).

AC110 In the remainder of this section of our report, we first refer briefly to the Commission's proposals for the sub-region and then summarise the representations received, including the counter-proposals. We then consider the representations and the counter-proposals and make our conclusions. We present our conclusions under two main headings: 'north Staffordshire' (referring collectively to the broad area covering the Commission's proposed constituencies of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stone, Kidsgrove and Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent Central, Stoke-on-Trent South, and Staffordshire Moorlands); and 'south Staffordshire' (referring collectively to the broad area covered by the Commission's proposed constituencies of Stafford, Cannock Chase, Burton, Tamworth, Lichfield, and South Staffordshire). We divide the presentation of our conclusions in this way for practical reasons in reflection of the representations made.

The Commission's initial proposals for the sub-region

AC111 We do not summarise the Commission's proposals, which are set out in *West Midlands: Initial proposals*. However, in the light of the representations, we draw attention to the following particular aspects of the proposals.

AC112 First, the Commission proposed a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency that would have the same boundaries as the District of Staffordshire Moorlands.

AC113 Secondly, it proposed that there be two whole constituencies in the City of Stoke-on-Trent, as there are now but with different configurations of the wards, and one constituency that would cross the city boundary to the north.

AC114 Thirdly, it proposed that the existing constituencies of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stone be significantly reconfigured and that there be two new constituencies: Kidsgrove and Tunstall to the north; and Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stone to the south.

AC115 These aspects of the Commission's proposals were very controversial. Other elements of the proposals (in what we call south Staffordshire) generated less, but still significant, dispute.

Representations on the sub-region

AC116 There is considerable support for the Commission's initial proposals. Some people wrote simply to endorse the initial proposals; others wrote with more detailed comments. A large number of people wrote to express either support in full or general support for the Commission's proposals. The authorities of Tamworth Borough Council (IP/019740), Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (CR/005072), South Staffordshire Council

(IP/008329), and Staffordshire County Council (IP/014420) support in full or in part the Commission's proposals, as do a number of MPs, local councillors, the Conservative Party (IP/025311 and CR/005049), and parish councils or other local organisations.

AC117 Many of these representations are generalised, although some are specific in what they support. The most significant feature of the representations received in support of the initial proposals is the large number of people who support a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency that follows the local authority boundaries of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. There are many letters supporting this element of the Commission's proposals, including several proforma letters with additional comments and three petitions in favour of Biddulph remaining within the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency.

AC118 Another notable feature of the representations in support of the initial proposals is that there are comparatively few objections to the Commission's proposals in relation to its proposed constituencies of Cannock Chase, Burton, Tamworth, Lichfield, and South Staffordshire.

AC119 There is also considerable objection to the Commission's initial proposals, and a large number of people wrote to express their opposition to them. The authorities of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council (IP/022528) and Stoke-on-Trent City Council (IP/022190) object to the Commission's proposals for north Staffordshire in particular; others including MPs, local councillors, the Labour Party (IP/025315 and CR/005106), the Liberal Democrats (IP/025336 and CR/005103) and parish councils or other local organisations object to some extent or another to the initial proposals.

AC120 Many of these representations are generalised, although some are specific in what they object to. We mention here two specific objections since they lie at the root of the issues that we have to address in making our recommendations in relation to north Staffordshire.

AC121 First, most of the objections express opposition to the Commission's proposals to reconfigure the constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme and create two new constituencies. There are many representations to this effect. There is also a petition with a large number of signatures which states that those who signed object strongly to the Commission's proposal to abolish the constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme and would prefer to see the constituency retained and enlarged to include the wards of Loggerheads and Whitmore, and Madeley.

AC122 The objection here, as articulated by some, is that the Commission's proposals to divide the existing Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency between two new constituencies are flawed because: they pay no regard to the history of the town and borough, which has played a part in forming local community ties; they break local ties in the core urban area of Newcastle-under-Lyme and beyond; and they merge the core urban area and rural hinterland of Newcastle-under-Lyme with other areas with which there is no affinity. Particular aspects of these objections deserve mention here.

AC123 There are representations which express a strong wish that Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency should not be merged at any point with the City of Stoke-on-Trent. This, it is said, reflects local history and the determination of both to remain as settlements with separate identities, as well as local geography (the A500 along the valley

separating the borough from the city). It is also argued that the wards of Bradwell, Porthill, Wolstanton, and May Bank have strong local ties that would be broken by the Commission's proposals, for example because they form part of the local ecclesiastical Parish of Wolstanton and share sports facilities (such as the Bradwell Community Centre). There are also representations that oppose the division of the wards of Chesterton and Holditch from the wards of Silverdale and Parkside, and Knutton and Silverdale on the basis that local ties would be broken, for example the brick and tile-making business carried out in the area. In relation to the rural Audley and Bignall End, and Halmerend wards, it is said that they look to and have ties with Newcastle-under-Lyme, to which there are good road links, rather than with wards to the north of the City of Stoke-on-Trent. Similarly, it is said that the wards of Madeley, and Loggerheads and Whitmore look to Newcastle-under-Lyme as their local town, to which there is good road access. It is also argued that the Commission's proposals should be rejected because they merge parts of the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme with Stone and areas to the south of Stoke-on-Trent, with which they have no real affinity.

AC124 Secondly, there is significant opposition to the Commission's proposals relating to Stoke-on-Trent. In this respect it is said that the proposals pay no regard to the history of Stoke-on-Trent and would divide communities within the city, in particular the town of Burslem. Again, history appears to play a significant role in determining modern identities and the community links that currently exist. The objections here refer to the history of the six pottery towns (Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke-upon-Trent, Fenton, and Longton) which it is said retain their identities to this day. The focus of concern relates to the Commission's separation of the

wards of Burslem North and Burslem South and the effect on local ties that exist in the 'mother town' of the Potteries. The representations also express fears about the efforts being made to protect heritage and promote economic growth in the area (e.g. through the Burslem Regeneration Company). It is also said that Tunstall and Burslem are linked, the former providing shopping facilities and the latter social facilities, and should be regarded as one entity.

AC125 We also mention two relatively minor objections. First, in relation to the area that we term 'north Staffordshire', there is a suggestion for a small amendment to the Commission's proposals put forward by Councillor Mark Holland, who appeared at the Stafford public hearing (Day 2, pp 4-7) and made a written representation (IP/023747). This is to 'swap' wards along the boundary of the proposed Newcastle-under-Lyme, and Kidsgrove and Tunstall constituencies so that the Bradwell and Porthill wards would fall in the former constituency and the Knutton and Silverdale, and Silverdale and Parkside wards would fall in the latter constituency. Councillor Holland said that this would better reflect local community identities. Secondly, in relation to the area that we term 'south Staffordshire' it is suggested that the Haywood and Hixon ward should remain within a Stafford constituency and that the ward of Hammerwich should remain within a Lichfield constituency. These minor changes are also put forward on the basis that local ties would be better respected.

AC126 We turn now to summarise those representations that are accompanied by counter-proposals.

AC127 As referred to earlier in our report, the Labour Party puts forward a region-wide set of counter-proposals. It supports the allocation of

11 constituencies to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. However, while recognising the need for major change to the constituency boundaries in north Staffordshire, it objects to the Commission's proposals on the basis that they are 'highly disruptive to the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme which has always formed the basis of a single parliamentary seat, and which is divided into two constituencies, one also including the town of Stone and the other Kidsgrove and the north of Stoke-on-Trent', and that they divide the Stoke-on-Trent wards of Burslem North and Burslem South thereby 'breaking ties in one of the main towns of the Potteries'. It supports the Commission's proposal for Stoke-on-Trent South, but puts forward proposals for two new Stoke-on-Trent constituencies which would include wards currently in the constituency of Staffordshire Moorlands, and for a new Leek and Stone constituency which would include wards to the south of Stoke-on-Trent currently in the Stone constituency. It justifies this approach in part by arguing that 'the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme has a stronger representational identity than the Staffordshire Moorlands District which has not been contained in a single constituency since 1997'. In south Staffordshire it promotes less change. The Labour Party's counter-proposals are summarised below.

AC128 The Labour Party proposes:

- a. the existing constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme plus the wards of Loggerheads and Whitmore, and Madeley (currently in the existing constituency of Stone);
- b. the existing Stoke-on-Trent North constituency less the wards of East Valley, and Norton and Bradeley, plus the wards of Newchapel, Brown Edge and Endon, Biddulph North, Biddulph South, Biddulph East, Biddulph West, and Biddulph Moor (currently in the existing constituency of Staffordshire Moorlands);
- c. the same constituency of Stoke-on-Trent Central as is being proposed by the Commission, but without the ward of Burslem South and with the wards of Bagnall and Stanley, Cellarhead, and Werrington (currently in the existing constituency of Staffordshire Moorlands);
- d. a new constituency named Leek and Stone, which would include the wards of the existing Stone constituency less the wards of Chartley, Church Eaton, Eccleshall, Gnosall and Woodseaves, Loggerheads and Whitmore, and Madeley, plus the wards that are currently in the existing constituency of Staffordshire Moorlands, excepting those wards to be ceded to Stoke-on-Trent North and Stoke-on-Trent Central;
- e. the same constituency of Stafford as being proposed by the Commission, but without the Chartley and Milwich wards (both currently in the existing constituency of Stone) and the ward of Wheaton Aston, Bishopswood and Lapley (currently in the existing constituency of Stafford);
- f. the same constituency of Lichfield as being proposed by the Commission but with the ward of Chartley;
- g. the existing constituencies of Burton, Cannock Chase (both unchanged), and Tamworth with the ward of Hammerwich (currently in the existing constituency of Lichfield); and
- h. the same constituency of South Staffordshire as being proposed by

the Commission, but with the ward of Wheaton Aston, Bishopwood and Lapley.

AC129 Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council objects to the Commission's proposals on the basis that they take no account of the identity of Newcastle as a cohesive community and would undermine existing local government boundaries and disrupt community ties. In particular, it deplores the proposal to put the wards of Holditch, Cross Heath, Porthill, and Wolstanton into separate constituencies and the proposals to include rural villages to the west of the borough in a new Kidsgrove and Tunstall constituency. The borough council asks the Commission to implement an alternative. Its counter-proposals are identical to the counter-proposals put forward by the Labour Party.

AC130 While Stoke-on-Trent City Council supports the Commission's proposal for Stoke-on-Trent South it objects to the Commission's proposals on the basis that they 'divide Burslem, the mother town of Stoke-on-Trent' and result in a constituency that has no cohesion and forces together a section of the north of the city with parts of the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme which ought to remain separate. It considers that the statutory rules can be addressed by including within Stoke-on-Trent 'areas that share strong economic and community ties with the city of Stoke-on-Trent which are found to the east and north of the city where there are shared community ties and identities through travel to work, shopping and leisure'. While this is not a defined counter-proposal it is generally consistent with the Labour Party's counter-proposal in so far as it relates to proposed constituencies for the north Staffordshire area.

AC131 Paul Farrelly, the MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, presented written representations

(IP/023830 and CR/005117) and appeared at the hearing in Stafford (Day 2, pp 41-46). While he supports the Labour Party's counter-proposals for the whole region he focuses his attention on north Staffordshire and in particular on the effects of the Commission's proposals on Newcastle-under-Lyme. He argues that the Commission's proposals fail to have proper regard to the statutory factors, in particular the breaking of local ties. He contends that they pay no regard to historic identity and that they would break close community ties within the urban core of Newcastle-under-Lyme and between the outlying villages and the urban area. His counter-proposal for Newcastle-under-Lyme and north Staffordshire is identical to that put forward by the Labour Party, although he suggests the name of 'Staffordshire Moorlands and Stone' in place of 'Leek and Stone' and the name of 'Stoke North and Biddulph' in place of 'Stoke-on-Trent North'.

AC132 Dr Tristram Hunt, the MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central, objects (IP/022467) to the Commission's proposals, stressing the separate communities of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent; he too supports the Labour Party's proposals in relation to this area.

AC133 Many other representations opposing the Commission's proposals offer alternative proposals that are consistent with (including those that overtly support) the Labour Party's counter-proposals for the north Staffordshire area. These representations include councillors (e.g. Councillor David Becket (Stafford public hearing, Day 2, pp 13-15), Councillor Gilly Reynolds (IP/003398), Councillor Gareth Snell (Stafford public hearing, Day 2, pp 8-13; IP/023478)) and people speaking on behalf of residents' associations or other organisations (e.g. Westlands, Seabridge and Clayton Residents' Association (IP/022861) and

Ashfields Residents' Association (IP/013601)), and individual members of the public.

AC134 The Liberal Democrats also object to the Commission's proposals for this sub-region.

AC135 In relation to north Staffordshire, the Liberal Democrats refer to 'cross party support' for the idea of producing a single Staffordshire Moorlands constituency, but are concerned that in order to achieve this result 'Newcastle-under-Lyme would cease to remain an independent constituency' and that in Stoke-on-Trent the Commission's proposals would split the historic town of Burslem between two constituencies. They refer to a proposed solution to take wards from the west of Staffordshire Moorlands and put them into a renamed Stoke-on-Trent North constituency (as per the Labour Party's counter-proposal), but here they acknowledge that Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and others 'argue very strongly for one constituency for their district'. In the light of this, the Liberal Democrats refer to what they call 'the impasse' of deciding whether or not the benefit of keeping the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme in one constituency is outweighed by 'the extensive disruptions to community affiliation' that this would cause elsewhere around the edge of Stoke-on-Trent and the prevention of the formation of a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency which is coterminous with the district. The Liberal Democrats finally decide to support counter-proposals put forward by Dr Nicky Davis (Stafford public hearing, Day 1, pp 85-92; IP/025156) but with two amendments (which we will describe when we refer to Dr Davis's counter-proposals below).

AC136 In relation to south Staffordshire, the Liberal Democrats support the Commission's proposals for Burton and Cannock Chase but object to the other

proposals, in particular the retention of the constituency of South Staffordshire. They consider that this constituency has 'no longitudinal road or rail links and combines many areas of dramatically different character and different historic, community and economic links which are either inward to communities next door in Stourbridge, Dudley or Wolverhampton or outward across the border into Shropshire or at the northern end, with Stafford or Cannock'. The Commission's proposals would, they argue, have an undesirable knock-on effect, particularly in Shropshire and the Borough of Sandwell. They therefore recommend as follows: that the ward of Huntington and Hatherton be added to their proposed Stafford constituency; that their proposed West Staffordshire and East Shropshire constituencies include the wards of Bilbrook; Brewood and Coven; Cheslyn Hay North and Saredon; Cheslyn Hay South; Codsall North; Codsall South; Essington; Featherstone and Shareshill; Great Wyrley Landywood; Great Wyrley Town; Wheaton Aston, Bishopswood and Lapley; and Gnosall and Woodseaves; that the Stourbridge constituency include the ward of Kinver; that the Wolverhampton West constituency include the wards of Perton Dippons, Perton East, and Perton Lakeside; that the Dudley North constituency include the wards of Wombourne North and Lower Penn, Wombourne South East and Wombourne South West; and that Dudley South include the ward of Himley and Swindon. Here the counter-proposals include constituencies that cross county boundaries (and the sub-regional boundaries adopted by the Commission) and the division of the District of South Staffordshire between seven constituencies (Bridgnorth and Wellington, Dudley North, Dudley South, Stafford, Stourbridge, West Staffordshire and East Shropshire, and Wolverhampton West), resulting in the significant reconfiguration of the South

Staffordshire constituency. Elsewhere in south Staffordshire the Liberal Democrats: agree with the Commission's proposals to retain Cannock Chase unchanged; propose a Lichfield constituency that is the same as that put forward by the Labour Party with the exception of the three wards of Hammerwich, Shenstone, and Stonnall, which the Labour Party includes in its proposed Tamworth constituency, and the Haywood and Hixon, and Chartley wards, which the Liberal Democrats include in their proposed Stafford constituency; propose a Tamworth constituency which includes four wards from the Borough of North Warwickshire (Newton Regis and Warton, Polesworth East, Polesworth West, and Dordon); and propose a Sutton Coldfield constituency which includes the existing Tamworth constituency ward of Little Aston. Here again, the Liberal Democrats' counter-proposals involve constituencies that cross county and the Commission's sub-regional boundaries.

AC137 Councillor David Murray (Stafford public hearing, Day 1, pp 17-21) submitted representations in support of the Liberal Democrats' counter-proposals in so far as they relate to south Staffordshire (IP/023710). His perspective is that there is strong support for the town of Telford in Shropshire to be a single constituency; that the constituency of South Staffordshire should be removed; and that the wards within the District of South Staffordshire should be used to make up deficiencies in numbers for his proposed constituencies to the west in Shropshire, to the east in the urban area of Wolverhampton and to the north in Staffordshire. In these respects his counter-proposals are the same as those put forward by the Liberal Democrats, in particular in respect of the proposals for the District of South Staffordshire.

AC138 Henry Parocki, a resident of Wolverhampton, also presented counter-proposals (IP/008834 and IP/019672) which include new constituencies that cross county boundaries (and the boundaries between the sub-regions adopted by the Commission). In north Staffordshire Mr Parocki's configuration is similar to, but not the same as, that of the Labour Party. He proposes that the existing Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency be enlarged, by including the wards of Talke and Madeley. He proposes the creation of a Stoke-on-Trent North constituency that also includes wards from the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Biddulph area from the District of Staffordshire Moorlands. He also proposes a Stoke-on-Trent Central constituency that includes two wards, Werrington and Cellarhead, from the District of Staffordshire Moorlands. As a consequence, he proposes a Leek and Stone constituency (as the Labour Party does). To the south of the sub-region Mr Parocki transfers wards from the District of South Staffordshire to his cross-county boundary constituencies of Tettenhall and Brierley Hill.

AC139 Dr Davis, a resident of Trentham in Stoke-on-Trent, appeared at the Stafford hearing and also submitted representations in objection to the Commission's proposals for north Staffordshire (IP/025156). Her position can be summarised as follows:

- a. She is 'strongly in favour' of the Commission's proposals to make the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency coterminous with the district boundary by including the five wards currently within the constituency of Stone and by excluding the ward of Newchapel.

- b. In relation to Newcastle-under-Lyme, she objects to the Commission's proposals because they would split the town nearly equally in two and would combine the wards around the town centre with Stone and southern rural areas. In her original counter-proposal she proposed a revised Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency to include the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme and most of the existing wards in Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough in one constituency, but to exclude the westerly wards of Loggerheads and Whitmore, and Madeley, as well as the wards of Seabridge and Clayton to the south of the urban area (which would join her proposed, newly formed West Staffordshire constituency). Here we note the two amendments that the Liberal Democrats put forward in their support of Dr Davis's original counter-proposals. First, the Liberal Democrats suggest that the wards of Keele and Clayton be exchanged so that the former would fall within Dr Davis's West Staffordshire constituency and the latter in her revised Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency. Secondly, it is suggested that the name of Stone be retained rather than West Staffordshire. In Dr Davis's revised counter-proposals, which she submitted after the public hearing, she proposes that the wards of Audley and Bignall End, and Halmerend also join the newly formed West Staffordshire constituency and that the wards of Seabridge and Clayton remain in her (revised) Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency. This, she says, is better because 'it concentrates the more urban wards largely in Newcastle-under-Lyme and the more rural wards largely in West Staffordshire'.
- c. In relation to the City of Stoke-on-Trent, she objects to the Commission's proposals, in particular because they split Stoke and the town of Burslem, as well as exclude Burslem North and Tunstall from the proposed city constituencies. On the basis of the six historic towns that formed the City of Stoke-on-Trent and which she says continue to have strong identities, she proposes a Stoke-on-Trent North constituency (rather than Stoke-on-Trent Central) that includes the areas of Burslem and Tunstall, and a Stoke-on-Trent South constituency that includes the areas of Hanley, Stoke, Fenton, and Longton. Her proposal would leave the four wards of Trentham and Hanford, Blurton, Meir Park and Sandon, and Weston and Meir North to the south of the city area to be joined with the new West Staffordshire constituency to the south (which includes parts of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough, Stafford Borough, and Stoke-on-Trent City).
- d. Elsewhere in the sub-region Dr Davis agrees with the Commission's proposals to retain unchanged the existing constituencies of Cannock Chase and Burton. She puts forward what she calls minor amendments to the other proposed constituencies. She proposes that the ward of Hammerwich be within Lichfield rather than in Tamworth, because this would avoid splitting the town of Burntwood, and that Whittington should be within Tamworth rather than in Lichfield, placing it with other rural wards around Tamworth. Towards the south-west of the sub-region, Dr Davis's proposals are again similar to those of the Commission, but she would prefer to put the ward of Wheaton Aston, Bishopswood and Lapley

into the constituency of South Staffordshire because it is in South Staffordshire District.

- e. Dr Davis also recommends that if there are two Stoke-on-Trent constituencies they should be called Stoke-on-Trent North and Stoke-on-Trent South (rather than one called Stoke-on-Trent Central), that the Burton constituency be called East Staffordshire (to reflect the local authority area), and that her proposed constituency to the south of Newcastle-under-Lyme be called West Staffordshire (because it is opposite her proposed East Staffordshire constituency).

AC140 Mr Stephen Whittaker, a resident of Urmston in Manchester, submitted counter-proposals that include this sub-region (IP/025396 and CR/003585). He supports the allocation of 11 constituencies to the County of Staffordshire including Stoke-on-Trent. In relation to north Staffordshire he considers that '[t]here is a choice, unfortunately ... whether to make the Staffordshire Moorlands seat coterminous with the district, or to expand the current Newcastle-under-Lyme seat to include the Loggerheads and Whitmore, and Madeley wards of Newcastle-under-Lyme'. In this respect he supports the Commission's proposal to make the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency coterminous with the district's boundaries. However, like others, he does not support the Commission's proposal to divide the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme into two new constituencies and puts forward a counter-proposal that is very similar to the revised counter-proposal put forward by Dr Davis. His proposal differs in that he includes the ward of Audley and Bignall End in, and excludes the Newchapel ward from, his proposed Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency (putting the Newchapel ward into his proposed

Stoke-on-Trent Burslem); he also recommends the names of Stoke-on-Trent Burslem and Stoke-on-Trent Hanley (to reflect the two largest of the 'Six Towns' of Stoke-on-Trent). A further difference between the two counter-proposals is that Mr Whittaker proposes that the ward of Keele be included in his West Staffordshire constituency, whereas Dr Davis proposes that it be included in her proposed Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency.

AC141 In relation to south Staffordshire he supports the Commission's proposals to retain the constituencies of Cannock Chase, Burton, and South Staffordshire, as well as the Commission's proposed Stafford constituency. He supports the Commission's proposals for the Lichfield and Tamworth constituencies, but agrees with the idea of swapping the wards of Hammerwich and Whittington.

AC142 Mr Adrian Bailey (Birmingham public hearing, Day 1, pp 45-49 - at which he handed in a document describing his counter-proposals), who lives in Birmingham, said that the biggest question in the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent area is whether to split Newcastle-under-Lyme. His counter-proposals for the area comprise:

- a. a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency coterminous with the district boundary by including the five wards currently within the constituency of Stone and by excluding the Newchapel ward;
- b. the existing Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency with the addition of the wards of Madeley, and Loggerheads and Whitmore (as the Labour Party proposes);
- c. the existing constituency of Stoke-on-Trent North with the addition of the Newchapel ward;

- d. the existing constituency of Stoke-on-Trent Central minus the wards of Hartshill and Penkhull, and Stoke and Trent Vale, with the addition of the three wards of Fenton, Longton North, and Longton South;
- e. a new constituency of Stoke-on-Trent South and Stone to include the Stoke-on-Trent wards of Hartshill and Penkhull, and Stoke and Trent Vale, plus the District of Stafford wards of Barlaston and Oulton, Fulford, St Michael's, Stonefield and Christchurch, and Walton;
- f. a Stafford constituency as proposed by the Commission but including the ward of Swynnerton;
- g. a South Staffordshire constituency as proposed by the Commission but including the ward of Wheaton Aston, Bishopswood and Lapley; and
- h. the Commission's proposed constituencies for Cannock Chase, Burton, Lichfield, and Tamworth.

AC143 Finally, we note that other counter-proposals were put forward, but we considered that these were not well enough defined or too limited in scope to merit further reference here.

Conclusions for north Staffordshire

AC144 The Commission's proposals for the constituencies in north Staffordshire were the subject of considerable debate at the hearings and in the representations that we received. Indeed, the vast majority of the many hundreds of representations relating to this sub-region were to do with these proposed changes and the counter-proposals to them. It is clear that this is an area where community identities are strong and where feelings can run high, in

particular in the local authority areas of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent, and Staffordshire Moorlands.

AC145 Having regard to the Commission's proposals and the representations that we have received there are in our view three 'stand-out', inter-related issues, and these have influenced our assessment:

- a. Whether or not to create a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency that is coterminous with the District of Staffordshire Moorlands.
- b. How to configure the constituencies for Stoke-on-Trent.
- c. How to configure the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency.

AC146 We can readily agree that, having regard to the statutory factors, there is advantage in creating a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency that contains the whole of the District of Staffordshire Moorlands and no wards from any other district. There is a consensus among those who promote counter-proposals that the wards around Cheadle (Forsbrook, Checkley, Cheadle West, Cheadle South East, and Cheadle North East) should be joined into the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency. The southern boundary of the constituency would then be coterminous with its district boundaries and there would be no crossing of district boundaries. To the north, the Newchapel ward would be excluded, making the boundary here also coterminous with the district boundary. We consider that it is also a positive feature of the Commission's proposals that elsewhere it retains the existing boundaries between the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency and the Stoke-on-Trent constituencies, and in so doing follows the established local government boundary

that separates the city from the district (which for some of its length runs broadly north to south in a valley). In our view, this element of the Commission's proposals (i.e. when considered alone) scores highly when account is taken of the statutory factors. We are not surprised that there is significant support for this element from residents in the District of Staffordshire Moorlands and others.

AC147 The City of Stoke-on-Trent is too small to include three whole constituencies and it is clear that the boundaries here will have to undergo significant change. However, that is not to say that we agree with the initial proposals to include the Burslem North and Burslem South wards in different constituencies, or that the Commission's proposed configuration of the Stoke-on-Trent constituencies is the most favourable in terms of the statutory factors. Moreover, whether or not it is necessary or desirable to reform the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency and create a new Kidsgrove and Tunstall constituency as proposed by the Commission is also a matter for debate. Indeed, the Commission's proposals for Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent are highly contentious, as we have already noted. In particular, many objectors drew attention to what they see as two serious flaws in relation to these elements of the initial proposals: the splitting of the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme between two constituencies; and the inclusion of the Stoke-on-Trent wards of Burslem North and Burslem South in different constituencies. These two objections are the most consistently held and we now consider them in turn.

AC148 Under the Commission's proposals, partly because the electorate of the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme is too large to allow for one constituency only and partly as result of its proposal for a Staffordshire Moorlands

constituency that contains the whole of the district, the existing constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme would be significantly reconfigured, with various wards being divided from each other by the proposed new boundary. We are concerned about this element of the initial proposals for the following reasons, all of which are reflected in the many representations that we received.

AC149 The town of Newcastle-under-Lyme has a long history, having been given its Royal Charter as long ago as 1173. We accept that this long history has helped forge a close relationship between wards in the core urban area around the historic town. Despite its proximity to Stoke-on-Trent its industrial past has been dominated by coal mining rather than pottery production and, we are told, Newcastle-under-Lyme has fought hard, and successfully, to maintain its own identity separate from the City of Stoke-on-Trent.

AC150 Bearing in mind the above and taking into account the representations that we received, we consider that the Commission's proposed changes in constituencies would break local ties. In particular, the proposed new boundary would divide between constituencies the wards of Bradwell and Porthill, and Wolstanton and May Bank. We accept the arguments that these wards are linked in many respects, by history as well as in topographical terms, the residents sharing common facilities such as religious groups, sports clubs, and schools. We also accept that there are ties, which as a result of the Commission's proposals would be broken, between the wards of Chesterton and Holditch and the wards of Silverdale and Parkside, Knutton and Silverdale, and Cross Heath. We consider that the breaking of community ties in the urban area of Newcastle-under-Lyme is a clear disadvantage of the Commission's initial proposals. We also

accept that many residents in the wards of Audley and Bignall End, and Halmerend look to Newcastle-under-Lyme as their local town, as do residents in the wards of Madeley, and Loggerheads and Whitmore, although beyond the M6 and further afield in the rural area the question of local ties is likely to be more complex.

AC151 We are also concerned about the breaking of local ties in Stoke-on-Trent. Here too we have had regard to local history in considering the question of whether or not the Commission's proposals would break community ties. Stoke-on-Trent is known as the home of the pottery industry and, although the economy has diversified in recent years, its proud history derives in large part from this. The original town of Stoke became amalgamated early in the 20th century with the five towns of Burslem, Tunstall, Hanley, Longton, and Fenton to become a county borough, and shortly thereafter it was given city status. The 'Six Towns' of the City of Stoke-on-Trent value their historic identities, none more so it seems than Burslem - the 'mother town' of the Potteries. We accept that the Commission's proposals would break community ties that evidently exist between the two Burslem wards. We consider that the inclusion of the two wards in different constituencies would be undesirable.

AC152 Having considered these two important objections to the Commission's proposals we mention two other arguments that were made. First, it was argued that areas in the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme have nothing in common with the area around Stone and to the south of Stoke-on-Trent. Secondly, it was argued that there is no real physical connectivity between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stone and Blythe Bridge. There are main roads running broadly north to south and to

the west of Stoke-on-Trent, but it is pointed out that the A34 passes through the urban area of Stoke-on-Trent. Having regard to the statutory factors and the *Guide*, these arguments do not persuade us to reject a Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency that contains wards to the south of the city, nor do we consider that such a constituency would be too large or that the road connections are inadequate.

AC153 We now review the counter-proposals in turn, considering their merits in the context of the three issues that we have identified and having regard to the statutory factors. We then make our conclusions as to whether and to what extent any revisions should be made to the Commission's proposals.

AC154 The Labour Party's counter-proposals avoid the breaking of local ties in Newcastle-under-Lyme; in particular they avoid the breaking of ties in the core urban area. This is a positive feature of these counter-proposals.

AC155 They also avoid the division of the Burslem wards between constituencies in Stoke-on-Trent and this too, we consider, is a positive feature of these proposals.

AC156 However, the Labour Party's counter-proposals have negative features too. They involve changes to existing constituency boundaries and involve constituencies that cross the city boundary to the north/north-east and the east. The counter-proposals would also prevent the creation of a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency that contains the whole of the district (an objective which was strongly supported by many). There was significant opposition to the counter-proposals in these respects, in particular from the residents in the Staffordshire Moorlands wards in the Biddulph area and in the Brown Edge and Endon, Bagnall and Stanley, Werrington, and Cellarhead wards.

AC157 Many people in the Biddulph area carry out shopping and work-related trips to Stoke-on-Trent (using the A527). However, we understand that Biddulph, which is a sizeable town, has its own valued identity, as reflected in the main settlement's modern renown as the Garden Town of Staffordshire. Moreover, it appears that the Biddulph area looks in more than one direction, including to Congleton as well as Leek, which are both close by. Shopping and employment links with other parts of Staffordshire Moorlands do exist and we are told that there are others in terms of leisure trips, education, health, and essential services.

AC158 Residents in the wards of Brown Edge and Endon, Bagnall and Stanley, Werrington, and Cellarhead have good access to Stoke-on-Trent and no doubt many visit the city for a variety of reasons. However, we are satisfied that there are links with other parts of Staffordshire Moorlands, though they were not well defined in the representations. There are shopping and other facilities in Leek and Cheadle, towns which are not far away. We are also told, and having regard to the nature of the area and its rural character we accept, that there are community and business links across the towns and villages within the Staffordshire Moorlands area.

AC159 The links between these wards and the city are a natural consequence of the relationship between a rural area and a nearby large town or city. It does not follow from this, however, that there are no local ties with other parts of Staffordshire Moorlands (and we do not understand this to be suggested by those supporting the Labour Party's counter-proposals). The representations made in response to the counter-proposals, including petitions and proforma letters, express a strong determination that these wards should remain part of the Staffordshire Moorlands

constituency. This evidence reflects not only the pride of those living in the area and the shared common values of living in a predominantly rural area but also a determination to remain part of what is felt to be a very strong community in Staffordshire Moorlands. We conclude, having regard to the representations, that the Labour Party's counter-proposals would have the negative effect of disrupting local ties in this area.

AC160 Finally, we note that the Labour Party's counter-proposals accord with the Commission's initial proposals in so far as they include the wards around Cheadle in the same constituency with Staffordshire Moorlands. However, the Labour Party's proposed constituency of Leek and Stone would extend further to the west and cross the local government boundary with Stafford Borough Council. It was said by Paul Farrelly MP that the Commission's proposed Staffordshire Moorlands western boundary would 'split' Blythe Bridge between constituencies, 'increasing the confusion among the electorate'. However, it seems to us that fixing the constituency boundary so that it is consistent with the local government boundary would not increase any confusion for residents of Blythe Bridge, and might even reduce it.

AC161 Mr Parocki's counter-proposals for north Staffordshire are similar to those of the Labour Party and are positive in so far as they also avoid the splitting of Newcastle-under-Lyme. However, they rearrange the boundaries in the City of Stoke-on-Trent so that the town of Burslem is divided between a proposed Stoke-on-Trent North constituency and a proposed Stoke-on-Trent South constituency. His counter-proposals also cross the city's boundaries with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and involve the transfer of wards from Staffordshire Moorlands into

wards in Stoke-on-Trent (albeit one fewer ward is moved).

AC162 The counter-proposals for north Staffordshire put forward by Dr Davis, and adopted in part by the Liberal Democrats, avoid splitting the urban area of Newcastle-under-Lyme, where there are local ties. She excludes the wards of Audley and Bignall End, and Halmerend, and would break some local ties here with the urban wards of Seabridge and Clayton being included in her Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency. In this respect we prefer this revised proposal to both her original proposal and the amendments suggested by the Liberal Democrats. On the other hand, the addition of the Stoke-on-Trent wards of Talke, Butt Lane, Ravenscliffe, and Kidsgrove in her counter-proposals means that the borough boundaries are followed to the north of Stoke-on-Trent. Her arrangement of constituencies in Stoke-on-Trent protects the famous 'Six Towns of Stoke' and in particular avoids the separation of the Burslem wards (North and South) between constituencies. Another positive feature of her counter-proposals is that they avoid crossing boundaries and breaking ties to the east of the city and are able to ensure that a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency becomes coterminous with local government boundaries. She proposes a new boundary to the south of Stoke-on-Trent within which a number of wards would join her proposed constituency of West Staffordshire to the south. Dr Davis's evidence, based on her local knowledge, was that her configuration would be the best available for the city and that her new boundary to the south would exclude what she called peripheral areas such as Trentham, which she considered should join with villages to the south (such as Barlaston) as part of her new West Staffordshire constituency. This would result in a new constituency that runs from Fulford in the east

to Audley in the north-east (which, in line with what we have said before, we consider would not give rise to significant difficulties in terms of connectivity or accessibility).

AC163 Mr Whittaker's counter-proposals are similar to those of Dr Davis. They do not include the Staffordshire Moorlands wards in new Stoke-on-Trent constituencies and allow for a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency that contains the whole district. They also avoid splitting the urban area of Newcastle-under-Lyme, although we consider not as well as Dr Davis's counter-proposals because the Keele ward is excluded. They also differ in relation to Stoke-on-Trent because Mr Whittaker's proposed constituency of Stoke-on-Trent Burslem includes the ward of Newchapel, thereby crossing the city boundary and imposing a new boundary between Newchapel and the ward of Kidsgrove.

AC164 Mr Bailey's counter-proposals also include a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency that includes the whole district. They also avoid splitting the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme and add in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough wards of Madeley, and Loggerheads and Whitmore. His counter-proposals for the City of Stoke-on-Trent also avoid dividing the Burslem wards between constituencies and do not involve the crossing of the boundaries between the city and Staffordshire Moorlands District. However, they do include constituencies that cross the city boundaries in both the north and the south (with only one whole constituency in the city). Moreover, while he retains the existing boundary between Stoke-on-Trent North and Stoke-on-Trent Central, he proposes a new boundary between his Stoke East constituency and his Stoke South and Stone constituency. This proposed arrangement to the south of the city is different from that promoted by Dr Davis in that the wards excluded to join a

constituency to the south of the city include the wards of Hartshill and Penkhull, and Stoke and Trent Vale.

AC165 It can readily be appreciated from what we have said above that the task before us is a difficult one. What must be abundantly clear is that there is no easy or perfect solution to the problems that were presented to us. We did not expect to find an ideal solution and, in the light of the many conflicting factors, became reconciled to finding the least bad option. However, notwithstanding this, we are satisfied that the recommendation that we make is the best in the circumstances.

AC166 We were most attracted to the counter-proposals presented by Dr Davis and Mr Bailey. Both sets of counter-proposals impressed us in relation to the three issues which we identified, because they included a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency that contains the whole of the district with no other wards from other constituencies, but not at the expense of splitting the town or urban area of Newcastle-under-Lyme or dividing the town of Burslem between constituencies. Mr Bailey's counter-proposals have much to recommend them having regard to the statutory factors, but they involve two cross-local authority boundary constituencies in Stoke-on-Trent. We are also concerned about the effect of his proposed arrangement within the city in relation to the breaking of local ties within Stoke-on-Trent, in particular around the town of Stoke, one of the Six Towns of Stoke-on-Trent, on which matter we received insufficient evidence. Dr Davis's counter-proposals also have considerable merit in terms of the statutory factors and they involve only one constituency that crosses the city boundary and include two whole constituencies within the city boundary. We are also satisfied that they provide a

suitable configuration in relation to wards within the city.

AC167 Our conclusion is that the Commission's proposals should be rejected in favour of Dr Davis's counter-proposals, which in overall terms strike the best balance between the statutory factors.

AC168 We also accept Dr Davis's recommendation that if there are two Stoke-on-Trent constituencies they should be called Stoke-on-Trent North and Stoke-on-Trent South (rather than one called Stoke-on-Trent Central). This is logical. We also accept that her proposed constituency to the west and south of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent should be called West Staffordshire. While we do not accept Dr Davis's recommendation that the proposed Burton constituency should be called East Staffordshire (as we indicate below), this new name has some logic for this newly formed constituency and would not conflict with names used for other constituencies.

Conclusions for south Staffordshire

AC169 As we have noted, there were relatively few objections made to the Commission's proposals for the area that we have termed south Staffordshire and we can deal with the objections and counter-proposals more briefly.

The Stafford constituency

AC170 Our conclusion here is that the Commission's proposal for a Stafford constituency should in large part be commended. However, in the light of the representations and counter-proposals relating to specific wards we make the following points.

AC171 First, the existing Stone constituency ward of Milwich should be included within the Stafford constituency. The Labour Party's

counter-proposal differs from the Commission's proposal by excluding from its proposed Stafford constituency the ward of Milwich, which would be included in its proposed constituency of Leek and Stone. We have already rejected the Labour Party's counter-proposal for Leek and Stone and we note that all other counter-proposals, including that of Mr Bailey, include the Milwich ward in a new Stafford constituency. Having regard to our conclusions for north Staffordshire, and taking into account all the representations, we consider that this ward should be included within the Stafford constituency. In so doing the Stafford constituency would extend to become coterminous with the boundary between Stafford Borough Council and East Staffordshire Borough Council.

AC172 Secondly, the existing Stone constituency ward of Chartley should also be included in the Stafford constituency. The Labour Party's counter-proposals differ from the Commission's proposals by excluding from the Stafford constituency the ward of Chartley, which would be included in its proposed Lichfield constituency. All the other counter-proposals that we have considered include the Chartley ward in a Stafford constituency. Taking into account the representations, we consider that the Chartley ward should remain in a Stafford constituency, and in so doing so its boundary would extend to become coterminous with the local authority boundary.

AC173 Thirdly, the existing Stafford constituency ward of Haywood and Hixon should be included in the Lichfield constituency, as proposed by the Commission. While there is some objection to the proposal to move Haywood and Hixon from a Stafford constituency to a Lichfield constituency, there are no counter-proposals that demonstrated to us an acceptable configuration that allows the

ward to remain within a Stafford constituency. We accept that some local ties with Stafford would be broken but conclude nonetheless that this change is necessary in order to reach an acceptable configuration of constituencies. The Liberal Democrats' counter-proposals include this ward in a Stafford constituency, but we were not persuaded that this change should be made. We note that retaining the ward would mean that the Stafford constituency to the east would become coterminous with the local authority boundary, but are concerned that this proposal was driven more by the knock-on effect from other elements of their counter-proposals than by any local factor. This is but one element of a complex set of changes that the Liberal Democrats put forward. We consider that these changes would give rise to too much disruption overall.

AC174 Fourthly, the existing Stafford constituency ward of Wheaton Aston, Bishopswood and Lapley should be included in the South Staffordshire constituency. All the counter-proposals include this ward in the South Staffordshire constituency, and we agree that this change to existing boundaries is justified, noting that the transfer would extend the South Staffordshire constituency so that it would then be coterminous for a length at least with the district's boundary.

The Lichfield and Tamworth constituencies

AC175 The Commission proposed minor amendments to the existing constituencies.

AC176 As we have already indicated, we consider that the ward of Haywood and Hixon should be included in the Lichfield constituency.

AC177 There were a number of representations made in relation to the Commission's proposal

to include the ward of Hammerwich in the Tamworth constituency from the existing Lichfield constituency. While some suggest that the inclusion is a logical one, others suggest that the Hammerwich ward should remain in the Lichfield constituency and that the Whittington ward should be included in the Tamworth constituency from the existing Lichfield constituency. On the basis of the material we received we were not persuaded that this alternative was better in terms of the statutory factors.

AC178 The Conservative Party suggests that the Tamworth constituency be renamed Tamworth and South East Staffordshire, but we were not persuaded to recommend this (having regard to the guidance on naming constituencies in the *Guide*).

The constituencies of Burton and Cannock Chase

AC179 There was widespread support for the Commission's proposals to retain the constituencies of Burton and Cannock Chase, and none of the counter-proposals put forward alternatives to them. Our recommendation is that these constituencies should remain unchanged. We do not accept Dr Davis's recommendation that the Burton constituency be renamed East Staffordshire. We take into account the guidance on naming constituencies in the *Guide*, and prefer that it retain its name.

The South Staffordshire constituency

AC180 The Commission proposed that the constituency remain unchanged and there was considerable support for this too. That having been said, and as we have already stated, we recommend that the ward of Wheaton Aston, Bishopswood and Lapley be included in the South Staffordshire constituency.

AC181 The Liberal Democrats' counter-proposals (which in this respect Mr Murray adopted) include the significant reconfiguration of the South Staffordshire constituency. The complaint here is that the retention of the South Staffordshire constituency creates problems in Shropshire and the Black Country (in particular the Borough of Sandwell). As is clear from the conclusions reached in our report, we do not accept that there are problems that cannot be resolved without crossing the county boundaries here. We do not consider there to be any justification for such significant alteration to existing constituencies and their relationship with local government boundaries. In reaching our conclusions we have had regard to the support for the retention of existing boundaries in this area.

AC182 For similar reasons we reject the counter-proposals for this constituency put forward by Mr Parocki.

Warwickshire and the West Midlands sub-region

Introduction

AC183 This area contains:

- the area of the former West Midlands Metropolitan County Council, which covers the cities of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton and the metropolitan boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, and Walsall; plus
- the County of Warwickshire.

AC184 The West Midlands metropolitan county area can be described as a number of interwoven and overlapping communities. Given the dense population and the spread of urban areas, the boundaries which individual residents or groups of residents may recognise