

The Boundary Committee for England

Final recommendations

Recommendations for unitary local government in Cumbria and Lancashire



Final recommendations for unitary local government in Cumbria and Lancashire

May 2004

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Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: publications@boundarycommittee.org.uk

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Foreword

In this report we set out our final recommendations for unitary patterns of local government in the two-tier areas of Cumbria and Lancashire.

In reaching conclusions on our final recommendations, the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003 required us to assume the existence of elected regional assemblies and that the functions of local authorities will remain unchanged. Unlike the structural reviews of the 1990s, 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 has been guided by the Local Government Act 1992 and by the *Policy and Procedure Guidance* issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), which raised issues relating to performance, capacity, community leadership and representation, among others.

This context, and the requirement to assume the existence of an elected regional assembly in each of the three regions under review, has pointed towards the creation of larger rather than smaller unitary local authorities. The individual authorities need to be large enough to influence thinking in the region and also to provide the full range of local government services across a large geographical area, sometimes sparsely populated and based in many small local communities. The ODPM guidance also recognises the importance of effective mechanisms for accountability and the community leadership role.

We consider it is important to comment on the impact unitary structures, if implemented, might have on representation and community leadership at the local level. Some stakeholders have recognised the opportunity the review presents to create a new structure of local governance with the potential to bring about increased involvement of local communities at the grass roots level through, for example, decision-making devolved to local areas and links with parish and town councils. This has led to some welcome innovative thinking in some submissions, building upon existing good practice. The potential exists, from this review and in the context of elected regional assemblies, for a new shape to local government across what are currently two-tier areas, marrying together strategic scope and capacity with well-grounded responsiveness to diverse local communities.

Our draft recommendations were options for consultation. We were seeking to refine our proposals and we posed a number of questions, primarily to local authorities. For the larger unitary authority options we asked how they might maintain or enhance a strategic focus while at the same time ensuring local involvement to reflect and represent local communities, and develop partnerships with others such as local councils and other community groups. For options based on amalgamations of districts the issue was primarily how to deliver large-scale services such as education and social care effectively, and the potential to develop strategic capacity in relation to these services.

It is not part of our task to take a view on the merits or otherwise of unitary local government outside the context of this review. Nevertheless, we have become aware during this review that there is an appetite for change among most two-tier local authorities in the three regions under review, with or without the establishment of elected regional assemblies. There is a strong view that the context within which local government now operates, for example the focus on community leadership, cross-cutting issues and quality service delivery, along with the culture of inspection and 'league tables', points to a move towards a structure of unitary authorities with sufficient capacity and resources to fulfil their intended role.

Following the publication of our draft recommendations, we undertook consultation with local stakeholders. We also commissioned further opinion research by MORI in each review area to gauge local people's views. One of the consistent messages arising from this research is that people value the quality of local government services above other criteria, including the cost of services. Reasons given for the different preferences among the options we put forward reflect the balance that needs to be struck between economies of scale/efficiency and community engagement.

We are very grateful for the co-operation we have received during the review from the elected members and staff of councils in the affected areas, other stakeholders and the many others who contacted us with their views.

Ultimately the public will vote on the new structures they see as most appropriate for their area in referendums to be held in the near future. In the event that the result of referendums is to introduce elected regional assemblies, The Boundary Committee's intention will be to conduct, as a matter of priority, electoral reviews in all new or continuing authorities, or any others materially affected by the outcome of the review.

Pamela Gordon
Chair, The Boundary Committee for England

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'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 of final recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire

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 East, North West and Yorkshire & the Humber.

We began the review of local government structures in Cumbria and Lancashire on 17 June 2003.

This report sets out our final recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire. It summarises the results of the consultation we undertook on our draft proposals, and makes proposals for two options for patterns of unitary authorities in Cumbria and Lancashire.

Our proposals for patterns of wholly unitary authorities are set out in chapter 6 of this report and are indicated on the maps in Appendix A. They are:

In Cumbria:

- **Option A: a single unitary authority comprising the whole of the Cumbria county area;**
- **Option B: two unitary authorities based on combinations of existing districts in Cumbria and Lancaster City in Lancashire (Allerdale, Copeland, Carlisle City and Eden; and Barrow-in-Furness, South Lakeland and Lancaster City).**

In Lancashire:

- **Option A: a single unitary authority based on the majority of the Lancashire county area;**
- **Option B: three new unitary authorities for central, eastern and northern Lancashire (incorporating Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland districts in Cumbria) and the transfer of the remaining areas in Lancashire to the existing Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Sefton and Wigan authorities.**

This report should be read in conjunction with our *Local government review overview report* (henceforth 'the overview report'), which was published in December 2003 concurrently with our draft recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire. Our overview report explained the general approach we took in developing the draft recommendations. Copies can be downloaded from our website or by contacting us.

The ODPM will now consider the recommendations contained within this report as part of its preparations for referendums on elected regional assemblies and local government change. It is understood that the Government will not take final decisions on the local government options for a period of six weeks from the date of this report (until 6 July 2004) during which time you may write to the Deputy Prime Minister with any comments.

The Deputy Prime Minister can be contacted at the following address:

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Zone 5/B1
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

1 Background to the local government review

1 On 16 June 2003, The Boundary Committee for England was 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 six two-tier county areas of the North East, North West and Yorkshire & the Humber regions. Our task was to report to the Deputy Prime Minister by 25 May 2004 with at least two options for wholly unitary patterns of local government in each two-tier county area.

2 This report contains our final recommendations for options for structural change in Cumbria and Lancashire. Subject to Ministers' decisions on our final recommendations, electors in the two-tier areas of Cumbria and Lancashire will be asked to vote on their preferred pattern for unitary government at the same time as the referendum on elected regional assemblies. Our recommendations inform electors about the possible unitary structures of local government that could be implemented in the event of a 'yes' vote in the referendum on elected regional assemblies.

3 In seeking to recommend at least two options for unitary local government in each two-tier county under review, we have also been able to consider and make proposals for changes to the boundaries of existing single-tier authorities adjoining two-tier areas. However, this has only been with a view to expanding the areas of the single-tier authorities, by absorbing part or all of an existing two-tier authority area. In Lancashire we are putting forward final recommendations which impact on neighbouring single-tier authorities. Additionally, our final recommendations include a proposal which would create a unitary authority that crosses the boundary between Cumbria and Lancashire.

4 We cannot review the boundaries of regions as part of these local government reviews, nor can we recommend the retention of the existing two-tier local government structure.

5 In carrying out these reviews, we have acted in accordance with:

- Section 14(8) of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003, i.e. 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.

6 As part of a local government review the Committee may make recommendations for:

- the abolition of a local authority whose functions have been transferred to another authority;
- the creation of new local government areas (i.e. a district or a county);
- alterations to local government areas;
- any statutory 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.

7 Details of the legislation under which we work are set out in the ODPM's 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*, produced at the start of the present review process in June 2003, also provided information about our approach to the reviews. Copies of the guidance are available through our website (www.boundarycommittee.org.uk) or by contacting us at the address at the back of this report.

8 The review was in four stages (see Table 1).

Table 1: The stages of the review

| Stage | Dates | Description |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Stage One | 17 June 2003 – 8 September 2003 | Commencement of review and submission of proposals for wholly unitary patterns of local authorities. |
| Stage Two | 9 September 2003 – 30 November 2003 | The Committee considers proposals, determines draft recommendations and prepares draft recommendations report. |
| Stage Three | 1 December 2003 – 23 February 2004 | The Committee publishes draft recommendations report and invites representations. |
| Stage Four | 24 February 2004 – 25 May 2004 | The Committee considers representations, reaches conclusions on final recommendations and submits a final report to the Deputy Prime Minister. |

9 Stage One began on 17 June 2003 when we wrote to the county and district councils in Cumbria and Lancashire inviting proposals for unitary patterns of local government. We also notified unitary and metropolitan authorities and other key stakeholders in and adjoining the counties, including Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside Police and Fire & Rescue Authorities, parish and town councils and the Members of Parliament with constituencies in Cumbria, Lancashire and the adjoining single-tier areas. 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.

10 We also commissioned public opinion research, carried out by MORI, in each of the districts in Cumbria and Lancashire. This comprised around 300 face-to-face interviews and one focus group per district. The results of this research were published on 17 October 2003 and are available from our website, as well as from MORI's website (www.mori.com).

11 At Stage Two we considered all the submissions received during Stage One, along with the public opinion research analysis and financial information, and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 1 December 2003 and ended on 23 February 2004. This stage involved publishing our draft recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire and public consultation on them. We placed a notice in the local press advising of the publication of our draft recommendations and issued a press release.

13 As part of the consultation exercise, we decided to issue an information leaflet to households in two-tier areas in Cumbria and Lancashire. This was not a legal requirement but we wanted to extend the public consultation as widely as possible and the leaflet was intended to be a further communications tool, in addition to our consultation reports, website, and media advertising.

14 Some difficulties were encountered in the delivery of the household leaflets. Although we intended that the leaflets should be delivered at the start of the consultation period, in many areas delivery did not occur until the latter part of it. We are also aware that some residents may not have received leaflets. Accordingly, to ensure maximum exposure of our draft recommendations, we placed additional notices in local media in each review area towards the end of the consultation period. We were much assisted in publicising our draft recommendations by the often quite considerable publicity given to them by the local press and media.

15 During Stage Three, we also commissioned further public opinion research, again carried out by MORI, in order to gauge local people's views on our draft recommendations. The results were published on our website on 14 April 2004. The research comprised around 300 face-to-face interviews in each two-tier district under review. We also commissioned additional quantitative research in a number of review areas. Further details are provided in chapter 4.

16 During Stage Four we carefully reconsidered the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and decided on our final recommendations to the Deputy Prime Minister.

Cumbria

17 Cumbria was established as a county council following local government reorganisation in 1974. It comprises the historic counties of Cumberland and Westmorland, a small part of the former West Riding of Yorkshire and that part of what was formerly Lancashire which lies 'north of the sands', i.e. the Furness area.

18 It covers approximately 676,800 hectares. The county boundary is defined by the Irish Sea to the west, from the Solway Firth to Morecambe Bay, by the Scottish border to the north and by the Pennine hills to the east. The physical geography of Cumbria is dominated by a central 'dome' of high relief, which forms the basis of the

Lake District National Park. The major settlements in terms of population and industry are Barrow-in-Furness, Carlisle City, Kendal, Penrith, Whitehaven and Workington. In addition to the main population centres, Cumbria has several smaller towns, which provide shopping and service facilities. However, only around 20 settlements have a population of more than 2,500.

19 A structural review of Cumbria was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England in 1994. It determined that the existing two-tier structure of local government should continue.

20 Cumbria comprises the County Council and the six districts of Allerdale, Barrow-in-Furness, Carlisle City, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland. Map 1 shows the existing local authority boundaries in Cumbria, the main population centres, important geographical features and communication and transport links within Cumbria.

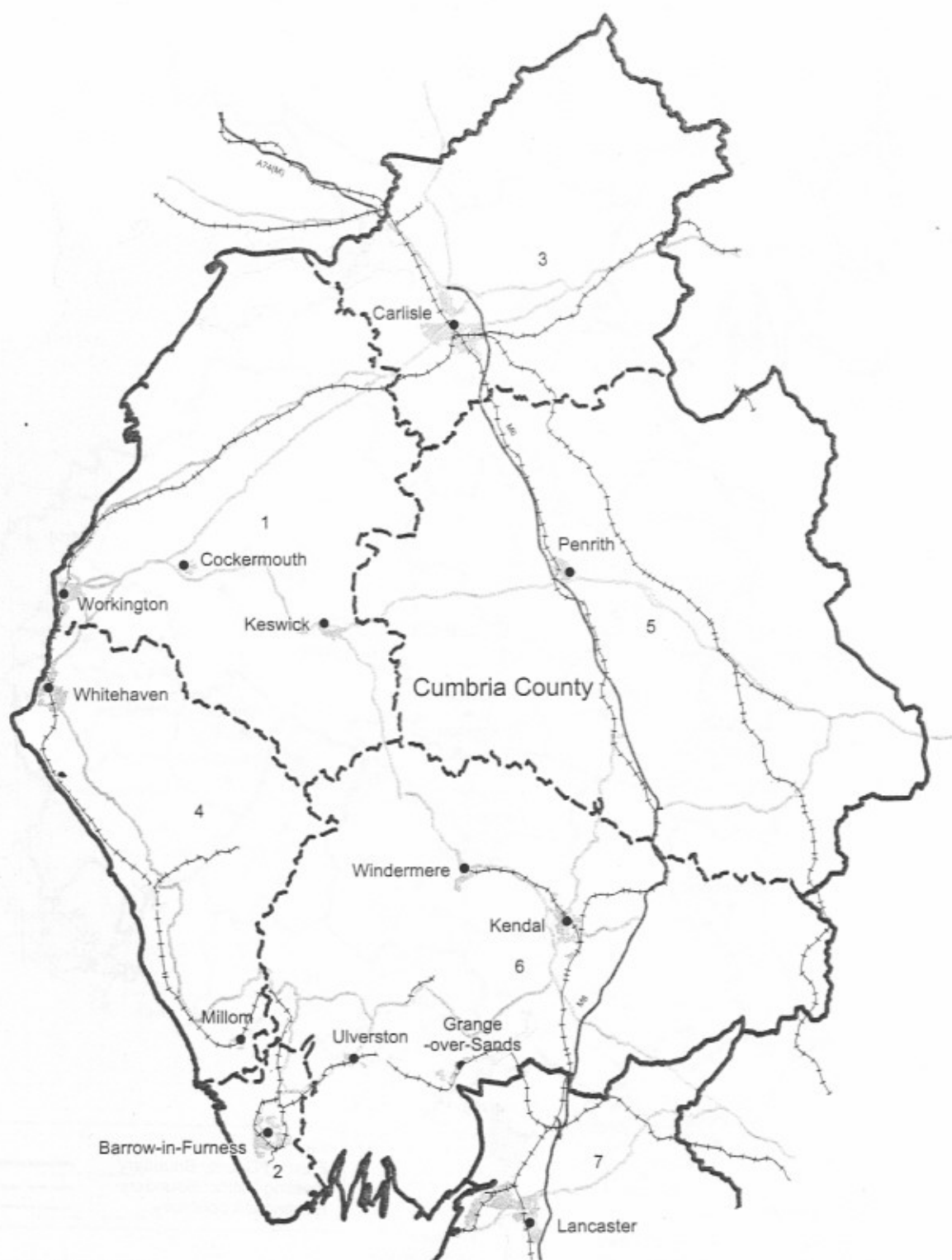
21 Table 2 shows the 2001 population figures, areas in hectares and population density in each district and in Cumbria as a whole.

Table 2: Current local authority structures

| Authority | Population (2001) | Area (hectares) | Population density (pop/ha) |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Cumbria County | 487,600 | 676,780 | 0.7 |
| Allerdale | 93,500 | 124,166 | 0.8 |
| Barrow-in-Furness | 72,000 | 7,796 | 9.2 |
| Carlisle City | 100,700 | 103,997 | 1.0 |
| Copeland | 69,300 | 73,176 | 1.0 |
| Eden | 49,800 | 214,241 | 0.2 |
| South Lakeland | 102,300 | 153,404 | 0.7 |

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Map 1: Existing local authority boundaries in Cumbria



Key to Districts

- 1 Allerdale
- 2 Barrow-in-Furness
- 3 Carlisle
- 4 Copeland
- 5 Eden
- 6 South Lakeland
- 7 Lancaster

Key

- Existing County Boundary
- Existing District Boundary

- Population Areas
- Motorways
- Other Main Roads
- Railways

Map 2: Existing local authority boundaries in Lancashire



Key to Districts

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Burnley | 9 Rossendale | 17 Bury |
| 2 Chorley | 10 South Ribble | 18 Knowsley |
| 3 Fylde | 11 West Lancashire | 19 Liverpool |
| 4 Hyndburn | 12 Wyre | 20 Rochdale |
| 5 Lancaster | 13 Barrow-in-Furness | 21 St Helens |
| 6 Pendle | 14 Blackpool | 22 Sefton |
| 7 Preston | 15 Blackburn with Darwen | 23 South Lakeland |
| 8 Ribble Valley | 16 Bolton | 24 Wigan |

Key
Existing County Boundary
Existing District Boundary
Existing UA boundary

Population Areas
Motorways
Other Main Roads
Railways

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Lancashire

22 Lancashire is bounded by Greater Manchester and Merseyside to the south, Cumbria to the north, the Irish Sea to the west and the Pennine uplands to the east. It has a population of approximately 1.1 million and covers 290,305 hectares.

23 The administrative county of Lancashire was officially created in 1889, although the historic county predates the 12th century. The county underwent administrative boundary changes during the local government reorganisation of 1974 when the metropolitan counties were established. The structure remained the same, other than minor boundary changes, until the 1990s.

24 A structural review of Lancashire was carried out in 1994 by the Local Government Commission for England. It determined that the existing two-tier structure of local government should continue. However, following a review in 1995, it recommended that Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool should become unitary authorities, and they gained unitary authority status in 1998.

25 Currently, Lancashire comprises the County Council and the 12 districts of Burnley, Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Lancaster City, Pendle, Preston City, Ribble Valley, Rossendale, South Ribble, West Lancashire and Wyre. Map 2 shows the existing local authority boundaries in Lancashire, the main population centres, important geographical features and communication and transport links within the county.

26 The county contains a number of closely spaced and functionally-interlinked medium-sized towns and small cities, including Lancaster City, Burnley and Preston City. It also includes a number of small market towns, including Ormskirk, Clitheroe and Rawtenstall. Several seaside resorts, such as Lytham St Anne's and Morecambe, as well as ports, commuter settlements and large areas of countryside and moorland also form part of the county.

27 Table 3 shows the 2001 population figures, areas in hectares and population density in each district and in Lancashire as a whole.

Table 3: Current local authority structures

| Authority | Population (2001) | Area (hectares) | Population density (pop/ha) |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Lancashire County | 1,135,000 | 290,305 | 3.9 |
| Burnley | 89,500 | 11,073 | 8.1 |
| Chorley | 100,400 | 20,435 | 5.0 |
| Fylde | 73,200 | 16,501 | 4.4 |
| Hyndburn | 81,500 | 7,315 | 11.2 |
| Lancaster City | 133,900 | 57,671 | 2.3 |
| Pendle | 89,200 | 16,952 | 5.3 |
| Preston City | 129,600 | 14,239 | 9.1 |
| Ribble Valley | 54,000 | 58,444 | 0.9 |
| Rossendale | 65,700 | 13,811 | 4.8 |
| South Ribble | 103,900 | 11,296 | 9.2 |
| West Lancashire | 108,400 | 34,688 | 3.1 |
| Wyre | 105,600 | 28,332 | 3.7 |

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

28 Table 4 summarises the current functions of county and district councils. The new unitary authorities we are proposing would have responsibility for all of these functions.

Table 4: Current functions of county and district councils

| Function | District councils | County councils |
|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Education | | • |
| Housing | • | |
| Planning applications | • | |
| Strategic planning | | • |
| Transport planning | | • |
| Passenger transport | | • |
| Highways | | • |
| Fire | | • |
| Social services | | • |
| Libraries | | • |
| Leisure and recreation | • | |
| Waste collection | • | |
| Waste disposal | | • |
| Environmental health | • | |
| Revenue collection | • | |

Source: Local Government Association (www.lga.gov.uk)

2 The Committee's approach

29 The draft recommendations overview report published in December 2003 set out the approach we adopted in developing the draft proposals on which we consulted between 1 December 2003 and 23 February 2004.

30 The overview report explained the background to our work and how it differed significantly from the 1990s reviews carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE). The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003 ('the 2003 Act') requires us to assume the existence of elected regional assemblies and that the functions of local authorities will remain unchanged. Unlike the earlier reviews, 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.

31 Our work is guided by the Local Government Act 1992 ('the 1992 Act'), as was that of the LGCE. However, we must have regard to guidance issued by the ODPM, which raised issues relating to performance, capacity, community leadership and representation, among others, that we needed to address in formulating our recommendations. The overview report explained our approach to these issues in further detail and set this in the context of the significant changes that have occurred in local government over the last 10 years. Indeed some of the issues we raised for further consultation centred upon aspects of the 'modernisation agenda' such as the reinforcement of the community leadership role, the importance of partnership working and performance in service delivery, and the impact of new patterns of local government upon these.

32 We are required to submit to the Deputy Prime Minister at least two options for wholly unitary patterns of local government in each county area under review. Our recommendations are designed to secure patterns of unitary local government for the residents of the two-tier areas under review that provide for long-term, sustainable local authorities.

33 The establishment of new unitary authorities as a consequence of this review would entail the creation of authorities that combine the functions of both county and district councils. However, we acknowledge that a considerable amount of governance and service provision, while carried out locally, is not the direct responsibility of local government and this would not change as a result of this review. This is an important consideration, and consequently we have had regard to patterns of non-local government service provision and sought views from the relevant agencies involved.

34 Our draft proposals generally, but not exclusively, built upon the submissions received from local authorities and other stakeholders. In the main they were contained within the existing county areas but, in a number of review areas, where we believed it would facilitate effective and convenient local government in the current two-tier areas, we proposed extending existing metropolitan or unitary authority areas.

35 We received very few proposals for the creation of unitary authorities based on the boundaries of a single district council. Equally, however, we received few proposals that did not build upon existing local authority boundaries. It is understandable that respondents should have favoured using existing districts as building blocks in this review but in some cases we suspect that more substantial changes could have offered benefits.

36 The number and diversity of the areas under review, in terms of their geography and population, have presented particular challenges for us. Our approach, while informed by a consistent application of principle, resulted in different conclusions on draft recommendations in different settings. This was probably inevitable given the nature of the county areas being reviewed. What is clear is that there is no single test that can be applied to determine whether or not a particular pattern of unitary local government is the right one for a given area. Instead, there is a need to look at a complex array of considerations and to exercise judgement.

37 We received many further submissions during Stage Three and these have been taken into account in reaching conclusions on our final recommendations. In certain areas, these included new proposals on which, because of the constraints of the review timetable, we did not have an opportunity to consult. This chapter considers the further evidence taken into account in reaching our conclusions, under a series of headings:

- geographical size, population and capacity;
- community identity;
- performance;
- community leadership and representation;
- joint arrangements and partnership working;
- effective service delivery;
- financial costs;
- new and continuing authorities;
- boundary issues.

Geographical size, population and capacity

38 In the overview report we expressed the view that new unitary authorities need to be capable of 'punching their weight' within a regional context. We remain convinced this is important and our final recommendations tend towards larger rather than smaller units. In each of the regions under review there already exist some substantial metropolitan and unitary authorities with significant populations and resources. Their influence within the regional dimension is likely to be disproportionate unless balanced by new unitary authorities with similar or larger populations and capacity. Conversely, in some cases the existing larger authorities may, because of their long-standing capacity to deliver the full range of local government services, form the basis for new amalgamations with areas currently served by two-tier authorities.

39 The size of an authority, in both geographical and population terms, and its capacity to deliver the 'modernisation agenda' are issues that feature throughout the guidance to us from the ODPM. This alone meant that our proposals were likely to differ significantly from those of the 1990s reviews. In the overview report we commented that there was no specific population size recommended by the ODPM for new unitary structures, although this was an issue frequently raised with us by local authorities, particularly during Stage One of the review.

40 The ODPM guidance, while acknowledging that smaller units of local government may have advantages in terms of responsiveness and public confidence, states that this underestimates the potential for larger authorities to deliver effective democratic scrutiny through devolved arrangements, effective working with parish and town councils and improved democratic representation. Larger authorities would also have the potential to balance 'localism' with taking a more strategic view of how the needs

and aspirations of their communities might be addressed within the wider context of the region.

41 We have looked at the evidence available linking population size and effectiveness of service delivery and conclude that it is mixed. There are smaller authorities working effectively, as evidenced by inspection and CPA results, and larger ones working less well, and vice versa. Broadly, our view on this issue remains the same as expressed in the overview report. During Stage Three, we received further evidence to the effect that determinants of success in smaller rural unitary authorities tend to be the same as that in larger units, namely leadership, adopting decision-making arrangements that reflect diverse communities, and building effective partnerships. However, we also received some evidence that rural authorities, at both district and county level, encountered difficulties in the recruitment and retention of high calibre and specialist staff.

42 Recent research commissioned by the ODPM defines capacity as 'the right organisation, systems, partnerships, people and processes to deliver against a particular agenda or plan.'¹ Overall capacity appears to be more than the sum of its individual parts and studies on improvement in local government have recognised that successful councils have strong corporate capacity. There is no conclusive evidence of a simple and overriding relationship between size, whether expressed in a geographical sense or in terms of overall population, and capacity.

43 Geography and population density were dominant considerations over much of the area under review and 'local government' often expressed a concern about the added cost of delivering services in rural and sparsely populated areas. However, there were also concerns about addressing the needs of communities under larger unitary options especially where issues of deprivation and access to external funding might apply. We received further evidence about these matters during Stage Three. We took account, where appropriate, of geographical features that define the natural boundaries of communities.

44 We also received arguments for and against mixing rural and urban areas in a single authority, the latter on the grounds that the rural areas would be neglected, or that the focus on economic and urban regeneration would be diluted. For our part, we see benefits and synergies in urban/rural mixes although there must be regard to topography and geographical size. There is often an interdependence between rural and urban areas, and in such circumstances we see few benefits in seeking to separate them artificially.

45 The ODPM guidance asks us to consider the extent to which the structure, geography and size of an authority might influence its ability to exercise community leadership, engage with the local community and work effectively with partner organisations. From the information and proposals received, we conclude that there is no simple formula for success.

46 While there are no absolute parameters relating to size of authority, we acknowledge that there are potentially capacity issues with very small authorities. This was highlighted to us by a number of government departments in the ODPM guidance and by some stakeholders. We are of the view that it is necessary for the Committee to search for solutions that while not guaranteeing high performing

¹ Office of Public Management (2003) *Capacity building in local government – research on capacity building needs*, available at www.odpm.gov.uk.

councils with any certainty, would not place the proposed new councils at a disadvantage in resource or capacity terms.

47 Our proposals are intended to strike a balance between, on the one hand, unitary authorities of an appropriate size and capacity to deliver services effectively and, on the other, those that to some extent reflect geography, historic ties and the socio-economic links between communities in an area.

Community identity

48 Within any area there will be many different and overlapping communities. There are 'affective' communities and there are 'effective' communities. The former relate to affinity to a particular town, village or area, the latter to shared identities and activities such as work, shopping and local schooling for children.

49 While the ODPM guidance makes no comment about the geographical size of unitary structures, we are asked to give weight to the wider patterns of community within an area and to the economic links between them. The 'geographical reach' of the new authorities would therefore involve a number of communities of place and interest.

50 The ODPM guidance also stressed the link between community leadership and the ability of councils to ensure the identities and interests of local communities are properly reflected in the decisions authorities make about service provision. This has been a factor we have sought to explore, particularly with the proponents of larger unitary authorities.

51 The evidence from the MORI research carried out on our behalf in each of the review areas tended to bear out the ODPM view that people most frequently identify with their immediate locality, village or town, i.e. their affective community. Previous research also confirmed this view. Given the emphasis of the ODPM guidance, the very local level is clearly not a basis upon which to build new local government structures. We noted some attachment among residents to historic county **areas**, although not necessarily to the county **council**, and some attachment to a particular region.

52 In terms of 'effective' communities, the research found that neighbouring metropolitan areas such as Manchester and Newcastle can exert a significant pull in terms of employment, leisure and shopping and in some cases this influence spreads to counties in neighbouring regions. However, in the limited context of this review, the 'pull' of a major city does not necessarily have any particular implications for local government restructuring. On the other hand there are geographical barriers (e.g. physical features) within the review areas that exert considerable influence, especially, but not exclusively, in the large rural areas of dale and moor.

53 Opinion research is only one strand of evidence considered by the Committee. In general terms, the final recommendations, which we have narrowed down from the options circulated for consultation, are based on patterns of unitary local government that reflect community identities. We acknowledge, however, that not all levels of community identity can be reflected in our recommendations, given the balance we seek to strike between various factors. In particular, all options we put forward need to provide for potentially high performing unitary authorities. There is some evidence in proposals from local authorities for devolved decision-making and local service delivery, which could involve and engage with local communities. However, effective

and sustained implementation is likely to present challenges for all new authorities, not least because there would be financial costs arising from such arrangements.

54 We proposed names for unitary authorities as part of our draft recommendations that we believed would reflect local people's feelings about historic and traditional affiliations. We specifically asked for views on the proposed names during the consultation on our draft recommendations and have taken account of the responses in our final recommendations.

Performance

55 The ODPM guidance mentions a number of factors that high performing councils appear to have in common. These include high quality political leadership, good managerial skills, adequate corporate capacity, a willingness to innovate and good relationships with external organisations. While not directly affecting the ability to be high performing, size and geography may also have an impact upon the ability of a council to recruit and retain specialist staff, develop the corporate centre or have the capacity to develop specialist services, community leadership and partnership working.

56 The introduction of corporate assessments as part of wider external inspection of local authorities has highlighted the key role councillors play in overall council performance. The overview report recognised this but concluded that it would be difficult to replicate current arrangements with any certainty under new unitary patterns of local government in the review areas. We received further evidence during Stage Three on the results of external inspection or re-inspections.

57 We remain of the view that current performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance as many factors are involved. As such, future performance is difficult to predict. We are nevertheless aware, from submissions and published independent inspection results, of the current range of performance across existing local authorities in the review areas. In many cases they could provide a good basis from which to build the new authorities.

58 At the time we formulated our draft recommendations, we commented on the published performance scores of neighbouring unitary councils seeking to widen their boundaries into a two-tier area. We received further evidence from some such authorities during Stage Three in more recently published reports that show improving performance. It is encouraging to note that improvements in performance can be achieved relatively quickly; this underlines the need not to place too great an emphasis on current results when looking towards future authorities.

59 We consider the final recommendations we now make would not disadvantage the new unitary authorities in terms of resources or potential capacity and in this sense we have concluded that the conditions are potentially in place to create high performing local authorities.

Community leadership and representation

60 The ODPM guidance made a number of references to the key role councils play in leading their communities, and the factors that we may wish to consider when proposing new unitary structures. Indeed, this is an area where councils have begun to develop many new initiatives in response to the Local Government Act 2000. Central to the Government's agenda is the need for strong and accountable local democratic leadership, leading and empowering local communities.

61 We consider that the community leadership role exercised by local authorities is of major importance and we have looked carefully at how proposed unitary authorities could tackle this issue. Community leadership in the sense that it represents the needs and aspirations of communities can operate at more than one level. It can be concerned with local, sub-regional, regional, national and European levels. It is linked to community identity and the confidence that citizens have that their democratic representatives understand the needs of communities. The opinion research conducted on our behalf has suggested that for citizens there is often a preference for decision-making at its most local level. However, this tends to be based on a preference for local government units that in many cases would be significantly smaller than existing districts and that would not be viable in the terms of the remit of this review.

62 We received further evidence during Stage Three on how large unitary councils could engage with the many diverse communities within their area, reconciling potentially conflicting priorities and developing effective organisational structures that would ensure effective service delivery was maintained. Some of these submissions showed thoughtful and innovative approaches to these issues. Conversely, we received further evidence relating to smaller-scale options that stressed local knowledge and understanding of communities as key elements of approaches to community leadership. There was evidence of local support for this approach.

63 Some of the initial (Stage One) submissions proposed a relatively large number of councillors for new unitary authorities, particularly those that would be on a county-wide scale. We recognise that individual members would have a wider range of constituency duties as councillors in a unitary authority. Representational issues would certainly feature in any future review of electoral arrangements.

64 We received further evidence during Stage Three on the impact a much wider range of service responsibilities would have, not only on the workload of individual councillors but also on the geographical area each would be likely to represent. We acknowledge that local representation is not solely concerned with the overall number of councillors and the ratio of residents to councillors. Almost inevitably, the overall number of councillors would reduce significantly in each county area as a consequence of the replacement of the current two-tier structure by a unitary pattern of local government.

65 The separation of Executive and Scrutiny arrangements, as provided for in the 2000 Act, are a relatively recent introduction in local government. We sought and received further evidence of the impact large-scale devolution would have on the overall decision-making arrangements of councils. We also sought evidence of the impact the large number of elected representatives proposed under some options might have on the effectiveness of the decision-making process and its links to wider organisational management. Some of the models put forward for the largest unitary authority proposals would present a considerable challenge to overcome inherent difficulties in operating an extensive system of area devolution, and in finding models of political management capable of operating effectively in such a context.

66 That is not to say such challenges cannot be met. It is clear that some patterns of devolved decision-making can work within the legislative framework. However, issues remain, for example, about the role of non-council member representatives on area boards and the powers of such bodies, in terms both of the level of decision-making and geographical extent. These are grey areas. We believe that further

guidance from the ODPM would be both welcomed by local government and be a necessary part of encouraging innovation to take place.

67 The role of town and parish councils under a unitary structure of local government is potentially significant given the likely overall reduction in elected members, although we retain the caution we expressed in the overview report concerning capacity, capability and desire in some parts of the parish and town council sector. Some stakeholders recognised the opportunity for a wider role for town and parish councils in their initial submissions, possibly supported by the enhanced potential deriving from Quality Parish status, the amalgamation of smaller parish councils to increase available resources, or the creation of new local councils where none exist at present.

68 As set out above, however, alternative proposals have also been made for devolving powers locally, through specially-designed local arrangements such as area committees or boards, and some submissions suggest the operation of such arrangements could be complementary to the progress of the Quality Parish initiative in individual areas.

69 We sought further evidence as to how these arrangements might work in practice and perhaps link with devolved decision-making and the development of community strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). Further evidence supporting this approach tended to be from larger town and parish councils. However, we recognise that at present this could not be considered a substitute for effective community leadership and engagement from the new unitary authorities. It seems clear that different approaches are likely to be taken in different areas. This is appropriate, given that locally grown devolved arrangements, as opposed to a 'one size fits all' approach, are more likely to deliver on the ground.

70 Even without the establishment of new unitary patterns of local government in the review areas, the Committee is of the view that Government might wish to consider incentives aimed at encouraging principal authorities to provide support in implementing the proposals they have put to us regarding links with town and parish councils, devolved decision-making and service delivery. However, we recognise that initiatives to enhance existing town or parish councils or create new ones may not be appropriate in all parts of the review areas, including presently unparished urban areas.

Joint arrangements and partnership working

71 In the overview report we commented on the increasingly important role partnerships play in supporting the delivery of a wide range of priorities and services with other local partners, although we also recognised this was a developing area. We received further evidence relating our draft recommendations to existing or potential partnership activity and, in particular, the interaction between LSPs and local authorities. We have taken this into account. Some submissions at Stage Three raised specific issues about the nature and relevance of different types of partnership arrangements in the wider context of securing service provision. This material has helped inform our thinking on these issues and the way in which they relate to our final recommendations.

72 The ODPM guidance to The Boundary Committee states that we 'should consider the evidence that smaller local authorities rely more heavily on joint arrangements to deliver quality public services and that these serve to confuse lines of accountability' (Paragraph 5.18). The submissions made to us suggest that the terms 'joint

arrangements' and 'partnerships' are often used interchangeably to refer to a wide range of working arrangements. These range from 'statutory' agreements, arising from section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, to more innovative ways of working which the Government has actively encouraged to improve the quality of services, or to tackle problems that cut across organisational boundaries. These arrangements can include partnerships associated with the delivery of major services or projects that frequently exist for example between social services and health service providers.

73 LSPs are non-statutory and non-executive bodies drawn together to develop strategies and priorities to deliver improvements against a range of cross-cutting local issues for which no single partner has full responsibility. They are required in each of the 88 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas, but they also operate elsewhere on a county and sub-county (district) basis with a range of partners drawn from across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors. The essence of these partnerships is to bring together the major service providers and stakeholders in a locality to develop shared views and co-ordinate service provision and policy development.

74 In addition, there are also contractual partnerships that cross the spectrum of local government functions. Procurement of services is one example. In relation to a service being provided directly by the local authority or indirectly through some form of contract or agreement, the Government recognises a 'mixed economy' and it is for individual councils within the requirements of the Best Value regime to determine an appropriate approach.

75 This spectrum of methods of service delivery may involve 'joint arrangements' (in the strict sense of arrangements authorised by s.101 of the 1972 Act) and other forms of partnership in differing degrees. At one pole, a local authority may arrange for the delivery of the whole of a service for which it is responsible through another local authority, or two or more local authorities may arrange to deliver such services jointly. Such arrangements are wholly the creation of s.101 of the 1972 Act. At the opposite pole, an authority may choose to deliver a service in partnership with one or more non-local authority agencies (whether in the public, commercial or voluntary sectors).

76 The statutory basis for those arrangements will generally be found elsewhere than in s.101, typically in s.2 of the Local Government Act 2000. Between these poles lies scope for a wide variety of arrangements involving more than one local authority and featuring elements of joint arrangements and broader forms of partnership. For instance, a local authority may deliver a service under joint arrangements with another local authority, which in turn procures that service from or with the non-local authority sector. Alternatively, two or more local authorities may make joint arrangements among themselves collectively, to procure services from that sector.

77 These are all lawful and proper mechanisms for a local authority to secure the provision of a service for which it is responsible. The Boundary Committee has an interest in identifying effective partnership working – including possible joint working between unitary local authorities – as a guide to possible future patterns of local government structure. At the same time, however, the Committee is of the view that the more extensive the use of joint arrangements – that is, the involvement of a plurality of local authorities – in the provision of a service, the greater the risk that lines of local authority accountability may be blurred. Part of the advantage of unitary over two-tier structures is that a single local authority has clear responsibility for

providing a range of services. The involvement of more than one local authority through joint arrangements risks compromising that advantage. That is a factor to which we are entitled to, and do, give weight.

78 We have tended toward a preference that any unitary authorities resulting from this review should be capable of providing or procuring, without recourse to formal joint arrangements, the full range of local government services. Joint or partnership working between local authorities may provide an economic, effective and efficient means of providing services but, in our view, such arrangements should not be essential to the delivery of quality services. On the other hand, partnership working with bodies outside local government is increasingly important in the provision of comprehensive services, i.e. not just those within the remit of local government.

79 We express these views having regard to the guidance given by the ODPM and to the submissions made to us during the review, including those received at Stage Three. We consider our approach consistent with the ODPM guidance and the policy reflected in it.

80 It is a matter of judgement for the potential new authorities whether, and to what extent, arrangements between authorities or groups of authorities might be part of service delivery mechanisms, and to what extent they would serve to cloud accountability, bearing in mind the recognition of a 'mixed economy' in service provision. However, this is but one consideration and, as will be clear from this report as a whole, our final recommendations for particular authorities are based on many other factors besides. We have sought to recommend unitary authorities of such a capacity to ensure that they have the maximum flexibility in deciding how local services will be provided, whether directly by the council concerned or through some other arrangement.

81 We are mindful of factors relating to partnership working referred to in the guidance. In particular, while partnerships can be an effective way of delivering priorities where more than one organisation has a role to play in achievement, there is a risk that a multiplicity of partnerships can impose additional costs and take a disproportionate amount of senior management and councillor time. Similar considerations can apply in partnership organisations that deal with a multiplicity of local authorities. We are concerned to ensure that our recommendations for patterns of unitary authorities will allow the new councils to work effectively with partner organisations.

82 Most local authorities under review stated that they either have in place a community strategy and an LSP to monitor its delivery, or are in the process of setting them up. LSPs are seen by Government as a way of involving a wide range of partners in the achievement of agreed community objectives while at the same time rationalising existing partnerships and addressing what has been referred to as 'partnership fatigue'.

83 Our proposals have sought to strike a balance between arrangements that take into account the role of LSPs while at the same time reflecting the needs of the major service and project partnerships that may operate over a significant geographical area. Most submissions from local authorities commented on how they would seek to restructure current partnership arrangements to reflect their preferred option for unitary local government.

84 Where possible, our proposals for new unitary authorities have attempted to bring about a level of coterminosity with the boundaries of key strategic partners. While this

may not always be the case, it is in part a reflection of the multiplicity of these partnerships within the region and the areas under review. However, the establishment of new unitary authorities may in itself have a beneficial effect in bringing about the rationalisation of existing partnerships.

Effective service delivery

85 A key issue from our Stage One public opinion research was the emphasis the community places upon the delivery of high quality public services. As a consequence we sought further evidence from key stakeholders concerning this issue, although the question varied depending on the option. For larger unitary authority options we were concerned about the arrangements for service delivery at the local level of services currently provided by district councils. In the case of smaller unitary authority options we were concerned about the capacity to deliver large-scale services such as education and social care. We were also interested (bearing in mind national e-government targets) to receive evidence of IT based solutions to service delivery issues.

86 We received additional evidence in relation to larger unitary authority proposals regarding how services would be maintained at the local level for a range of functions using 'one-stop' customer centres integrated with authority-wide IT networks and a customer contact centre. A number of submissions also set out arrangements for the rationalisation of a number of services to bring benefits in terms of enhanced customer service and common IT networks.

87 Specific examples of proposals included housing benefit and council tax administration, electoral registration, integration of waste disposal and collection and the range of regulatory services currently administered across county and district councils. Our view is that some of these initiatives, if implemented as outlined in submissions, would enhance services to the local community while at the same time maintaining a local presence across functions that offered local people the opportunity to transact a wide range of business with the new councils.

88 For smaller unitary authority proposals we received additional information relating to the arrangements that would be developed to deliver the larger-scale services such as education and social care. This is an important issue, since one of the most fundamental effects of structural change is the acquisition by any resulting sub-county unitary authorities of responsibility to provide these services. The information we received was mixed in quality. There was an emphasis on building on district-based or area arrangements already present in many county council organisational structures as a means of providing local solutions. The argument was also made that for some specialist services, some form of joint arrangement with other local authorities, possibly with outsourcing, might be appropriate.

89 We remain concerned at the contention, prevalent in some proposals for smaller unitary authorities, that the 'passporting' of a high proportion of education funding directly to schools somehow means that less money is required for education overall and that in particular there will be less need for some of the services currently provided by Local Education Authorities (LEAs). We believe this may underestimate the continuing role of the LEA and its key function in supporting schools. Similarly, the implications of the Children Bill for local authorities were sometimes underplayed. In addition, there appeared to be insufficient attention in some submissions to the impact responsibility for the strategic management of large-scale services would have, both on the corporate centre of an authority and on overall service delivery.

90 Some proposals for smaller unitary authorities stressed that the local knowledge of the current district councils would be beneficial in delivering large-scale services. Submissions also referred to developing closer links with, for example, individual schools for the benefit of education generally. A specific example in one case referred to poor school performance being mainly concentrated in the area of a proposed smaller unitary authority and therefore best handled at that level rather than as part of a much wider county area as at present. Proposals for smaller unitary authorities (as much as those for larger ones) also stressed the benefits available from the integration in a unitary authority of all local government services.

91 One area where most submissions appeared strong was economic regeneration, where partnership and other collaborative initiatives were mentioned. Partnership working, building on the recently established LSPs, was also cited in some cases as a way to develop new service initiatives and priorities. There was a view in some submissions that capacity was demonstrated by recent inspection results. There was a general recognition that smaller unitary authorities in particular may need to develop links with other councils or partners for some specialist services to achieve the additional capacity required to ensure provision of a wider range of services.

Financial costs

92 The ODPM's guidance provided a financial model for use by The Boundary Committee. This model only addresses the current 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 reorganisation is available on the ODPM website (www.odpm.gov.uk).

93 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 took the view that cost estimates cannot be a determining factor in deciding which patterns of wholly unitary structures are appropriate.

94 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 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 was 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.

95 The Audit Commission found that the returns for Cumbria and Lancashire were prepared in accordance with our requirements, and that the financial and related information contained in the returns was relevant to assessing the costs of 'being in business' and was consistent with the records held by each of the local authorities under review.

96 We received further evidence from stakeholders on the possible costs associated with implementation of various proposals arising from this review. We have not evaluated them in any great detail, nor given cost estimates undue weight in reaching our final recommendations. We commented in the overview report that while there are many views on the costs of restructuring, the financial model provided by the ODPM to identify the costs of 'being in business', while narrow in concept, provides an opportunity for comparison. We have noted the further evidence provided but it

has not been audited by the Audit Commission or analysed by our financial consultants (PricewaterhouseCoopers).

97 In any event, we have considerable doubts over the accuracy and viability of any costing model that seeks to predict future local authority costs associated with restructuring. That is because such matters will largely depend on the policies and priorities of the elected members of those new unitary authorities when they are established some years hence. In particular, for example, it needs to be borne in mind that some of the notional 'savings' illustrated in the costs of 'being in business' exercise might be balanced by costs implicit in implementing comprehensive local devolution arrangements.

98 This report provides the estimated costs of 'being in business' for each option put forward as part of our final recommendations to the Deputy Prime Minister.

New and continuing authorities

99 The legislation in relation to new and continuing authorities is complex, particularly in the context of this review. Under the provisions of section 14(5)(b) of the 1992 Act, **new** authorities result where there are boundary changes involving 'the amalgamation, or aggregation of areas or parts of areas or involving other substantial alterations of areas'. On the face of it, this seems straightforward: where there are *substantial* alterations of areas, **new** authorities are created. Conversely, **continuing** authorities will be created in circumstances where there are no substantial alterations in area.

100 However, this is to overlook the provisions of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003, which introduce a further dimension. Section 14(5) of the 2003 Act provides that the Committee 'must not consider any boundary changes in relation to:

- (a) any area in the region which is not the area of a relevant authority [a metropolitan district or shire unitary authority] unless it has the effect that any part of the area of a relevant local authority [a two-tier county or district council area] *becomes part of the area of a local authority which is not a relevant local authority* (emphasis added).

101 It is, of course, the prerogative of the Courts to give an authoritative interpretation of the statute. However, in our view, taken together, these provisions mean that unitary authorities formed from the amalgamation of existing authorities in two-tier areas will, in all cases, be **new** authorities. Conversely, those that result from the amalgamation of single- and two-tier authorities will, in legal terms, be **continuing** authorities, as will those which achieve unitary status on their existing boundaries. This includes metropolitan districts, whose status, notwithstanding section 14(7)(b) of the 1992 Act, would be unaffected by any changes to their boundaries with non-metropolitan areas. Our recommendations are based on this understanding.

102 However, we envisage that all the unitary authorities that would be created as a consequence of, or result from, this review should be viewed as making a fresh start, irrespective of the formal distinction above. In making our recommendations, we took the approach of assessing the viability of new authorities delivering the totality of local government services and fulfilling their various representational and community leadership roles. While appreciating that we could not start with a completely 'blank sheet' in these matters, it was not our approach to see how unitary authorities could

be created by 'adding' on to existing functions. Indeed, it was encouraging that even county councils seeking to become unitary authorities appreciated that the incorporation of those functions currently exercised by district authorities would have a significant impact and would require them to think again about the wider structure, processes and culture of the authority. We endorse this view and would advocate very strongly that whatever the boundaries of the new unitary authorities that emerge, they should be seen, in all practical senses, as 'new' authorities.

103 As a means of reinforcing this view, The Boundary Committee will wish to undertake an electoral review of all the unitary authorities resulting from this review, so that first elections to shadow authorities take place on revised electoral arrangements.

Boundary issues

104 During the course of the review we identified or had our attention drawn to a number of boundary anomalies between our proposed unitary authorities. A number of these appeared to have a prima facie case for change. However, experience suggests that boundary changes can be extremely controversial locally and, bearing in mind the focus of this review and constraints of the review timetable, we decided not to pursue them. In any event, there is a quite separate principal area boundary review process under which the Deputy Prime Minister can ask for the Committee's advice on such matters. We would encourage the Deputy Prime Minister to consider whether such a review should be undertaken at an early stage.

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3 Draft recommendations

105 This chapter summarises our draft recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire.

106 Our draft recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire were published on 1 December 2003. In formulating our draft recommendations, we had to ensure that our proposals would facilitate a pattern of unitary authorities for the whole of Cumbria and Lancashire. We could not look at one local authority area in isolation, but needed to consider the consequential effects of any proposed options across the whole of both counties.

107 Our proposals were those that we considered would be most likely to provide the setting for high-performing and robust unitary authorities and sought to build on the proposals put to us during the first stage of consultation.

108 We proposed that two options for patterns of unitary government in Cumbria should be put forward for consultation as set out in the table below. Option Two proposed a new unitary authority crossing the current boundary between Cumbria and Lancashire.

Table 5: Draft recommendations for Cumbria

| Option | Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|---|---------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Option One: a single unitary authority | Cumbria County Council | Cumbria County | 487,600 |
| Option Two: two unitary authorities | North Cumbria | Allerdale, Copeland, Carlisle City and Eden | 313,300 |
| | South Cumbria & Lancaster | Barrow-in-Furness, South Lakeland and Lancaster City | 308,200 |

109 We proposed that three options for patterns of unitary government in Lancashire should be put forward for consultation as set out in the table below. In all three options, some parts of the existing county would be transferred to existing adjacent unitary authorities.

Table 6: Draft recommendations for Lancashire

| Option | Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|--------------|---------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Option One | Lancashire County Council | Most of Lancashire County | 1,051,400 |
| | Blackpool | Blackpool and part of Wyre | 218,500 |
| | Rochdale | Rochdale and part of Rossendale | 212,600 |
| Option Two | Central Lancashire | Chorley, Preston City, South Ribble and parts of Fylde and Wyre | 384,400 |
| | East Lancashire | Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and part of Rossendale | 510,100 |
| | Fylde Coast | Blackpool and parts of Fylde and Wyre | 270,600 |
| | Rochdale | Rochdale and part of Rossendale | 212,600 |
| | Sefton & West Lancashire | Sefton and part of West Lancashire | 338,900 |
| | South Cumbria & Lancaster | Barrow-in-Furness, Lancaster City and South Lakeland | 308,200 |
| | Wigan | Wigan and part of West Lancashire | 353,900 |
| Option Three | Blackburn & Ribble | Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley | 272,900 |
| | Central Lancashire | Chorley, Preston City, South Ribble and parts of Fylde and Wyre | 384,400 |
| | Fylde Coast | Blackpool and parts of Fylde and Wyre | 270,600 |
| | Rochdale | Rochdale and part of Rossendale | 212,600 |
| | Sefton & West Lancashire | Sefton and part of West Lancashire | 338,900 |
| | South Cumbria & Lancaster | Barrow-in-Furness, Lancaster City and South Lakeland | 308,200 |
| | South East Lancashire | Burnley, Pendle and part of Rossendale | 237,200 |
| | Wigan | Wigan and part of West Lancashire | 353,900 |

4 Submissions received

Cumbria

110 We received almost 570 submissions in relation to Cumbria during the consultation on our draft recommendations. These included submissions from each two-tier authority under review. We are grateful to all those who gave us their views during the consultation period.

111 Table 7 summarises the preferred options of the existing local authorities in Cumbria. None of the authorities expressed a second preference.

Table 7: Summary of representations by two-tier authorities in Cumbria

| Authority | Preferred option |
|---|--|
| Cumbria County Council | A single unitary authority (Option One of our draft recommendations). |
| Allerdale, Copeland, Carlisle City and Eden district councils | Two unitary authorities in the north of the county, based on pairs of existing districts; West Cumbria (Allerdale and Copeland) and East Cumbria (Carlisle City and Eden). |
| Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council | A single unitary authority in south Cumbria and north Lancashire (Option Two of our draft recommendations). |
| South Lakeland District Council | Did not express a preference. |

Cumbria County Council

112 Cumbria County Council supported Option One of our draft recommendations. Its Stage Three submission reiterated the arguments in favour of a single unitary authority that were put forward in its initial submission. These included potentially lower transitional costs and levels of disruption associated with the implementation of a new authority, being able to attract and retain high quality staff and having the strategic capacity to effectively deliver a full range of local government services. In addition, the Council addressed concerns we raised in our draft recommendations report regarding representation issues, and gave details of the new corporate management plans.

Allerdale, Copeland, Carlisle City and Eden councils

113 In Stage Three, two joint submissions were received, one each from Allerdale and Copeland, and Carlisle City and Eden. The councils strongly objected to both our options for consultation. They reiterated their support for two pairings of unitary authorities in the north of the county, but made no reference to their preferred future arrangements in the south. They repeated the perceived benefits of such a pattern of authorities, including the belief that it would be best placed to reflect communities of identity within a diverse area, that it would result in responsive, mid-range authorities and thus have strategic capacity to provide services, yet would remain focused on

local needs. In addition, they argued that two unitary authorities in the north would be better placed to address the particular concerns in east and west Cumbria.

Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council

114 Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council supported the South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority in Option Two of our draft recommendations, while proposing an alternative name for the authority.

South Lakeland District Council

115 South Lakeland District Council did not express a view on either of the options put forward as part of our draft recommendations. However, it did request that a third option for Cumbria should be put forward, based on two unitary authorities for the whole county: West Cumbria would incorporate Allerdale, Copeland, Barrow-in-Furness and part of South Lakeland, and East Cumbria would comprise Carlisle City, Eden and part of South Lakeland.

Parish and town councils

116 Option One of our draft recommendations was supported by 15 parish and town councils as their first, second or third preference. A number of reasons were cited, including the retention of the Lake District under one authority and the perception that a single unitary authority would be better placed to recruit and retain high-calibre staff. However, nine parish and town councils objected to Option One. Many felt that a single unitary authority for Cumbria would be geographically too large to deliver services across an area with sparse population.

117 Option Two was supported either in its entirety or with reference to one of the two authorities by 24 parish and town councils as their first or second preference. Many of these respondents emphasised the perceived north/south divide in Cumbria and considered that Option Two recognises this. In addition, others considered that this option acknowledged the affinities between south Cumbria and north Lancashire, and the communication links that exist between them. However, Option Two was opposed by 17 parish and town councils for reasons including the perception that the proposed North Cumbria unitary authority was too large and that it may not be accountable.

118 The three unitary authority option put forward by five of the six district councils at Stage One, but which did not form part of our draft recommendations, was supported by 14 parish and town councils as their first or second preference, and four opposed the option. Several councils felt that there are natural affinities shared by the 'paired' districts, with the mountains acting as a natural barrier between the east and the west of the county. However, some felt that this was not a viable option, particularly with respect to the proposed West Cumbria unitary authority and the economic challenges it would face. A number of parish and town councils also made general comments about the review and the options.

National bodies

119 We received 14 representations from national stakeholder organisations. The Association of British Counties favoured naming new unitary authorities to reflect the geography of traditional counties, and provided suggested names for each of the

draft options. The Association of Lord Lieutenants favoured including as few unitary authorities in each county as possible.

120 The Environment Agency noted that all the options would involve a reduction in the number of local authorities, which could allow for better targeting of resources and improved working relationships. The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) highlighted that Cumbria County Council is currently engaged in developing distinct partnerships with health groups, and other stakeholders, on a county-wide basis. The SSI, however, indicated that there has been a differing pace of these developments between the north and south of the county, a sub-county distinction that is compounded by the configuration of health and social services, in relation to mental health, on a north/south basis. The SSI expressed concern that authorities constituted on a smaller sub-county basis would be unlikely to have the capacity to effectively deliver a full range of social services.

121 The Countryside Agency submitted research that found effective political leadership a more important characteristic of successful rural unitary authorities than factors relating to size, structure and geography. It also identified several common characteristics in successful authorities.

122 The County Councils Network (CCN) supported proposals for a single unitary authority in each of the counties under review. It argued that such authorities would fit within the local government modernisation agenda, building on the track record of existing county councils, and be both strategic and local in nature.

123 The National Union of Teachers (NUT) stated their opposition to the breaking up of the education function where it is currently delivered at a county level, arguing that new unitary authorities would not be large enough to provide the necessary infrastructure.

124 The Trading Standards Institute expressed a preference for county-wide unitary authorities in each area under review, arguing that they would have the lowest transitional and operating costs, and would facilitate high performance. Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) requested that the Committee carefully consider the impact of any local government changes on smaller regulatory services. The General Register Office (GRO) expressed concerns about the viability of the Registration service and stated that any further disaggregation may exacerbate its position.

125 The National Council on Archives (NCA) supported arrangements that would maintain strong archive services in the areas under review. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) favoured arrangements that would ensure that museum and archives collections, currently held at county level, are not broken up. The Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government (ACALG) expressed a preference for county-wide unitary authorities, as the best way to ensure the continuity of archive provision. The National Archives stated that, in the event of multiple unitary authorities being established in a county, joint arrangements may be necessary for archives and records management services. The ACALG and the NCA also favoured such joint arrangements, if necessary.

Public opinion research

126 During the consultation on our draft recommendations we commissioned MORI to carry out public opinion research on our behalf. This research consisted of 300 face-to-face interviews in each of the districts in Cumbria. The purpose of this

research was to explore people's views in relation to the draft options we put out for public consultation.

127 Interviewees were asked about their preferences for the three options put forward for public consultation. The research findings showed that across Cumbria as a whole Option Two was the more popular option of interviewees (43%). Option One was the less supported option of the interviewees (27%).

128 When thinking about the review, interviewees were asked what they feel are the important issues that should be taken into account. As with the research carried out at Stage One, quality of services was cited as the single most important issue across all areas. In addition, those interviewed also expressed a desire for new authorities to be accountable to local people and respond to local people's wishes. The cost of services is also identified as an issue that should be considered, albeit to a lesser extent.

129 The MORI opinion research for Cumbria was published on 14 April 2004 and can be downloaded from our website (www.boundarycommittee.org.uk) and from MORI's website (www.mori.com).

Other representations

130 Around 470 further representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local residents, organisations, political groups, councillors and Members of Parliament.

131 Eric Martlew MP (Carlisle), Tony Cunningham MP (Workington), John Hutton MP (Barrow and Furness) and Hilton Dawson MP (Lancaster and Wyre) supported Option Two. They considered that the unitary authorities that would be created under Option Two would be of an adequate size, whilst maintaining a local perspective. Eric Martlew MP objected to the option proposed by five of the six districts in Stage One.

132 Nine political groups also submitted their views. The Conservative Party expressed a preference for a sub-county option with unitary authorities based on the Carlisle City and Eden model. Cumbria County Council Labour Group Office and Carlisle City Council Labour Group offered general support for the proposals in the draft recommendations. Option Two was the preferred option of the Westmorland and Lonsdale Constituency Labour Party, the Carlisle Labour Party, the Carlisle District Labour Party, the Lancaster City branch of the Liberal Democrats and the Liberal Democrats Group on Allerdale Borough Council. Argumentation in support of Option Two centred around the perception that it would create unitary authorities with potential benefits in terms of their capacity to deliver services. The Barrow and Furness Conservative Association, Ulverston Joint Committee supported Option One, and objected to Option Two.

133 We received five representations from regional/sub-regional bodies commenting on options in Cumbria. The North West Development Agency assessed each of the options, and expressed some concerns relating to Option Two and the transitional arrangements and potential disruption it considered might arise. The Northern TUC claimed that any new unitary structures should not lead to the creation of new democratic deficits or result in any compulsory redundancies. The Campaign to Protect Rural England North West raised concerns regarding the future interaction of the Lake District National Park Authority with local authorities and those authorities' resultant ability to protect the Lake District National Park. Concerns were also highlighted over potential environmental issues regarding Morecambe Bay. In

addition to this, it commented on issues such as the size of an authority, its ability to remain accountable and democratic and its capacity to acquire the necessary expertise and skilled staff. The North of England Trading Standards Group was concerned about the possible fragmentation of trading standards services. It argued that smaller unitary authorities have faced significant difficulties with regard to the effective delivery of such services and highlighted that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has some concerns over the uniformity of service provision across these smaller delivery units.

134 The North West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council expressed concerns about need to maintain the quality of current service provision under any new boundary change. It also supported the establishment of joint management arrangements for services that are currently delivered at county level, if necessary.

135 Cumbria Police Authority expressed its opposition to any boundary changes that would impact upon its ability to provide effective policing and urged that policing issues should be determined on an operational basis. It was particularly opposed to Option Two, which could potentially lead to the amalgamation of Cumbria Constabulary with Lancashire Constabulary. It argued that such a merger would give rise to serious transitional problems and hinder effective policing in the present county area. Cumbria Criminal Justice Board expressed concerns about the loss of coterminosity with local authorities under Option Two of our draft recommendations. Lancashire Police Authority and Lancashire Constabulary considered that the constabulary had the capacity to police the Cumbria area, in relation to the cross-county unitary authority proposal.

136 We received six representations from Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and other health related organisations. North Cumbria Mental Health and Learning Disabilities NHS Trust expressed a preference for Option One on the grounds that a larger unitary authority would give rise to potential efficiency gains. However, it did not consider that patient care would suffer under Option Two. All three PCTs in north Cumbria supported a North Cumbria unitary authority (Option Two). Both the Morecambe Bay Hospital NHS Trust and the Morecambe Bay PCT supported a South Cumbria & Lancaster authority (Option Two), commenting on the perceived benefits for the effective delivery of health and social care services that coterminosity with the local authority could yield.

137 The Cumbria Association of Local Councils welcomed our views on effective community engagement in Cumbria. It expressed the view that 'the momentum for change in the parish tier [of government] will accelerate' and that this should be an important factor when designing the future structure of unitary authorities.

138 The Western Heads' Consortium expressed support for Allerdale and Copeland joining to form a unitary authority. It considered that 'West Cumbria is uniquely placed with regards to educational landscape in its relationship with its local councils' and that there is considerable collaborative activity which exists between both councils and their secondary schools. The West Cumbria Partnership also supported the creation of a West Cumbria unitary authority comprising Allerdale and Copeland, in order to reflect what it considered to be the diverse needs and interests of the area.

139 The Lake District National Park Authority highlighted its obligation, under the Environment Act 1995, to 'foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park' and thus the need for this to be taken into account when formulating our recommendations. The Cumbria Tourist Board felt that

our proposals should take into account the implications for the economy of Cumbria. It expressed a preference for Option One, suggesting that one authority would be best placed to ensure that a coherent strategy could be developed for the whole county. This view was shared by the Keswick Tourism Association.

140 The Duchy of Lancaster Office recognised the widely perceived view that residents in the Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland district council areas have close ties with Lancashire, yet stated that any option that could be interpreted as 'changing the status of Lancaster' would be seen as a step to be resisted, as it would ignore matters of historical significance.

141 The Cumbria Chamber of Commerce and Industry expressed its support for elected regional assemblies and unitary authorities. It proposed an additional option for an east/west split, the former comprising Carlisle City, Eden and South Lakeland and the latter Allerdale, Copeland and Barrow-in-Furness. It felt that districts in east Cumbria had commonalities such as modern services and economies, whereas it considered that the western area faces similar economic, social and housing issues and shares a similar manufacturing base. Of the options put forward, it preferred Option One.

142 The North Eastern and Cumbrian Co-operative Party supported the creation of unitary authorities in Cumbria and opposed Option One. It also expressed the opinion that northern Cumbria relates much more to Newcastle and the North East while south Cumbria generally looks towards Manchester. The Friends of Cumbria Archives supported Option One. They urged the Committee not to divide small services such as Archive Services. This view was shared by the Cumbria Family History Society. The Cumbria County Council Archives Advisory Group made general comments regarding archiving services and the implications of our draft recommendations. The High Sheriff of Cumbria expressed a preference for Option One, considering that the characteristics of Cumbria would be best represented by a single unitary authority.

143 The Egremont Team Ministry supported Option Two, while the Appleby in Westmorland Society objected to this option. The latter supported Option One as it had concerns that dividing the county could lead to the fracturing of existing partnerships and a need to reconfigure existing county-wide organisations. The Northern Rock Foundation, a grant-providing body for Cumbria, expressed concern over the South Cumbria & Lancaster option as it considered that this could possibly result in a loss of funding for Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland districts.

144 A number of other groups made general comments about the review.

145 We received over 430 representations from members of the public. Option One was supported by 105 individuals as either their first or second preference. Many felt that this option would best reflect the needs and community identity of the people of Cumbria. It was generally perceived that Option One would be the least disruptive of the two options and that it would keep the Lake District National Park within one local authority. Option One was opposed by 35 individual respondents. It was perceived by some of these respondents that the geography of Cumbria poses certain difficulties in the delivery of services across the whole area. It was generally considered that members of a single unitary authority would have difficulties in carrying out their representational role.

146 A total of 75 individual respondents supported Option Two in its entirety either as their first or second preference. Many referred to the coterminosity this option

would achieve with the health authorities, a perceived divide between the north and south of the county and the view that this option best reflects historical boundaries as reasons for supporting this option. Option Two was opposed either in its entirety or in respect of one of the two authorities by 114 individual respondents. Some considered that this option attempted to unite very different places.

147 We received a considerable number of submissions specifically relating to our proposed South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority. This authority was specifically supported by over 70 members of the public either as their first or second preference. Their reasons included the perceived natural affinity existing around the Morecambe Bay area, the coterminosity with the health services and that such a local authority would be of an appropriate size given its geography. This unitary authority was opposed by around 60 individual respondents. Some of these respondents felt that the authority could lead to difficulties, as it would combine large rural areas with large urban areas. Some respondents felt that South Lakeland and Lancaster City were geographically and culturally very different and should not be amalgamated.

148 We received just over 30 representations supporting the retention of the existing structure. Many felt that reorganisation would prove to be too expensive and that the existing system, though currently experiencing difficulties, still works well. We also received some support for the revival of the historic county areas of Westmorland and Cumberland as unitary authorities. Some felt that either the historic boundaries were the natural boundaries for the area, or that residents still identify with those boundaries.

149 We received just over 30 representations in support of the three unitary authority option, either in its entirety or in relation to one of the proposed authorities, which was proposed by five of the six district councils during Stage One. One individual respondent opposed the proposal. Many of those who supported this option commented on the existing partnerships between Carlisle City and Eden, and Allerdale and Copeland. Some respondents felt that it was important that west Cumbria had its own identity and others were of the opinion that the three 'pairings' would provide for unitary authorities with adequate population sizes to effectively deliver the full range of local government services.

150 We received other proposals for patterns of unitary authorities in Cumbria. Five submissions were received stating a preference for an east/west split of the county comprising various possible configurations. We received one submission opposing an east/west split.

151 We received nine submissions, from members of the public and one parish council, in support of transferring Millom into the proposed South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority. Some respondents considered that Millom had more in common with the Furness area, while others suggested that Millom was relatively isolated from the rest of north Cumbria.

152 A number of other organisations made general comments about the review.

Lancashire

153 We received around 3,700 submissions in relation to Lancashire during the consultation on our draft recommendations. These included submissions from each two-tier authority under review and six adjoining unitary authorities. We are grateful to all those who gave us their views during the consultation period.

154 Table 8 summarises the preferred options of the existing local authorities in Lancashire. In many cases they provided us with one preferred option while some also indicated a second preference.

Table 8: Summary of representations by two-tier authorities in Lancashire

| Authority | Preferred option | Second preference |
|---|---|--|
| Lancashire County Council | A single unitary authority, based on existing county boundaries. | None stated. |
| Burnley and Rossendale borough councils | Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale unitary authority (South East Lancashire unitary authority in Option Three of our draft recommendations). | Unitary authority based on Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale and Ribble Valley. Also proposed a unitary authority based on Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn. |
| Chorley Borough Council | Unitary authority based on existing boundaries. | None stated. |
| Fylde and Wyre borough councils | Unitary authority based on Wyre and Fylde. | Unitary authority based on Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde borough councils. |
| Hyndburn Borough Council | Unitary authority based on Hyndburn and Ribble Valley. | None stated. |
| Lancaster City Council | A single unitary authority in south Cumbria and north Lancashire (South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority in Options Two and Three). | None stated. |
| Pendle Borough Council | Unitary authority based on Burnley, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale, and a unitary authority based on Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn. | None stated. |
| Preston City Council | Central Lancashire unitary authority based on Chorley, Preston City and South Ribble. | Unitary authority based on Preston City and South Ribble. |
| Ribble Valley Borough Council | 'Enhanced' Ribble Valley unitary authority, based on a rural expansion of the existing district or a unitary authority based on Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale and Ribble Valley. Also proposed a unitary authority based on Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn districts. | None stated. |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| South Ribble Borough Council | Central Lancashire unitary authority based on Chorley, Preston City and South Ribble or a unitary authority based on Preston City and South Ribble. | None stated. |
| West Lancashire District Council | Unitary authority based on existing boundaries. | Expanded unitary authority, including parts of Chorley and South Ribble. |

Table 9: Summary of representations by unitary authorities in and adjoining Lancashire

| Authority | Preferred option | Second preference |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Blackpool Borough Council | Enlarged Blackpool to incorporate coastal strip from Wyre and a small part of Fylde. Proposed several options for the rest of Lancashire that would be compatible with this option. | None stated. |
| Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council | Unitary authority based on Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, and parts of Ribble Valley, South Ribble and Chorley. Proposed adding the remainder of Ribble Valley to the proposed South East Lancashire unitary authority (Option Three of our draft recommendations) or that it should join with Fylde, part of Wyre and Preston City. | None stated. |
| Bury Metropolitan Borough Council | Enlarged Bury, including the whole of Rossendale. | Enlarged Bury, including the Haslingden and Rawtenstall areas of Rossendale. |
| Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council | '...suggested that Whitworth might become part of the Borough within the context of Bury Council's proposal that most of Rossendale should be transferred to Bury' but also expressed reservations. | None stated. |
| Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council | Expressed no preferences on the draft recommendations, but proposed adding Bickerstaffe ward to Sefton (instead of Wigan) if the draft recommendations to divide West Lancashire were confirmed. | None stated. |
| Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council | Expressed no preferences on the draft recommendations but made comments. | None stated. |

Lancashire County Council

155 As in Stage One, Lancashire County Council proposed a unitary authority based on its existing boundaries, which it called a 'New Council for Lancashire'. Its Stage Three submission provided further detail of how it considered such a proposal would allow a greater integration of services across Lancashire. The County Council argued that, through its own consultation, people had expressed a view that local government leadership should represent and articulate the needs of the county at regional, national and international level. It argued that this option would ensure that 'Lancashire is big enough to count and local enough to care'.

156 The County Council also addressed concerns raised in our draft recommendations report regarding community engagement, giving details of the establishment of a network of local cabinets which would be based on communities, a local advisory group to offer views to each local cabinet before local councillors take service decisions, and a stronger role for parish and town councils. The County Council stated that it would also support community forums and cited numerous examples of how it currently uses information technology in order to connect with local people.

Lancaster City Council

157 Lancaster City Council supported the establishment of a South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority, as proposed under Options Two and Three. It sought to address areas of concern we had raised in our draft recommendations report and suggested setting up area committees in order to engage effectively with local communities and provided some evidence on how strategic services might be delivered. It also suggested several alternative names for the new authority.

Wyre and Fylde borough councils

158 Wyre and Fylde borough councils objected to Options Two and Three, insofar as they related to their area, stating that they objected to the dividing of the districts. Fylde argued that the draft recommendations were based on 'superficial information collected on shopping, leisure and travel-to-work patterns' with little community identity basis. They also argued that residents could receive a lower quality service under either option.

159 Both councils also expressed their opposition to Option One. Fylde Borough Council considered that a single unitary authority would, in practice, recreate the existing two-tier structure, while Wyre Borough Council objected to the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area being transferred to Blackpool.

160 They reiterated their Stage One proposal for a Wyre and Fylde unitary authority based on Wyre and Fylde districts, arguing that such an authority would provide high quality services and achieve public acceptance.

161 As their second preference, Wyre and Fylde borough councils proposed a unitary authority based on Wyre, Fylde and Blackpool. They stated that such an authority would have the capacity to deliver the full range of local government services while still being small enough to engage effectively with local communities, and avoided the division of either district.

Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley borough councils

162 Preston City and South Ribble councils reiterated their Stage One proposal for a unitary authority based on Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley. However, both councils objected to our proposal to divide the Wyre and Fylde districts, adding parts to Central Lancashire. Preston City argued that there is no significant gravitation from Wyre and Fylde to mid-Lancashire, other than for shopping. It also argued that in the long-term, as Blackpool develops its tourism proposals and attracts inward investment, the community areas of Wyre, Fylde and Blackpool would strengthen to form a natural Fylde Coast identity. They argued that their proposed Central Lancashire unitary authority would have the capacity to provide high quality services. In our draft recommendations report, we had raised concerns about community engagement and the possibility that Preston City could dominate the proposed authority. In order to address this, Preston City and South Ribble councils provided us with details of the model of community engagement they would wish to see operating in the new authority.

163 South Ribble also reiterated its joint first preference for a unitary authority based on Preston City and South Ribble districts. This was Preston City Council's second preference.

164 Chorley Borough Council objected to our draft recommendations for the area. In particular, it objected to the addition of parts of Fylde and Wyre to our proposed Central Lancashire unitary authority. It reiterated its Stage One proposal for a unitary authority based on its existing boundaries, but did not add to its Stage One submission with any further evidence or argumentation.

165 Preston City Council and Chorley Borough Council strongly objected to the proposal for a single unitary authority.

West Lancashire District Council

166 West Lancashire District Council strongly objected to Options Two and Three for the district and reiterated its Stage One proposal for a unitary authority based on the district's existing boundaries. It expressed concern that we had misinterpreted parts of its original submission and the MORI public opinion research. The Council argued that West Lancashire has a strong community identity, which separates it from the rest of Lancashire and the adjoining metropolitan areas. The submission also addressed what the Council considered to be the detrimental effects of dividing its existing services and the disadvantages that dividing the district would have for local people. It argued that as a high-performing district council, it would be well-placed to carry out county council functions.

167 As its second preference West Lancashire District Council proposed an expanded West Lancashire unitary authority, including parts of Chorley and South Ribble districts. The Council stated that this would increase the population of the authority, if a higher population figure was deemed necessary by the Committee, arguing that these areas had a common identity with West Lancashire.

168 We note that the Council undertook its own extensive consultation exercise regarding its proposal for unitary status and it forwarded, as part of its submission, views from around 4,000 local people opposing our draft recommendations and supporting a West Lancashire unitary authority.

Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale borough councils

169 Burnley and Rossendale borough councils supported a unitary authority comprising Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale districts, as proposed under Option Three of our draft recommendations, other than the transfer of Whitworth (a parish in Rossendale) to Rochdale. They reiterated the arguments made in their Stage One submission that the three districts of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale have a similar social and demographic make-up. The two councils also argued that while this new authority would have the capacity and critical mass to deliver the full range of local government services, it would be small enough to be able to effectively engage the community. The submission also discussed the delivery of major services and how the new authority might tackle various common social, economic and regeneration issues. Burnley and Rossendale borough councils stated strongly that the whole of Rossendale should be included in this authority. These councils also supported our proposed Blackburn & Ribble unitary authority for the remainder of east Lancashire (under Option Three of our draft recommendations).

170 Pendle Borough Council proposed a unitary authority comprising Ribble Valley, Pendle, Burnley and Rossendale districts, and a single unitary authority comprising Hyndburn and the existing unitary authority of Blackburn with Darwen. This option was the joint first preference of Ribble Valley Borough Council, and the second preference of Burnley and Rossendale borough councils. The submission deployed arguments similar to those in support of a South East Lancashire unitary authority, although it suggested that the addition of Ribble Valley would create a diverse authority which would contain a mix of urban and rural areas. It was also argued that the addition of Ribble Valley would add areas of relative affluence which would be important to both the external image and economic development strategy of the new authority. All of the district councils that supported this proposal said that Whitworth parish in Rossendale should be included in the authority.

171 Ribble Valley Borough Council opposed being linked with Blackburn with Darwen as proposed under Options Two and Three of our draft recommendations and was also strongly opposed to any suggestion that the borough should be divided under any alternative options. It expressed a joint first preference for a unitary authority based on expanded borough boundaries. However, it provided little additional evidence beyond what was provided during Stage One in relation to this proposal.

172 Hyndburn Borough Council objected to our draft recommendations to link it with Blackburn with Darwen under Options Two and Three. It reiterated its Stage One proposal for a unitary authority based on Hyndburn and Ribble Valley districts. It argued that such an authority would bring together two generally good councils that would have a sufficiently large resource base to function effectively. Hyndburn Borough Council also objected to the alternative proposal submitted by some of the district councils in East Lancashire proposing that the east Lancashire area be divided into two unitary authorities consisting of Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn, and Burnley, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale. Hyndburn Borough Council argued that this configuration would not serve any identifiable patterns of community.

173 Each of the East Lancashire districts, excluding Hyndburn, objected to a single unitary authority for Lancashire. They argued that the proposed authority would be too large and diverse to effectively engage with local communities.

Unitary authorities in and adjoining Lancashire

Blackpool Borough Council

174 Blackpool Borough Council broadly supported Option One insofar as it included the transfer of Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys to its area. It reiterated its argument that the transfer of this part of Wyre into Blackpool would unite common communities with similar priorities and provided supporting evidence. In order to engage the community, the Council proposed establishing town forums or reinstating town councils in Fleetwood, Thornton-Cleveleys and Poulton. However, it reiterated its Stage One proposal for additional minor boundary amendments on and around its boundary with Fylde Borough Council.

175 Blackpool Borough Council highlighted a number of concerns over Options Two and Three of our draft recommendations, for a Fylde Coast unitary authority. It stated that there is no common community interest or identity across the proposed area and that the Fylde Coast unitary authority would lose the focus on the regeneration of the resorts of Blackpool and Fleetwood and the urban social problems of these communities. The Council outlined patterns of unitary authorities for Lancashire as an alternative to a Fylde Coast unitary authority.

176 Blackpool Borough Council also objected to any proposal for a unitary authority based on Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde. The council argued that there is no common or community interest between the areas as a whole and that there would be hostility from residents towards this proposal. The council also expressed concern that such an authority could cause a loss of focus for Blackpool's Masterplan.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

177 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council objected to our proposed East Lancashire and Blackburn & Ribble unitary authorities, and proposed a unitary authority based on Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn and parts of South Ribble, Chorley and Ribble Valley. This was a modified version of its Stage One proposal, which had involved incorporating most of Ribble Valley within the proposed new Blackburn-based unitary authority. The Council reiterated many of the themes of its Stage One submission while also arguing that taking a smaller area of Ribble Valley, south of the river Ribble, would better reflect local community identities and interests than its Stage One proposal. The Council also made some suggestions for unitary authorities in the remainder of east Lancashire.

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

178 Bury Metropolitan Borough Council reiterated its Stage One proposal for a unitary authority based on Bury and Rossendale. It argued that its improvements in performance meant that it would have a more positive impact for Rossendale residents than any proposal to include Rossendale in an authority with existing two-tier districts. It reiterated some of the arguments set out in its Stage One proposal, particularly in relation to shared community identity and interests with Rossendale. The Council also emphasised the benefits it considered Rossendale residents would receive by being part of a Greater Manchester metropolitan authority, as well as commenting on the benefits a larger population base would have for Bury itself. Its second preference was the transfer of a smaller area of Rossendale, the Rawtenstall and Haslingden areas, to Bury.

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council

179 Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council stated that in its Stage One submission it had only suggested that the Whitworth area of Rossendale might become part of the borough if the remainder of Rossendale was transferred to Bury. The Council maintained that it was crucial that the residents of Whitworth were fully consulted and that it would oppose the transfer of this area to Rochdale unless the proposal had the support of residents. The Council also stated that it could not support the continued existence of Whitworth Town Council if Whitworth were transferred to Rochdale and that Whitworth would have to be incorporated into its existing Township scheme.

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

180 Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council said that, as it had not proposed during Stage One any expansion of its boundaries, it had not had time to fully investigate the impact of our draft recommendations to transfer the western part of West Lancashire to its area. It was concerned over the impact that our draft recommendations could have on Sefton politically, financially and for residents. In particular, this related to the uncertainty surrounding the continuing status of any metropolitan authority that is expanded as part of this review (this issue is addressed in chapter 2). The Council suggested, however, that if we were to confirm the proposed transfer, the Bickerstaffe ward of West Lancashire should also be included within its area.

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

181 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council stated that it had not sought the changes proposed in our draft recommendations for the eastern part of West Lancashire to be transferred to Wigan. It stated that its prime concern was to maintain the current level of 'excellent' service provided to its existing residents. However, the Council commented that if the draft recommendations are confirmed as final, 'it would be willing to use its proven skills when dealing with areas of social deprivation and to improve facilities'.

Parish and town councils

182 We received representations relating to Lancashire from 102 parish and town councils. Just over 20 stated that they wished to retain the current two-tier system or that they were opposed to elected regional assemblies. Ten parish and town councils supported Option One of the draft recommendations, while a further seven parish and town councils supported Option One as a second preference, preferring to retain the status quo. Option One was opposed by six parish and town councils.

183 Whitworth Town Council stated that residents in the parish of Whitworth should have a choice over whether it should be transferred to Rochdale, as that change featured in all of our draft recommendations.

184 Fewer parish councils wholly supported Options Two and Three (three and two respectively), while a further two parish councils supported these options with minor modifications. One parish council objected to these options. However, many commented on one or more of the proposed authorities in Options Two or Three. A number of parish and town councils in Cumbria and Lancashire commented on a South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority (as detailed earlier).

185 We also received a number of submissions relating to West Lancashire from parish and town councils. Five objected to West Lancashire being divided between Sefton and Wigan, three supported a unitary authority for West Lancashire and three supported merging the district with a Central Lancashire unitary authority, or with Chorley and South Ribble only, either in its entirety or in relation to its northern parishes. Two parish councils supported the proposal to divide the district.

186 We received four submissions from parish and town councils supporting the establishment of a new unitary authority based on the whole of Wyre, Fylde and Blackpool, and objections from two parish councils to the proposal to link Fylde with Blackpool. We also received three representations from parish councils in Ribble Valley objecting to a merger between Blackburn with Darwen and Ribble Valley. We received three submissions supporting an 'enhanced' Ribble Valley unitary authority, which would include some rural areas of neighbouring authorities. We also received two submissions proposing a number of alternatives for east Lancashire.

187 A number of parish and town councils expressed second preferences, made other proposals in relation to their area and made other comments about the review.

National bodies

188 We received 14 representations from national stakeholder organisations. The Association of British Counties favoured naming new unitary authorities to reflect the geography of traditional counties, and provided suggested names for each of the draft options. The Association of Lord Lieutenants favoured including as few unitary authorities in each county as possible.

189 The Environment Agency noted that all the options would involve a reduction in the number of local authorities, which could allow for better targeting of resources and improved working relationships. The Social Service Inspectorate highlighted what it considered to be the merits and drawbacks of each of the draft recommendations. It considered that Lancashire County Council would need to provide further evidence of how a single unitary authority would adequately represent local needs over such a large geographical area. It also highlighted the complexities of mixing urban and rural areas and the importance it placed upon coterminosity between local government boundaries and Primary Care and NHS Trusts.

190 The Countryside Agency submitted research that found effective political leadership a more important characteristic of successful rural unitary authorities than factors relating to size, structure and geography. It also identified several common characteristics in successful authorities.

191 The County Councils Network (CCN) supported proposals for a single unitary authority in each of the counties under review. It argued that such authorities would fit within the local government modernisation agenda, building on the track record of existing county councils, and be both strategic and local in nature.

192 The National Union of Teachers (NUT) stated their opposition to the breaking up of the education function where it is currently delivered at a county level, arguing that new unitary authorities would not be large enough to provide the necessary infrastructure.

193 The Trading Standards Institute expressed a preference for county-wide unitary authorities in each area under review, arguing that they would have the lowest transitional and operating costs, and would facilitate high performance. Local

Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) requested that the Committee carefully consider the impact of any local government changes on smaller regulatory services. The General Register Office (GRO) expressed concerns about the viability of the Registration service and stated that any further disaggregation may exacerbate its position.

194 The National Council on Archives (NCA) supported arrangements that would maintain strong archive services in the areas under review. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) favoured arrangements that would ensure that museum and archives collections, currently held at county level, are not broken up. The Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government (ACALG) expressed a preference for county-wide unitary authorities, as the best way to ensure the continuity of archive provision. The National Archives stated that, in the event of multiple unitary authorities being established in a county, joint arrangements may be necessary for archives and records management services. The ACALG and the NCA also favoured such joint arrangements, if necessary.

Public opinion research

195 During the consultation on our draft recommendations we commissioned MORI to carry out public opinion research on our behalf. This research consisted of around 300 face-to-face interviews in each of the districts in Lancashire, as well as Sefton and Wigan metropolitan borough councils. The purpose of this research was to explore people's views in relation to the draft options we put out for public consultation.

196 Further interviews were carried out in the districts of Fylde, Rossendale, West Lancashire and Wyre. The purpose of these interviews was to enable us to gauge more closely the community identities, interests and preferences of local people in areas that presented us with particular challenges during the review.

197 Interviewees were asked about their preferences for the three options put forward for public consultation. The research findings showed that across Lancashire there was little difference between the levels of support for each of the Options. Option One is the most popular option (22%), followed by Option Two (19%) and then Option Three (18%).

198 When thinking about the review, interviewees were asked what they feel are the important issues that should be taken into account. As with the research carried out at Stage One, quality of services was cited as the single most important issue across all areas. In addition, those interviewed also expressed a desire for new authorities to be accountable to local people and respond to local people's wishes. The cost of services was also identified as an issue that should be considered, albeit to a lesser extent.

199 The MORI opinion research for Lancashire was published on 14 April 2004 and can be downloaded from our website (www.boundarycommittee.org.uk) and from MORI's website (www.mori.com).

Other representations

200 Around 3,500 further representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local residents, organisations, political groups and Members of Parliament.

201 We received submissions from 15 MPs and one MEP. Nigel Evans MP (Ribble Valley) opposed all of the draft recommendations for Lancashire. Peter Pike MP (Burnley), Colin Pickthall MP (West Lancashire) and Hilton Dawson MP (Lancaster and Wyre) all opposed Option One of the draft recommendations or expressed concerns over the viability of one large unitary authority. Option One was supported by Gordon Prentice MP (Pendle) as a second preference and Option Two was supported by Peter Pike MP as a second preference.

202 The majority of MPs who made submissions to us referred to the specific options relevant to their area. Eric Martlew MP (Carlisle), Tony Cunningham MP (Workington), John Hutton MP (Barrow-in-Furness) and Hilton Dawson MP all supported a South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority, although the latter proposed a minor boundary amendment.

203 David Borrow MP (South Ribble) supported a Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley unitary authority and opposed linking parts of Wyre and Fylde to Central Lancashire. Lindsay Hoyle MP (Chorley) supported a Chorley unitary authority, or a Chorley & Leyland authority as a second preference.

204 Hilton Dawson MP also supported merging parts of Wyre and Fylde with Preston City and Central Lancashire, while Joan Humble MP (Blackpool North & Fleetwood) and Gordon Marsden MP (Blackpool South) supported an expanded Blackpool authority, as proposed under Option One, and opposed the draft recommendations for a Fylde Coastal unitary authority.

205 Colin Pickthall MP and David Borrow MP also opposed dividing West Lancashire between Sefton and Wigan and both supported joining West Lancashire in an authority with Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley. In addition, Colin Pickthall MP also opposed a West Lancashire unitary authority. Dr John Pugh (Southport) stressed that a Sefton & West Lancashire unitary authority should remain within the Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority.

206 Gordon Prentice MP and Peter Pike MP supported our proposed South East Lancashire unitary authority. Nigel Evans MP proposed a Ribble Valley unitary authority, based on its existing district boundaries. David Chaytor MP (Bury North) proposed that Rossendale should merge with Bury and the Rt. Hon. Jack Straw MP (Blackburn) supported Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's Stage One proposal for a Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, majority of Ribble Valley and small parts of South Ribble and Chorley unitary authority. He opposed an East Lancashire unitary authority. A number of other MPs forwarded letters from their constituents. Terry Wynn MEP proposed alternative names for our proposed authorities.

207 We received 20 submissions from political parties and groups. The Conservative Party objected to each of the draft recommendations. The Parbold & Wrightington Branch Labour Party made general comments regarding unitary authorities. The Blackpool & Fleetwood Liberal Democrat Party and the Conservative Group on Blackpool Borough Council supported Options Two and Three in respect of the proposed Fylde Coast unitary authority. Wyre Labour Party supported Option One in relation to the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area, and opposed Options Two and Three in relation to Wyre. The Leyland East Branch South Ribble Labour Party also supported Options Two and Three, and opposed Option One. Chorley Liberal Democrat Executive Committee opposed all options and proposed a unitary authority based upon Chorley and South Ribble.

208 The Barrow and Furness Conservative Association, Ulverston Joint Committee opposed Options Two and Three, specifically relating to our proposed South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority. However, the Cumbria County Council Labour Group Office expressed its support for each of our draft recommendations. The Liberal Democrats Lancaster City Branch, Westmorland & Lonsdale Constituency Labour Party, the Carlisle City Council Labour Group, the Carlisle Labour Party and the Carlisle District Labour Party also expressed their support for Options Two and Three, regarding our proposed South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority.

209 As its first preference, the West Lancashire District Council Labour Group proposed a unitary authority based on West Lancashire and Chorley, South Ribble and Preston City, called South West Lancashire. However, it also argued that our draft recommendation to divide the district should also form part of our final recommendations. The Group opposed a West Lancashire unitary authority. West Lancashire Constituency Labour Party supported these views in relation to West Lancashire's inclusion within the Central Lancashire unitary authority, and our proposal to divide the district. West Lancashire Conservative Association forwarded the results of a survey it carried out, where the majority of residents surveyed preferred to retain the existing two-tier structure, with very few supporting either of our draft recommendations for the area.

210 The Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the Conservative Party in Southport proposed combining Ormskirk and Southport, and the Southport Party on Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council supported Options Two and Three, specifically relating to Sefton & West Lancashire, although its preferred option would be to add Southport to West Lancashire. The Conservative Group on Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council favoured Southport and the western part of West Lancashire forming one authority outside of Merseyside, although it did not support elected regional assemblies.

211 A number of local councillors also made comments on our draft recommendations. One county councillor objected to all our draft recommendations for Lancashire, while another councillor, a member on both the county council and a borough council, proposed retaining the status quo, or Option One as a second preference. One county councillor and one district councillor objected to Options Two and Three of our draft recommendations in relation to our proposed South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority. One borough councillor supported Option Three of our draft recommendations in relation to our proposed South East Lancashire unitary authority, but including Whitworth parish, and objected to any proposal to transfer Rossendale to Bury. A county councillor also objected to this proposal, and supported a Lancashire unitary authority.

212 One district councillor supported a West Lancashire unitary authority, while another supported the proposal that West Lancashire should be included in a Central Lancashire authority. One parish councillor supported the inclusion of Skelmersdale and Up Holland in Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council. He also forwarded the results of a local survey he had carried out in one ward in the eastern part of the district, where most residents who responded supported a West Lancashire unitary authority, and linking with Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council was the second most preferred option, although the overall response rate was low.

213 We received six representations from regional/sub-regional bodies commenting on options for Lancashire. The North West Development Agency assessed each of the options, and expressed some concerns relating to each of them, and with Options Two and Three in particular, relating to the transitional arrangements and

potential disruption it considered might arise. The North West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council made general comments about the review (see Cumbria section for further detail). The North of England Trading Standards Group expressed a preference for larger unitary authorities for the effective delivery of trading standards.

214 The Greater Manchester Transport Authority said that it could take in additional areas from West Lancashire and Rossendale providing the affected unitary authorities retained their existing metropolitan status and that the change was supported by the district councils. We also received a representation from Mersey Travel which commented it would prefer the south-eastern parts of West Lancashire be transferred to Merseyside, rather than Greater Manchester, and that it would wish its public transport provision to extend to this area. The Campaign to Protect Rural England North West raised concerns regarding the interests of rural communities in authorities with urban areas in relation to Options Two and Three of our draft recommendations.

215 We received 10 submissions from Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and other health-related bodies. Hyndburn with Ribble Valley PCT opposed Option One of the draft recommendations, commenting that it would make it difficult for NHS bodies to enter into meaningful partnership arrangements with such a large authority. It considered there were merits for east Lancashire in both Options Two and Three of our draft recommendations but said that it would object to the transfer of rural parishes from Ribble Valley into another unitary authority as this would severely disrupt the provision of health care. Blackburn with Darwen PCT supported our proposed Blackburn & Ribble unitary authority under Option Three of our draft recommendations. Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale NHS PCT supported Option Three for a South East Lancashire unitary authority, as did the Brook Advisory Centre, Burnley.

216 Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust and Morecambe Bay PCT supported Options Two and Three for a South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority and commented that the area would benefit from the coterminosity of health and social care services. North Cumbria Mental Health and Learning Disabilities NHS Trust, while not explicitly supporting a South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority, commented that it did not believe patient care would suffer under such an authority. West Lancashire PCT stated that it wished West Lancashire district to remain as one entity and objected to the proposal to divide the district. Southport & Formby PCT made some general comments concerning the impact on service delivery under any changes to boundaries. Blackpool PCT supported Option One of the draft recommendations.

217 We received submissions from three police authorities, one police constabulary, two magistrates courts committees and three fire and civil defence authorities. Lancashire Police Authority and Lancashire Constabulary said all of the draft recommendations would be workable in policing terms, but that Option One would be the preferred option as it would lead to the least disruption. Lancashire Constabulary highlighted some concerns over policing a large East Lancashire unitary authority and both organisations opposed recommendations to transfer West Lancashire and Whitworth out of Lancashire. Both organisations also considered that Lancashire Constabulary had the capacity to police the Cumbria area, in relation to the cross-county unitary authority proposal. Cumbria Police Authority objected to boundary changes which would impact upon policing, as detailed earlier.

218 Greater Manchester Police Authority did not favour any specific option but commented that there were resource implications for transferring part of Lancashire to Greater Manchester. Lancashire Magistrates' Court Service supported Option One and opposed Options Two and Three. Merseyside Magistrates' Court Committee supported the proposal that the Ormskirk area of West Lancashire should be covered by Merseyside Police Authority, but proposed that Skelmersdale should be covered by it also.

219 Lancashire Combined Fire Authority considered that our draft recommendations conflicted with the Government's regional fire agenda. Merseyside Fire & Civil Defence Authority stated that it would have the capacity to take on additional areas if we transferred to it areas from Lancashire under our final recommendations, but had concerns relating to funding. Greater Manchester County Fire Service commented that it would be able to make the necessary arrangements to cover additional areas but was concerned about the potential impact upon the metropolitan status of Wigan and Rochdale.

220 The North and Western Lancashire Chamber of Commerce opposed our draft recommendation to divide West Lancashire and proposed a unitary authority based on West Lancashire and Central Lancashire. It broadly supported the other authorities in Option Two, and raised concerns about the size of Option One. Chamber Business Connections, in a submission forwarded by Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, supported the proposal to transfer Rossendale to Bury. The Chamber of Commerce East Lancashire supported a single unitary authority for east Lancashire, but considered that two east Lancashire unitary authorities could be viable. It opposed Option One. Hyndburn Chamber of Commerce supported the proposal for a Hyndburn & Ribble Valley unitary authority, and supported our East Lancashire unitary authority under Option Two of our draft recommendations as an alternative preference.

221 We received a submission from Blackpool UNISON branch, supporting Option One. The West Lancashire UNISON branch expressed concerns regarding the draft recommendations for the district in relation to local service provision. The Lancashire UNISON branch sent us a breakdown of a survey that it had conducted among its members. It received a total of 416 responses, the majority of which supported Option One. The CWU Mid Lancashire Group supported Option One of our draft recommendations and made general comments about the review. The National Union of Teachers Lancashire County Division preferred retaining the status quo, but chose Option One as a second preference.

222 We received submissions from local community groups, voluntary groups and residents associations in Lancashire. Clitheroe Civic Society and Waddington Women's Institute wished to retain the status quo.

223 The Egremont Team Ministry supported our proposed South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority under Options Two and Three of our draft recommendations. The Appleby in Westmorland Society objected to this proposal and Penwortham Women's Institute objected to any proposal that severed the link between Lancaster and Lancashire.

224 Wyre Housing Association supported Options Two and Three, particularly the proposed Fylde Coast unitary authority. However, it opposed Option One. Heyhouse Residents Association supported a Wyre and Fylde unitary authority, and adding Wyre (less the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area) and Fylde to our proposed Central Lancashire unitary authority as a second preference. It opposed linking Wyre

and Fylde with Blackpool. The Seafront Quality Management Board, the Blackpool Federation of Schools and Colleges and Blackpool Agency Alliance stated that they supported our proposed expansion of Blackpool under Option One. The Thornton Action Group objected to Option One of our draft recommendations in relation to Thornton-Cleveleys and instead supported a unitary authority comprising Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde in their entirety.

225 Burnley Civic Society and Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale Council for Voluntary Services supported the creation of a South East Lancashire unitary authority as featured in Option Three of our draft recommendations. Burnley & Padiham Community Housing and Belthorn Village Community Group supported an East Lancashire unitary authority as featured in Option Two of our draft recommendations. The Rossendale Chartists provided a critique of the options available for Rossendale and supported Bury Metropolitan Borough Council's proposal for a Bury with Rossendale authority. The Ribble Valley Branch of Lancashire Association of Parish and Town Councils supported Option One, or a unitary authority based upon Ribble Valley, Burnley and Pendle.

226 West Lancashire Civic Trust, the Claybrow and Holland Moor Estate Management Board, South Lathom Residents' Association and Ormskirk and District Community Council all opposed dividing West Lancashire between Sefton and Wigan. The latter proposed a West Lancashire unitary authority on its existing boundaries. The Wrightington & Appley Bridge Steering Committee expressed concerns over linking Appley Bridge and Wrightington with Wigan. The West Lancashire Council for Voluntary Services proposed adding West Lancashire to Central Lancashire as an alternative for West Lancashire residents.

227 We received a submission from 'Unite Craven', a group seeking the return of Bowland and West Craven from Lancashire to North Yorkshire under a Craven unitary authority. It demonstrated a significant amount of local support for this proposed change. However, we are not permitted to recommend authorities that cross regional boundaries as part of this review.

228 We received 26 submissions from school headteachers and governors in Lancashire commenting on our draft recommendations. The majority of these came from West Lancashire and a large number took the view that education in the district would be best delivered if West Lancashire merged in an authority with Central Lancashire. Many also raised concerns over the District Council's proposal for a West Lancashire unitary authority and commented that it might not be large enough to effectively provide education services in the area. Most of these submissions also objected to the draft recommendations to divide West Lancashire between Sefton and Wigan. Four of these representations supported retaining the status quo, two supported Option One and one supported our proposed Sefton & West Lancashire unitary authority as a second preference. We also received a submission from the headteacher of a Ribble Valley primary school who objected to Option One and supported a link between Ribble Valley and Blackburn with Darwen, and two submissions from the headteacher and the Chairman of Governors of a high school in Whitworth supporting the inclusion of Whitworth in a Lancashire-wide unitary authority.

229 We also received submissions from a number of other organisations. Blackpool Transport Services supported Option One in relation to Blackpool, Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys. The Campaign to Protect Rural England West Lancashire District Group supported Option One, with a unitary authority based on West Lancashire and Central Lancashire as its second choice. The Ribble Valley Citizens'

Advice Bureau objected to Ribble Valley being linked with urban areas and said that it wished to see Ribble Valley linked with other rural areas. The Duchy of Lancaster Office and the Northern Rock Foundation made comments regarding our proposed South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority, as detailed earlier. The Friends of Real Lancashire, Elswick Women's Institute and Balderstone & District Women's Institute advocated a return to traditional names to reflect Lancashire's identity.

230 The Friends of Lancashire Archives, Bury Archaeological Group, The Mourholme Local History Society and Cumbria County Council Archives Advisory Group made general comments regarding archiving services and the implications of our draft recommendations.

231 The majority of submissions received in Lancashire were from local residents and these are summarised below.

232 Most residents supported no change. Of those residents who selected a preferred option, Option One had the most support, with the majority of the responses being in the form of a tear-out slip from a newsletter issued by Lancashire County Council. Most stated that they preferred this option because it would be the cheapest or because it would not differ considerably from the status quo and was, therefore, the next best option to 'no change'. In total, almost 900 respondents favoured Option One as their first or second preference, mainly for these reasons. Over 60 individual respondents objected to Option One. Over 20 respondents specifically supported the option in relation to the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area, while over 70 respondents specifically opposed this.

233 Options Two and Three, which only differ in relation to east Lancashire, received over 320 representations in support. Out of these two options, Option Three received more support, largely from residents in the east Lancashire districts who believed that two unitary authorities for east Lancashire, rather than one, would be more effective and would better reflect local community identity and interests.

234 The majority of submissions regarding the proposed South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority came from residents in the Cumbria area (see the Cumbria section above for more detail).

235 Twenty-three individual respondents supported our proposed Fylde Coast unitary authority, while another 20 respondents objected to it, and seven respondents specifically objected to Wyre and Fylde being divided by our proposals. Over 20 respondents supported Wyre and Fylde borough councils' Stage One preference for a Wyre & Fylde unitary authority. Seven respondents supported a 'City of the Fylde' unitary authority, which would combine Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre in their entirety, while another 20 respondents objected to such a proposal. In total, around 280 respondents objected to parts of Wyre and Fylde being linked with Blackpool in the same authority.

236 Regarding east Lancashire, almost 20 respondents supported Option Two, while this option was opposed by 12 respondents. Option Three for east Lancashire was supported by almost 40 respondents, and opposed by five. Over 120 respondents objected to other east Lancashire districts being linked with Blackburn with Darwen in a unitary authority; the majority of these came from Ribble Valley, and around 20 other respondents objected to Ribble Valley being linked with any urban areas. Most of these respondents said they would prefer Ribble Valley to be linked with a rural area.

237 Around 70 respondents objected to Whitworth being linked with Rochdale, and seven respondents specifically objected to the lack of choice for Whitworth residents amongst our draft recommendations. Around 30 respondents supported Rossendale (either in part or in its entirety) being transferred to Bury. In addition, we received around 280 representations, in the form of a leaflet issued by a local political group, which supported the Haslingden and Helmshore area of Rossendale being transferred to Bury. Thirteen respondents objected to part or all of Rossendale being linked with Bury. We also received over 40 representations advocating a return to the traditional boundary between Lancashire and North Yorkshire in relation to areas of Burnley and Pendle in Lancashire and Craven in North Yorkshire. However, as detailed earlier, we are unable to cross regional boundaries as part of this review.

238 Six respondents supported our proposed Central Lancashire unitary authority, while it was opposed by around 20 respondents. One respondent specifically supported the Central Lancashire unitary authority proposed by South Ribble and Preston City councils, without the addition of parts of Wyre and Fylde. Six respondents from Chorley and South Ribble objected to being linked in an authority with Preston City.

239 We received over 20 submissions in support of our draft recommendations to divide West Lancashire between Sefton and Wigan, with many of the respondents arguing that being part of a metropolitan authority would improve service provision. Almost 300 responses were received in opposition to this proposal. Respondents gave a variety of reasons why they objected to the proposal but most argued that it would not represent local community identities and interests in the area and that they would prefer to stay as part of Lancashire. Many of these representations were in response to campaigns in the local press, and a number used a tear-out form provided by a local newspaper and the District Council. Over 40 respondents supported West Lancashire District Council's proposal for a West Lancashire unitary authority, while six respondents opposed this.

240 Over 30 respondents supported the inclusion of West Lancashire in an authority with one or more of the Central Lancashire councils, and this was opposed by two respondents. Fourteen respondents proposed that the Southport and Formby area of Sefton should be added to the whole or part of West Lancashire, to return the area to Lancashire. However, as detailed in chapter 1, we can only expand adjoining unitary authorities, not reduce their size, and we are therefore unable to consider this proposal.

241 The remaining representations made other proposals for Lancashire but provided little evidence, proposed minor amendments to our draft recommendations, addressed long-standing boundary anomalies between authorities (our views on which are expressed in chapter 2), advocated a return to traditional boundaries or made general comments on the review.

242 In addition to individual submissions, we also received a number of petitions. We received a 600-signature petition objecting to our draft recommendations to transfer Ribble Valley to Blackburn with Darwen. We also received a submission from the *Ormskirk Advertiser* containing around 6,000 reply slips objecting to our draft recommendations to divide West Lancashire between Sefton and Wigan; this followed a campaign led by the newspaper under the banner 'Out of Lancs: No thanks'. We also received a large petition from groups supporting the return of parts of east Lancashire to North Yorkshire, as detailed earlier.

5 Analysis of proposals

243 This chapter analyses the responses to the options on which we sought views and details our further consideration of those options in light of consultation. It also details our analysis of alternative proposals and comments on our draft recommendations.

244 In our draft recommendations report, we set out the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed patterns of unitary authorities, based on the information and evidence available to us during the first stage of the review. We have now been able to further assess those patterns in the light of what has been put to us during the consultation on our draft recommendations and the further information we sought from a number of interested parties after the end of consultation.

245 The analysis below informs our final recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire which are set out in chapter 6. As in our draft recommendations report, there are proposals that cross the county boundaries. These will be examined in each section. Once again, we propose discussing the main options for Lancashire on a geographic basis (e.g. north Lancashire, east Lancashire etc.).

Cumbria

Draft recommendations: Option One

Table 10: Option One

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Cumbria County Council | Cumbria County | 487,600 |

246 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed a single unitary authority based on Cumbria's existing boundaries, as proposed by Cumbria County Council.

247 Having considered the evidence received, we remain of the view that this option has a number of merits. It could lead to a viable authority providing the full range of local government services and build upon the County Council's existing expertise in the delivery of key services. We feel such a unitary authority would be able to build upon economies of scale in the delivery of services and core management. In addition, it could effectively deliver the larger services and specialist functions. We also consider that a single unitary authority would be well-placed to participate in the network of county-wide and sub-county partnerships with the private and public sector that currently operate within Cumbria, and could possibly rationalise the number of partnerships required.

248 We note the argument put to us that there could be benefits in terms of the recruitment and retention of high calibre and specialist staff if a single unitary authority was created. We are aware that rural local authorities sometimes suffer from recruitment problems at both district and county level. Indeed, we note that this is an issue for the current authorities. The creation of a single unitary authority in the area might serve to alleviate these difficulties in Cumbria.

249 In our draft recommendations report we raised concerns about a single unitary authority potentially having difficulties in its community leadership role and in

effectively representing its population given the size, geography and sparsity issues in Cumbria. The County Council has addressed this issue in its Stage Three submission. The Council is in the process of establishing a Cumbria Democracy Commission, a body that will comprise representatives from public, private and voluntary sectors, with academics and interested individuals. It stated that this will be set up regardless of the outcome of the referendum. The aim will be to identify the building blocks of communities and local representation in Cumbria. We consider that such an approach could be an innovative way of engaging with communities by identifying the most suitable building blocks for representation. This, in part, acknowledges the difficulties that could be faced by some parish councils in taking on additional representation responsibilities, by identifying groups of parishes and other community groups in unparished areas. In addition, we note the plans set out by the County Council to devolve some executive functions to Local Committees, made up of the county councillors elected for each district area.

250 The geographic size of the proposed authority also means that it would encompass a variety of communities with differing needs. It would be incumbent on the council to adopt an inclusive approach, recognising and balancing the needs of all the communities they represent.

251 The very large geographical areas that each councillor would have to cover in the rural areas of Cumbria could limit their potential for direct face-to-face contact with their constituents. It could also increase the amount of time spent travelling both within their ward or division and to central committees, thereby further limiting the time available for representative duties. Whilst face-to-face contact may potentially be limited, we cannot exclude the potential role of IT and other technology to address some of these geographical issues in relation to representation.

252 While we consider that the measures suggested by the County Council to engage with local communities could be effective, we note that some stakeholders remain concerned that such an authority would be too large and remote, a view that was also shared by the four northern district councils in their Stage Three submission. This was also reflected in the submissions we received, which indicated that there was more support for our alternative option.

253 Inevitably, our assessment of the County Council as a potential unitary authority cannot ignore the 'weak' rating in the latest CPA inspection that was published after the issue of our draft recommendations. Whilst we have noted throughout the course of the review that assessments can change, this particular assessment, which followed a 'zero-star' rating for social services, gave us cause to reflect especially carefully. Clearly, the County Council faces many challenges in moving forward and we note, in this respect, that the authority is in the process of implementing an urgent recovery plan and has made a number of senior staffing changes to support this plan. The improvement of poor-performing services is the main priority, while children's services already has its own improvement plan. Other priorities that have been identified are the development of a risk strategy and a long-term partnership vision, both of which are currently underway with the assistance of outside consultants, and the development of a strategic purchasing and procurement policy, which is presently under review. A mentoring and development partnership with Cheshire County Council has been established to assist the development of political management improvements and communication within the organisation.

Draft recommendations: Option Two

Table 11: Option Two

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------|
| North Cumbria | Allerdale, Copeland, Carlisle City and Eden | 313,300 |
| South Cumbria & Lancaster | Barrow-in-Furness, South Lakeland and Lancaster City | 308,200 |

254 This option involves the division of Cumbria into two unitary authorities, with the addition of the Lancaster City Council area from Lancashire. The South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority was proposed to us by Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council and Lancaster City Council during Stage One. Both this unitary authority, and the proposed North Cumbria unitary authority, were supported by a number of stakeholders, although not the four northern district councils concerned or the County Council. The Stage One submissions we received from the four northern districts, proposing East and West Cumbria unitary authorities, did not persuade us that those authorities would have the capacity to provide large-scale services, or deal with these wider structural issues. In the light of our concerns regarding the proposal to divide Cumbria into three unitary authorities (as outlined in the Other proposals section), as proposed by five of the six district councils in Stage One, we considered this two-unitary-authority option as a viable alternative to Option One. We considered that the challenges facing the county as a whole, in particular western Cumbria, would be better addressed by larger authorities which might be better placed to act strategically on important issues such as regeneration and economic decline.

255 The option was opposed by the four northern district councils during Stage Three and they reiterated their Stage One proposals for two unitary authorities in the north of the county. The councils argued that the North Cumbria unitary authority would have little community identity and would combine two areas that are geographically distinct, with minimal transport links and which would have problems in supporting their local economies and social infrastructure. They also considered that it would be high-risk, as it 'is not based on any established infrastructure', though they provided little further detail on this point.

256 We have given careful consideration to the submissions received and have identified a number of strengths in relation to this proposal. As detailed in our draft recommendations report, we consider that this proposal reflects the broad communities of identity in Cumbria. The Stage One MORI opinion research suggests that the most significant divide in terms of local affinities within Cumbria is on a north/south basis. The research suggests that there are few community links between Allerdale, Copeland and Eden and the south of the county, while those residents in Carlisle City who do look to the south seem to do so only as far as the North Lakes. Similarly, the research suggests that residents in Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland generally have few links with the north of the county.

257 Though we take no particular view on the optimum size of new authorities, we note that this proposal would create two authorities which lie between a single unitary authority and other proposed sub-county authorities. As detailed earlier, we note the performance issues relating to the County Council and the improvement programme now in place. Although the unitary authorities in Option Two could face some challenges in the disaggregation of county council services, we consider that they would have a sufficiently large resource base to deal with these challenges. We also

consider that such a pattern of authorities would be well-placed to tackle the socio-economic issues currently faced in West Cumbria and Barrow-in-Furness.

258 We consider that the creation of a South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority could assist in addressing concerns relating to the Morecambe Bay area, such as the economy, the need for regeneration in Barrow-in-Furness following industrial decline and environmental issues. There is a partnership, the Morecambe Bay Partnership, at work in the area, which reflects local environmental concerns which, to some extent, reflect a shared community interest. Health authority boundaries are also coterminous with this proposal. In this respect, such a pattern of unitary authorities could serve to rationalise partnerships, although we note that some reconfiguration in the first instance may be required.

259 In addition, we note that Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster City have a shared community interest and strong historical links. There are also reasonable transport links, with the A6 and A590 linking Lancaster City, South Lakeland and Barrow-in-Furness. The Stage One MORI opinion research suggests that residents of Barrow-in-Furness have an association with north Lancashire. The travel-to-work evidence also suggests that there are strong links between the three areas, a view that has been reinforced by some of the submissions received during Stage Three.

260 We remain of the view that a South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority could provide a more 'balanced' authority than just Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland, given the differences between the urban centre of Barrow-in-Furness and predominantly rural South Lakeland. A South Cumbria & Lancaster authority could balance the needs of communities in the urban centres of Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster City, along with the Morecambe and Heysham areas, with those of communities in more rural South Lakeland and parts of the Lancaster City area. As detailed in chapter 4, Lancaster City Council made some proposals in regard to engaging effectively with local communities, for example by establishing area committees. However, as noted in our draft recommendations report, partnership working between Barrow-in-Furness, South Lakeland and Lancaster City is relatively underdeveloped.

261 It has been argued by the four district councils that creation of the proposed North Cumbria authority would fracture the effective partnership working that presently exists between Allerdale and Copeland, and Eden and Carlisle City, and that the aggregation of the different problems faced in the east and in the west of such an authority would soften the focus on tackling these issues. However, we consider that, far from undoing the good work of the existing partnerships, this pattern of authorities could strengthen the links that currently exist, and would allow them to flourish in a mixed socio-economic environment without need to reconfigure their LSP arrangements, unless this was deemed desirable. The focus, therefore, on the different problems faced across the proposed authority would not necessarily be lost.

262 As noted in chapter 4, this option received the most support in terms of submissions received and in the MORI opinion research. However, we recognise that any proposal that crosses the county boundary between Cumbria and Lancashire will not be supported by certain stakeholders, in view of the voting implications in the referendum which would link options for Cumbria and Lancashire in respect of this option. We note these concerns, but the proposals we put forward accord with the remit we have been given, within the context of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003.

263 We are aware that a South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority may face particular transitional challenges in delivering the key services which are currently carried out differently by Lancashire and Cumbria county councils. This issue would need to be addressed by the authorities concerned.

Other proposals

Table 12: Two unitary authorities in the north of the county

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| West Cumbria | Allerdale and Copeland | 162,800 |
| East Cumbria | Carlisle City and Eden | 150,500 |

264 This option was presented at Stage Three in joint submissions from Eden and Carlisle City, and Allerdale and Copeland, reiterating their Stage One preference. It involves the division of North Cumbria into two unitary authorities as shown in the table above and expresses no preference for the pattern of unitary authorities in the south of the county. We chose not to put this option forward as part of our draft recommendations for the reasons outlined earlier. The submissions also set out reasons why they felt that Options One and Two in our draft recommendations would be detrimental to the area. Their comments are detailed above.

265 Public opinion research carried out by MORI at Stage Three found that few interviewees spontaneously mentioned the 'pairs' of districts as their preferred option, when presented with the opportunity to express a preference for an option not being consulted upon. Most interviewees selected one of the two options that formed part of our draft recommendations.

266 We considered this proposal very carefully in formulating our draft recommendations. However we were of the view that these 'pairings' of authorities might not have the capacity or resource base to carry out the full range of local government services effectively, in the light of the issues faced by the areas concerned. During Stage Three, the four councils concerned provided further evidence and argumentation in support of their proposal, giving some more detail on how two unitary authorities in north Cumbria might run larger-scale services such as education and social services. We were also made aware of Copeland Borough Council's recently published CPA score, which rated the Council as 'fair'. However, we remain unpersuaded that issues relating to the provision of large-scale services have been adequately addressed. We also have concerns that the four councils may not fully appreciate the scale of the task of taking on and sustaining services that are, at present, underperforming at county level. Also, we recognise the benefits that larger authorities can bring in relation to staff recruitment and retention, and consider that two unitary authorities in the north of Cumbria could struggle to attract the requisite number of high-calibre managers and specialists, which could further impair their ability to provide large-scale services.

267 We also have concerns over the ability of two unitary authorities in the north of the county to tackle the particular structural issues in Cumbria. The county has suffered from deep-seated economic problems for a number of years, evidenced most recently in the decline of the nuclear industry at Sellafield and the regeneration needs resulting from this. We note the recent decision by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to establish a task force in west Cumbria to provide financial and strategic support to deal with the approaching decommissioning at Sellafield. While this outside assistance will no doubt mitigate the impact of decommissioning, there will be a requirement for local authorities to play a significant role. We consider that a

larger unitary authority for north Cumbria, with greater capacity and a more robust resource base, would be better placed to work with the task force, the DTI, and regional stakeholders in addressing this significant challenge.

268 While we acknowledge that two unitary authorities for the north of Cumbria would reflect community identities and interests and would achieve some local support, we consider that this particular configuration in Cumbria would be severely tested, given the significant challenges facing the county at present. We are strongly of the view that two unitary authorities in the north of the county would be a weaker alternative than either of the options on which we consulted and which have attracted reasonable measures of support.

269 South Lakeland District Council did not express a preference for any of our draft recommendations but considered that, in addition to Options One and Two, a third option for Cumbria, comprising two east/west unitary authorities within the county boundaries, should form part of our final recommendations. Cumbria County Council shared the view that a third option contained wholly within the county boundary should be offered, although it made no specific proposal. It was concerned that people in Cumbria should have a choice of two options that were not affected by the proposals for Lancashire. However, we considered that there was a lack of evidence to support this proposal, particularly regarding how such unitary authorities would effectively deliver the full range of local government services. In addition, we are of the view that amalgamating Barrow-in-Furness, Allerdale and Copeland into one authority would compound the problems presented by industrial decline and the challenges of regeneration faced in each of these areas. Furthermore, the Stage One MORI opinion research suggested that there was a north/south split in the county in terms of community identity, rather than an east/west split.

270 As detailed in chapter 4, we received a small number of submissions proposing that the area of Millom, in Copeland, be transferred to a southern unitary authority, arguing that the area has more in common with Barrow-in-Furness. We are of the view that any such boundary anomaly could be best addressed by a separate principal area boundary review at a later date, should interested parties deem this necessary. Such reviews lie within the discretion of the Office Deputy Prime Minister, who can ask The Boundary Committee to undertake them.

271 As during Stage One, we note there was some support for the revival of the historic county areas of Westmorland and Cumberland as unitary authorities. The proposed North Cumbria and South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authorities are variations on such proposals, and we remain of the view that these authorities are arguably a better reflection of present-day communities, links and partnerships. In practice, we received little persuasive evidence that existing districts in Cumbria should be divided in order to facilitate recreating historic patterns of local government.

Lancashire

Draft recommendations: Option One

Table 13: Option One

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Lancashire | Most of Lancashire county | 1,051,400 |
| Blackpool | Blackpool and part of Wyre | 218,500 |
| Rochdale | Rochdale and part of Rossendale | 212,600 |

272 We proposed a single unitary authority for the majority of Lancashire as Option One of our draft recommendations. This was broadly similar to the proposal made by Lancashire County Council during Stage One. However, we proposed two amendments to the County Council's proposed unitary authority to better reflect local community identity and interests. We proposed transferring the Whitworth parish area of Rossendale to Rochdale, and the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area of Wyre to Blackpool.

273 Having considered the evidence received, we remain of the view that a single unitary authority would have sufficient capacity to provide the full range of local government services. The proposal could provide economies of scale and the County Council's proposals for devolved budgets and community engagement (see below) would go some way to addressing how local services could be delivered over such a large authority. We also note that the Council received a 'good' rating from the Audit Commission in its CPA and has been praised for its strong political and corporate leadership, although we acknowledge that current performance cannot accurately predict the future performance of a new authority. We consider that the current performance of Lancashire County Council could provide the basis for a high-performing unitary authority. In addition, a single unitary authority could build upon the existing Lancashire-wide partnerships, and could serve to rationalise the number of other partnerships, if appropriate.

274 While we recognised that the County Council put forward a strong case for a 'New Council for Lancashire', providing details of community identity, service delivery and leadership, we had a number of concerns over the ability of the authority to effectively represent and engage with diverse communities over such a large population. These issues were raised in our draft recommendations report. The County Council's Stage Three submission answered the questions posed in the draft recommendations and overview reports, giving examples of current practice relating to localism and representation, and set out how it would address such issues through the operation of local cabinets. It provided some further detail on how the new authority would operate. It set out how budgets and services would be devolved to local cabinets and how cabinets would be required to consult and produce community plans. It also said how it would establish local advisory groups and community forums to ensure further community engagement and representation, as well as increasing the role of parish and town councils. In addition, the Council outlined how it would operate at officer and member level.

275 We noted some concerns raised by some interested parties during Stage One regarding the County Council's proposals for local cabinets, and the perception that this could be seen to be recreating the existing two-tier structure, rather than

responding more directly to the diversity of local communities. Indeed, in its Stage Three submission the County Council stated that the local cabinets would be based on the existing district areas unless otherwise determined as part of a consultation by the Lancashire Strategic Partnership. However, it also stated that some services may require a different 'footprint', and would be flexible about this and respond to individual needs.

276 The Stage One MORI opinion research found that there was a relatively high affinity with the county council area, especially compared to other counties in the North West. This was reflected in the submissions received, where a large number of respondents stated that they wished Lancashire to remain as a single entity.

277 Most of the district councils in Lancashire explicitly opposed Option One, on the basis that they considered it would dilute local accountability and representation. Some districts reiterated their belief that the County Council's proposed 12 local cabinets would mirror the existing two-tier structure and could potentially dilute accountability. We also noted that the majority of residents' support for Option One took the form of a tear-out slip from a newsletter issued by Lancashire County Council. Most respondents in support of a single unitary authority said they preferred the option because it did not differ considerably from the status quo and was, therefore, the next best alternative to 'no change'. In addition, some people supported this option because they objected to specific proposals for their own immediate area.

278 We consider that the size of the authority, in both geographical and population terms, and the practicalities involved in operating a Lancashire unitary authority would raise significant challenges. Such a unitary authority would be unique in English local government, and would face unprecedented challenges in structuring and operating its corporate governance. While we are persuaded that a Lancashire unitary authority would be capable of effective service delivery, the real test for such an authority would be its capacity to engage with and adequately represent a wide range of diverse communities over a large geographic area. Even with the establishment of local advisory groups and community forums, it is difficult to predict whether a single unitary authority for Lancashire, albeit less the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys areas, would be regarded by residents as being sufficiently 'local'.

279 In addition to submissions relating to our proposal for a reduced Lancashire unitary authority we also received submissions relating to the proposals to transfer Whitworth parish to Rochdale, and Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys to Blackpool.

280 The submissions we received at Stage One, along with views formed following our tours of the area, led us to consider that transferring Whitworth to Rochdale might better reflect local community identity and interest in that area of Rossendale. However, in the light of the additional information received at Stage Three, there does not appear to be conclusive evidence to support such a change. Indeed, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council expressed reservations over the suitability of transferring Whitworth, given the Township system that they operate. Furthermore, Whitworth Town Council 'demands that the residents of the parish [of Whitworth] be given a choice about whether they wish to remain with Rossendale, wherever its future lies, or be incorporated into Rochdale'. Under all three of our options put forward for consultation, we had proposed that Whitworth should be transferred to Rochdale.

281 We received further evidence from Blackpool Borough Council supporting the transfer of Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys to Blackpool. It argued an enlarged Blackpool would provide focus and improved service delivery to the whole area. We note the views of the Local Government Commission (LGC) during its 1995 review of Blackpool when it recommended unitary authority status. The legislation governing that review did not allow for the amendment of existing district boundaries, and the LGC stated that 'Blackpool's tightly drawn boundary is a cause for hesitation'. In the light of the homogeneity of these areas, we consider that this expansion is not simply a case of addressing a boundary anomaly, but a change that could provide for more convenient and effective local government for the people of Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys.

282 We note that Fleetwood, Thornton-Cleveleys and Blackpool are similar in social and economic make-up, have good transport links between them and there is a clear, homogenous, economic influence in the area. A Blackpool, Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys unitary authority would have a shared interest in regeneration and other social and economic issues. However, we do not consider that the coastal area in Fylde, to the south of Blackpool, shares the same social and economic issues to the extent that Blackpool does with Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys. We also note that the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area is quite different from the remaining hinterland of Wyre which is predominantly rural. However, we received a number of representations directly opposing Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys being transferred to Blackpool. The majority of these respondents stated that they did not have any affinity with the Blackpool area.

Draft recommendations: Option Two

Table 14: Option Two

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Central Lancashire | Chorley, Preston City, South Ribble and parts of Fylde and Wyre | 384,400 |
| East Lancashire | Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and part of Rossendale | 510,100 |
| Fylde Coast | Blackpool and parts of Fylde and Wyre | 270,600 |
| Rochdale | Rochdale and parts of Rossendale | 212,600 |
| Sefton & West Lancashire | Sefton and part of West Lancashire | 338,900 |
| South Cumbria & Lancaster | Barrow-in-Furness, Lancaster City and South Lakeland | 308,200 |
| Wigan | Wigan and part of West Lancashire | 353,900 |

283 Our first sub-county option was based on seven unitary authorities, which included changes to the boundaries of several existing unitary and metropolitan authorities.

284 We have given careful consideration to the submissions and evidence received during Stage Three, and consider each area in turn below.

North Lancashire

285 Our views on the merits and drawbacks of the proposed South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority, in the light of information received during Stage Three, are outlined in the Cumbria section of this chapter (see above).

Wyre, Fylde and Central Lancashire

286 In our draft recommendations report, we acknowledged that the Central Lancashire unitary authority which was proposed to us (based upon the existing districts of Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley) had considerable merit, and that we considered such an authority would provide focus to an area that already demonstrates economic cohesion and interdependence, through a history of joint working. However, as detailed above, we could not look at one area in isolation and had to consider the consequential effects of our proposals across the whole of the county, and we had particular concerns about viable options for the area to the west of Central Lancashire. With the information available to us during Stages One and Two, we were of the view that the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area of Wyre should be transferred to the existing Blackpool unitary authority. This followed our assessment of the clear socio-economic links between Blackpool and Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys, as detailed above. We considered the argument for these areas' inclusion in an expanded Blackpool authority to be particularly strong.

287 However, the removal of these areas from a Wyre & Fylde unitary authority, as proposed by Wyre and Fylde borough councils, raised serious questions over the capacity and viability of the residual authority to deliver large-scale services. We were also concerned about the lack of a main town as a focus for the remainder of Wyre and Fylde, and considered that this would pose serious challenges for such an authority. This led us to consider adding parts of Wyre and Fylde to the proposed Central Lancashire unitary authority as a means of providing an alternative, viable solution for the area.

288 The Stage One MORI opinion research suggested that there could be a distinction between the more urban western parts and more rural eastern areas of both districts, with clear communication links running east/west from those areas. We therefore proposed adding the eastern parts of Wyre and Fylde to the proposed Central Lancashire unitary authority, and expanding Blackpool to take in the western parts of both districts. We were aware that Preston City is a focal point for communities in and around the M6 corridor, and considered that a unitary authority based on Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley could also have the capacity to provide high-quality services to the eastern parts of Wyre and Fylde. We considered that an expanded Blackpool authority would build on existing service delivery, and would unite areas that shared common concerns regarding the coastal area of this part of Lancashire. We were of the view that these options provided viable unitary solutions for the Wyre and Fylde area, particularly as we were unpersuaded by the alternative put to us.

289 Although we considered that our Fylde Coast and Central Lancashire unitary authorities could provide the setting for high performing councils, we did note that the addition of such significant parts of Wyre and Fylde to Blackpool and Central Lancashire had not been proposed by any of the authorities involved. Indeed, the proposal to divide Wyre and Fylde between two unitary authorities was opposed during Stage Three by all the affected local authorities. They argued that there was no common identity between the parts of Wyre and Fylde and either unitary authority to which they would be added under our draft recommendations. It was also argued

that to add parts of Wyre and Fylde to Central Lancashire would dilute the potential strength of this unitary authority. An authority comprising Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley would have a strong urban centre, shared regeneration projects and a rural hinterland in each of the three component districts. The additional areas from Wyre and Fylde would stretch this hinterland out to the west considerably, and could reduce the focus of the authority.

290 The proposal to divide Wyre and Fylde received little support from other stakeholders. The general view of local authorities and other stakeholders was that Wyre and Fylde should remain intact, and no alternative boundaries were proposed in relation to dividing the districts. Accordingly, this has made it difficult for us to determine where a suitable boundary between a Fylde Coast unitary authority and a Central Lancashire unitary authority might be drawn.

291 We expressed concerns in our draft recommendations report that Preston City should not be seen to dominate a Central Lancashire unitary authority and that community engagement across all three current districts needed to be addressed. Preston City and South Ribble councils responded by giving details of the model of community engagement they would wish to see operating in the new authority, including details of how this would be established initially, and measures to build up the long-term involvement of residents. They gave examples of existing good practice in the two authorities that could be extended across the whole area.

East Lancashire

292 We considered that our proposed East Lancashire unitary authority could reflect the broad community interests of this part of Lancashire, uniting areas that have a broadly similar socio-economic basis. We also considered that such an authority would benefit from the inclusion of Blackburn with Darwen, which has experience of delivering the full range of strategic services and has been rated an 'excellent' performing authority by the Audit Commission. This option would also build on the existing joint-working and partnership framework in East Lancashire. In addition, it would, in our view, have the capacity to deliver the full range of services in this area and represent the East Lancashire area in a regional context.

293 Our East Lancashire proposal received no support from the five two-tier East Lancashire authorities or from Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. The principal objection was that such an authority would be too large to engage effectively with the community. This was a concern that we had raised in our draft recommendations report. As detailed earlier, we also received a number of submissions objecting to the transfer of Whitworth from Rossendale to Rochdale.

West Lancashire

294 When we put forward our draft recommendations, we were not satisfied that West Lancashire would form a viable unitary authority within the current boundaries of the District Council. The district council had also proposed taking in some additional areas from Chorley and South Ribble. However, we considered that this would not sufficiently increase the capacity of the proposed authority or reflect local community identities and interests in the area. Nor did we consider that West Lancashire District Council had fully explained how it would operate as a unitary authority, given its relatively small resource base, and had concerns over its proposals for the provision of education and social services. We noted that there were reasonably good communication links between Sefton, Ormskirk and the western part of West Lancashire. We also noted that some residents associated

themselves with Southport and that it provides a focal point for shopping. Conversely, Skelmersdale and the eastern areas of West Lancashire have links with Wigan, with which they have good transport links. We considered that south-eastern parts of the district had communities of interest with Wigan. In the absence of receiving persuasive argumentation during the first two stages of the review in support of a West Lancashire unitary authority, we considered that such a division would provide for more convenient and effective local government in the West Lancashire area than alternative proposals for combining all or part of the district with neighbouring Lancashire districts.

295 Our proposal to divide West Lancashire between two of the adjoining metropolitan authorities was strongly opposed by West Lancashire District Council and a large number of other stakeholders, details of which are provided in the previous chapter. We noted that, in all the submissions received, there was more opposition to the proposal to link the western part of the district with Sefton, than to the proposal to link the eastern part of the district with Wigan. Despite this significant opposition, we did receive some support from local stakeholders for this option, as outlined in chapter 4. Of these, a number argued that being part of an adjoining metropolitan authority would provide for better services in the area.

296 The main criticism of our proposals for West Lancashire in the sub-county option was that the district possesses a strong community identity, which, it was argued, our proposals would fragment. While we acknowledge the strong opposition that our recommendations have generated, we note that the Stage One MORI research showed that identification with the West Lancashire District Council area was a little lower than typically found in other Lancashire districts, suggesting that community identity in West Lancashire is not overwhelmingly stronger than anywhere else in the county. It was also argued that there is little community interest with Sefton or Wigan, although our MORI research does suggest some effective community linkages. Furthermore, we note that the opposition to our proposals has arisen from a campaign that focused as much on the retention of West Lancashire within Lancashire as on supporting a West Lancashire unitary authority.

297 We have noted that although the recommendation to divide the district was not proposed or expressly supported by either Wigan or Sefton, both expressed a view that it would be possible for them to expand their current services to incorporate the new areas. Both authorities have remained neutral in respect of our proposals while having concerns about their implications with regard to their future resource bases, the need for appropriate transitional financial arrangements and their own continuing status as metropolitan authorities.

Draft recommendations: Option Three

Table 15: Option Three

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Blackburn & Ribble | Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley | 272,900 |
| Central Lancashire | Chorley, Preston City, South Ribble and parts of Fylde and Wyre | 384,400 |
| Fylde Coast | Blackpool and parts of Fylde and Wyre | 270,600 |
| Rochdale | Rochdale and part of Rossendale | 212,600 |
| Sefton & West Lancashire | Sefton and part of West Lancashire | 338,900 |
| South Cumbria & Lancaster | Barrow-in-Furness, Lancaster City and South Lakeland | 308,200 |
| South East Lancashire | Burnley, Pendle and part of Rossendale | 237,200 |
| Wigan | Wigan and part of West Lancashire | 353,900 |

298 Option Three was similar to Option Two, the only difference being an alternative proposal for east Lancashire. Under this option, we proposed two unitary authorities in east Lancashire: one comprising Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley; and the other comprising Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale, less the parish of Whitworth.

299 During Stage Three, this option received more support than a single unitary authority for east Lancashire (Option Two). The majority of this support came from residents and stakeholders in the east Lancashire districts who believe that two unitary authorities for east Lancashire would be more effective and better reflect local community identities and interests. This reflects the concerns we raised in the draft recommendations report over the size of our proposed East Lancashire unitary authority. In addition, all of the east Lancashire districts, including Blackburn with Darwen, rejected our proposed East Lancashire unitary authority and supported the establishment of two authorities in the area. However, there are differences of opinion between the east Lancashire districts on the composition of the two unitary authorities, which are outlined in more detail in the 'other proposals' section below.

300 A South East Lancashire authority was supported by both Burnley and Rossendale councils in their Stage Three submissions. In addition, the recent CPA results for Burnley and Pendle have yielded 'good' ratings for those authorities and this could provide the basis for a high-performing South East Lancashire unitary authority.

Other proposals

301 We received proposals from a number of authorities during Stage Three to divide other districts, in order to facilitate their preferred pattern of local government, or to address long-standing boundary anomalies. As noted in the Cumbria section of the report, we are of the view that the latter in particular could be best addressed by

a separate principal area boundary review at a later date, should interested parties deem this necessary. Such reviews lie within the discretion of the Deputy Prime Minister, who can ask The Boundary Committee to undertake them.

302 These alternative proposals are discussed on a geographical basis (e.g. north Lancashire, east Lancashire etc.).

Table 16: Alternative Lancashire options

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| 'Reduced' Lancashire | Burnley, Pendle, Ribble Valley, Preston City, Chorley, South Ribble, Fylde and part of Wyre | 760,000 |
| 'Rural Lancashire' | Ribble Valley, Fylde and part of Wyre | 174,800 |
| 'Rural Expanded' | Ribble Valley, Fylde and parts of Wyre, Preston City, Lancaster City and Pendle | 226,400 |

303 Blackpool Borough Council made a number of alternative proposals for Lancashire, which would be compatible with their preference for a Blackpool, Fleetwood & Thornton-Cleveleys unitary authority. It proposed a 'reduced' Lancashire authority, with Lancaster City merging with south Cumbria; Hyndburn with Blackburn with Darwen; West Lancashire with Sefton and Wigan; Whitworth with Rochdale and the remainder of Rossendale with Bury. However, it provided little evidence or argumentation to support its proposal. While we recognise that such an option would reduce the size of a Lancashire unitary authority, which could address some of the concerns raised on this issue, we do not consider that removing all the proposed districts from Lancashire would necessarily best reflect local community identities and interests or be a significant improvement over Option One of our draft recommendations.

304 Blackpool also proposed a 'Rural Lancashire' authority comprising Ribble Valley, Fylde and part of Wyre. This was also supported by Burnley and Rossendale borough councils as a second preference for part of east Lancashire. Blackpool stated that the proposed authority would incorporate a rural core and allow the authority to focus on rural issues. However, little further evidence and argumentation was provided. We note that there are few transport links between Ribble Valley and Wyre, and that the proposed authority would have no obvious administrative centre. In addition, other than from the authorities referred to above, such an option has received little support and there is little evidence that it would lead to effective and convenient local government in the area.

305 As an alternative, Blackpool also proposed a 'Rural Expanded' authority comprising all of the areas in the proposed 'Rural Lancashire' authority as well as additional wards from Preston City, Lancaster City and Pendle. It stated that the M65 could be used as a natural boundary and, like 'Rural Lancashire', such an authority would represent rural interests in the area. We note that the proposed authority could have sufficient size and capacity to function as a unitary authority. However, as with the 'Rural Lancashire' authority, with the exception of the M65, there are few transport links, the authority would have no obvious administrative centre and there is little evidence of community identity and interests in the area other than the authority containing rural communities. It would also have significant consequential effects on

neighbouring authorities, dividing four other districts. We consider that alternative options in this area would be more suitable.

Table 17: Wyre & Fylde unitary authority

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Wyre & Fylde | Wyre and Fylde districts | 178,800 |

306 Both Wyre and Fylde authorities reiterated their Stage One submission for a Wyre & Fylde unitary authority based on existing boundaries. We received little further evidence or argumentation in their Stage Three submissions on how the proposed authority would operate, given the concerns raised in our draft recommendations report about this proposal. We remain convinced of the merits of transferring the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area to Blackpool in view of their close socio-economic links and their shared need for regeneration. This raises questions over the capacity and viability of a residual Wyre & Fylde authority. We remain of the view that a reduced Wyre & Fylde unitary authority would be unlikely to be viable, given its residual resource base, and have concerns over its ability to provide large-scale services. We believe that an alternative solution to serve the interests of local residents would be preferable to such a unitary authority and are confident that such an option exists.

Table 18: 'City of the Fylde' unitary authority

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 'City of the Fylde' | Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde districts | 321,100 |

307 We also received a proposal from Wyre and Fylde for a new 'City of the Fylde' unitary authority, comprising Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde, as their second preference. They argued that the interests of Wyre and Fylde residents, and the rural communities in particular, would be better represented if the authorities were kept as whole entities, rather than divided between authorities, as proposed in Options Two and Three of the draft recommendations. They provided evidence of how the proposal would create a 'diverse' authority, reflecting both urban and rural interests and how this diversity could prove a benefit to a new authority which would need to respond to the full range of challenges facing it. They also referred to the merits of joining with Blackpool in terms of improving local authority performance, as Blackpool Borough Council is acknowledged as an ambitious authority currently seeking to improve the quality of services. However, they emphasised that the authority would need to be a completely new one, not simply an extension of Blackpool.

308 As already indicated in our draft recommendations, we consider that there are good links between the three authorities and there is a community of interest in the coastal area of the three boroughs. We also consider that the new unitary authority would have sufficient capacity to carry out the full range of local government services, building upon Blackpool's experience, and would have a presence comparable to that of other authorities in the region.

309 We received a large number of submissions, mainly from individuals, objecting to the inclusion of Wyre and Fylde with Blackpool, and the division of the districts. Many residents stated that they felt little affinity with Blackpool. It is possible, however, that those respondents saw the risk of absorption into Blackpool rather than being part of a new authority including Blackpool. We are also mindful of the fact that

this proposal was not exposed to public consultation, and so it is difficult to be certain of public response to such an authority. We recognise the challenge a 'City of the Fylde' unitary authority would face in adequately representing the diversity of community interests and identities but see potential strengths in that diversity.

Table 19: Two unitary authorities for east Lancashire

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|---|---|-------------------|
| Ribble Valley, Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale | Ribble Valley, Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale districts | 298,400 |
| Blackburn with Hyndburn | Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn districts | 219,000 |

310 We received further evidence during Stage Three on alternative compositions for two unitary authorities in east Lancashire. Ribble Valley and Pendle borough councils proposed a unitary authority based on Burnley, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale, as their preferred option and a unitary authority based on Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn. Burnley and Rossendale borough councils proposed this as their second preference. The councils provided evidence and argumentation to support their proposals.

311 It was argued that a Ribble Valley, Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale unitary authority would create a balance of urban and rural areas as well as a diversity of economic and social conditions. The councils provided evidence and argumentation to the effect that the authority would represent diverse interests and argued that it would lead to more effective and convenient local government than alternative formulations. They also argued that the relatively deprived areas of Pendle, Burnley and Rossendale would benefit from Ribble Valley's different experience.

312 We noted the significant opposition in the submissions received to our proposals to transfer Ribble Valley to Blackburn with Darwen, and consider that the former's merger with Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale may better reflect the local community identities and interests of Ribble Valley residents. We also note that there are good transport links between the districts and that they are accustomed to working together through a number of existing partnerships such as East Lancashire Together, the East Lancashire e-government project and the East Lancashire Project. The councils provided details of how such a unitary authority might deliver key services and represent and engage with local communities. We consider that the proposed authority could have the capacity to function as a high performing unitary authority in the light of the existing partnerships and economic diversity of these authorities.

313 The councils also supported the establishment of a Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn unitary authority to fit in with this option for east Lancashire. We remain of the view that there is a strong community of interest between Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen, although we note the opposition of Hyndburn Borough Council to this proposal. We also note that Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen are geographically coherent and there are good transport links between them. We also remain of the view that Hyndburn would benefit from the experience of Blackburn with Darwen as an existing unitary authority that is already accustomed to delivering the full range of local government services to its residents. We received few submissions from the Hyndburn area objecting to its proposed transfer to Blackburn with Darwen and consider it could function as an effective unitary authority.

Table 20: expanded Blackburn with Darwen unitary authority

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|-----------------------|--|-------------------|
| Blackburn with Darwen | Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn and parts of Ribble Valley, Chorley and South Ribble | 231,600 |

314 In its Stage Three submission, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council made some small adjustments to its original submission for an enlarged Blackburn with Darwen unitary authority and proposed to take in five southern wards (rather than a large part) of Ribble Valley, the whole of Hyndburn and small parts of South Ribble and Chorley. It argued that this would better reflect local community identity and interests than its Stage One submission as it would only include the more urban area of Ribble Valley district to the south of the River Ribble. We consider that this proposal has similar merits to the Stage One submission. As detailed above, Blackburn with Darwen is similar in topography and demography to neighbouring Hyndburn and there are good transport links between the two authorities, although we acknowledge the opposition of Hyndburn Borough Council to any link with Blackburn with Darwen. In addition, we note that Blackburn with Darwen has taken into consideration the opposition from more rural parts of Ribble Valley when formulating its Stage Three proposal. However, we note from the submissions we have received that there is little community of interest between Ribble Valley as a whole and Blackburn with Darwen and removal of the southern wards for Ribble Valley would affect the balance which could be achieved by the inclusion of Ribble Valley in any other configuration of districts. We also remain of the view that the proposed unitary authority would require a number of significant boundary changes to the adjoining districts, the consequences of which would be best addressed outside the current review.

Table 21: Hyndburn & Ribble Valley unitary authority

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Hyndburn & Ribble Valley | Hyndburn and Ribble Valley districts | 135,500 |

315 Hyndburn Borough Council reiterated its Stage One preference for a Hyndburn and Ribble Valley unitary authority. It provided further evidence and argumentation to support how its proposals would, in its view, provide for the most effective and convenient pattern of local government for the area. The submission also referred to its objections to both our sub-county options for east Lancashire and also to the new proposals from Ribble Valley and Pendle borough councils, all of which proposed linking Hyndburn with Blackburn with Darwen. However, we received few submissions that supported a Hyndburn and Ribble Valley unitary authority, and are unpersuaded that this proposal could provide the best solution for this area.

Table 22: Bury with Rossendale

| Unitary Authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Bury with Rossendale | Bury and Rossendale districts | 246,300 |

316 Bury Metropolitan Borough Council reiterated its Stage One preference to expand its boundaries to take in the whole of Rossendale, along with a second preference to take in the Rawtenstall and Haslingden areas only (a population of approximately 45,000). It provided us with some further evidence and argumentation to support its proposals. Bury argued that the authority would encompass a natural community and that it would provide for effective and convenient local government in the area. It provided evidence on how Rossendale could benefit from being part of the Greater Manchester sub-region and as part of an existing unitary authority that is already accustomed to delivering the full range of services. In addition, it described what it considered to be the benefits for Bury.

317 We consider that Bury could have a lot to offer Rossendale, both in terms of its experience of delivering large-scale services and its improved performance. We noted that Bury has improved its CPA rating to 'fair' since the publication of our draft recommendations and it is recognised as one of the most improved councils in the country. It could be argued that Rossendale could benefit from being linked with an authority that has successfully embarked upon an improvement programme, particularly given the challenges it faces in relation to its own performance. However, we are mindful of the possible impact that such an addition might have upon Bury's continuing improvement programme within its current boundaries.

318 We received a large number of submissions from the Haslingden and Helmshore area of Rossendale on a leaflet circulated by a local political party supporting a merger of that area with Bury. However, we also received submissions from Rossendale Borough Council and other stakeholders that supported Rossendale remaining linked to other Lancashire authorities. We share the view that there are alternative proposals for Rossendale, within the current two-tier area, that could provide for equally or more effective and convenient patterns of local government for Rossendale residents and better reflect local community identities and interests. We also consider that the inclusion of Rossendale within a Ribble Valley, Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale unitary authority is important as its large, rural area would provide additional balance to the more urban areas within Burnley and Pendle, complementing Ribble Valley to the north.

Table 23: Chorley unitary authority

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Chorley | Chorley district | 100,500 |

319 At Stage Three, Chorley Borough Council reiterated its preference for a Chorley unitary authority, based on existing boundaries. However, we received little further information addressing the concerns we expressed over such an authority in our draft recommendations report, in terms of its critical mass and capacity to deliver all local government services. While we received a small number of submissions supporting a Chorley unitary authority, these were mainly from people who opposed being linked with Preston City. We remain of the view that a Chorley unitary authority could face significant challenges, and would lack adequate resources and strategic capacity. We also consider that there are more suitable alternatives in the area. We consider

that the economic cohesion and interdependence of Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley, and the shared history of joint working, serves to emphasise the importance of the inclusion of Chorley in a Central Lancashire unitary authority, which we consider would be weakened without it.

Table 24: West Lancashire unitary authority

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| West Lancashire | West Lancashire district | 108,400 |

320 In its Stage Three submission, West Lancashire District Council reiterated its preference for a West Lancashire unitary authority, based on existing boundaries, and provided further evidence and argumentation in support of its proposal. It set out a new decision-making structure for the proposed authority and gave some details of how it would deliver key services. It provided further evidence on community identity in West Lancashire and argued strongly that its predominantly rural and cohesive community set it apart from the neighbouring Merseyside and Greater Manchester authorities, and it considered that the response to our draft recommendations was evidence of this. We also note that West Lancashire was rated as a 'good' council in the recent CPA assessment and was praised for community building. In addition, we received a number of submissions supporting a West Lancashire unitary authority, as detailed in chapter 4, and we met a significant amount of opposition to our proposal to divide the district and unite its component parts with adjoining metropolitan authorities.

321 We have noted the public support for a 'West Lancashire' unitary authority, most notably arising from the Council's own information campaign; it is far from clear, though, that the reaction of the public primarily reflects support for a West Lancashire unitary authority as such, as distinct from opposition to our proposal to divide the district. We recognise that a West Lancashire unitary authority could represent local community identities and interests. Nevertheless, we received a number of submissions from local headteachers, school governors and other key stakeholders in the area who argued that West Lancashire was not large enough to effectively deliver key services such as education. We share some of those concerns. Many of these submissions argued that key services could better be delivered if West Lancashire formed part of a larger Central Lancashire unitary authority.

322 We also noted that, as in its Stage One proposal, West Lancashire District Council proposed as an alternative taking in small parts of Chorley and South Ribble, to boost its population by around 11,000 people, if this was required by the Committee. It argued that these areas had more in common with West Lancashire than with Preston City. Our views relating to minor boundary amendments are detailed in chapter 2, and we do not consider that such an amendment would significantly increase the capacity or resource base of a West Lancashire unitary authority.

Table 25: South West Lancashire unitary authority

| Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------|
| South West Lancashire | Preston City, South Ribble, Chorley and West Lancashire districts | 442,300 |

323 As an alternative to our proposals for West Lancashire, the Labour Group on West Lancashire District Council proposed that the Central Lancashire unitary authority (not including parts of Wyre and Fylde) should be expanded to take in the whole of the district. The Group argued that a West Lancashire unitary authority would not have the capacity to function as a viable unitary authority, and that residents should have the choice of a 'Lancashire' solution as well as an opportunity to link with adjoining metropolitan areas. It gave details of links between West Lancashire and South Ribble and Chorley in areas such as history, topography, road/rail links, health and police services and travel-to-work patterns. The Labour Group acknowledged that its submission lacked detail as a result of it being submitted independently of the Council.

324 We consider that while such an authority could provide a 'Lancashire' solution for the West Lancashire area (which is also the case with a Lancashire unitary authority), there is little evidence to support including it in Central Lancashire. We have significant concerns that any alternative substantial additions to the Central Lancashire unitary authority could dilute its anticipated focus and effectiveness, given that the economic cohesion and interdependence that exists between Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley is not in evidence in West Lancashire. There are few current working links between West Lancashire and Chorley and South Ribble (with both of which it has narrow geographical frontages). The main transport links in West Lancashire run south, rather than north, in the district. We also note that there are few existing partnerships between West Lancashire and its neighbouring Lancashire districts.

6 Final recommendations

325 This chapter contains our final recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire.

326 In formulating our final recommendations, we have had to ensure that our proposals facilitate a pattern of unitary authorities across the whole of the two county areas reviewed individually or taken together. We could not look at one local authority area in isolation, but rather have needed to consider the consequential effects of our proposals across both counties, in the light of a cross-county option. Within the constraints of this review, we consider that all the options we put forward are likely to provide the setting for high-performing and robust unitary authorities. Once again, we discuss our final recommendations for Lancashire on a geographical basis (e.g. north Lancashire, east Lancashire etc.).

Cumbria

Option A

327 Having examined the evidence and argumentation received in relation to Option One of our draft recommendations, we consider that this proposal should form part of our final recommendations. We consider that a single unitary authority would be likely to have sufficient capacity to provide the full range of local government services and be able to act strategically in a relatively large, sparsely populated area. We have noted the particular issues in Cumbria relating to geography, sparsity and staff recruitment and consider a large authority would be well-placed to address these. We also consider that a single unitary authority for Cumbria would provide a viable resource base to assist in service provision.

328 We note the County Council's plans for its Democracy Commission, and the other measures it would employ in order to address potential challenges relating to community engagement over such a large area, and consider that these could be effective and go some way towards addressing our concerns surrounding this issue.

329 We acknowledge that there may be some concerns regarding the County Council's ability to become a unitary authority, in the light of its recent performance, but consider that the County Council is taking positive steps to address the situation. We consider that Option A of our final recommendations could provide the setting for a robust and sustainable unitary authority.

Option B

330 We are also confirming Option Two as part of our final recommendations, to be referred to as Option B. We remain of the view that the two-unitary-authority option would be well-placed to reflect the generally perceived differences in terms of local affinities between the north and the south of the county. Such a perception is underlined by the submissions we received and the MORI research in Cumbria. In addition, we note that this option has significant local support and would therefore be likely to generate the support of local stakeholders if established.

331 We consider that this option would provide two unitary authorities that would have sufficient capacity and resources to effectively provide the full range of local government services and to address the specific challenges facing different areas.

332 We have noted the concerns of local authorities in the north of Cumbria regarding existing ties and partnership working. However, we remain of the view that the creation of a North Cumbria unitary authority would not necessarily damage the partnership working in evidence between Allerdale and Copeland, and Eden and Carlisle City. Indeed such working relationships could be enhanced within the broader framework. One of the challenges of this new authority would be the development of a robust local government infrastructure; in our view this is achievable.

333 We carefully considered the additional information and evidence that was put to us in Stage Three and subsequently in relation to the proposal for two unitary authorities in the north of Cumbria. It is clear that the authorities involved have put a great deal of work into the Stage Three submissions, and we are grateful for this. In addition, we have noted the recently published CPA result for Copeland, which was rated as a 'fair' performing council by the Audit Commission. Nevertheless, we are not persuaded that the proposal for West and East Cumbria unitary authorities should form part of our final recommendations.

334 We consider that our proposed North Cumbria unitary authority would be better placed to inherit County Council services than the smaller West and East Cumbria unitary authorities. In addition, we did not find the further evidence submitted to us persuasive in relation to the capacity of those authorities to provide the full range of local government services. As detailed above, we consider that the community identity and partnership working currently demonstrated in the 'pairings' of districts need not be lost by forming part of a larger North Cumbria unitary authority, and consider our proposed unitary authority would be better placed to be a high performing unitary authority in the North West regional context than the proposed West and East Cumbria unitary authorities, given its increased capacity and presence.

335 We are aware of the particular characteristics of Cumbria, such as its reliance on the tourism industry and its regeneration needs stemming from long-standing structural economic difficulties, which are outlined above. We consider that these characteristics point towards the need for larger authorities, with the area being covered by one, or at most, two unitary authorities, not least to give the county a strong voice at regional, national and EU level.

336 The table below details the names we are proposing for potential new unitary authorities under each of our options. We note that Cumbria County Council proposed new names for the authority in Option A, including 'The Council for Cumbria', 'The Cumbria Local Authority' and 'Cumbria Council'. We also received a number of alternative names for the authorities in Option B, and propose naming them North Cumbria and Morecambe Bay, to reflect local views.

337 Therefore, we are proposing that two options for unitary local government in Cumbria be put forward as our final recommendations, as set out below.

Final recommendations for Cumbria

Option A

The districts of Allerdale, Barrow-in-Furness, Carlisle City, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland should be abolished and their functions transferred to Cumbria County Council, which should be renamed Cumbria Council.

Option B

Cumbria County Council and the districts of Allerdale, Barrow-in-Furness, Carlisle City, Copeland, Eden, South Lakeland and Lancaster City (from Lancashire) should be abolished. The functions of these authorities should be transferred to two new unitary districts, to be named 'North Cumbria' (comprising the former areas of Allerdale, Carlisle City, Copeland and Eden districts) and 'Morecambe Bay' (comprising the former areas of Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland, and Lancaster City from Lancashire).

Table 25: Final recommendations for Cumbria

| Option | Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------|
| Option A: a single unitary authority | Cumbria | Cumbria County Council | 487,600 |
| Option B: two unitary authorities | North Cumbria | Allerdale, Copeland, Eden and Carlisle City | 313,300 |
| | Morecambe Bay | Barrow-in-Furness, South Lakeland and Lancaster City | 308,200 |

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

Lancashire

Option A

339 Having considered all the evidence received, we consider that Option One should form part of our final recommendations, to be referred to as Option A, with a minor amendment in the Rossendale area. We consider that a single unitary authority has the potential to be high performing, with a strong regional presence and capacity. The option has received a considerable amount of local support and would broadly enable the present county to remain as one entity, reflecting local community identities and interests. 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 and services currently performed by the district councils. It would also achieve financial viability in terms of a robust resource base.

340 We also consider that the County Council has addressed the concerns raised in our draft recommendations report in relation to the representative role and accountability of a single unitary authority, giving examples of current practice

relating to localism and representation. We are of the view that the proposed local cabinets, local advisory groups, community forums and the increased role of parish and town councils could have the potential to ensure the representation and engagement of the diverse local communities of Lancashire without recreating the two-tier system. However, we note a number of concerns raised by district councils in Lancashire, over how an authority containing over one million people, spread across a large geographical area, could represent such a diverse range of communities and interests without mirroring the existing two-tier system. We share some of those concerns and recognise that such new arrangements pose a significant governance challenge.

341 We are sensitive to the organisational, and possibly legal, complexities involved in devolving decision-making within such a large local authority. This has recently been evidenced elsewhere. The challenge should not be underestimated and a single unitary authority covering Lancashire would need to be highly innovative and forward-thinking in putting into effect viable devolved structures to engage with communities and deliver services at a local scale. This indicates the importance of the ODPM issuing further guidance on what the present legislation permits by way of devolved governance arrangements, as discussed in chapter 2.

342 We note that, in its submission, Lancashire County Council refers to Option One of the draft recommendations, albeit on its existing boundaries, as a new authority. We welcome this approach and are of the view that if such an authority were to come into being, the recognition that it would be a new form of local government would be crucial to its success. We consider that, in order to gain the support of key stakeholders within the county, Option A of our final recommendations must not be viewed as a way of retaining the status quo, a view which we note has been expressed by many respondents. This, along with the issues highlighted earlier in the report, such as community engagement, operation of the corporate centre and local service delivery, is a significant challenge which the Council must rise to if a Lancashire unitary authority is to be successful.

343 We remain of the view that combining the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area of Wyre with Blackpool has considerable merit and should form part of our final recommendations. We examined Blackpool Borough Council's proposal and agree that the proposed authority would be similar in socio-economic and demographic make-up and would provide clear focus and improved service delivery to the area. We considered that combining this part of Wyre with Blackpool would better represent local communities and lead to more effective and convenient local government than retaining it within Lancashire. The wards that would be transferred from Wyre to Blackpool are listed below.

Table 26: Wards to be transferred from Wyre to Blackpool as part of Option A

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| Bourne | Norcross |
| Breck | Park |
| Carleton | Pharos |
| Cleveleys Park | Rossall |
| Hardhorn | Staina |
| High Cross | Tithebarn |
| Jubilee | Victoria |
| Mount | Warren |

344 We carefully considered the proposal, made by Blackpool Borough Council, for a reduced Lancashire unitary authority. However, we consider that there was little evidence or argumentation to support how this authority would best reflect local

community identities and interests other than being compatible with a Blackpool, Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys authority.

345 In the light of the further evidence received during Stage Three, we have been persuaded that transferring the Whitworth area of Rossendale to Rochdale would offer the most effective and convenient local government. We have noted that this proposal was opposed locally in Whitworth and in Rossendale. We also consider that, as Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council considered that it would not be able to support Whitworth Town Council under its Township scheme, residents in Whitworth would be better represented by remaining within a unitary authority in Lancashire. We therefore propose that Whitworth remains within a unitary authority in Lancashire in all of our final recommendations.

Option B

346 As in our draft recommendations report, in formulating a sub-county option for patterns of unitary authorities in Lancashire we have divided the county into discrete geographical areas, as did many respondents in their submissions to us. On the basis of the evidence and information received, we propose a second option which includes a number of unitary authorities in Lancashire as well as changes to the boundaries of several existing unitary authorities. Option B of our final recommendations builds on the two sub-county options that formed part of our draft recommendations (Options Two and Three). We consider that each of these authorities would provide a viable resource base in order to deliver local services. In this respect, such a pattern of unitary authorities could serve to rationalise partnerships, although we note that some reconfiguration in the first instance may be required.

North Lancashire

347 In the north of Lancashire, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for a South Cumbria & Lancaster (to be renamed Morecambe Bay) unitary authority as final. This option is outlined in more detail in the Cumbria section of the report.

Central Lancashire

348 As part of Option B of our final recommendations, we propose a Central Lancashire unitary authority, comprising the existing districts of Chorley, Preston City and South Ribble. This option is based on proposals put forward by Preston City Council and South Ribble Borough Council in Stage One and Stage Three of the review.

349 We note that there were significant objections to our draft recommendations to add parts of Wyre and Fylde to the Central Lancashire unitary authority. In the light of the evidence received during Stage Three and subsequently, we now consider that adding these areas to Central Lancashire would dilute that authority's potential strengths and focus and that an alternative formulation would better meet the needs of Wyre and Fylde residents.

350 We remain of the view that there are strong links between the three districts of Preston City, South Ribble and Chorley. Travel-to-work evidence suggests that there is strong movement between them, and we are also aware of joint partnership working between the three districts, for example the Buckshaw Village project, a joint housing and business development between Chorley and South Ribble. We consider

that such examples of shared working demonstrate the economic homogeneity between all three districts, and their clear interdependence.

351 We expressed concerns in our draft recommendations that Preston City could dominate such an authority and requested more information regarding community engagement. We note that Preston City and South Ribble have addressed this issue, suggesting a programme of work that could be undertaken as a means of ensuring community engagement across all three districts. We are therefore satisfied that a Central Lancashire unitary authority could be able to effectively engage with the entire community.

352 We are also satisfied that a Central Lancashire unitary authority would have the capacity to provide the full range of local government services effectively. Although we acknowledge that the present performance of an existing council can only provide a broad indicator on the future performance of a unitary authority, the recent performance of the constituent councils suggests that a Central Lancashire unitary authority would be starting from a strong base in order to deliver major services currently being undertaken by the County Council. We hope that areas where one council needs improvement and another is strong will result in improved services. For example, the CPA Inspection Report notes that South Ribble Borough Council engages well with the community, while this is identified as an area that Preston City and Chorley could improve upon.

353 We note that Chorley Borough Council reiterated in Stage Three a preferred option for a Chorley unitary authority, based upon its existing boundaries. This option was not included in our draft recommendations as we were of the view that it did not possess the capacity to effectively deliver the full range of local government services. We received little further evidence from Chorley during Stage Three regarding this proposal. In addition, we consider that Chorley would make a significant contribution to a Central Lancashire unitary authority, as outlined above, and also consider that the rural areas in Chorley would complement those in Preston City and South Ribble. We have therefore decided against putting a Chorley unitary authority forward as part of our final recommendations.

Fylde, Wyre and Blackpool

354 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed that Wyre and Fylde be divided between Blackpool and Central Lancashire and sought local views on this and other possible viable alternatives for the area. During Stage Three we received significant opposition to our draft recommendations from all affected councils. We also received opposition from members of the public. The main reason for the opposition was that the councils contended that there would be little community identity within the enlarged Central Lancashire and the Fylde Coast unitary authorities, and that it would be better if the districts of Wyre and Fylde were kept whole. Therefore, we assessed alternative proposals that were put to us with a view to finding a viable alternative.

355 Wyre and Fylde borough councils reiterated their Stage One proposal for a Wyre and Fylde unitary authority as their first preference. We note that Wyre and Fylde are largely similar in economic composition and, other than their coastal zones, both are largely rural in character. There is also evidence of shared community identities and some common interests between the two boroughs. We also note a history of joint working. However, we received little further information from Wyre and Fylde borough councils responding to the concerns we raised about such an authority in our draft recommendations report. We remain unpersuaded that a Wyre

and Fylde unitary authority would have the capacity to effectively deliver the full range of services required and, as detailed in our draft recommendations, are of the view that it would face significant obstacles, particularly if the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area were transferred to Blackpool, reducing the population of the proposed unitary authority significantly. We therefore looked at alternative proposals for this area.

356 During Stage Three Wyre and Fylde borough councils proposed combining Wyre, Fylde and Blackpool in one authority as their second preference. We did not consult on such a proposal at Stage Three as it had not previously been proposed to us locally and, at that time, we were of the view that alternative options might be more suitable for this part of the county. However, after giving this option careful consideration, and in the light of the strong evidence put forward for it, we have decided to include it as part of our final recommendations.

357 We consider that combining Wyre and Fylde with Blackpool would create a unitary authority of sufficient capacity to provide services effectively, building on Blackpool's experience of being an existing unitary authority. We note that Wyre and Fylde borough councils acknowledge that joining with Blackpool council could increase performance, although, in our view, this may be in the medium- to longer-term. We also note that such an authority would be coterminous with some existing stakeholders and agencies, such as Mental Health Implementation Teams and the Acute Trust. The primary care trusts covering the three districts also work closely together, sharing staff and services.

358 We also note that Wyre and Fylde borough councils acknowledge that a Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde unitary authority would recognise the links that exist between the three districts in relation to transportation, travel to work patterns and major urban facilities. They also recognise the pull that Blackpool exerts on residents in the surrounding areas in terms of economy, employment and leisure as well as the economic influence of the coastal area, as evidenced by our Stage One opinion research. Both councils therefore feel that this option would contribute to effective and convenient local government.

359 While we accept that Blackpool has little experience of delivering services to largely rural authorities, Wyre and Fylde borough councils both have such experience and we are confident that the combination of the three existing authorities would create a unitary authority with the expertise and capacity needed to tackle these issues effectively. We believe that a Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde unitary authority would be able to embrace its diversity and develop a new, balanced and innovative authority. We consider that neither rural nor urban areas would dominate.

360 Blackpool Borough Council has raised objections to such a proposal, based on the argument that it could have a detrimental effect upon Blackpool. We also note that a large number of respondents objected to linking Wyre and Fylde with Blackpool. However, such respondents may have perceived a risk of being absorbed into Blackpool, as it currently is, whereas our proposal envisages the creation, to all intents and purposes, of a new and different authority. While we understand Blackpool Borough Council's concerns, our remit is to seek the best pattern for unitary government within the two-tier areas of Lancashire, and we are of the opinion that a Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde unitary authority provides the best available option for patterns of unitary government within Lancashire as a whole. We also consider that there would be sufficient capacity and shared interests to provide the setting for a high-performing unitary authority that would have a comparable presence and weight to that of other unitary authorities in the region.

East Lancashire

361 Having examined the evidence on the options for consultation in east Lancashire we propose two unitary authorities for east Lancashire as part of our final recommendations; one based on Burnley, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale authorities and one based on Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen authorities. As stated earlier, there was a general consensus among the districts and other stakeholders that two unitary authorities for east Lancashire, rather than one, would be more effective and better reflect local community identities and interests in the area. However, a number of possible formulations were suggested for two east Lancashire unitary authorities.

362 There was considerable opposition to merging Ribble Valley with Blackburn with Darwen in the Stage One and Stage Three submissions and we consider that community identities and interests of Ribble Valley residents would be better reflected by combining it with the other east Lancashire districts. We consider that a Burnley, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale unitary authority and a Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen unitary authority would better reflect local community identities and interests and create more effective and convenient local government than the alternative formulations proposed.

363 A Burnley, Pendle, Ribble Valley & Rossendale authority would combine a mixture of different communities that would contain areas of urban and rural economic and social diversity. We consider that the relatively deprived areas of Pendle, Burnley and Rossendale could be complemented by the more affluent Ribble Valley creating a good blend of economies and communities. We also note that there are good transport links between these areas and a number of existing partnerships between the districts. We consider that the proposed authority could have the capacity to function as a high-performing unitary authority, while still representing and reflecting the needs of its communities. As with Option A, we propose that Whitworth remain within Lancashire as part of our final recommendations.

364 Having evaluated the evidence received, we also consider that a Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen authority could function as a high-performing unitary authority while reflecting local community identities and interests. The proposed authority would be geographically coherent, have excellent transport links and a strong community of interest. We also remain of the view that Hyndburn would benefit from the experience of Blackburn with Darwen as an existing high-performing unitary authority. Although we received a few objections to the merger of Hyndburn with Blackburn with Darwen, we consider that this would be a more suitable alternative to a unitary authority which combined Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley (either in part or in its entirety) in a single unitary authority.

365 In formulating our final recommendations we have carefully considered all of the alternative proposals in east Lancashire. We recognise that Bury is a greatly improved council, having moved to 'fair' in its recent CPA assessment. Its experience in managing the improvement process could be of benefit to the Rossendale area and it would have much, potentially, to offer Rossendale residents. However, we are of the view that a Bury with Rossendale authority would not facilitate a better solution for Rossendale residents than being included in an authority with Burnley, Pendle and Ribble Valley, which has the potential to perform well as a unitary authority. In the light of our views on this alternative proposal for Rossendale, we are not persuaded that the interests of its residents would be better served by being part of an authority outside the current two-tier area. We also note that, while Bury might

gain from expansion in terms of increasing its population and influence in the region, its submission did not fully address how Rossendale residents would benefit.

366 We examined Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's submission and did not consider that adding the southern wards of Ribble Valley and small parts of South Ribble and Chorley areas to Blackburn with Darwen would better reflect local community interests or lead to more effective and convenient local government in the areas concerned. As detailed earlier, there may be a case for some minor adjustment of boundaries between any unitary authorities resulting from this review. However, we consider that these could best be considered as part of a principal area boundary review, which we would be asked to carry out by the Deputy Prime Minister. We also remain of the view that Hyndburn Borough Council's proposal for a Hyndburn and Ribble Valley unitary authority would not have as much potential to perform as a high-performing unitary authority as to other options put forward for east Lancashire.

West Lancashire

367 We carefully considered the evidence and argumentation received for the West Lancashire area. We note and welcome the considerable effort which has gone into West Lancashire District Council's Stage Three submission and the local information and media campaigns in relation to our draft recommendations. This has engendered greater public interest in and debate about the review process, a development we view as healthy. In the light of this debate, we reconsidered the three options that, in our view, were available in relation to West Lancashire. Our consideration of West Lancashire in the context of the county as a whole is informed by its residual position against the background of the persuasive proposals for unitary authorities which had emerged in respect of other areas of the county, leaving the district without an obvious place in the larger proposed sub-county structures. The options considered were: adding West Lancashire to a Central Lancashire unitary authority; a West Lancashire unitary authority; and amalgamating the district with adjoining metropolitan authorities.

368 We examined again the evidence for including the whole of West Lancashire in a Central Lancashire unitary authority. However, our concerns about the lack of links between West Lancashire and the neighbouring Lancashire districts remain. In particular, we consider that one advantage of the Central Lancashire unitary authority we have proposed is that it would have a strong socio-economic homogeneity. West Lancashire is of a different character. Such evidence as we received during the review tends to support the view that its inclusion within a Central Lancashire unitary authority could dilute the anticipated effectiveness of that authority. Our Stage One opinion research conducted by MORI clearly indicates that far fewer residents of West Lancashire share an effective community identity with other areas of Lancashire, when compared to areas within the district, or with adjoining metropolitan areas. Indeed West Lancashire District Council did not contend that its area shared significant practical links with the Central Lancashire area; rather such links as the Council's evidence pointed to (in relation to economic activity and travel) tended to be with the metropolitan areas in the southern parts of the county.

369 We reconsidered the case for a West Lancashire unitary authority in the light of additional evidence and argumentation received during Stage Three and subsequently, reviewing again the material received at Stage One. We are aware of and give weight to the argument put to us, both in Stage One and Stage Three, that West Lancashire has a distinct identity that separates it from its Lancashire and metropolitan neighbours. In particular, the District Council argued that the significant local opposition to our draft recommendations, as demonstrated by the campaigns

run by the Council and a local newspaper, was evidence of this distinct identity. The perception that the proposed local government changes would take them 'out of Lancashire' was a particular concern for some residents. We have noted the strong feeling that has emerged during Stage Three regarding West Lancashire, but we are not satisfied that this is best interpreted as support for a West Lancashire unitary authority, rather than a preference for the status quo. In addition, the Stage One MORI research showed that identification with the West Lancashire District Council area was a little lower than typically found in other Lancashire districts, suggesting that community identity in West Lancashire is not overwhelmingly stronger than anywhere else in the county.

370 We have noted the CPA Inspection report for West Lancashire, released after the publication of our draft recommendations, which rated West Lancashire as a 'good' authority, praising it for its strong leadership and its efforts to develop community identity. As noted elsewhere in this report, current performance can only give a broad indication of how a council might perform when undertaking services that are currently county council functions. While we recognise the achievements of West Lancashire District Council in carrying out its services and representational role under the present arrangements, we remain unpersuaded that a West Lancashire unitary authority could effectively carry out large-scale services. We do not consider that the complexities of the provision of education and social services, in particular, were fully addressed in information received during Stages One and Three. In addition, we were concerned that recent developments in areas such as children's services had not been fully understood by the District Council.

371 We therefore consider that a West Lancashire unitary authority would face significant challenges in carrying out these functions, and are concerned that a West Lancashire unitary authority would therefore be a relatively 'high-risk' option in relation to the provision of large-scale services. A similar perception is, to some degree, reflected in the submissions we received from headteachers and school governors in the area expressing concerns about the ability of a West Lancashire unitary authority to deliver education effectively. We note all that has been said by West Lancashire about joint arrangements and partnerships, but remain concerned that the partnerships contemplated by West Lancashire in its Stage One and Stage Three submissions are likely to involve joint working with neighbouring local authorities as an essential, and not merely an optional or enhancing, feature of the provision of services such as education and social services. In contrast, we feel that residents in West Lancashire could benefit from the existing experience of Sefton and Wigan in providing these services, and we feel confident that Sefton and Wigan could expand their existing services to provide for West Lancashire residents. We consider that provision of large-scale services by the larger authorities that would result from amalgamation with those areas would be a lower-risk option for the West Lancashire public.

372 These competing factors tend to confirm the potential for tension between two of our statutory criteria; that of providing for effective and convenient local government on the one hand, and of reflecting the identities and interests of local communities on the other. We have carefully considered both of these in reaching our final recommendations across each of the review areas. While we note the community identity arguments put to us regarding West Lancashire, and do not underestimate the wide support for the survival of West Lancashire as an entity, we have ultimately concluded that our concerns about the capacity of West Lancashire District Council to deliver services currently carried out by the County Council have not been satisfactorily allayed. We feel that a West Lancashire unitary authority would face significant challenges in seeking to achieve effective service delivery.

373 We therefore consider that, in the context of this review, the amalgamation of the West Lancashire area with Sefton and Wigan, and consequent division of the present district, provides an outcome which is by far the most likely to conduce to effective and convenient local government. Even if that were to have the effect of compromising some community affinity with the present district area, we have concluded that this would be outweighed by the need for the community to be served by those units of local government most likely to have the capacity for effective service delivery.

374 As our draft recommendations were for the purposes of consultation, we sought views on the proposed boundary which would divide the district. During Stage Four, we learned of a petition in support of the creation of a parish for the Lathom South area in West Lancashire. The proposed boundary of the new parish would straddle the new boundary between the proposed enlarged authorities of Sefton and Wigan. The case for a new parish will be considered by the ODPM after the publication of our final recommendations. However, the fact that a petition for a new parish has been submitted is, in itself, a manifestation of community identity in the Lathom South area. We do not propose that this community identity should be divided by a boundary between two authorities. Accordingly, we propose amending the proposed boundary between the enlarged Sefton and Wigan authorities to ensure that the whole of the proposed new parish is contained within one of the expanded authorities. The tables below indicate the wards to be transferred to Sefton and Wigan, following this amendment.

Table 27: Wards to be transferred from West Lancashire to Sefton under Option B

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Aughton Park | Knowsley |
| Aughton & Downholland | North Meols |
| Burscough East | Rufford |
| Burscough West | Scarisbrick |
| Halsall | Scott |
| Hesketh-with-Becconsall | Tarleton |

Table 28: Wards to be transferred from West Lancashire to Wigan under Option B

| | |
|--------------|--------------------|
| Ashurst | Parbold |
| Bickerstaffe | Skelmersdale North |
| Birch Green | Skelmersdale South |
| Derby | Tanhouse |
| Digmoor | Upholland |
| Moorside | Wrightington |
| Newburgh | |

375 We note the suggestion by Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council that the Bickerstaffe area should be transferred from the proposed enlarged Wigan authority to our proposed Sefton & West Lancashire authority. However, Bickerstaffe forms part of the area in the proposal for a new parish. We do not consider it would be appropriate to transfer the whole of the proposed new parish to the enlarged Sefton authority, as this would divide Skelmersdale between the two metropolitan areas.

376 We also note that there was some support for adding Southport (in Sefton) to West Lancashire. We recognise that the addition of Southport could have increased the viability of a West Lancashire unitary authority and there is evidence of affinities between the two areas. However, in the context of this review we are prohibited by section 14 (5) of the 2003 Act from making any recommendation that has the effect

of reducing the area of existing unitary authorities. Nevertheless, we consider that whether or not structural change takes place in accordance with our recommendations, the boundaries between or within Sefton and West Lancashire could be reviewed at a later date to address these long-standing boundary concerns. However, such a review would of necessity impact on Merseyside districts more generally, and this underlines the undesirability of our expressing a view in the context of the present review.

377 The table below details the names we are proposing for potential new authorities under each of our options. Where possible we have adopted the names proposed to us in submissions. However, where no names have been proposed, we have proposed our own. As detailed in the Cumbria section of the report, we propose renaming South Cumbria & Lancaster as Morecambe Bay to better reflect local views. In the remainder of Lancashire, we have tried to reflect local geography where possible.

378 Therefore, we are proposing that two options for unitary local government in Lancashire be put forward as our final recommendations, as set out below.

Final recommendations for Lancashire

Option A

The districts of Burnley, Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Lancaster City, Pendle, Preston City, Ribble Valley, Rossendale, South Ribble, West Lancashire and Wyre should be abolished and their functions transferred to Lancashire County Council, which should be renamed Lancashire Council.

The existing unitary authority of Blackpool Borough Council should be expanded to include the Fleetwood and Thornton-Cleveleys area of Wyre (as detailed in Table 26). This authority should be renamed Blackpool with Fleetwood Borough Council.

Option B

Lancashire County Council and the districts of Burnley, Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Lancaster City, Pendle, Preston City, Ribble Valley, Rossendale, South Ribble, West Lancashire and Wyre, and Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland (from Cumbria) should be abolished. The functions of these authorities should be transferred to three new unitary districts, to be named 'Central Lancashire' (comprising the former areas of Chorley, Preston City and South Ribble), 'East Lancashire' (comprising the former areas of Burnley, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale) and 'Morecambe Bay' (comprising the former areas of Lancaster City, and Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland from Cumbria).

The existing unitary authority of Blackpool Borough Council should be expanded to include the former areas of Fylde and Wyre. This authority should be renamed Blackpool & the Fylde Borough Council.

The existing unitary authority of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council should be expanded to include the former area of Hyndburn. This authority should be renamed Blackburn with Hyndburn Borough Council.

The existing metropolitan authority of Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council should be expanded to include the western part of West Lancashire (as detailed in Table 27). This authority should be renamed Sefton & West Lancashire.

The existing metropolitan authority of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council should be expanded to include the eastern part of West Lancashire (as detailed in Table 28).

Table 29: Final recommendations for Lancashire

| Option | Unitary authority | Constituent parts | Population (2001) |
|----------|--------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Option A | Lancashire | Majority of the Lancashire County Council area | 1,058,700 |
| | Blackpool with Fleetwood | Blackpool and part Wyre | 218,500 |
| Option B | Blackburn with Hyndburn | Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn | 219,000 |
| | Blackpool & the Fylde | Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre | 321,100 |
| | Central Lancashire | Chorley, Preston City and South Ribble | 333,900 |
| | East Lancashire | Burnley, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale | 298,400 |
| | Morecambe Bay | Barrow-in-Furness, Lancaster City and South Lakeland | 308,200 |
| | Sefton & West Lancashire | Sefton and part of West Lancashire | 332,800 |
| | Wigan | Wigan and part of West Lancashire | 359,900 |

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

380 In addition to consulting on options for future local government structures in our draft recommendations report for Cumbria and Lancashire, we also considered and sought views on the treatment of ceremonial arrangements and the provision of certain services. Our conclusions on these issues are set out in Appendix B.

Financial model

Cumbria

381 The table below sets out the costs of 'being in business' of the current local government structure and for each of the options that we are putting forward as final recommendations. Further information is available on our website.

Table 30: Financial model – costs of 'being in business' – Cumbria

| | Costs (£m) |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Existing two-tier structure | 17.6 |
| Option A | 9.1 |
| Option B | 13.9 |

382 Option B includes the unitary authority of Morecambe Bay, comprising Barrow-in-Furness, South Lakeland (in Cumbria) and Lancaster City (in Lancashire). Accordingly, the costs of 'being in business' associated with Option B cannot be directly compared with the costs associated with Option A or with current costs.

383 During Stage One, Cumbria County Council also supplied us with its own evaluation in relation to the cost of its own proposal, for the other option we consulted upon as part of our draft recommendations (Option Two) and for those proposed by the district councils in Cumbria, which we did not consult upon. In using a model developed by the County Councils' Network, Cumbria County Council estimated that a single unitary authority for Cumbria would have a three-year payback period, as compared with 39 years for a two-unitary option (including Lancaster City) or a three-unitary option, which would never pay for itself. However, as at Stage One, the figures provided by the Council have not been audited by the Audit Commission, and we have no view on them.

Lancashire

384 The table below sets out the costs of 'being in business' of the current local government structure and for each of the options that we are putting forward as final recommendations. Further information is available on our website.

Table 31: Financial model – costs of 'being in business' – Lancashire

| | Costs (£m) |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Existing two-tier structure | 38.7 |
| Option A | 12.8 |
| Option B | 26.0 |

385 Option B includes the unitary authority of Morecambe Bay, comprising Barrow-in-Furness, South Lakeland (in Cumbria) and Lancaster City (in Lancashire). Accordingly, the costs of 'being in business' associated with Option B cannot be directly compared with the costs associated with Option A or with current costs.

7 Next steps

386 Having completed the review of local government in Cumbria and Lancashire and submitted our final recommendations to the Deputy Prime Minister, we have fulfilled our obligation under the direction we received on 16 June 2003.

387 It is now up to the Deputy Prime Minister to decide whether to accept our recommendations, with or without modification, or reject them.

388 The ODPM will now consider the recommendations contained within this report as part of its preparations for referendums on elected regional assemblies and local government change. It is understood that the Government will not take final decisions on the local government options for a period of six weeks from the date of this report (until 6 July 2004) during which time you may write to the Deputy Prime Minister with any comments.

389 The Deputy Prime Minister can be contacted at the following address:

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Zone 5/B1
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

390 The Electoral Commission will be responsible for conducting at a later date the referendums on elected regional assemblies. As part of the referendums, voters in two-tier areas of each region will have the opportunity to vote on their preferred pattern of unitary local government.

Appendix A

Maps of final recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire

The following maps illustrate our final recommendations for wholly unitary patterns of local government in Cumbria and Lancashire:

Map A1 illustrates Option A for Cumbria.

Map A2 illustrates Option B for Cumbria.

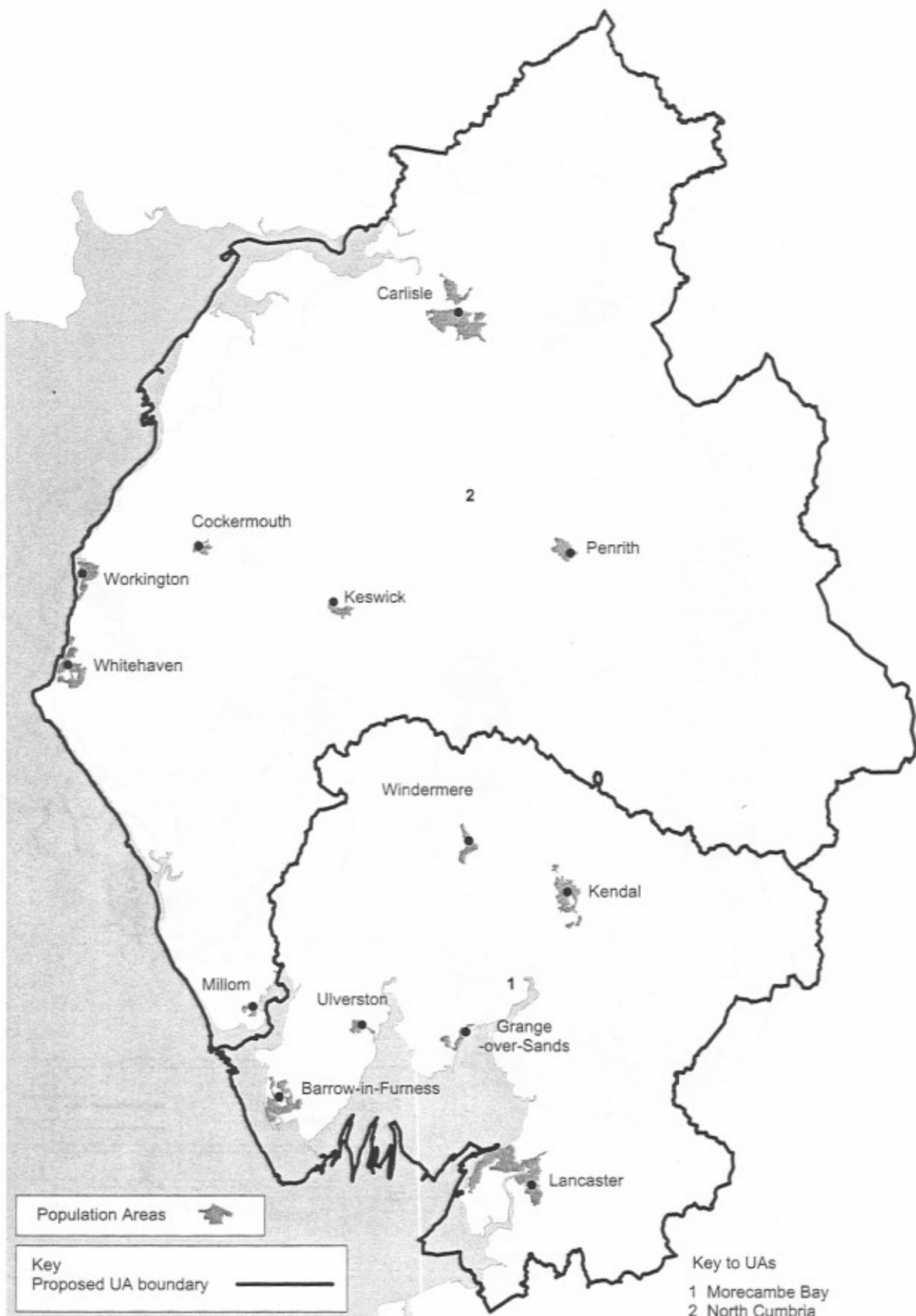
Map A3 illustrates Option A for Lancashire.

Map A4 illustrates Option B for Lancashire.

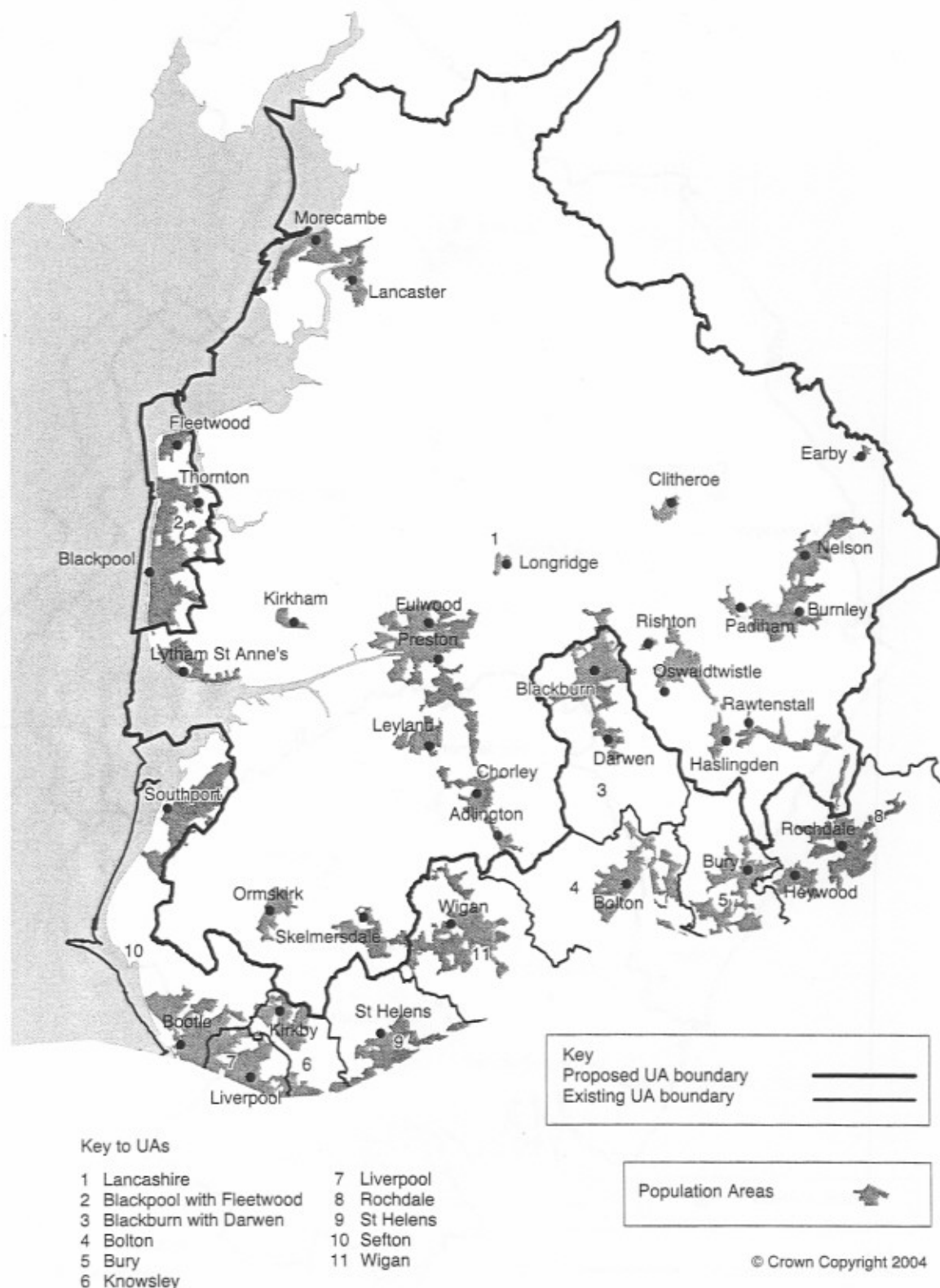
Map A1: Option A for Cumbria



Map A2: Option B for Cumbria



Map A3: Option A for Lancashire



Map A4: Option B for Lancashire



Key to UAs

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 Blackburn with Hyndburn | 8 Bolton |
| 2 Blackpool and the Fylde | 9 Bury |
| 3 Central Lancashire | 10 Knowsley |
| 4 East Lancashire | 11 Liverpool |
| 5 Morecambe Bay | 12 Rochdale |
| 6 Sefton and West Lancashire | 13 St Helens |
| 7 Wigan | |

Key
Proposed UA boundary ———
Existing UA boundary - - - - -

Population Areas



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Appendix B

Other matters

In addition to consulting on options for future local government structures in our draft recommendations report for Cumbria and Lancashire, we also considered and sought views on the treatment of ceremonial arrangements and the provision of certain services.

Our conclusions on these issues are discussed below.

Ceremonial arrangements

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.

Under the Reserve Forces Act 1980 every county is entitled to a Lord Lieutenant. While this is entirely appropriate for unitary counties, in practical terms there is no need for most unitary districts to have their own Lord Lieutenant and other ceremonial arrangements. We have considered the particular circumstances relating to our proposals for a South Cumbria & Lancaster unitary authority, which crosses the existing Cumbria and Lancashire boundary. As part of our final recommendations, we are proposing that the new authority be linked with Lancashire for ceremonial purposes.

Existing ceremonial arrangements in Cumbria and Lancashire will remain unaffected under Option A of our final recommendations for both counties.

Final recommendation – Cumbria Option B

The county of Cumbria should be retained for ceremonial and related purposes, and the new unitary district of North Cumbria should be associated with the county for such purposes. The unitary authority of Morecambe Bay should be associated with the county of Lancashire for ceremonial and related purposes.

Final recommendation – Lancashire Option B

The county of Lancashire should be retained for ceremonial and related purposes, and the new unitary districts of Central Lancashire, East Lancashire and Morecambe Bay should be associated with the county for such purposes. The unitary authorities of Blackburn with Hyndburn and Blackpool & the Fylde should continue to be associated with the county of Lancashire for ceremonial and related purposes.

During our consultations a number of other ceremonial-related issues were raised with us, in relation to the preservation of mayoralties and city status following reorganisation. These are important matters to local people and should not be overlooked.

We understand that, following the precedent of the 1974 reorganisation, on application the Deputy Prime Minister can provide for Charter Trustees to be established for an area. This means that those councillors elected to represent wards that are in the area of the existing local authority will constitute a body corporate known as the Charter Trustees of the borough or city. Charter Trustees have few powers but may elect one of their number to be mayor, and may exercise powers to appoint local officers of dignity. Further information on these matters can be obtained from the ODPM.

Public protection

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 Secretary of State to make provision in respect of the constitution, election and membership of public bodies in any area affected by the structural change order, plus their abolition or establishment.

Under section 17(6), the Secretary of State is required to ensure that no unitary county or a district (unitary or two-tier) is divided between two or more police areas.

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. Accordingly, for options that included sub-county patterns of unitary authorities, we made draft recommendations in respect of the area and membership of the committee that appoints members of police authorities.

We received a number of comments on our draft recommendations regarding police authority areas to the effect that they ignored the operational requirements of the police service. It was felt that changes to area and, potentially, resources and staffing, were being driven by non-policing factors, to the detriment of the service.

We consider such comments to be entirely valid and have reviewed our approach to police authority areas. It is not part of our role to determine what may be the operational requirements of the police service, nor do we have the expertise to do so. Accordingly, we have decided to make no recommendations in respect of police authority areas or membership. We believe such matters are more appropriate for the Home Office to take a view on, in consultation with the relevant responsible bodies.

Where we proposed the creation of sub-county patterns of unitary authorities we also proposed in our draft recommendations the establishment of combined fire authorities, on the grounds that such matters were too important to be left to informal joint arrangements. However, the Fire and Rescue Services Act Bill provides the Secretary of State with discretionary powers to establish combined fire and rescue authorities on a regional basis. Given the stage reached by the Bill in its passage through Parliament, we do not consider it appropriate for us to make any recommendations in relation to fire authorities.

Strategic planning

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.

As indicated in our draft recommendations report, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill makes provision for the introduction of regional spatial strategies (RSS) in each region and the abolition of the structure plan and UDP process. Such regional planning guidance as is prescribed by the Secretary of State will become the RSS. In addition, the Secretary of State will have the power to recognise a body as the regional planning body for a region.

Given the stage reached by the Bill in its passage through Parliament, we do not consider it appropriate for us to make any recommendations in relation to strategic planning. Nor do we propose making any recommendations for waste and mineral planning functions in relation to sub-county unitary authorities; we consider that these matters can be addressed through co-operation between the authorities concerned.

Passenger transport

In discussing the division of West Lancashire district between Sefton (in Merseyside) and Wigan (in Greater Manchester) in our draft recommendations report, we made no proposals relating to passenger transport. This omission was drawn to our attention by a number of respondents.

Both Merseyside and Greater Manchester have Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs), whose coverage and membership is provided in the Local Government Act 1985. As a consequence of our final recommendations for West Lancashire district, we therefore recommend as follows:

Final recommendation

Merseyside and Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authorities should continue to cover the areas of the districts of Sefton (to be renamed Sefton & West Lancashire) and Wigan respectively, as expanded.

The number of members appointed to the PTAs from each of the districts in Merseyside and Greater Manchester is set out in the 1985 Act and, we understand, reflects the relative populations of the districts in each of those counties. The Secretary of State may wish to consider whether, in the light of our recommendations for alterations to the areas and populations of Sefton (to be renamed Sefton & West Lancashire) and Wigan, there is a need to review the number of members appointed to PTAs from these districts.

Other services

We believe that the unitary authorities set out in our options would each have the capacity to carry out the other main local government functions directly, albeit some may choose to do so in partnership with other public or private sector bodies. However, we expect the authorities, particularly those included within the sub-county option, 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 records management are maintained.

Appendix C

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 C1: The Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria

| Criteria | Compliance/departure |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 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. | We comply with this requirement. |
| It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose. | We comply with this requirement. |
| 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. | We comply with this requirement. |
| 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. | We comply with this requirement. |
| 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. | We comply with this requirement. |
| 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. | We comply with this requirement. |
| Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated. | We comply with this requirement. |

