

### 3 Initial proposals for the Eastern region

**18** The Eastern region comprises the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk. These counties are covered by a mixture of district councils, county councils and unitary authorities.

**19** The region currently has 58 constituencies. In this review the region has been allocated 57 constituencies, a reduction of one. Of the 58 existing constituencies only 20 have electorates within 5% of the electoral quota (within the range of 71,031 to 78,507 registered electors). In addition, the electorates of 27 constituencies currently fall below the lower 5% limit, while the electorates of 11 constituencies fall above the upper limit.

**20** In seeking to produce initial proposals for the region whereby 57 whole constituencies would have an electorate within 5% of the electoral quota, we first considered whether local authority areas could usefully be grouped into sub-regions. Our approach when grouping local authority areas together in sub-regions was based on trying to respect county boundaries wherever possible and on achieving (where we could) obvious practical groupings such as those dictated in some part by the geography of an area.

**21** Nevertheless, our division of the Eastern region into sub-regions is a purely practical approach. Respondents to our consultation are welcome to make counter-proposals based on other groupings of counties and unitary authorities, if the statutory factors can be better reflected in those counter-proposals.

**22** When thinking about sub-regional groupings for the Eastern region we noted that the county of Cambridgeshire

(which includes the unitary authority of Peterborough) has an allocation of 7.4 constituencies based on an electorate of 554,887. With an allocation of seven whole constituencies, Cambridgeshire's constituencies have an average electorate size of 79,270. The size of electorates in these constituencies makes it impossible to allocate to Cambridgeshire seven constituencies that fall within 5% of the electoral quota. Therefore Cambridgeshire needs to be grouped with a neighbouring county. We noted that Norfolk has an electorate of 645,761, which gives an allocation of 8.6 constituencies. The latter allocation translates into an average constituency size of 71,751 when Norfolk is allocated nine whole constituencies – just 720 electors above the lower limit of the 5% target. The size of these electorates in Norfolk makes it clear that it would be extremely hard to build nine constituencies within the county that are also within 5% of the electoral quota. We therefore decided to group Norfolk and Cambridgeshire into a sub-region, so that we could propose constituencies within 5% of the electoral quota.

**23** We also noted that Hertfordshire has an electorate of 801,230, which gives an allocation of 10.7 constituencies. An allocation of 11 whole constituencies to Hertfordshire gives an average constituency size of 72,839. Electorates of this size in Hertfordshire could allow us to build 11 constituencies within 5% of the electoral quota. But given the dense pattern of settlements in some parts of the county, which make it challenging not to divide towns between constituencies, we decided that we could have better regard for the statutory factors if Hertfordshire were included in a sub-region with another county or counties.

**24** We noted that Essex and Bedfordshire both have electorates that come close or very close to allowing a whole number of constituencies to be allocated (see below). Given this fact we decided that there would be no practical benefit gained from including either of these counties in a sub-region with Hertfordshire. We thus propose to group Hertfordshire with Cambridgeshire and Norfolk in a single sub-region. This arrangement allows us to build a limited number of constituencies that cross county boundaries, and hence create 27 constituencies within 5% of the electoral quota, while also having regard to other statutory factors.

**25** The ceremonial county of Bedfordshire (comprising the unitary authorities of Luton, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford) has an electorate of 439,574, which gives an allocation of 5.9 constituencies. With our proposed allocation of six whole constituencies, the average size of constituencies in Bedfordshire is 73,262. Although this is lower than the electoral quota of 74,769, it is not low enough to indicate to us that problems would be encountered when building six constituencies within the county's boundary. Hence we propose to create six constituencies within the county.

## Initial proposals for the Bedfordshire sub-region

**45** Of the existing six constituencies in the ceremonial county of Bedfordshire, only one is within 5% of the electoral quota – the constituency of South West Bedfordshire. Of the remaining five constituencies, two are above the upper 5% limit (Mid Bedfordshire and North East Bedfordshire). The remaining three constituencies (Bedford, Luton North and Luton South) all have electorates below the lower 5% limit.

**46** We considered first how we could keep South West Bedfordshire unchanged but found this was not feasible given the changes needed to surrounding constituencies in order to bring them within 5% of the electoral quota.

**47** The existing constituency of North East Bedfordshire has an electorate of 83,599. In order to bring it within 5% of the electoral quota we propose to transfer the Borough of Bedford ward of Eastcotts to the Mid Bedfordshire constituency. This change and local government ward boundary changes (to the Borough of

Bedford wards of Eastcotts, Kempston Rural, Clapham, and Great Barford; and to the Central Bedfordshire Council wards of Arlesey, and Northill) bring the North East Bedfordshire constituency within 5% of the electoral quota.

**48** In order to bring the Mid Bedfordshire constituency within 5% of the electoral quota we propose to transfer the wards of Aspley and Woburn, Toddington, and Barton-le-Clay (all Central Bedfordshire Council wards) into South West Bedfordshire. The existing South West Bedfordshire constituency has 76,959 electors so the addition of these wards pushes it above the upper 5% limit. Local government boundary changes to the Central Bedfordshire Council ward of Caddington have partially mitigated this consequence, by transferring some electors from South West Bedfordshire into the Luton South constituency. But, in addition, we propose to transfer the Central Bedfordshire Council wards of Tithe Farm, Parkside, and Houghton Hall from South West Bedfordshire into our proposed Luton North and Houghton constituency. These wards comprise the town of Houghton Regis, the whole of which we propose be included in Luton North and Houghton.

**49** Local government boundary changes to the Elstow and Stewartby ward, the Goldington ward and the Kempston Rural ward are enough to bring our proposed Bedford constituency within 5% of the electoral quota.

**50** We propose to include in Luton South the ward of Barnfield (Borough of Luton), from the existing Luton North constituency, resulting in both the Luton South and Luton

North constituencies being brought within 5% of the electoral quota.

**51** As a result of the changes we propose in Luton and its surrounding area, all of the Central Bedfordshire Council wards that comprise the town of Dunstable are included in our proposed South West Bedfordshire constituency.