



LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE
FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF
NORTHUMBERLAND

A REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

London: HMSO

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the recommendations for the structure of local government in Northumberland, as agreed by the Commission:

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* Mr Ansbro declared an interest in this review on 25 March 1994, and therefore has taken no part subsequently in the Commission's deliberations or decisions in relation to its draft or final recommendations.

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First published 1994

ISBN 0 11 780096 1



The Local Government Commission for England

Sir John Banham
Chairman

Dear Secretary of State

THE FUTURE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF NORTHUMBERLAND

With this letter the Local Government Commission is submitting its final recommendations for the structure of local government in Northumberland.

You will be aware that the Commission put forward two possible structures, on which we sought the views of all those with a stake in local government in the area. These possibilities were:

- (i) the retention of the existing structure of one county council and six district councils;
- (ii) the replacement of the current arrangements by two unitary authorities.

The Commission's stated preference was for the retention of the existing structure, but we made it clear that we would be prepared to recommend the alternative of two unitary authorities if it turned out to enjoy greater local support.

Since our draft recommendations were published on 13 July 1994, the Commission has heard directly from over 16,000 respondents, including many voluntary organisations, businesses, parish and town councils, and other local and national organisations, along with each of the local authorities. We have also commissioned a survey of a representative sample of local residents.

This consultation has led the Commission to confirm its provisional view that changing to a unitary structure would not accord with the wishes of the people of Northumberland. It is now clear that there is overwhelming local support for the retention of the existing two-tier structure of county and district councils. Taking this into account, and considering all the other evidence in the light of the statutory criteria, we are recommending no change to the present structure of local government in the area.

The review process has brought to the surface a number of useful proposals for enhancing the management and effectiveness of local government, whether in a two-tier or unitary structure. Indeed, the Commission has been mindful of the fact that the manner in which any given structure is managed is probably as important as the structure itself and in any case there is a constant need to revise and update practices. We hope that such improvements will be pursued with appropriate vigour now that the distractions of reorganisation can be put behind local authority members and officers alike. In particular, we would like to see more management authority and responsibility devolved to local communities, and a more meaningful consultative role for parish and town councils.

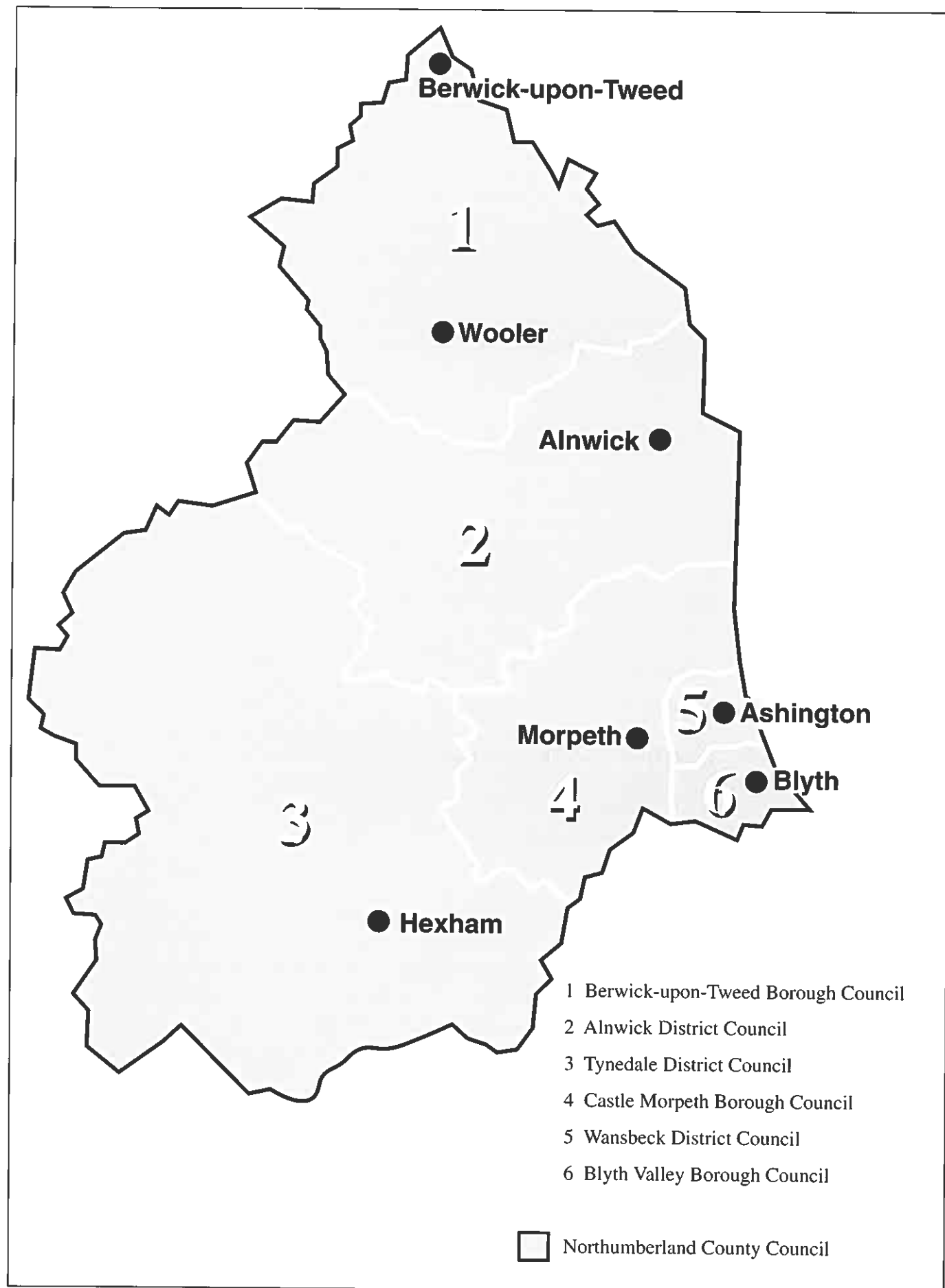
In a further general report to be published when its structural review programme has been completed, the Commission will discuss the establishment of unitary authorities where these come into existence, and their on-going evolution; the same report will consider the improvements that can and need to be made in two-tier structures where they continue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Banham', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sir John Banham
Chairman
15 December 1994

Map 1: THE STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NORTHUMBERLAND



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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1 This report contains the Commission's final recommendations for the future structure of local government in Northumberland. It represents the culmination of a year's work by the Commission, during which time it received the views of over 16,000 individuals and organisations.
- 2 The report is in four main parts:
 - (i) Chapter 2 describes the Commission's draft recommendations
 - (ii) Chapter 3 details the responses to consultation over the draft recommendations
 - (iii) Chapter 4 sets out the Commission's conclusions
 - (iv) Chapter 5 contains the Commission's final recommendations.
- 3 The review commenced on 13 December 1993 and was conducted under the provisions of Part II of the Local Government Act 1992, having regard to the Secretary of State's November 1993 Policy and Procedure Guidance as amended by the courts. In accordance with the Procedure Guidance, the Commission wrote to all the principal authorities in Northumberland, informing them of the review's commencement. Copies were also sent to the other organisations and individuals listed in Annex A to the Guidance.
- 4 A period of some 20 weeks, until 29 April 1994, was given for all local authorities and any other body or person interested in the review to put their views to the Commission on whether there should be changes to the structure of local government in the county, or to boundary and electoral arrangements, and, if so, what those changes should be.
- 5 The Commission's draft recommendations were published in its report *The Future Local Government of Northumberland* on 13 July 1994. Copies were sent to all who had been informed of the commencement of the review; to organisations which wrote to the Commission during the initial consultation stage; to appropriate representative organisations; and to those organisations and individuals listed in Annex A of the Secretary of State's Procedure Guidance. Copies were also made available on request to local residents.
- 6 In addition, principally through the Royal Mail, the Commission distributed over 141,000 leaflet questionnaires summarising its draft recommendations and an alternative structural option to households in the county. The Commission also advertised extensively in the local press, drawing residents' attention to the review and to its draft recommendations and other structural options.

2 THE COMMISSION'S DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7 At the start of the review, local authorities, members of the public and all other interested parties were invited to write to the Commission giving their views on the future local government of Northumberland. Mrs Ann Levick, the Commissioner with particular responsibility for the review, visited the county and met numerous local authority members and officers, interest groups, business organisations and individuals.
- 8 Before considering the options for local government in Northumberland, the Commission endeavoured to learn about local perceptions of community identity, and to determine how much local people knew both about the Commission's work and their views on the principle of unitary local government. As part of the review, a county-wide survey among a representative cross-section of the population was undertaken by Market & Opinion Research International (MORI) on behalf of the Commission. The survey, similar to those carried out in other review areas, covered interviews with 1,308 residents aged 18 and over. The results were published by MORI in January 1994. A summary of the findings is given in Appendix A.
- 9 The Commission received some 115 representations at this stage. Of these only 46 were from individuals and the remainder were from a mixture of interest groups, the voluntary sector, parish councils and the business community. The majority of submissions from individuals supported the retention of the two-tier structure with just three favouring unitary districts or larger unitary authorities. Many groups who expressed an interest in a particular local authority service supported the principle of larger rather than smaller unitary authorities. There was, however, considerable support for the present two-tier structure, especially from the parish councils.
- 10 The Commission also received a wide spectrum of views from national organisations with a particular interest in the issues raised by local government reorganisation. Almost unanimously, those favouring change have recommended unitary authorities larger than the existing districts; but there was also support for the retention of the existing two-tier structure. Each of the principal local authorities in Northumberland also made their views known to the Commission.

THE STRUCTURAL OPTIONS FOR NORTHUMBERLAND

- 11 The Commission is required by section 13(5) (a) and (b) of the Local Government Act 1992 to have regard to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government. The Secretary of State's Policy Guidance to the Commission states that proposals which are put forward by groups of authorities should be an important starting point for the Commission. The Policy Guidance also advises that, where such proposals demonstrate that a range of options have been considered, along with the implications for individual services, the Commission should give them particular weight. Accordingly, the Commission examined carefully the main options suggested by the existing local authorities. In doing so, however, it was mindful of the need to arrive at draft recommendations or alternative options which were viable, which had been assessed against the existing two-tier structure, and which met the statutory criteria set out in section 13(5) of the 1992 Act.
- 12 Only two proposals were submitted as first preferences by the existing local authorities. These were:
 - (i) Retention of the current structure but with improvements to eliminate duplication and improve service delivery. This proposal was jointly submitted under the heading 'The Northumberland Partnership' by the county council and five of the six districts.
 - (ii) Replacement of the current arrangements by three unitary authorities. This proposal was submitted by Alnwick District Council.
- 13 The Commission's draft recommendations provided full details of its consideration of these structures.
- 14 Having considered all the evidence submitted by others and collected by itself, the Commission concluded that the statutory criteria would best be satisfied by retaining and improving the current two-tier structure. It consulted on the following draft recommendation.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

The current two-tier structure of a county council and six district councils should be retained.

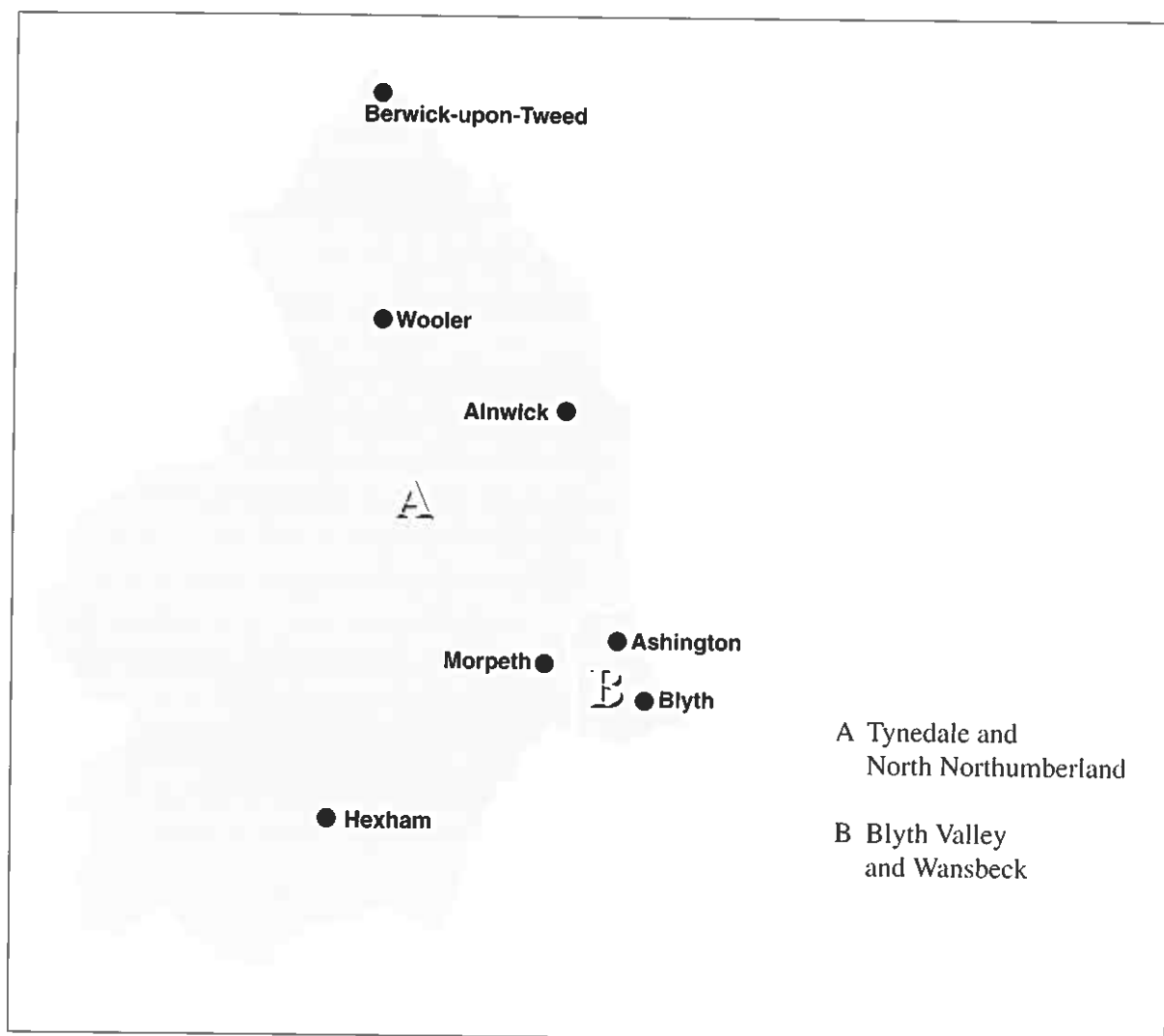
- 15 On consideration, the Commission believed that the second preference of five of the seven principal local authorities — for two unitary authorities — was viable and would also meet the statutory criteria. The Commission indicated that it would be prepared to recommend this option to the Secretary of State if new evidence justified this, including evidence about the level of local support. Accordingly, in addition to its draft recommendation, the Commission decided to consult the people of Northumberland on the alternative structure.

ALTERNATIVE STRUCTURE

The existing two-tier structure of seven councils should be replaced by two new unitary authorities serving:

- (i) Blyth Valley and Wansbeck council areas;
- (ii) Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Castle Morpeth and Tynedale council areas.

Map 2: TWO UNITARY AUTHORITIES



- 16 The Commission also believed that the names of any new authorities should be decided by local people, and invited suggestions.
- 17 While the Commission's alternative unitary structure involved the abolition of the county council, the Commission wished to make clear that it was not advocating the abolition of the 'County of Northumberland'. The Commission recognised that many people have strongly held loyalties to their county and that, should the county council be abolished, the county would continue as a focus for loyalty and identity as well as for historic, ceremonial, sporting and other purposes.

OTHER MATTERS

- 18 In addition to reviewing the structure of local authorities in Northumberland, the Commission is also required to consider the delivery of certain local authority services, to make recommendations about future electoral arrangements, and to take account of the role which parish and town councils could play in the review area. The Commission's consideration of these issues, and its draft recommendations in respect of them, are set out below.

PUBLIC PROTECTION (POLICE, FIRE AND OTHER SERVICES RELATED TO LAW AND ORDER)

- 19 The Secretary of State's Policy Guidance to the Commission is explicit in requiring police and fire services to be carried out over an area no smaller than at present. Indeed, the Commission received no proposals suggesting that these services should cover a smaller area. Accordingly, the Commission concluded that the fire service should continue to cover the present county area of Northumberland and that a combined authority should be established for this service, if the unitary structure is preferred, on which representatives of the new councils should serve. It concluded that representatives of any new unitary authorities should also serve on the Northumbria Police Authority, and consulted over the following draft recommendation.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

The existing police and fire services, and probation and magistrates' courts services should continue to cover their present areas.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

- 20 The Commission is invited by section 14 of the 1992 Act to consider whether unitary authorities should be empowered to prepare unitary development plans rather than, as at present, structure plans and local plans.

- 21 The Commission was concerned that strategic land use planning for Northumberland should not be undermined by changes to the structure of local government in the county. This matter is fully discussed in the Commission's report, *Renewing Local Government in the English Shires*. As the present authorities recognised in their initial submissions to the Commission, there is a high level of interdependence between different parts of the county and this needs to be reflected in an appropriate planning structure. This indicated a need for a strategic approach to planning across the whole area of Northumberland, as at present. Accordingly, the Commission made the following draft recommendation.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

There should be no change to current planning arrangements if the existing local government structure is retained.

- 22 The Commission concluded that, if two unitary authorities were preferred, they should assume joint responsibility for structure planning for the whole of their combined area. The new unitary authorities should also be mineral and waste planning authorities, with strategic minerals and waste policies being included in the joint structure plan: each authority individually should have responsibility for formulating detailed minerals and waste policies for its area in general conformity with the policy framework established by the structure plan, and it should be authorised to include such policies in its local plans. Responsibility for local plans should rest with each of the new unitary authorities in its respective area and it should also exercise development control functions for its area for all purposes.

OTHER SERVICES

- 23 The Secretary of State's Policy Guidance advises the Commission that, where it recommends unitary authorities, the aim should be to make the individual authorities responsible for all local government services, with the exception where necessary of law and order services. The Guidance further advises the Commission that it should recommend shared arrangements for particular functions where a satisfactory structure is unlikely to be achieved without them. The Commission has had regard to these aspects of the Guidance in the conduct of its review of Northumberland.
- 24 From the information submitted during the initial stage of the review, the Commission was satisfied that the two unitary authorities canvassed in the alternative structure would command sufficient resources to carry out the other main local government services, whether directly or by contracting out to other local authorities or to the private sector.

- 25 The Commission was also satisfied that the local authorities in the area would be in a position to put in place adequate structures for any shared arrangements necessary to function efficiently. It therefore made no draft recommendations in this respect. However, the Commission expressed its expectation that the new authorities should work closely together to ensure that specialist expertise would not be unnecessarily broken up. In particular, it was concerned that the existing levels of efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of relatively small scale but important functions, such as trading standards, archive provision and emergency planning, would not be reduced by reorganisation.

ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

- 26 In its review of shire England, the Commission has examined the means by which local democratic control and accountability can be secured in the wake of changes to the existing structure. In Northumberland, current electoral arrangements are relatively straightforward in that the six district councils and the county council are all on a four year electoral cycle. Many of the district wards return two or three councillors. The district councils are characterised by very low electoral ratios relative to other parts of England (generally around one councillor per 1,000 electors) although this reflects, in large part, the very low population densities of rural Northumberland. The ratio of county councillors to electors is 1 to 3,654 which is also low relative to the other shire counties. A particular issue arises in the borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed where half the district wards have at least 25 per cent more (or fewer) electors than the borough average, thus raising the issue of electoral inequalities.
- 27 The Commission generally supports the view of the Committee of Enquiry into the Conduct of Local Authority Business (1986) that there should be one councillor for every electoral ward and, as is currently the case in Northumberland, that the whole council should be elected together once every four years.
- 28 The Commission's report, *Renewing Local Government in the English Shires*, sets out the Commission's view that the ratio of councillors to local residents should generally be around 1 to 4,000. This ratio is mid-way between the existing average national ratios for district and for county councils and in line with that for the existing metropolitan districts – the only unitary authorities in England outside London. It also reflects the Commission's wish to see both a different role for councillors and more back-up and support available to assist them in carrying out their difficult task. However, it is not a hard and fast rule and the Commission wishes to apply it sensitively, taking into account sparsely populated areas, or particularly deprived areas, as well as the need to minimise disruption.
- 29 In the Commission's draft recommendations, it indicated that if its preferred recommendation of no change to Northumberland's local government structure is supported, then the current electoral arrangements should continue. The Commission wishes to examine the arrangements in Berwick-upon-Tweed in particular at a later date, with a view to harmonising electoral representation across the borough.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

The Commission proposes no change in electoral arrangements if the two-tier structure is retained.

- 30 If the alternative unitary structure of two unitary authorities were to be preferred, the Commission indicated that new electoral arrangements would need to be implemented and proposals for this, which were set out in the Commission's draft recommendation report, are summarised below in Figure 1. The Commission was mindful of the wish, strongly expressed throughout the county, that new electoral arrangements should take account of the very low population densities in much of rural Northumberland and enable elected representatives to maintain a local community presence.

Figure 1

ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR TWO UNITARY AUTHORITIES

Local authority	Electorate	Number of wards	Number of councillors	Councillor-to-elector ratio
Blyth Valley/Wansbeck	110,712	32	63	1:1,757
Rural Northumberland	130,425	48	76	1:1,716

Source: Local Government Commission Draft Recommendations

- 31 The Commission proposes to review electoral arrangements generally throughout England during the next five years as part of a periodic electoral review it is required to undertake. In Northumberland, as elsewhere, this review could look further at the electoral arrangements proposed.

LOCAL COUNCILS

- 32 The Commission considered that the structure of local government in Northumberland should build on the strong sense of identity with immediate neighbourhoods, as found by the MORI survey. It received a number of submissions suggesting how this might be achieved.
- 33 Since parish and town councils can be an important reflection of people's sense of identity with their community, the Commission believes that their role should be enhanced. This should include regular meetings with the principal local authorities, improved consultation on planning and highways issues and, where there is a demand from a local council, devolved management of local facilities such as sports grounds and libraries. Members of parish and town councils would also be well placed to help residents secure

assistance or redress when faced with problems about local services. These proposals enlarge on existing practice, and reflect suggestions in many of the submissions to the Commission, both nationally and locally.

- 34 The Commission does not envisage an increase in the statutory powers of parish and town councils, nor the establishment of another tier of local government. However, the Commission does see an important role for parish and town councils in empowering local communities. The Commission agreed with many of its respondents that a clear consultative framework should be established between principal local authorities and parish and town councils. This framework, or 'local charter', could ensure that parish and town councils have rights to the following:
- (i) a clear statement of matters affecting the local community upon which they will be consulted, with the areas for consultation being widely drawn;
 - (ii) sufficient information from principal authorities about local matters on which local councils' views have been requested;
 - (iii) the right to a written explanation from a principal authority if it does not accede to the views of the parish or town council, as it may legitimately decide;
 - (iv) regular meetings between representatives of the principal authorities and the parish and town councils to discuss matters of common interest.
- 35 The Commission recognised that the enhanced role it proposes would require the creation of parish councils for areas of the county that are currently unparished. At present Northumberland has a total of 153 parishes, representing 97 per cent of the land area but only 50 per cent of the electorate. This reflects the contrasting nature of the county with three of the four rural districts fully parished. In the fourth, Berwick-upon-Tweed, only the main settlement is unparished. However, neither Blyth Valley nor Wansbeck district is parished.
- 36 It was acknowledged that, in spite of the evidence of strong local identity, this had yet to be translated into a direct and widespread demand for local councils in the unparished areas of the county. However, there were representations on boundary changes specifically in relation to the parishing of Ulgham village. The Commission consulted on the following draft recommendation.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

The existing parish of Ulgham should be abolished, and should be replaced by two parishes:

- (i) a parish area representing Ulgham village;
- (ii) a parish area representing Widdrington Station and Stobswood villages.

- 37 With no clear evidence as yet of a strong demand from the public for parishing most other areas of Northumberland, the Commission did not propose to recommend the creation of new parishes generally as part of this present review. Nevertheless, it indicated it would welcome comments from residents in Northumberland on the subject of parishing, which it would reflect in its report to the Secretary of State. Should it become evident that there is demand for parishing generally, the Commission indicated it would recommend to the Secretary of State that it should be directed to undertake a review of parishing arrangements in the county.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

If there is clear local support for parishing areas in Northumberland which are not currently parished, the Secretary of State should be invited to direct the Commission to undertake a review in which the scope for future parishing can be considered.

In addition, there should be an enhanced consultative role for all town and parish councils.

Elections for parish and town councils should, wherever possible, be held at the same time as elections for the principal authorities.

3 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

- 38 In response to its draft recommendation report, the Commission received over 16,000 written representations from residents, local authorities, Members of Parliament and public and private sector organisations. These included individual letters, proforma letters, a petition and returns of questionnaires. The Commission is most grateful to all who took the trouble to give their views on the future structure of local government in Northumberland.
- 39 All these representations, irrespective of their source or nature, have been carefully considered by the Commission and have been taken into account in its final recommendations. As required by the Secretary of State, a list of respondents is available on request from the Commission and all representations may be inspected at the Commission's offices.

LOCAL RESIDENTS

- 40 Residents of Northumberland expressed their views on the Commission's draft recommendations either directly to the Commission or through local authorities, Members of Parliament or others. They also made their views known through a survey of public opinion conducted on the Commission's behalf by Market & Opinion Research International (MORI).
- 41 The Commission's public consultation was unprecedented in local government terms. To ensure that the Commission received as wide a variety of views as possible, it sought the views of residents by means of a leaflet with a detachable questionnaire delivered by the Royal Mail to households throughout the county. This was an ambitious task and some difficulties were experienced in ensuring that each household received a copy of the leaflet. These were remedied by using a variety of methods to ensure that the residents of Northumberland were aware of the Commission's draft recommendations and knew how to comment on them. The Commission is satisfied that all the residents of Northumberland have had the opportunity to make their views known.
- 42 Nevertheless, the Commission recognises that the response to the leaflets can give only a broad indication of the views of the public, some of whom may have been influenced, in some cases, by the publicity of the existing authorities.

RESPONSES DIRECT TO THE COMMISSION

- 43 Figures 2 and 3 below summarise the views as expressed to the Commission either in individual letters or through household questionnaires. They do not include the views of those who submitted proforma letters or who signed or submitted a petition; these are summarised separately.
- 44 NOP was commissioned to tabulate responses on behalf of the Commission, and these tabulations were published shortly after the conclusion of the consultation period. Copies may be obtained from NOP at Tower House, Southampton St, London WC2E 7HN, price £5.00.

Figure 2
VIEWS ON STRUCTURAL CHANGE: AN OVERVIEW

Structure	Percentage of responses
No change	86
Two unitary authorities	11
Other (including no preference)	3
Total (number)	(n=15,936)

Source: NOP analysis, November 1994

Figure 3
VIEWS ON STRUCTURAL CHANGE: DISTRICT LEVEL ANALYSIS

Local Authority Area	Option 1 (no change)	Option 2 (two unitary authorities)	No preference /other	TOTAL
Alnwick	1,320 82%	218 14%	73 4%	1,611 100%
Berwick-upon-Tweed	2,420 90%	206 8%	52 2%	2,678 100%
Blyth Valley	2,351 87%	290 11%	49 2%	2,690 100%
Castle Morpeth	2,774 81%	520 15%	134 4%	3,428 100%
Tynedale	2,162 85%	288 11%	91 4%	2,541 100%
Wansbeck	2,368 88%	260 10%	75 2%	2,703 100%
County Total	13,395 86%	1,782 11%	474 3%	15,651 100%
Out of County	252 88%	15 5%	18 7%	285 100%
Total				

Source: NOP analysis November 1994

Notes

- 1 'Other' category includes respondents who did not express a preference for a single structural option: these the Commission classified as multiple choice returns. Very few of this type of response were recorded in Northumberland. The 3 per cent of responses not covered by the two options out to consultation were spread among preferences for three unitary authorities, a unitary county-level authority, alternative boundaries to those suggested and no expressed preference.
 - 2 These tables include both letters and leaflets. They also include responses from outside the county area and others, such as local groups and businesses.
- 45 The main points to emerge are:
- (i) The Commission's draft recommendation for no change to the current structure was the clear preference of respondents throughout the county. There was relatively little variation on a district basis. The highest level of support was in Berwick-upon-Tweed (90 per cent) and the lowest level was in Castle Morpeth (81 per cent).
 - (ii) The alternative structure of two unitary authorities attracted little support in the public responses. The highest level of support was in Castle Morpeth (15 per cent) and Alnwick (14 per cent) and the lowest in Berwick-upon-Tweed (8 per cent). There was no significant difference in the level of support between the more urban districts of Wansbeck and Blyth Valley and rural Northumberland.

- (iii) No other structural option received significant support. There was a small body of opinion in favour of three unitary authorities, either as proposed in the submission from Alnwick District Council (20 responses) or on different or unspecified boundaries (46 responses). Support for a unitary county-level authority drew 41 responses.
- 46 There appears to have been little campaigning in Northumberland compared with some other review areas, although the County Council and some districts did advertise their strong preference for the current two-tier structure and urged residents to make their views known. The Commission received few responses by way of proforma letters: of these, 61 supported two unitary authorities, 45 preferred the current structure and 20 favoured a unitary county-level authority. Only one petition was received, with 257 signatures, requesting that a parish be established for Newbiggin-by-the-Sea.
- 47 The Commission has paid close attention to all the views expressed during the consultation programme. However, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the attitudes of local residents from this part of the consultation programme alone as respondents may not be representative of residents as a whole. The same issue of representativeness applies to local authorities' and other consultation programmes.

MORI SURVEY

- 48 In order to obtain a representative view of residents' attitudes towards change, the Commission engaged MORI to undertake an independent survey during the consultation period.
- 49 Those interviewed were shown a copy of the Commission's household leaflet (with text indicating the Commission's recommendations being deleted) and were asked about each of the options for structural change. They were also given an opportunity to suggest other options.
- 50 All respondents were, therefore, asked two questions about their preferences: first, they were asked to select one of the Commission's options; second, they were asked if there were any other options they would have preferred. By taking account of people's responses to both questions, a succinct summary can be prepared which best reflects people's views and preferences.

The methodology is as follows:

- (i) those selecting one of the Commission's options as their first preference with the prompted list, and who then went on to say they did not have any other preference when offered an open choice, are described as firm supporters of that option;

- (ii) those who, having given their preference for one of the Commission's options, then went on to say there was actually another structure that they would prefer are re-allocated to take account of this information;
- (iii) there were also those who expressed no view or preference to the Commission's prompted list of options or to the unprompted open choice question. These people remain categorised as 'don't knows'.

Figure 4 below sets out the results of this analysis across the county and within individual districts.

Figure 4
SUMMARY OF RESIDENTS' PREFERENCES ON STRUCTURAL OPTIONS – 'FIRM SUPPORT'

Authority	Percentage of respondents			
	Option 1 (no change)	Option 2 (two unitary authorities)	Other	No preference /don't know
Alnwick	59	16	13	12
Berwick-upon-Tweed	69	7	6	18
Blyth Valley	48	27	8	17
Castle Morpeth	40	10	7	42
Tynedale	70	9	6	15
Wansbeck	48	21	13	19
Overall county average	54	17	8	21

Source: MORI, November 1994

Note

Option 1 includes all respondents who expressed a firm preference for 'no change'.

- 51 A summary of the MORI survey findings is given in Appendix B. A copy of the full tabulations may be obtained direct from MORI, 32 Old Queen St, London SW1H 9HP, price £10.00.
- 52 The main points to emerge from the MORI survey are :
 - (i) Overall, support for Option 1, while less overwhelming than suggested by the NOP results, is still convincing.
 - (ii) Respondents in the local authority areas of Blyth Valley, Wansbeck and Castle Morpeth indicated less satisfaction with current arrangements than those in the outer rural areas, but still preferred 'no change'.

- (iii) Support for retaining the two-tier structure was strongest in Berwick-upon-Tweed and Tynedale.
- (iv) Castle Morpeth registered the lowest level of support for Option 1 (41 per cent), but this did not translate into support for unitary solutions, with 42 per cent of respondents indicating 'no preference/don't know'.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- 53 Figure 5 summarises the views of the Northumbrian local authorities at the end of the consultation period, as the Commission understands them.

Figure 5

LOCAL AUTHORITIES' PREFERENCES

Local Authority	Preference
Alnwick District Council	Continues to support three unitary authorities
Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council	Option 1 (no change)
Blyth Valley Borough Council	Option 1 (no change)
Castle Morpeth Borough Council	Option 1 (no change)
Tynedale District Council	Option 1 (no change)
Wansbeck District Council	Option 1 (no change)
Northumberland County Council	Option 1 (no change)

Source : Local authority Stage 3 submissions.

Note

The Alnwick District Council submission was received 18 days after the close of the consultation period.

- 54 The views of the principal local authorities are straightforward. The County Council and five of the six district councils, in their joint submission to the Commission, have indicated their strong preference for the retention of the current structure and are actively considering ways to improve the delivery of services. Alnwick District Council, while conceding that the Commission's unitary alternative is unlikely to generate much support in the county, remains firm in its belief that a structure of three unitary authorities would bring about long term improvements.

OTHER CONSULTEES

- 55 Only one of the review area's four MPs expressed a written preference – in favour of no change – during the consultation period. (The Commission noted, however, that the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed wrote to the Commission in Stage 1 setting out the reasons why he considered that the current structure should be retained in Northumberland.)
- 56 Business interest in the draft recommendations has been low. No Chambers of Commerce responded and only two written submissions were received from representative business organisations during the consultation period. BACMI (the British Aggregate Construction Materials Industries trade federation) and the Sand and Gravel Association both wrote to support the retention of the two-tier structure and express concern that sub-county unitary options could lead to the fragmentation of strategic services.
- 57 In Stage 1, the Confederation of British Industry (Northern Region) expressed a preference for a unitary county: however, in recognition of size and community interest concerns, stated:
- Should the unitary county option be rejected....CBI also wishes to express its support for the status quo.*
- 58 Tynedale Chamber of Commerce also wrote during Stage 1 in support of a three unitary authority option.
- 59 Five individual businesses made submissions. All of them emphasised the need for a county-wide authority for Northumberland; one expressed disappointment that the Commission had not consulted on a unitary county and the remaining four supported the status quo.
- 60 Although there were few responses from professional and public bodies, without exception they expressed a preference for no change to the existing structure and concern over the cost and quality of service provision if county services were divided into smaller geographical areas.
- 61 The possible vulnerability of library services was highlighted by the Library Association:
- Two unitary authorities would run the risk of breaking up the current collections and services provided by the county whilst leaving two new public library authorities, neither of which would have the necessary resources to develop an effective public library service on their own.*
- 62 The high degree of coterminosity between the county boundary and that of other organisations has assisted co-ordination of service delivery which has been particularly valuable in health and social service provision. In this context, the Social Services Inspectorate commented:

There are strong local relationships between the Social Services Department and District Health Authority in the context of community care. This has facilitated some innovative developments which might be lost if the boundaries lose their coterminosity.

- 63 The Northumberland Health Authority and Family Health Services Authority endorsed this point of view and emphasised the need to balance closeness to individual communities with the flexibility in resource allocation that is possible with larger organisations and concluded:

An organisation with key responsibilities for a population in excess of 300,000 is likely to have more flexibility and room to manoeuvre in addressing (community health) problems than two smaller organisations.

- 64 Many of the statutory consultees shared a concern that the particular attributes of the county — a low population and, in the rural areas, its dispersed nature — limit the potential advantages of unitary authorities. Submissions from professional organisations and public bodies representing archaeology, archives, minerals and National Park planning, waste disposal, museum services and sports provision all commented on the disruption to existing service arrangements and the problems of maintaining and improving service standards if the two unitary authority solution is chosen.

- 65 The response from community and voluntary organisations was similarly strongly supportive of retaining the current structure. The Community Council of Northumberland expressed its support for the draft recommendations and ‘...warmly endorses the proposals concerning the enhancement of the roles, rights and responsibilities of parish councils’.

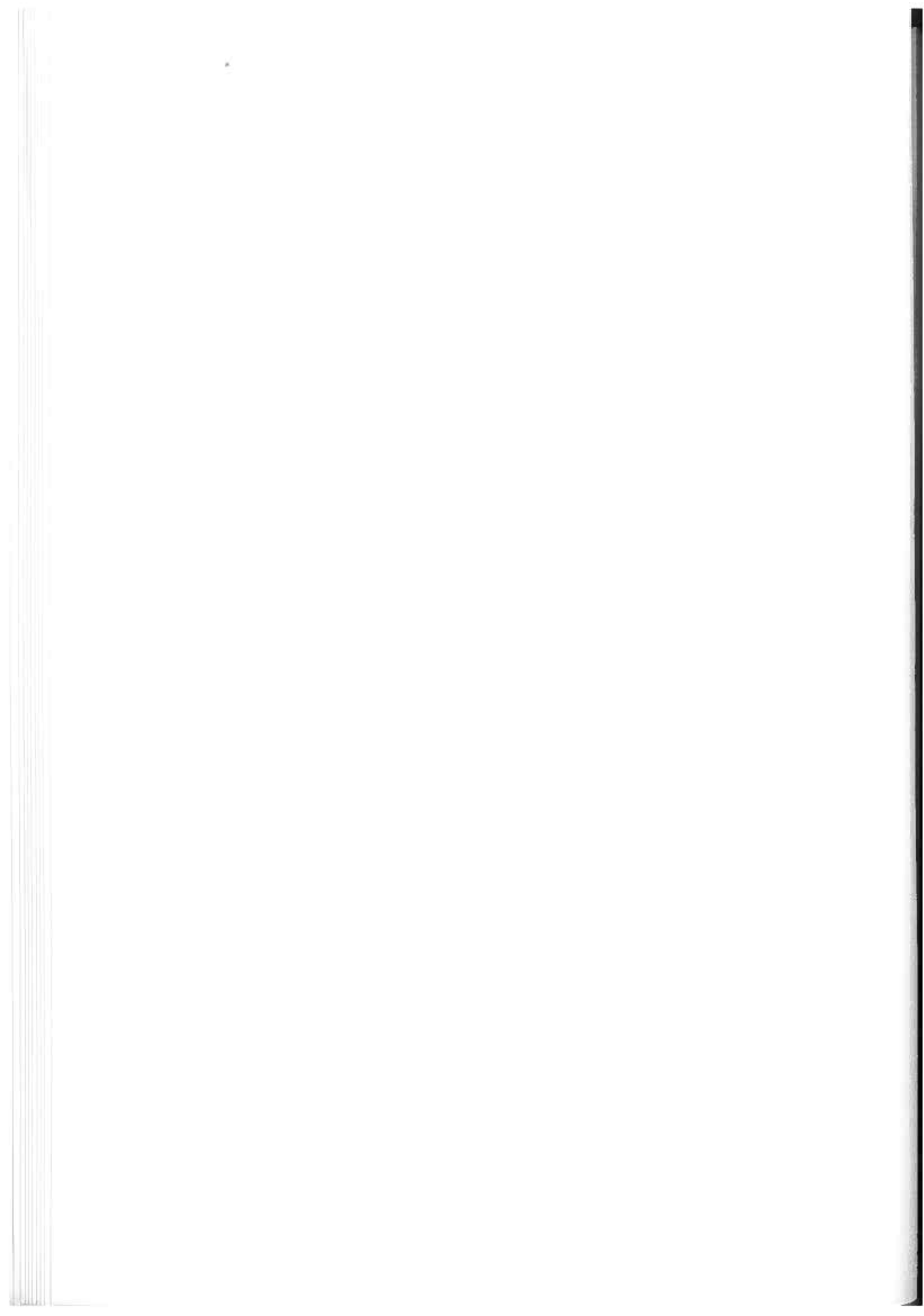
- 66 On an individual basis, only 23 of Northumberland’s 133 parish and town councils responded to the draft recommendations. Fifteen favoured no change, six supported Option 2, one favoured a unitary county and the remaining parish council proposed a change to a district boundary.

- 67 Submissions from educational interests raised concerns about the future of rural schools in a unitary structure. The Newcastle Diocesan Education Board addressed a wider concern when it commented:

...Option 2 would seriously disadvantage the greater part of the county that is very rural. The Tynedale and North Northumberland area would be particularly badly affected and the rural schools would inevitably be placed under even greater financial pressure....Option 2 would more than likely lead to the closure of small rural schools.

- 68 The Northumberland Branch of the Transport & General Workers Union lent its support to retention of the existing structure but saw no need for the introduction of parish councils in Blyth Valley and Wansbeck.

- 69 Notwithstanding the overwhelming support for no change expressed through responses to the consultation programme, the Commission received some written submissions favouring structural change. The Berwick-upon-Tweed Conservative Association wrote to register its strong preference for two unitary authorities, concluding: '*...Option 2 offers the best solution in terms of financial savings, community interest, delivery of service and local accountability*'.
- 70 The Commission received a number of representations requesting the restoration of the historic county of Northumberland for ceremonial purposes and the abolition of the county of Tyne and Wear. Some 179 representations supported this proposition, including one from the Northumbrian Language Society.



4 THE COMMISSION'S CONCLUSIONS

- 71 The Commission has reassessed its draft recommendations in the light of its consultations and the results of the MORI opinion survey undertaken during the consultation period.
- 72 Any recommendations for change the Commission makes must satisfy the statutory criteria given in section 13(5)(a) and (b) of the 1992 Act. This stipulates that its recommendations must have regard to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government. On occasion, this means striking a balance between the two criteria to ensure that one is not satisfied at the expense of the other.
- 73 Accordingly, in reaching its final conclusions on the future structure of local government in Northumberland, the Commission has had to exercise a degree of judgement in order to conform to the statutory criteria and to the Secretary of State's Policy Guidance (in particular the issues of identity, accessibility, responsiveness and democracy). In doing so, it has considered and weighed both the evidence which has been submitted, some of it conflicting, and which it has itself collected.
- 74 In order to determine whether there was a case for structural change in Northumberland, the Commission reviewed those criteria in the light of the responses received during the consultation period.

THE IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- 75 The MORI survey on community identity, summarised in Appendix A, was carried out on behalf of the Commission during the initial stage of the review. It helped the Commission to assess patterns of community identity and interests, and indicated the strength of personal affiliation with various divisions of local government.
- 76 Throughout Northumberland, community identity is generally strongest in respect of the local neighbourhood or village, followed by the home town or nearest town. Attachment to local government areas, whether county or district, was less pronounced. The main points which emerged were that:
- (i) *Alnwick* was generally representative of the Northumbrian districts. Residents identify most strongly with their village. The nearest town, the district and the county command a lower but still significant feeling of belonging.
 - (ii) *Berwick-upon-Tweed*, by contrast, has stronger town and county identities.

- (iii) In *Blyth Valley*, neighbourhood identity was below the county average, though still high at 81 per cent. District and county affiliation were below average.
 - (iv) *Castle Morpeth* had the weakest district identity of the six districts but county affiliation was well below all other districts also.
 - (v) In *Tynedale*, the most dispersed of the districts, community identity was strong at village level, and this carried through to district and county levels.
 - (vi) *Wansbeck*, in contrast to neighbouring Blyth Valley, displayed very strong neighbourhood and village loyalties and above average identification with the nearest town.
- 77 While the Commission has clear evidence of community identity and interests in the review area, it is not possible to create a local government structure which reflects all the indicators of such identity and interests. These have had to be weighed in the balance with a number of other factors.

EFFECTIVE AND CONVENIENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- 78 The Commission received a number of representations on its draft recommendations in relation to particular services. To take one example, the Commission shares the views put to it about the importance of local government's responsibilities for care in the community. The Commission believes it to be highly important that any new structure should facilitate effective working relationships between social services departments, housing departments and health authorities. Care in the community and the Government's Health of the Nation initiative, as well as crime prevention and measures to overcome social alienation, require active co-operation between district services (housing, environmental health, leisure, recreation, local planning, for example) and county services (social services, education, strategic planning, police, highways and transportation, for example).
- 79 The co-operation and active involvement of other public bodies such as the health trusts and health authorities, the training and enterprise councils, the churches, voluntary organisations and the business community is crucial and must also be realised. The integration of such a wide range of interests within a single organisation is impracticable, nor is it likely that each interest could be organised on common boundaries. Nevertheless, the Commission accepts that the high degree of coterminosity of the county boundary with the relevant partners has facilitated community care planning and development and encouraged innovation in joint-purchasing and budgeting for care programmes. This would be at some risk if the county level is removed.

- 80 In relation to statutory land-use planning, this is an important issue which the Commission considered in detail in *Renewing Local Government in the English Shires*. In Northumberland, the Commission recommended that, if there were to be two new unitary authorities, they should assume joint responsibility for structure planning for the county as a whole. However, each authority should be responsible for the preparation of its own local plans.
- 81 The Commission received few comments on planning issues during the consultation period but those it did receive stressed the advantages of retaining a two-tier planning system across the county as a whole. Mineral planning is an important consideration in Northumberland and the Commission recognised the strength of the concern of respondents who feared a loss of strategic oversight of this sensitive policy area if unitary authorities replaced the county planning authority. The Commission has also taken into account the economies of scale possible in organising waste management at the county level and the significant financial, planning and administrative support provided by the County Council to the Northumberland National Park.
- 82 In relation to other services, such as libraries, archives, museums and other heritage services, representations have pointed to the need to retain county-wide services, without joint arrangements if possible, and to maintain the integrity of records and collections. Respondents have also stressed the need for effective joint arrangements for specialist or strategic services, at present run on a county-wide basis, if they are to be split among smaller authorities. The Commission recognises the merit of these representations and the doubts expressed about any benefits accruing to these services if a unitary structure is adopted.
- 83 The urgency now attending environmental issues reinforces the potential advantages to be gained by increasing co-operation between the planning, environmental health, education, recreation, and highways and transportation services of local government. The retention of a county council with a population base in excess of 300,000 offers the prospect that local government will be able to command adequate resources to accomplish effective liaison with other organisations such as the National Rivers Authority and the new Environmental Protection and Highways Agencies.
- 84 Education remains a key concern of the public and of local government. The successful local development of the economy will require close working relationships between local government, the major education institutions, the business community and the training and enterprise councils. Again, the more these organisations are able to co-operate with one another, the greater is the prospect of success for the community's young people, including those with special educational needs. The practical prospects for co-ordination are improved by coterminosity of boundaries among partners, and the ability to operate on a strategic level while maintaining close contact with local communities. In Northumberland, the Commission is persuaded by the argument that this is best achieved by improvements to the two-tier structure.

- 85 The Commission believes that the existing structure should allow voluntary organisations to continue to play a full part in providing local services. Voluntary organisations are not only important service providers, but also help develop strong, active and involved communities.
- 86 Many respondents expressed the view that structural change would lead to larger and more remote unitary authorities. The Commission is of the firm opinion that convenient services do not necessarily depend on small scale local government structures. Of more importance is their organisation and access to them. With the effective devolution of management responsibilities to the community level, and an enhanced representational and consultative role for parish and town councils, unitary authorities should ensure improved access to and efficiency of services to the public.
- 87 The Commission has also been mindful of the fears expressed by many, particularly in the remoter areas of the county, that the removal of the district tier of local government and its replacement by two unitary councils, one of which would cover 97 per cent of the county area with relatively poor transport links, carries the risk of more remote local government. The Commission accepts that these concerns have some substance.
- 88 Finally, the Commission has been assured by many in Northumberland's local government that improvements could be made to the existing two-tier structure. Many ways have been offered to achieve improvements: for example, by avoiding duplication, co-ordinating resources, securing effective partnerships, improving consultation and establishing one-stop shops. Through the 'Northumberland Partnership', the County Council and five of the districts have indicated a series of practical measures to improve the effectiveness of local government and the convenience of its services. The Commission feels that enhancing the role of parish and town councils would also be appropriate to the current structure of local government.

COSTS AND SAVINGS

- 89 The Commission is required to consider the change in overhead costs which may result from changes in the structure of local government. This is not a straightforward matter and the issues concerned are discussed more fully in the Commission's report, *Renewing Local Government in the English Shires*.
- 90 Figure 6 below shows existing local government indirect expenditure (administrative overheads), based upon financial material provided by the local authorities in Northumberland. The Secretary of State's Policy Guidance only requires the Commission to look at indirect expenditure, since the level of direct service provision is largely independent of local government structure. Indirect expenditure usually represents only some 10 per cent of total local government spending.

Figure 6

ESTIMATE OF EXISTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT INDIRECT SPENDING

	£ million
Staff costs (including associated overheads)	28
Accommodation	1
Information technology	5
Costs of democracy (members allowances etc)	1
Total of existing indirect expenditure	35

Source: Local Government Commission

- 91 Figure 7 below shows the Commission's estimates of annual savings and transitional costs of the unitary option detailed in its draft report.

Figure 7

COMPARISON OF THE INDIRECT COSTS OF THE UNITARY OPTION AGAINST EXISTING ARRANGEMENTS

Option	Annual savings/costs	Transitional costs	Payback period
Two unitary authorities	From £4m to £6m saving	From £14m to £16m	3 to 4 years

Source: Local Government Commission

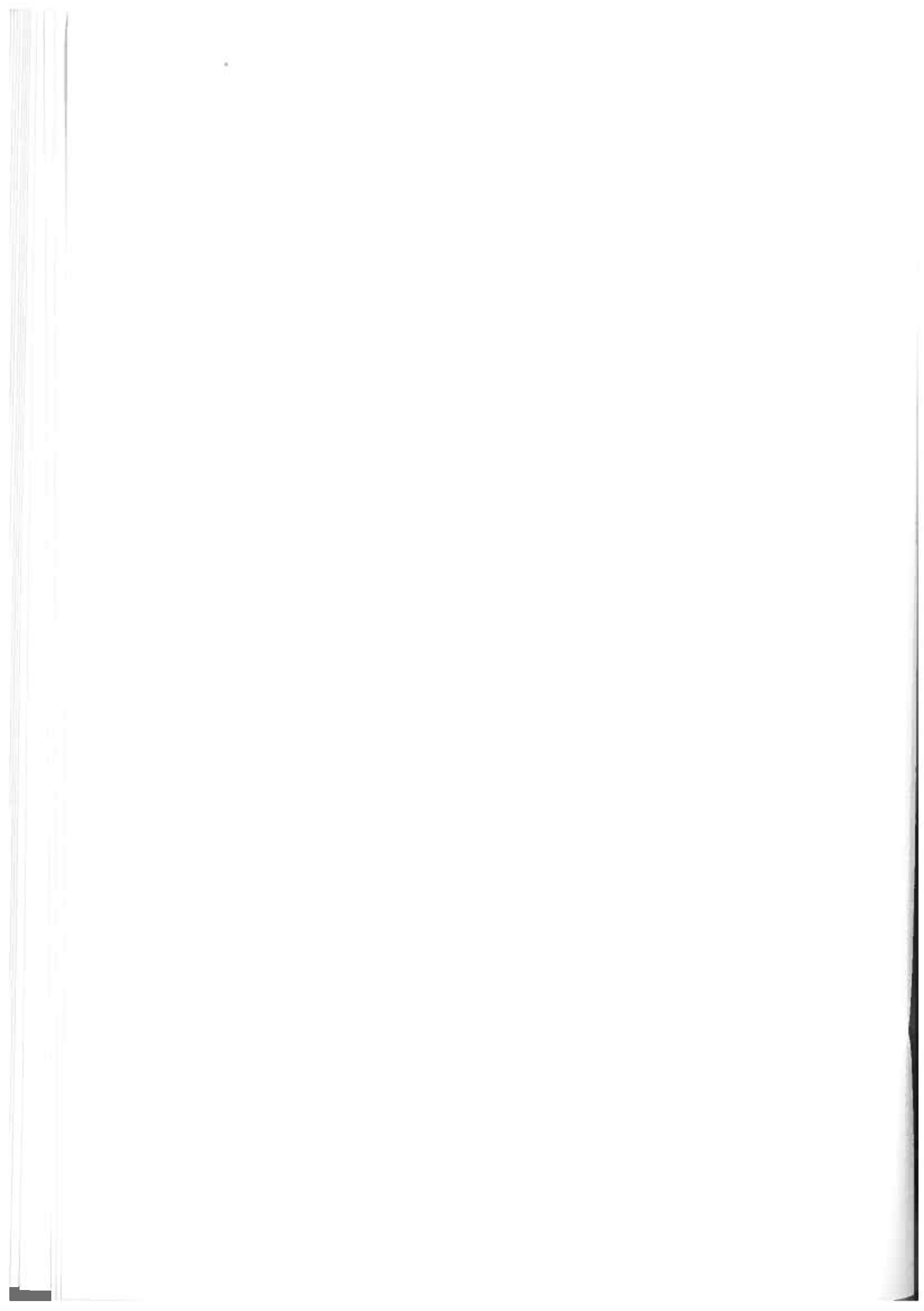
- 92 The county and district councils in Northumberland provided the Commission with their own estimates of the financial consequences of a range of structural alternatives. However, in order to secure a consistent approach, the Commission has applied the financial methodology developed by Ernst & Young and the Commission, as published in December 1993, to produce the estimates in figure 7. The figures are expressed as a range in order to reflect the broad nature of the estimates and assumptions involved. They slightly differ from those given in Appendix A to the Commission's draft recommendation report, reflecting further analysis undertaken by the Commission during the consultation period.
- 93 The Commission's analysis indicates that the two unitary authority option could secure longer term annual savings after paying back the start-up costs in the first four years or so. However, the Commission has had to balance this consideration against the evidence it has reviewed on community identity and service delivery.

- 94 The detailed figures on which the Commission's estimates are based have been published separately. Copies have been sent to the Secretary of State and to the principal authorities in the review area. Additional copies are available from the Commission on request.

CONCLUSION

- 95 Having reviewed all the evidence before it against the statutory and other criteria, the Commission has to conclude whether to recommend retention of the two-tier structure or propose the unitary alternative.
- 96 The Commission's proposed unitary structure brought into sharp focus the two contrasting faces of Northumberland. On the one hand, the intensely rural character of its market towns and dispersed villages and, on the other hand, the urbanised south eastern corner of the county facing the major challenges of urban renewal and regeneration. In its draft recommendations, the Commission concluded that two unitary authorities would be capable of meeting the statutory criteria for convenient and effective service delivery. However, many respondents have major reservations about the ability of the alternative structure to secure improvements over the existing two-tier arrangements. Bearing in mind the absence of any local government champions for the unitary proposal, the Commission has considered the implications for service delivery very carefully.
- 97 The response to its draft recommendations confirms the Commission's provisional view that convenient and effective service delivery in Northumberland would be better secured by improvements to the two-tier system than by introducing a unitary structure. In particular, it concedes that the proposed rural unitary authority would have difficulty in maintaining services that are accessible and responsive to a widely dispersed rural population. Although this concern does not extend to the proposed urban unitary authority, the Commission is sympathetic to the generally expressed concern that, overall, some important local government services could be put at risk. Indeed, throughout the review, the Commission received no representations from any service provider, professional body or client group suggesting the proposed unitary structure would significantly improve delivery in a specific service area.
- 98 In suggesting an electoral structure for the proposed two unitary authorities, the Commission took account of local circumstance and the special problems faced by dispersed rural populations and disadvantaged urban communities. The proposed overall councillor - to - elector ratio (1 to 1735) is well below that proposed elsewhere. The Commission received relatively little specific comment on the proposed electoral arrangements. However, the MORI survey provides evidence that residents remained worried about the issues of size and remoteness and, compared with the existing arrangements, were not convinced that improvements in the resourcing of elected representatives and the enhanced role of local councils were sufficient recompense for the perceived democratic deficit.

- 99 The evidence in respect of community identity and support for the present structure is clear and compelling. Although the MORI survey suggests that support for the current structure may be less than is suggested by the NOP returns, overall it still attracted 54 per cent of the 'firm' support of residents as against 17 per cent for the unitary alternative. From the evidence before it, the Commission has reached the conclusion that support for the retention of the two-tier structure in Northumberland is both deep and widely based.
- 100 The Commission's financial analysis has identified possible long term savings with a unitary structure. However, in considering all the evidence before it, the Commission has formed the view that structural change would not adequately address the issues of identity, accessibility, responsiveness and democracy to which it has had regard in the conduct of this review. Having considered all the evidence, including the response to the consultation report, the Commission has concluded that it would be better to retain and improve the current local government structure in Northumberland, in accordance with its draft recommendation and with the clearly expressed preference of local residents.
- 101 In the following chapter the Commission sets out its final recommendations to the Secretary of State.



5 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 102 The final recommendations below reflect the views in the Commission's report *Renewing Local Government in the English Shires* as well as the responses to the Commission's consultations. The first section addresses the structure of local government in Northumberland; the second relates to the other matters on which the Commission consulted.

THE STRUCTURE

FINAL RECOMMENDATION 1

There should be no change to the existing structure of one county council and six district councils in Northumberland.

- 103 In its draft recommendations, the Commission noted that the county of Northumberland would continue to serve as a focus for loyalty and identity and for historic, ceremonial, sporting and other purposes even if the county council were to be abolished. Relatively few representations commented on ceremonial aspects of the county, although a submission from the Northumbrian Language Society urged the abolition of the County of Tyne & Wear and the restoration of Northumberland's traditional boundary along the northern bank of the River Tyne. However, such a proposal is not within the remit of the Commission.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION 2

There should be no change to present arrangements in respect of ceremonial and related issues in Northumberland.

OTHER MATTERS

- 104 In addition to looking at the structure of local authorities in Northumberland, the Commission is also required to examine the position of certain services, to make recommendations about future electoral arrangements and to take account of the part that town and parish councils could play in each area it reviews. Since the Commission is not recommending changes to the structure of local government, the Commission does not propose to make any recommendations regarding particular services, such as public protection and land-use planning.

ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

- 105 The Commission proposes to review electoral arrangements generally throughout England during the next five years. This will enable the Commission to look further at the situation in Northumberland. In the meantime, the Commission does not propose any changes to the electoral and warding arrangements of the existing authorities.

LOCAL COUNCILS

- 106 Since parish and town councils can be an important vehicle for the expression of local community identity, the Commission believes their role should be enhanced, whether or not there is a change to a unitary structure. This should include regular meetings with the principal authorities, improved consultation on planning and highways issues and, where appropriate, devolved management of local facilities. Members of parish and town councils would be well placed to help residents secure assistance or redress when faced with problems about local services. These proposals enlarge on existing practice, and reflect suggestions in many of the submissions to the Commission, both nationally and locally.
- 107 No increase in the statutory powers of parish and town councils is envisaged, nor the establishment of another tier of local government. However, the Commission agreed with many of its respondents that a clear consultative framework should be established between principal local authorities and parish and town councils. This framework is set out in paragraph 34 of this report.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION 3

There should be an enhanced consultative role for all town and parish councils. Elections for parish and town councils should, wherever possible, be held at the same time as elections for the principal authorities.

- 108 The Commission recognised that the enhanced role it proposes would require the creation of either parish or town councils for areas of the county that are unparished — only 3 per cent of the land area but half the electorate. The MORI survey undertaken on behalf of the Commission found that 70 per cent of respondents agreed that town and parish councils should be set up where they do not exist if local people want them.
- 109 There has been some interest in the establishment of local councils from the unparished areas of Northumberland and, during the consultation period, the Commission received:
- (i) nine submissions and a petition containing 257 signatures requesting the creation of a parish for Newbiggin-by-the Sea;
 - (ii) a detailed case for abolishing the parish of Ulgham and replacing it with two parishes, one representing Ulgham village and the other representing Widdrington Station and Stobswood villages;

- (iii) a submission from the Northumberland Association of Local Councils raising a number of parish boundary issues requiring attention. In addition, the Commission has noted that a number of parish boundaries have been obscured by open cast mining activities.
- 110 The evidence in relation to the parish of Ulgham is sufficient as to convince the Commission that the existing parish should be abolished and replaced by two parishes as proposed. Further details are contained in Appendix C.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION 4

The existing parish of Ulgham should be abolished and should be replaced by two parishes:

- (i) a parish representing Ulgham village
 - (ii) a parish representing Widdrington Station and Stobswood villages.
- 111 The other parishing issues raised during the review will need further consideration and consultation before the Commission is in a position to make recommendations.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION 5

The Commission invites the Secretary of State to direct it to undertake a review in which the scope for further parishing in Northumberland can be considered.

* * *

NEXT STEPS

- 112 Having completed its review of Northumberland and submitted its final recommendations to the Secretary of State, the Commission has fulfilled its statutory role under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1992.
- 113 All further representations and correspondence concerning the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State, who will take them into account before reaching a conclusion on the Commission's recommendations. Representations should be addressed to:

The Secretary of State for the Environment
Local Government 1 Division
Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 3EB

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF MORI FINDINGS ON COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Extract from the Commission's draft recommendation report.

RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TO CHANGE

Local attitudes to change are important. It has generally been our experience that, in principle, residents favour a unitary system of local government, although there are some review areas where support for such a system has proved to be weak. Furthermore, we have also found that when residents are given choices for unitary structures, it can be difficult to translate support for the unitary principle into support for actual unitary structures.

As part of its market research on community identity in Northumberland, the Commission sought the views of local residents on the principle of unitary local government. Almost half the residents (48 per cent) supported the principle that one council should provide services in the area rather than two. One third (31 per cent) expressed opposition, and a further one in five (21 per cent) did not have an opinion either way. The overall balance in favour of change in Northumberland is lower than in most other counties reviewed by the Commission. In four of the six districts, support for the principle of unitary local government outweighed opposition and the level of support was highest in Blyth Valley (57 per cent) and Wansbeck (56 per cent). However, in Tynedale, opinion was evenly divided and in Berwick-upon-Tweed more people opposed the unitary principle than supported it with 50 per cent opposed as against 30 per cent in favour. Figure A1 sets out the results by district.

Figure A1
SUPPORT FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF UNITARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Question: 'Please tell me whether you support or oppose the following proposal. One council should provide services for this area, rather than the present county council and borough/district council.'

Percentage of respondents

Authority	Support	Oppose	Neither/ no opinion
Alnwick	53	28	20
Berwick-upon-Tweed	30	50	20
Blyth Valley	57	21	22
Castle Morpeth	43	33	24
Tynedale	35	37	27
Wansbeck	56	28	16
Overall	48	31	22

Source: MORI, January 1994

THE IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The Commission considered it helpful to establish baseline information on the priorities people attach to the various factors that will influence local government structure. MORI was commissioned to survey public opinion throughout the areas of England subject to review.

This survey enabled the Commission to gauge the relative importance the public gives to major factors that will influence government structure. Responses to the question: 'which three of these factors, if any, do you think should be the more important in deciding the local government structure in your area?' are shown in figure A2. The survey reveals that quality of services and responsiveness to local people are highest in people's concerns; conversely, historic or traditional boundaries are of less concern.

Figure A2

FACTORS DETERMINING LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Percentage of respondents mentioning each factor

Quality of services	64
Responding to local people's wishes	58
Cost of services	44
Accountability	36
Ease of contacting the council	20
Sense of local community	18
Access to local councillors	18
Level of information about the council and its services	16
Size of population covered	10
Historic or traditional boundaries	6
Other/Don't know	4

Source: MORI, December 1993

When asked what was the single most important factor, 28 per cent of the respondents identified quality of services; 27 per cent, responding to local people's wishes; 14 per cent, accountability; and 12 per cent, the cost of services. No other factor was identified by more than 3 per cent of respondents. In a separate MORI survey undertaken for the Commission on a national basis, 82 per cent of residents said they would not be prepared to pay extra for services to be locally based.

The evidence from the survey of opinion in Northumberland indicated that most people are, as yet, not fully aware of the issues involved in considering local government reorganisation. Indeed, when asked how much they knew about the issues, only 12 per cent claimed they knew a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount' about it. Over half of those surveyed either knew nothing about the issues or had never heard of proposals for changing the structure of their local government. This confirmed that most of the evidence received in the early stages of the review has been from people and organisations with a special interest in or knowledge of the review.

In relation to community identity, figures A3 and A4 summarise the key findings of the Northumberland survey. They show that, throughout Northumberland, community affiliation is generally strongest in respect of the local neighbourhood or village, followed by the home town or nearest town. Attachments to the local government areas of the county and the districts are less pronounced. A similar pattern of community identity was found in the other English counties, though the percentage of respondents identifying with the county area in Northumberland is above average.

Figure A3

COMMUNITY IDENTITY IN NORTHUMBERLAND: AN OVERVIEW

Question: 'How strongly do you feel you belong to each of the following areas?'

Percentage of respondents belonging 'very or fairly' strongly

	Very strongly	Very/Fairly strongly
This neighbourhood/village	48	87
Town/nearest town	32	71
District/borough area	19	58
County council area	23	59

Source: MORI, January 1994

Figure A4

COMMUNITY IDENTITY IN NORTHUMBERLAND

Question: 'How strongly do you feel you belong to each of the following areas?'

Percentage of respondents belonging 'very or fairly' strongly

Authority	Neighbourhood/ village	Town/nearest town	Borough/district council area	County council area
Alnwick	89	59	60	59
Berwick-upon-Tweed	88	86	63	72
Blyth Valley	81	74	56	58
Castle Morpeth	83	69	44	44
Tynedale	89	59	65	77
Wansbeck	94	78	62	53

Source: MORI, January 1994

APPENDIX B

Local Government Structure in Northumberland

RESEARCH STUDY CONDUCTED FOR
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND
OCTOBER 1994

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Local Government Commission for England

FROM: MORI Local Government Research Unit

DATE: 19 October 1994

RE: Public attitudes to Local Government structure in Northumberland

TECHNICAL NOTE

MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,877 adults aged 18+ across Northumberland. All Census enumeration districts (EDs) in the county were sorted into districts and, within district, ranked by percentage professional/managerial households. At this stage, 24 EDs were selected in each district, with a probability of selection proportional to the size of the population of each. Quota controls were set for each sampling point, by gender, age and work status using 1991 Census data. Around 300 interviews were achieved in each district, and at the analysis stage the data were weighted to account for the population profiles of each district and the relative population sizes.

MAIN FINDINGS

- A majority of residents across the County express a preference for Option One (retention of the existing structure).
- Option One is also chosen ahead of Option Two in each of the five districts.
- Correspondingly, Option Two is most frequently chosen by residents as their least preferred option - both across the county and within each district.

DETAILS

- Six in ten (59%) correctly name Northumberland as their County Council.
- Between seven and nine in ten name their District Council correctly:

Q What is the name of the Borough/District Council for this area?

Alnwick District	%
Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough	87
Blyth Valley Borough	90
Castle Morpeth Borough	70
Tynedale District	76
Wansbeck District	79
	73

- Just one in four (26%) have never heard of the Review, although in-depth knowledge of the Review remains low - just three per cent of residents say they know "a great deal" about the Review, and 12% know "a fair amount".
- The options for change were presented as on the Commission leaflet, modified to remove the text indicating the Commission's recommendation.

In summary:

One: Retention of the existing two-tier structure

Two: Two new unitary councils (Tynedale and North Northumberland; Blyth Valley and Wansbeck)

- Residents are more likely to support Option One than Option Two:

Q Please tell me which of these options, if any, you would most prefer?

		Option One	Option Two	None of These	Don't know
NORTHUMBERLAND	%	56	19	8	17
Alnwick	%	65	17	4	13
Berwick-upon-Tweed	%	71	8	4	17
Blyth Valley	%	49	31	5	15
Castle Morpeth	%	40	11	26	23
Tynedale	%	70	9	5	16
Wansbeck	%	55	23	5	18

- Offered the opportunity to name “other” options that they preferred (but with no particular options prompted), nearly nine in ten say either that there are none (66%) or that they do not know (20%). The proportions preferring another option are as follows:

Q What other options, if any, would you prefer to those I have shown you?

		No need to change	Pre-1974 structure	Some other preference
NORTHUMBERLAND	%	5	4	4
Alnwick	%	6	4	8
Berwick-upon-Tweed	%	6	3	3
Blyth Valley	%	4	2	5
Castle Morpeth	%	6	3	4
Tynedale	%	7	2	3
Wansbeck	%	3	11	2

- All respondents are, therefore, asked two questions about their preferences: first, they are asked to select one of the Commission’s options; second, they are asked if there are any other options that they would prefer.

By taking account of people’s responses to both questions we can prepare a succinct summary which best reflects people’s views and preferences.

The methodology is as follows: those who select one of the Commission’s options as their first preference with the prompted list, and then went on to say that they do not have any other preference when offered an open choice, are described as “firm” supporters of that option.

Those who, having given their preference for one of the Commission’s options, then went on to say there was actually another structure that they would prefer are re-allocated to take account of this information.

There are also those who express no view or preference at both the Commission’s options question and the unprompted open choice question. These people remain categorised as “Don’t know”. The table overleaf sets out the results of this analysis across the County and within individual districts.

Firm Support

		Option One	Option Two	No need to change	Other	Don't know
NORTHUMBERLAND	%	49	17	5	8	21
Alnwick	%	53	16	6	12	12
Berwick-upon-Tweed	%	63	7	6	6	18
Blyth Valley	%	44	27	4	7	17
Castle Morpeth	%	34	10	6	7	42
Tynedale	%	63	9	7	5	15
Wansbeck	%	45	21	3	13	18

- Since Option One is equivalent to “No need to change”, it is feasible to add figures horizontally for these two categories. Therefore, across the County, 54% of residents are firmly favouring no change.
- Option Two is most likely to be chosen as residents’ least preferred option:

Q Which, if any, of the options shown here would you least prefer?

		Option One	Option Two	None of these	Don't know
NORTHUMBERLAND	%	15	49	13	24
Alnwick	%	11	49	15	25
Berwick-upon-Tweed	%	4	42	26	29
Blyth Valley	%	26	43	10	21
Castle Morpeth	%	9	42	27	22
Tynedale	%	10	70	5	15
Wansbeck	%	15	4	6	34

- Seven residents in ten support the principle of setting up town or parish councils where people want them. This is broadly consistent throughout the county.

STATISTICAL RELIABILITY

The respondents to the questionnaire are only samples of the total "population", so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the "true" values). We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the "true" values from a knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% – that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the "true" value will fall within a specified range. The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the "95% confidence interval":

Size of sample on which survey result is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
100 interviews	6	9	10
300 interviews	3	5	6
1,000 interviews	2	3	3
1,900 interviews	1	2	2

For example, with a sample size of 300 where 30% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the "true" value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of ± 5 percentage points from the sample result.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be "real," or it may occur by chance (because not everyone in the population has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one - ie if it is "statistically significant", we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentage giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume "95% confidence interval", the differences between the two sample results must be greater than the values given in the table below:

Size of samples compared	Differences required for significance at or near these percentage levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
300 and 300	5	7	8
1,900 and 1,900	2	3	3
1,900 and 300	4	6	6

MARKED-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

OPTIONS RESEARCH (NORTHUMBERLAND)

Fieldwork: 15 August – 27 September 1994

N = 1,877 respondents aged 18+

Sample stratified by district

Data weighted to be representative of population profile

Gender	%
Male .....	.48
Female .....	.52

Age	%
18-24 .....	.12
25-34 .....	.18
35-44 .....	.19
45-54 .....	.16
55-64 .....	.16
65-74 .....	.14
75+ .....	.7

WRITE IN AGE

--	--

Work Status	%
Full-time (30 hrs/wk+) .....	.44
Part-time (8-29 hrs/wk) .....	.8
Not working (under 8 hrs) .....	.2
Looking after home/children .....	.12
Retired .....	.25
Registered unemployed .....	.5
Unemployed but not registered	*
Student .....	.2
Other .....	.2

Occupation of Chief Income Earner (CIE)
 Position/rank/grade

.....

Industry/type of company

.....

Qualifications/degrees/apprenticeship

.....

No of Staff Responsible for

.....

PROBE FOR CIE/PENSION

	%
AB .....	.20
C1 .....	.25
C2 .....	.24
D .....	.15
E .....	.15

Number in Household
Adults aged 18+ (inc. respondent)

	1	2	3	4	5+
%	18	60	16	5	1

Children (17 or under)

	0	1	2	3	4+
%	63	14	16	5	1

QA Are you or other members of your household employed by a council?
IF YES: Is this a Borough/District/City Council or a County Council?
CODE FOR BOTH RESPONDENT AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

	Respondent %	Other %
Yes:		
Borough/District/City ..	3	.3
County	4	.4
Don't know which	*	*
No	92	.77
Don't know	*	.16

Tenure	%
Owned outright .....	.31
Buying on mortgage .....	.39
Rented from Council .....	.19
Rented from Housing Association .....	.2
Rented from private landlord .....	.7
Other .....	.2

QB Is this your main permanent home, or is it a second or holiday home?

	%
Main/permanent .....	.99
Second/holiday	*

Car in Household
CIRCLE NUMBER

	0	1	2	3+
%	23	50	23	4

INTERVIEWER DECLARATION: I confirm that I have conducted this interview face-to-face with the above named person and that I have asked all the relevant questions fully and recorded the answers in conformance with the survey specification and the MRS Code of Conduct.

Interviewer Name Signature

Interviewer Number

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 /

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DATE OF INTERVIEW

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NB INTERVIEWER: ALL SHOWCARDS HAVE BEEN REVERSED. PLEASE BE CAREFUL TO CODE THE CORRECT RESPONSE.

Good morning/afternoon/evening. I'm from MORI, the market research and polling organisation. We are doing a survey about local issues, and I would like to ask you a few questions.

ASK ALL

Q1a Firstly, how long have you lived in this town/village?

Q1b And how long have you lived in this county?

	Q1a %	Q1b %
Less than 1 year .....	.5	.3
1-2 years .....	.5	.2
3-5 years .....	.10	.5
6-10 years .....	.14	.7
11-20 years .....	.19	.15
Over 20 years/all my life .....	.48	.68
Don't know/can't remember	—	—*

Q2 What is the name of the County Council for this area? DO NOT PROMPT

	%
Northumberland County Council .....	.59
Other .....	.31
Don't know .....	.10

Q3 What is the name of the Borough/District/City Council for this area? DO NOT PROMPT

	Correct %
Alnwick District Council .....	.87
Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council .....	.90
Blyth Valley Borough Council .....	.70
Castle Morpeth Borough Council .....	.76
Tynedale District Council .....	.79
Wansbeck District Council .....	.73
Other	—
Don't know	—

IF INCORRECT ANSWER AT Q2 OR Q3, READ OUT: In fact, this is the Northumberland County Council area and the Borough/District Council area.

ASK ALL

Q4 SHOWCARD A (R) As you may know, there is currently a review being undertaken by the Local Government Commission on the future of local government structure in this area. How much, if anything, would you say you know about this?

	%
A great deal . . . . .	.3
A fair amount . . . . .	.12
Just a little . . . . .	.37
Heard of but know nothing about . . . . .	.22
Never heard of . . . . .	.26

HAND OVER COMMISSION LEAFLET

Two options have been put forward by the Local Government Commission for the future structure of local government in Northumberland. Could you please read through this leaflet, which outlines the options and includes maps which illustrate them.

ASK ALL

Q5 SHOWCARD (B) Please tell me which of these options, if any, you would most prefer?
SINGLE CODE ONLY

	%
Option 1 . . . . .	.56
Option 2 . . . . .	.19
None of these . . . . .	.8
Don't know . . . . .	.7

ASK IF PREFER 1, OR 2. (OTHERS GO TO Q8)

Q6 Why do you say you would most prefer option ?

PROBE FULLY – DO NOT PROMPT. MULTICODE OK

Base: All expressing preference (1,411)

	%
Cost/Efficiency	
Will cost less/save money . . . . .	.13
More efficient/less duplication . . . . .	.4
Easier to manage . . . . .	.3
Size/Area	
Smaller areas better/others too big . . . . .	.27
Bigger areas better/others too small/too many councils . . . . .	.4
More sensitive to local area/people . . . . .	.14
Each area different/local identity . . . . .	.6
Want to join/be part of ...(area/town) . . . . .	.1
Don't want to join/be part of ...(area/town) . . . . .	.2
Takes account of different levels of community . . . . .	.1
Maintains strategic services . . . . .	.1
General	
No need to change/OK as it is . . . . .	.43
Like present Council/is good/satisfactory . . . . .	.5
Don't like present Council/is poor . . . . .	.1
Current services good/current councils provide good services . . . . .	.3
Would increase services/more services . . . . .	.3
Would improve services/services would be good quality . . . . .	.2
Need strong/influential council . . . . .	.1
Go back to how it was	*
Good idea generally . . . . .	.1
Other . . . . .	.20
Don't know . . . . .	.2

THERE IS NO Q7

ASK ALL

- Q8 SHOWCARD B (R) AGAIN Which, if any, of the options shown here would you least prefer? SINGLE CODE ONLY

	Least
Option 1	%
Option 2 .....	.15
None of these .....	.49
Don't know .....	.13
	.24

ASK IF LEAST PREFER OPTION 1, OR 2 (OTHERS GO TO Q10)

- Q9 And why do you say you would least prefer option ?

PROBE FULLY - DO NOT PROMPT. MULTICODE OK

	%
Cost/Efficiency	
Cost of change .....	.9
Would cost more to run/more expensive .....	.8
Too much duplication .....	.3
Too many joint arrangements .....	.2
Too difficult to manage .....	.5
Size/Area	
Area too big/smaller areas better .....	.37
Area too small/bigger areas better/too many councils .....	.6
Would ignore us/our views/would be isolated .....	.7
Too impersonal/less local .....	.11
Don't want to join/be part of...(area/town) .....	.2
No local identity .....	.4
Authorities too small to cope .....	.1
Too narrow/no strategic view .....	.1
General	
No need to change/OK as it is .....	.22
Like/Don't like present Council/is good/poor .....	.2
Poor services .....	.2
Current services would be reduced/in danger .....	.2
Bad idea generally .....	.2
I prefer the others/like other options more .....	.2
Other .....	.17
Don't know .....	.5

ASK ALL

- Q10 What other options, if any, would you prefer to those I have shown you?

	%
None .....	.66
Don't know .....	.20
Go back to how it used to be/back to pre-1974 structure .....	.4
No need to change/keep things as they are .....	.5
Other .....	.4

ASK IF CODE "3", "4" OR "5" AT Q10 (OTHERS GO TO Q12)
 Q11 **Why do you say that?**
 PROBE FULLY – DO NOT PROMPT. MULTICODE OK
 Base: All who prefer other options (262)

Cost/Efficiency	%
Will cost less/save money	11
More efficient/less duplication	6
Easier to manage	6
Size/Area	
Smaller areas better/others too big	16
Bigger areas better/others too small/too many councils	3
More sensitive to local area/people	21
Each area different/local identity	6
Want to join/be part of ...(area/town)	1
Don't want to join/be part of ...(area/town)	4
Takes account of different levels of community	3
Maintains strategic services	*
General	
No need to change/OK as it is	26
Like present Council/is good/satisfactory	4
Don't like present Council/is poor	3
Current services good/current councils provide good services	3
Would increase services/more services	4
Would improve services/services would be good quality	4
Need strong/influential council	*
Go back to how it was	9
Good idea generally	1
Other	23
Don't know	5

ASK ALL
 Q12 **Please tell me whether you support or oppose the following proposal**
 READ OUT

	Support %	Oppose %	Neither/ Don't know %
If local people want them, town and parish Councils should be set up, where they do not exist	71	14	15

THANK RESPONDENT
 GO TO DEMOGRAPHICS, THEN COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:

District Name:

COPY SAMPLE POINT FROM FRONT PAGE

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APPENDIX C

PARISHING ARRANGEMENT

ULGHAM

The Commission received a proposal for the parishing of Ulgham village in Castle Morpeth District. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1992, the proposal would require the abolition of the present parish of Ulgham and its replacement by two parishes - one parish for Ulgham village and a second for Widdrington Station and Stobswood villages.

The boundary of these parishes would broadly follow the present polling district boundaries of Ulgham and Widdrington Station with alterations made to take account of the proposed development of Stobswood opencast workings. The proposed boundaries are illustrated in map C1 below.

The Commission consulted on this proposal in its draft recommendations. It proposed to name the parish area covering Ulgham village 'Ulgham parish' and welcomed suggestions for the naming of the new parish area of Widdrington Station and Stobswood.

The Commission received a number of representations on this parishing issue. It received 50 submissions in support of the proposal (including four proformas), and two opposed. The proposal was supported by Ulgham Village Association, the current Ulgham Parish Council and Castle Morpeth Borough Council. No representations commented on the name of the proposed parish area of Widdrington Station and Stobswood. The Commission proposes that the new parish area should be named 'Widdrington Station and Stobswood parish'.

Many representations indicated a preference for parish elections to coincide with borough council elections in May 1995. The proposed electoral arrangements are set out in figure C1 below.

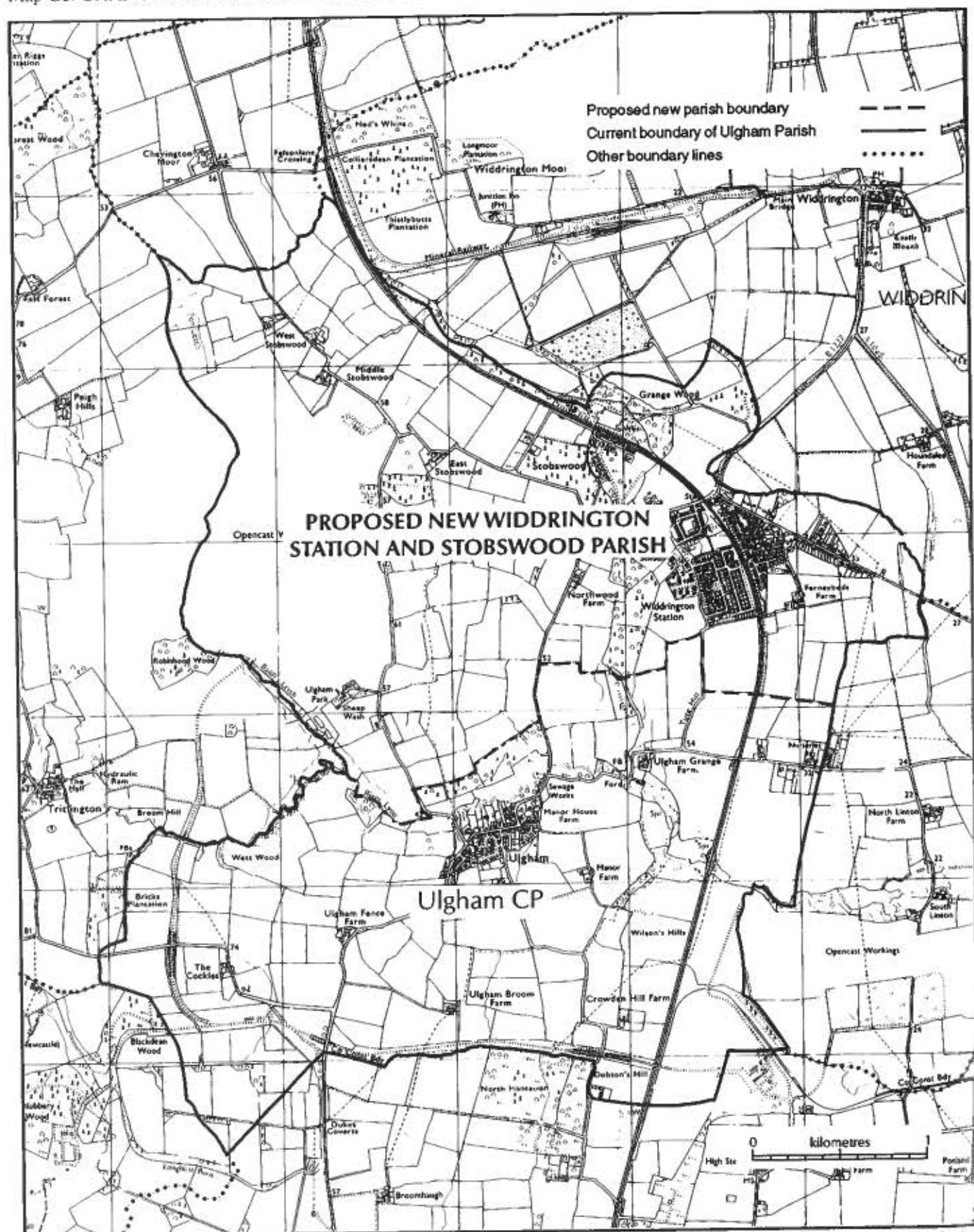
Figure C1

PROPOSED ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS IN THE PARISHES OF ULGHAM AND WIDDRINGTON STATION AND STOBWOOD

Polling district	Electorate	Councillors	Councillor: elector ratio
Ulgham	317	5	1:63
Widdrington Station & Stobswood	1939	7	1:277

Source: Local Government Commission, based on draft 1994/95 Register of Electors

Map C1: CHANGES TO THE EXISTING PARISH STRUCTURE OF ULGHAM



Base map reproduced from the
Ordnance Survey Map

Printed in the United Kingdom for HMSO
DL 296879, 12/94, C21, 3400,304754

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