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AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF THE CONCEPT OF THE COMMUNITY
WITHIN THE CURRENT REORGANISATION OF ENGLISH LOCAL
GOVERNMENT.

PHILLIP DAVID LEWIS

Doctor of Philosophy

ASTON UNIVERSITY
OCTOBER 1995

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ASTON UNIVERSITY
THESIS SUMMARY

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The thesis will examine the role and impact of the concept of the community within the structural reorganisation of English local government between 1992 and 1995. The methodological approach adopted within this thesis has been to compare the use, application and significance of the community with a case study of a specific local authority and its preparations for reorganisation. The authority in question was Wychavon District Council located in the County of Hereford and Worcester. The conclusions from this case study were then compared to the role and significance of the community in the reviews of other local authorities in England.

This study produced two important results. These were that there was an established body of literature which argued that the community could be of value to local government and that the community should be identified by measuring individuals sense of belonging and feelings of attachment, as well as such daily activities as shopping and working (which help to stimulate these feelings). The then Conservative Government even instructed the specially appointed Commission to apply this particular interpretation of the community to their reviews, and to attempt to base any new unitary authorities upon the social and spatial area it created.

The Conservative Government also gave the Commission a Community Index to assist with the identification of communities, and appointed the pollsters MORI to support the Commission with task of identifying the emotional and more subjective senses of community. The Commission eventually came to rely entirely on the MORI polls and whilst these polls attempted to faithfully apply the Governments interpretation of the community, they unfortunately produced small and often complex communities, which the Commission felt could not be applied to its reviews. This therefore led to the community becoming a secondary consideration to the factors of cost and efficiency. Furthermore the problematic nature of the community - that is, the production of small and complex communities - was repeated in this thesis own survey of community identities in the District of Wychavon. In fact this authorities proposals for reorganisation were based almost entirely upon the factors of cost, size and efficiency.

Therefore when Wychavon's use and application of the community are combined with the Commission's use of the community, it resulted in community identity occupying a secondary role within this review. However, it must also be noted that the Commission did use community opinion to make their final choices from a range of cost effective and efficient options.

Therefore whilst this thesis has observed that on the whole community identity was not a significant factor within the process of reorganisation, it has also observed that community opinion was a key influence in determining the Commission's final recommendations.

KEY WORDS: LOCAL GOVERNMENT, REORGANISATION, COMMUNITY, LOCALITY,
ENGLISH SHIRE COUNTIES

DEDICATION

I WOULD LIKE TO DEDICATE THIS THESIS TO MY WIFE SHARRON LEWIS, IT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE NEVER BEEN COMPLETED WITHOUT HER HELP AND SUPPORT.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE HELP AND SUPPORT THAT WAS PROVIDED BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL, MR DU SAUTOY AND THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW OFFICER, MRS S.KIRBY. THEY BOTH PROVIDED VALUABLE ADVICE AND SUPPORT IN PERMITTING ME TO ATTEND ALL THE RELEVANT COMMITTEES AND VIEW ALL RELEVANT DOCUMENTS.

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INTRODUCTION

“For forms of Government let fools contest”

(Alexander Pope 1688-1744)

The main subject of this thesis is the reorganisation of English local government that began in the July of 1992. This has been described as, ‘the biggest reorganisation of local government in more than twenty years’, and once complete¹ will add a further 42 new unitary authorities to local government in England and 96 throughout the country as a whole (Jake Arnold Foster 1996). This represents an important increase in the total number of unitary authorities, which will rise from 69 to 165 and serve over 54% of the country’s total population (Department of the Environment, Sir Paul Beresford, 1996). It will also leave in place a new type of county area, known as the hybrid. This is where unitary authorities have been created in two tier areas, an example of which is in Derbyshire which in addition to having a County Council and 8 District Councils, will also have a unitary Derby City in the middle of the County.

The creation of these hybrids and indeed this whole process of reorganisation has caused a considerable amount of controversy. At the centre of this controversy has been the independent Local Government Commission, which was specially appointed by the Government to conduct an area by area review of the English Shire Counties and Districts. It’s terms of reference, as specified in the 1992 Local Government Act, was to review this two tier system of local government and to recommend to the Secretary of State whether; “a unitary structure of local government would better reflect the identities and interests of local communities and secure effective and convenient local government” (1992 Local Government Act, section 15).

It was the Conservative Government’s opinion throughout this review that a system of unitary local authorities had the potential to bring important benefits to local government. The Conservatives particularly felt that a single unitary authority providing all local services could ‘reduce bureaucracy and costs’ and ‘improve the quality and co-ordination

¹ This reorganisation of English local government will not be complete until the final tranche of local councils achieve unitary status on the 1st of April 1998

of services' (Policy Guidance 1992, page 1, DoE). An additional opportunity was also believed to exist to relate, "the structure of local government more closely to the communities with which people identify" (Structure of Local Government in England, April 1991, page 6, DoE), thereby creating a more representative and responsive system of local government (ibid). Therefore, it was not surprising that the Government expected to see, "a substantial increase in the number of unitary authorities as a result of the Commission's reviews" (Policy Guidance to the Local Government Commission, DoE July 1992, page 2).

However, despite this preference for unitary local government the Conservative Government was anxious to stress that they did not have a national blueprint that would require the Commission to impose unitary authorities upon all localities, as happened in Wales and Scotland. Instead, it was emphasised that the Local Government Commission was an independent body that had to make its own decisions regarding the creation of unitary councils, once they had considered a range of important factors. The factors included the financial implications of such a change, whether it would improve the delivery of local services and whether it would be beneficial to local communities, taking into account their opinions, identities and interests.

The inclusion of these last factors of community identity and interest was particularly important, as it indicated that in this review the overriding considerations would not be cost and administrative efficiency (as happened in the last major reorganisation of local government in 1974). Instead it initially appeared that in this review community identity and the interests and opinions of local people would be significant influences capable of shaping the future structure of local government. This was further reinforced by the Government's instruction in the Commission's Policy Guidance that;

"local authorities should be based on natural communities. The Commission should assess the extent and strength of local peoples loyalties and identities, and their interests" (DoE, July 1992).

The Commission were even provided with a methodology for assessing this factor, which was labeled the 'Community Index'. The Index emphasised that the Commission should consider whether:

- a new unitary authority would be more beneficial in terms of local identity, history and travel patterns;
- it would create a more accessible system of local government;
- it would make the local authority more responsive to local needs and provide further opportunities for local people to become more actively involved in local government.

However, the application of this index and the continued assessment of 'community identities and interests' proved to be a problematical and controversial area for the Commission. They were criticised for failing to use this community index in their reviews and relying too heavily upon local opinion polls. The Commission's response was that in their opinion;

"it is better to address the question of community opinion directly, through opinion research amongst local residents, rather than to rely on inferences drawn from some community index. That was inevitably open to challenge on at least three grounds, the scoring of each factor, the relative importance or weighting, the inference to be drawn from the results" (The Future of Local Government from the Humber to the Wash, Local Government Commission, page 20, paragraph 34).

The above comment did not, however, deflect continued criticism that the Commission should attempt to apply this index and that it also lacked consistency in its consideration of community identity and in its overall decision making. Furthermore, this criticism came not just from local politicians and council officers affected by the review, but also from national politicians, including members of the previous Conservative Cabinet (Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr Heathcote-Amory). It even led to the Department of the Environment temporarily halting the review after only one year to review its future.

The result of this review was that the reorganisation of local government continued but with an accelerated timetable and a revised Policy and Procedure Guidance for the Local

Government Commission. The revised guidance re-emphasised the importance of the Commission considering community identities and interests and directed them towards recommending unitary authorities. Whilst this last point was successfully challenged in the High Court by Derbyshire and Lancashire County Councils, and resulted in the DoE having to remove this instruction, it did not stop the review from continuing. Neither did it alter the Government's instructions to the Commission that they should continue to regard the 'community' and its identities and local area as significant factors in their review.

The continuation of this review also meant continued criticism, which became increasingly directed at the Commission's outspoken chairman Sir John Banham who was often accused of arbitrarily imposing his own views upon Commissioners and their reviews. This situation was further compounded by growing dissatisfaction with the Commission's recommendations. For example, Humberside was one of a number of County Councils that challenged the Commission's recommendation to abolish their county in the High Court. It even appeared that this dissatisfaction was shared by the Secretary of State John Gummer, who refused to accept some of the Commission's final recommendations.

John Gummer's rejection of some of the Commission's recommendations resulted in the resignation of the Commission's Chairman Sir John Banham and its Chief Executive Martin Easteal, who were replaced by Sir David Cooksey and Mr Bob Chilton, as Chairman and Chief Executive respectively. Mr Cooksey and Chilton took charge of a reconstituted Local Government Commission, whose Policy and Procedure Guidances were revised for a second time. This time the Commission was instructed by John Gummer to complete a third and final review of 21 selected areas, in which the concept of the community was still to be regarded as an important factor.

Therefore, against this background of controversy and criticism, which raged for almost three and a half years from 1992 to 1996, there is a wealth of information that would merit further academic research and examination. However, the one issue that this thesis will

examine is the role and significance of the concept of the community, as it was the continued inclusion of this factor that made this review unique, particularly when compared to the reorganisation of local government in 1974.

The reorganisation of 1974 differed from this review because the concept of the community was not a significant factor. The current two tier system of county and district councils were created according to the criteria of cost and administrative efficiency. Therefore, questions arise as to whether this review could, unlike the reorganisation of 1974, successfully identify and evaluate a sense of community, and then use this factor to create new unitary authorities. Furthermore, if this reorganisation could and did achieve this, then how did it measure and quantify such a notoriously vague concept as 'the community'?

In order to properly address these questions this thesis will test the hypothesis that:

the concept of the community was a significant factor within this structural review of English local government, determining whether new unitary authorities should be created and what area and communities these new authorities should cover.

The examination of which will also enable this thesis to contribute to existing knowledge by determining:

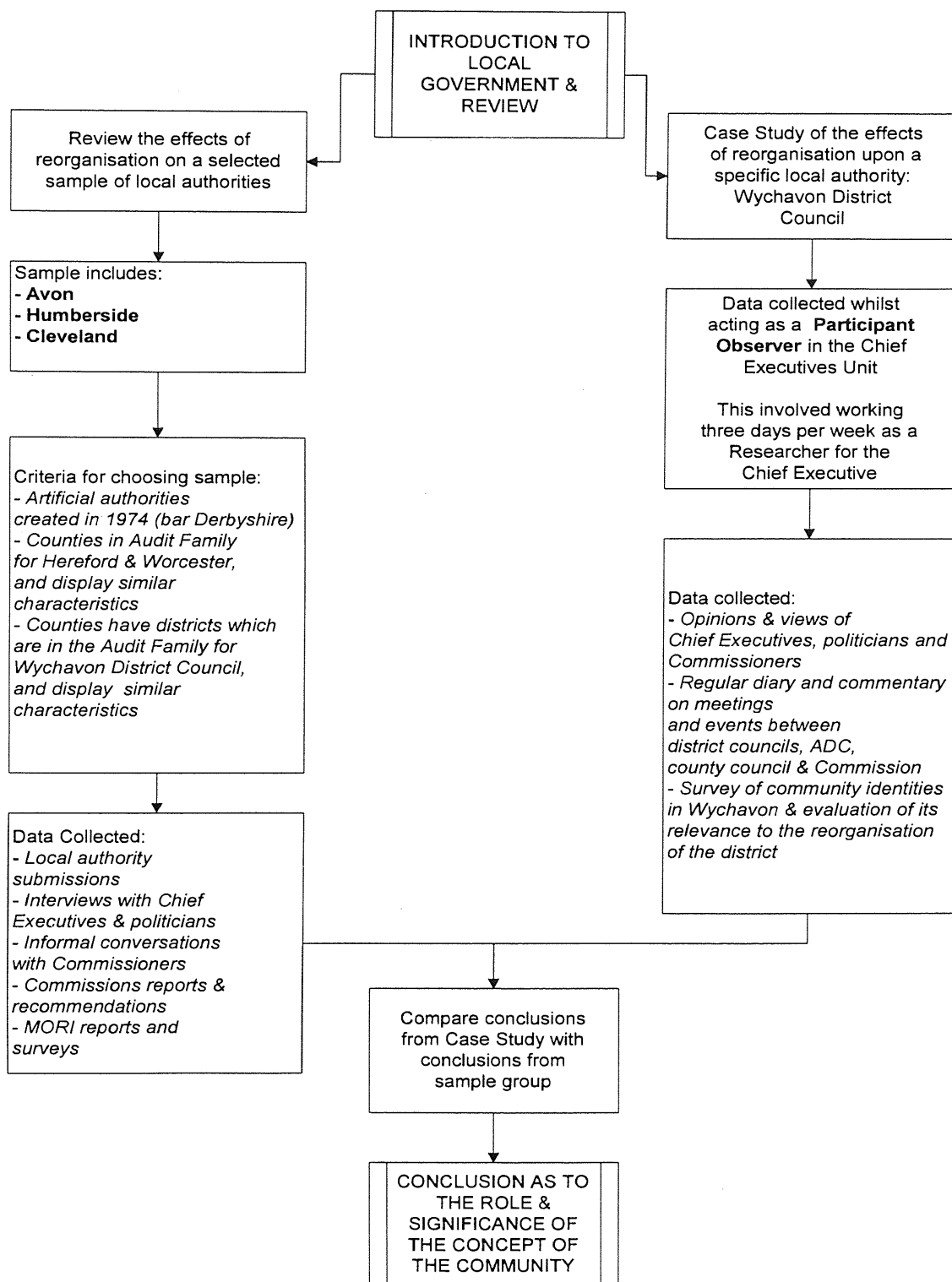
whether such a vague and nebulous concept as 'the community' could and did affect such a large scale structural review of English local government.

The realisation of these aims will however, require a structured analysis and the adoption of a specific methodological approach. In this instance the key methodology for this thesis will be a case study that examines the impact of local government reorganisation upon a specific local authority. Central to this case study will be a survey that will attempt to identify the key communities that existed within this authority's boundaries. The purpose of gathering this data will be is to determine whether *the community could be practically*

identified, how this could be achieved and exactly how important this factor was to the reorganisation of local government in this specific area. The conclusion from this critique can then be contrasted against the results of a number of national reviews, in similar authorities, to produce an overall conclusion as to the role and significance of the concept of the community within this reorganisation of local government.

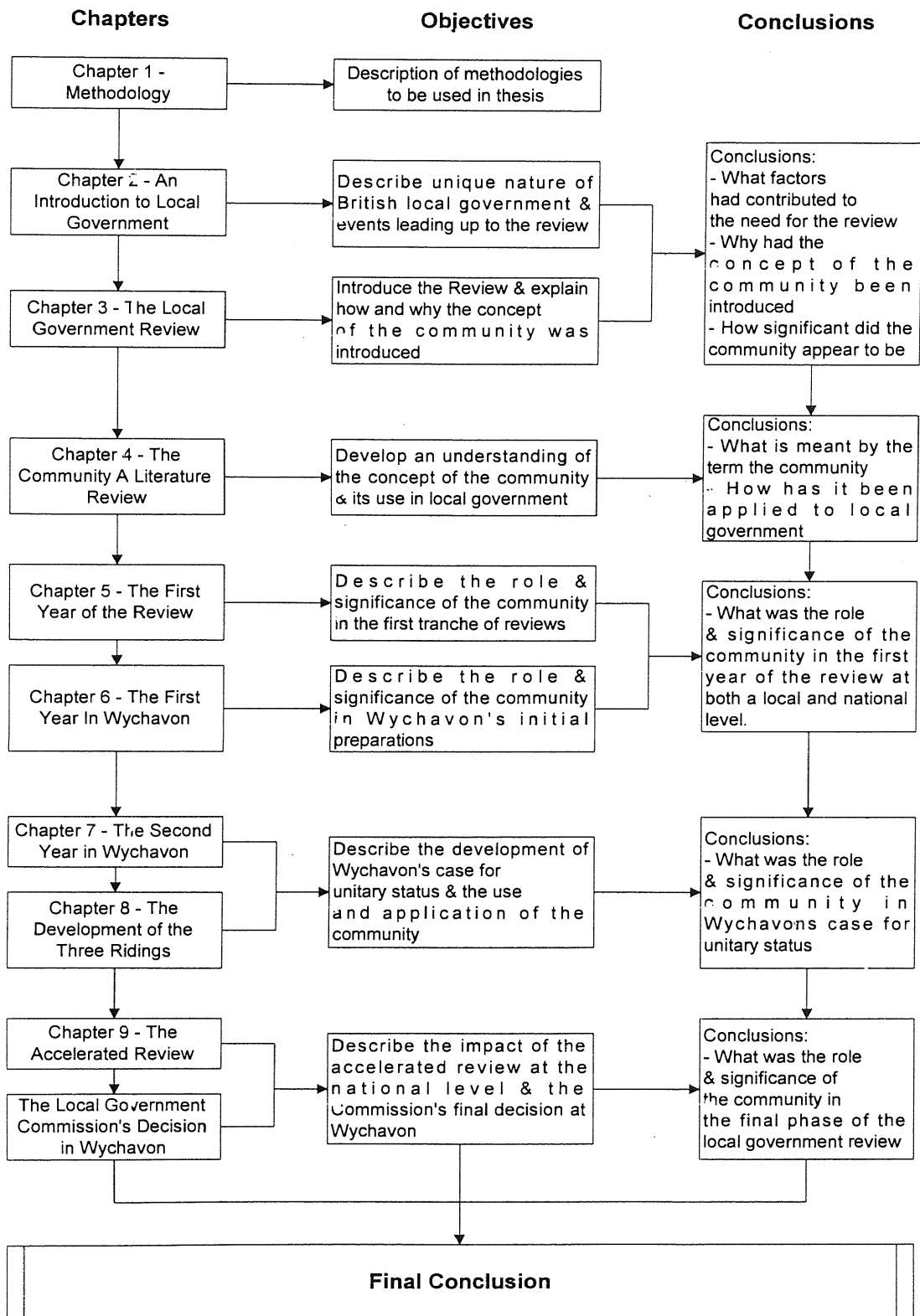
The flowchart in figure 1, provides an overview of this methodology and summarises its key features.

Figure 1: Methodology



A full review and explanation of why this methodological approach was adopted is provided in the opening chapter of this thesis, as demonstrated by figure 2, which also provides an overview of the key chapters and issues that will be tackled by this thesis.

Figure 2: Structure of Thesis



CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY

The introduction to this thesis briefly described the methodological approach, that would structure its analysis and provide its final conclusion with a rigorous foundation capable of withstanding scrutiny. The key tenets of this approach were to assess the impact of the concept of the community upon:

- the reorganisation of a specific local authority; and,
- the reorganisation of a selected group of similar authorities.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain why this approach was chosen.

Case Study

Aston University dictated that the financial and academic support for this thesis would only be provided if 3 days per week were spent working at Wychavon District Council (the Council) as a researcher for the Chief Executive, Mr du Sautoy and his assistant the Policy Officer, Mrs Suzanne Kirby. A contract was signed, which specified that this role would be performed for at least two and a half years and possibly three, depending upon the requirements of the Council. During this time the key responsibilities of this role included:

- assisting the Chief Executive Mr du Sautoy and his assistant Suzanne Kirby with developing Wychavon's case for unitary status;
- submitting reports and presentations to Wychavon District Council's specialist local government reorganisation committee on the authority's preparations for unitary status, and the continuing recommendations of the Local Government Commission;
- accompanying Mr du Sautoy to the Association of District Council meetings on local government reorganisation;
- accompanying Mr du Sautoy to meetings with his fellow Chief Executives and meetings with the Local Government Commission, in all cases taking minutes and producing written records of these meetings and their key decisions.

The Council also stated that a central part of the duties of the research officer would be to develop a survey that would enable them to identify key local communities within their district, and the attitudes of these communities toward local government

reorganisation. Therefore, as the research officer, a key responsibility was writing such a survey, identifying an appropriate sample group of over 2,000 local residents, managing the interviews and data analysis, and presenting the final results (a description of the development of this survey, the sampling and data analysis is provided in chapter 6). This proved to be particularly useful for this thesis, as it enabled it to test whether communities could be identified. It also enabled a formal examination of whether the concept and idea of local communities with distinct identities could be used to reorganise a local authority.

The contracted commitment from the Council was to pay an additional salary and to agree to act as a case study for this thesis, in return for performing the duties identified above. The case study was aided by Wychavon providing access to:

- all of the political groups within Wychavon and their leaders and deputy leaders;
- all of the authority's meetings and discussion groups on reorganisation;
- a range of external organisations, including the Local Government Commission, all the Chief Executives and council leaders of the local authorities in Hereford and Worcester, including the County Council, as well as a range of specialist ADC meetings, such as:-

⇒ the ADC County Branch Committee on reorganisation, which consisted of the Chief Executives and Leaders of the district councils in Hereford and Worcester;

⇒ the ADC County Branch Chief Executives Group, which was a sub-group of the main committee in which only the Chief Executives met to discuss specific issues such as finance, personnel and developing joint arrangements;

⇒ a national ADC committee on local government reorganisation, which consisted of Chief Executives drawn from district councils throughout the country (but primarily first tranche authorities) that met to discuss the development of this review and produce ADC briefing papers and circulars on local government reorganisation.

An advantage of access to this type of information is that it also meant that access could be gained to data that was regarded as confidential. Further opportunities were also

provided to interview a number of key national figures, such as senior figures at the ADC, including Geoffrey Filkin (a full and complete list is provided in Appendix A).

The key question was therefore, how to gather this information, conduct a case study examination and maintain the balance between being an employee of Wychavon District Council, and a PhD student producing an objective and at times, critical PhD thesis.

It was agreed by Aston University and Wychavon District Council that as a part time employee of the Council, the only method for gathering data would be to act as a participant observer. All parties agreed that this role would provide a number of advantages, including:

- the ability to become immersed in the day to day life of the Council and fulfil the contractual obligations of being a part time employee;
- the opportunity to be accepted by the Council and understand how it operated;
- the opportunity to identify the key decision makers within the Council and understand their behaviour, motivation and reasons for making key decisions;
- the ability to understand the Council's reaction to local government reorganisation and monitor key changes in this reaction, right from the start of local government reorganisation in July 1992 until its finish in 1996;
- the ability to monitor exactly how and why the Council used the concept of the community in its preparations for reorganisation;
- the ability to gain a unique insight into the operation of other local councils, such as Hereford and Worcester County Council and neighbouring district councils.

The role of participant observer, therefore, provided a unique opportunity to understand Wychavon District Council, the way it operated, its key decision makers, how it reacted to local government reorganisation and how it used the concept of the community. The next problem was how to collect, structure and analyse the data that was collected.

The solution was to enter the information and data collected into a weekly diary in which key events were highlighted, along with details of what decisions were made, why these

decisions were significant, who made them and why they made these decisions. This provided a structured account of how the Council prepared for the review and how it used the concept of the community within its preparations.

The role of participant observer with such a close association with Wychavon District Council did, however, cause problems. The most significant of these was that the objectivity demanded of an observer became challenged by having such a close working relationship with the authority. Furthermore, there were other significant problems including:

- many organisations and individuals in the latter stages of the review refusing to be formally interviewed because they disagreed with Wychavon's policy on reorganisation or wished to remain neutral. These included the Local Government Commissioners and the Chief Executive and Leader of Hereford and Worcester County Council;
- many district councils and county councils being reticent about forwarding copies of their submissions and cases for unitary status because they regarded these as private and confidential documents;
- the thesis becoming constrained by limiting its observations to the single area of Wychavon District Council and its surrounding county - Hereford and Worcester.

These problems were overcome by regularly taking leave from the authority and when possible working for 2 days per week from the Aston University Business School. This provided the opportunity to critique Wychavon's preparations and local events in a more objective environment and with individuals who were not involved or connected with the authority and its local area. Furthermore, whilst some key figures, such as the Local Government Commissioners would not agree to formal interviews it was possible to talk to them informally after meetings or during coffee and lunch breaks. This, therefore, made it possible to approach these individuals and ask such questions as:

- What did they think were the key decisions in their recent meeting or discussion?
- Why was that decision made?
- Who were the key actors and what role did they play?

The responses to these questions were then added to the diary that was being maintained and included observations upon key actors, decisions and influences. This approach proved to be more useful than formal interviews, as individuals were often quite frank and open, and it provided a unique opportunity to record the attitudes and opinions of key actors after all important meetings. It, therefore, represented an ongoing and continual review of the opinions and actions of Chief Executives, politicians and Local Government Commissioners, which not only recorded their decisions and actions but was also able to chart the ways in which their opinions changed as the review developed. However, it must be remembered in reading this thesis that the repeated statements of many Chief Executives, Commissioners and local politicians were provided informally and would (in their own admission) not be repeated in a formal interview. Individuals who gave information and brief interviews in such circumstances included:

- the Local Government Commissioners, Brian Hill, Clive Wilkinson and Stan Szaroletta;
- the Chief Executive of Hereford and Worcester County Council, John Turnbull;
- the Leader and Deputy Leader of Hereford and Worcester County Council, Liz Tucker and Peter Pinfield.

Thus, despite the problems associated with conducting a case study as a participant observer, it was possible to collect a significant amount of confidential and highly valuable data. However, the problem of ensuring that this case study did not dominate the thesis and that this research did not become a narrow study of one locality was more difficult. It was therefore decided that the results of the case study needed to be compared with the results of reviews in other local authorities. This was particularly important as the Local Government Commission was producing a range of different recommendations for different counties and appeared to be using the concept of the community in an inconsistent and varied manner. It would however be impossible to compare the case study against every review in England, instead a small sample group of similar authorities was utilised.

Sample Group

The task of identifying suitable authorities to compare with Wychavon and its surrounding county area, Hereford and Worcester, presented a significant challenge, particularly as there were 39 counties and 296 district councils at the start of local government reorganisation. The solution was to identify a small group of five county areas that displayed similar characteristics to Hereford and Worcester and had district councils that were similar to Wychavon. Therefore, the first step in this process was to identify the key characteristics of Wychavon District Council and Hereford and Worcester County Council.

Hereford and Worcester, and Wychavon

The one characteristic that was shared by both Wychavon and Hereford and Worcester was that both of these councils were created during the last major reorganisation of local government, when in 1974 and against considerable local opposition¹, the counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire were merged. This led to the two authorities earning the tag of 'artificial', as the County and District did not exist until it they were created in 1974, when all senses of community identity and local protests were ignored. Instead two key administrative principles governed the creation of this County, these were the desire to create authorities that were large enough to be self sufficient, directly providing all services, and the desire to ensure that these authorities would also be able to achieve economies of scale within the provision of local services.

The result was the creation of a County council and a district council that did not generate a sense of community and belonging from its local residents, and lacked a strong community identity. There were, however, a number of other characteristics that defined these 'artificial' local councils.

¹This local opposition to the merger of Herefordshire and Worcestershire was so great that, as already noted in chapter 1 page 15, professors Bryan Keith Lucas and Peter Richards observed that of all the councils created in 1974, 'Hereford and Worcester aroused the strongest hostility and deepest distaste' (1978, page 205). Furthermore local people in Herefordshire still refer to a Herefordshire Bull being walked down Downing Street, with a 100,000 signature petition, against the two counties merger being strapped to its back.

The District of Wychavon and Wychavon District Council

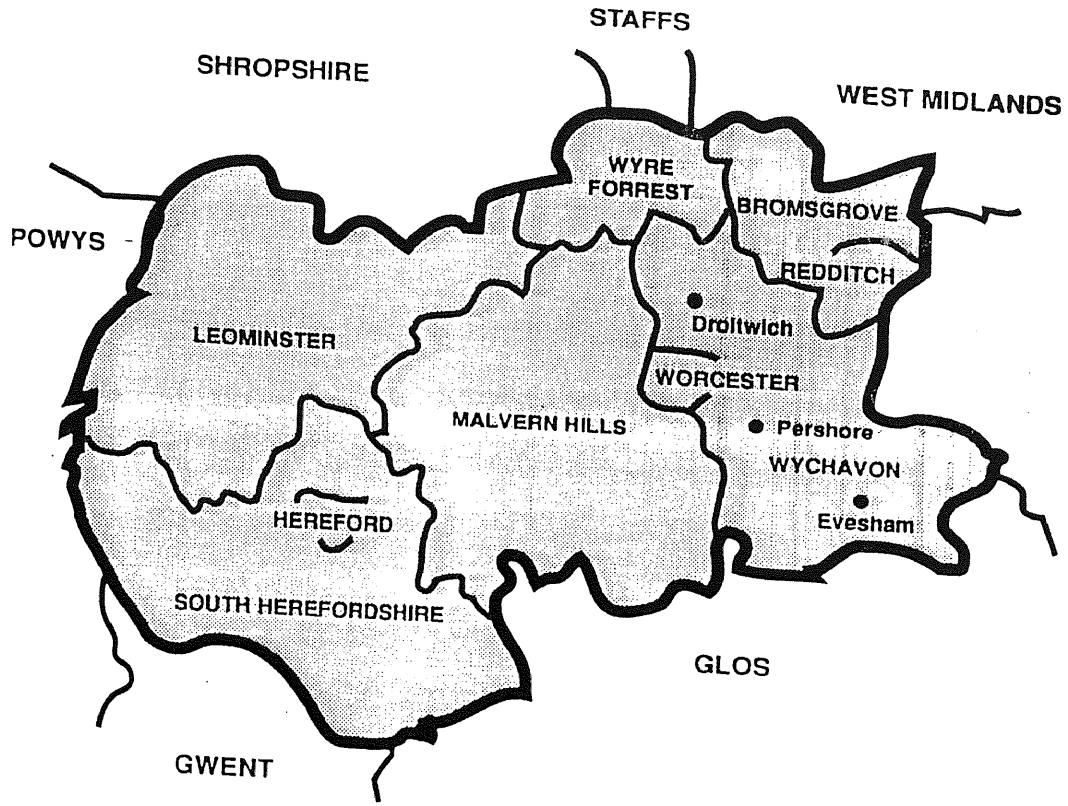
The District of Wychavon is located in the south eastern corner of the County of Hereford and Worcester, (as demonstrated by Map 1 overleaf). It is a District that is entirely parished encompassing three towns and sixty three parish councils, within its 260 square miles of largely rural countryside. This rural nature is particularly exemplified by its employment patterns, with Table 1 demonstrating that Wychavon has a comparatively high dependency on agriculture, as compared to the United Kingdom as a whole, with tourism rapidly becoming its second major industry. Industries such as metal goods, engineering and manufacturing, are all on a small scale within Wychavon, as demonstrated by Table 2, which lists Wychavon's top five employers. Table 2 demonstrates that all of these employers (with the exception of the District Council) are relatively small and light industrial manufacturers, employing no more than 500 people. Therefore, this characterises the District as being relatively free of any large scale industrialisation and development, remaining very rural in character.

Table 1: Employment Patterns In Wychavon

Standard Industrial Classification	% Employed Wychavon	% Employed Nationwide
- Agriculture, forestry, fishing	9.2	1.6
- Energy and water supply	0.4	2.3
- Mineral extraction, metal, chemical, manufacturing	3.5	3.2
- Metal goods, engineering, vehicles	14.0	10.8
- Other manufacturing industries	11.5	9.9
- Construction	4.5	4.7
- Distribution, hotels & catering	22.1	19.9
- Transport & communication	4.5	4.7
- Banking, finance, insurance	5.4	10.7
- Other services	23.9	30.8
Total Employed	34,905	21,778,300

SOURCE: WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL 1995 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Map 1



HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

Table 2: Major Employers In Wychavon

EMPLOYER	NUMBER. OF EMPLOYEES	LOCATION
Christian Salvesen Ltd	500 or more	Droitwich
Wychavon District Council	350 or less	Pershore
Britax Vega Ltd		Droitwich
Deritend Precision Castings Ltd		Droitwich
NEI APE Allen Gears		Pershore

SOURCE: HEREFORD AND WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL 1995

Wychavon is also characterised by the fact that it has an expanding population. Table 3 demonstrates that (based upon census data OPCS 1991) Wychavon has experienced an increase of 7.6% in its total resident population since 1981. Furthermore, estimates from Hereford and Worcester County Council (see also table 3) suggest that this expansion is set to continue until the year 2001. However, what is particularly interesting is that overall, during the period from 1981-1991, Wychavon has experienced a decline in its total number of schoolchildren (that is, ages 0-15) with much of its population increase coming from three particular age groups. That is, those aged 30-44, 45-59/64 and 60/65+, and it is this trend (as demonstrated by table 3), which is set to continue until the year 2001. Therefore Wychavon is characterised as having a largely adult and increasingly elderly population, who could have established and long-standing community loyalties and identities. The 1991 census also indicated that there was very little migration out of the district, in fact OPCS census data demonstrates that there was a 7% increase of people migrating into Wychavon (OPCS 1991).

Table 3: Age Structures For The 1981 And 1991 Census And The Year 2001

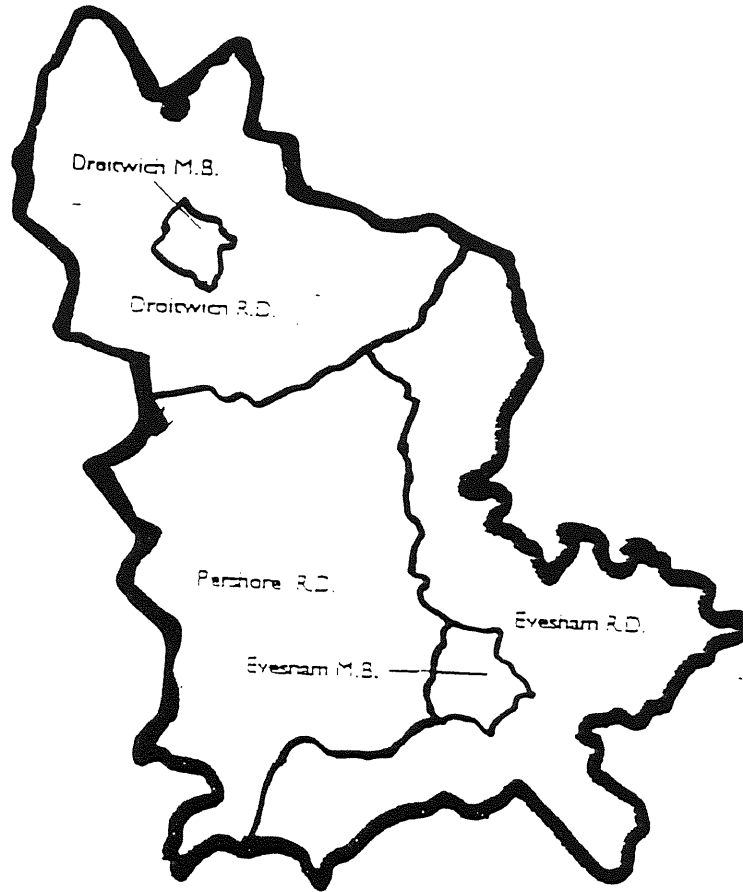
AGE GROUPS	Wychavon 1981 %	Wychavon 1991 %	Wychavon 2001 Increases (+) Decreases (-) %
0 - 4	6.1	5.9	+10.5
5 - 15	17.2	13.4	+13.2
16 - 17	12.4	12.6	-8.1
18 - 29	14.2	15.6	-10.7
30 - 44	13.6	21.7	+8.2
45-59/64	19.7	21.3	+21
60/65+	16.8	19.5	+15.5
TOTAL POPULATION	94,100	101,716	113,259

SOURCE: OPCS FOR 1981 AND 1991 HEREFORD AND WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL FOR 2001

These demographic characteristics could be potentially important, in that many of Wychavon's residents could have a sense of community and identity that actually predates the creation of this authority in 1974. Therefore, the question arises as to whether its local people would want the traditional communities that existed before 1974 (a possibility with Wychavon's established adult population), or whether Wychavon had managed to create a new sense of identity, that generated feelings of belonging and loyalty from its local communities. However, a sense of identity to Wychavon is hampered by its artificial nature, which means that even today, 20 years after its creation, it still has no District wide sense of community and single accepted identity. Instead the District is comprised of three separate communities, based around the towns of Evesham, Pershore and Droitwich. This is a situation that really predates 1974, when the area that Wychavon now encompasses formerly consisted of:

- Droitwich Metropolitan Borough Council and a dependent Droitwich Rural District Council.
- Evesham Metropolitan Borough Council and a dependent Evesham Rural District Council.
- Pershore Rural District Council. (SEE MAP 2)

Map 2 - Wychavon Pre-1974



M.B. - METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
R.D. - RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

The continuation of these community loyalties could, as suggested earlier, be related to Wychavon's established adult community, whose senses of community could possibly predate its creation in 1974. However, this overlooks the fact that each town has its own distinct identity which has been established and maintained by different histories and developments. For example, the largest town of Droitwich (total resident population 20,966 - 1991 OPCS Census results) owes its distinctness to its development as a natural source of salt and its brine baths. However, later in the 1960's and 1970's Droitwich became an overflow area for the West Midlands and Birmingham. This led to the movement of light industry to Droitwich (it is worth noting that in the previous list of five major employers - Table 2 - four are located in Droitwich), and to the movement of people and the building of new housing. This is in contrast to the second largest town of Evesham (total resident population of 17,823 - 1991 OPCS Census results), which remains very agricultural in nature.

Evesham continues to distinguish itself not through its light industry, but through its nationally famous agricultural produce. This is despite a small trading estate for industry situated outside the town, and attempts being made by both the District and County Council to attract more engineering and manufacturing industries. This small town however, remains a rural market town outside of the influence of the West Midlands and any large scale industrialisation and urbanisation. In these respects Evesham is similar to the smallest town of Pershore (total resident population 7,087 - 1991 Census results), which also owes its existence to agriculture.

Pershore does, however, distinguish itself by having more light industry than Evesham, having one of the Districts ten largest employers, the District Council, whose Civic Centre is located in the town. However, even though Pershore is the smallest town and has more in common with Evesham than Droitwich, it too stands as a separate community with its own small town, industry and sense of identity.

These three towns play a vital role in supplying their rural hinterlands with basic community needs. These needs range from superstores and shopping centres, to all middle

and high schools, to all leisure facilities. This is in addition to providing the main police and fire stations and acting as the main centre for local employment and industry. These towns are therefore focal points, which draw the surrounding parishes and rural area together to create a larger community. The importance of the towns and the imposition of its identities over a long period of time is possibly another reason why these separate communities have continued to survive, despite the imposition (in 1974) of a new District in the form of Wychavon.

Wychavon, is therefore, characterised by its expanding adult population, its rural nature, and its three distinct communities. This last characteristic is particularly significant because it indicates that if the local government review is to have the concept of the community as its primary factor, then it must identify a solution capable of reflecting the 'identities and interests' of these three separate communities.

However, despite this lack of an overriding identity these communities used to have at least one uniting and shared characteristic, and this was their political complexion which until the 1995 local elections, was predominantly Conservative. Wychavon District Council had had a Conservative majority since political parties were first formed there in 1984 (Wychavon The First Ten Years). This, however, changed in May 1995 with the election of a Liberal - Labour coalition, but for the purposes of this case study all of Wychavon District Council's preparations for the review were conducted by the old Conservative party at a time when they held 32 seats out of a potential 49 (the remaining 17 seats were split between 9 Liberals, 6 Labour councillors and 2 independents).

The political domination of the local Conservative party was also repeated in Hereford and Worcester County Council.

Hereford and Worcester County Council and the County of Hereford and Worcester

It has already been noted that the merger of the two counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire had aroused considerable local opposition in 1974. The immersion in the day to day activities of Wychavon District Council and regular contact with the County Council revealed that this opposition had never disappeared. For example, when attending meetings of the County Council it was observed that before county council meetings councillors tended to form into two main camps, those who represented wards in Herefordshire and those who represented wards in Worcestershire. However, when the councillors went into their meetings these two groups would dissipate and councillors would enter their political groupings. The Leader of Wychavon District Council commented that this was quite normal, stating that even though he was a Conservative he felt that he had more in common with Labour Worcestershire councillors than Conservatives from Herefordshire, who were 'rural hill billies' and 'different to Worcestershire folk'. Furthermore, when entering Herefordshire the County signs were defaced and instead of welcoming visitors to Herefordshire and Worcestershire, visitors were welcomed to Herefordshire, with the county name of Worcestershire being covered by black spray paint. County engineers commented that every time they changed the sign it was soon defaced again, therefore they had given up.

However, for over 20 years Hereford and Worcester had been a single County, that covered over 392,000 hectares of countryside. It also contained nine district councils, as demonstrated earlier by Map 2, and had a total population of 671,000. It was predicted by the County Council that this population would continue to rise throughout the county until the year 2000 (Hereford and Worcester County Council). The majority of this population 572,000, were located in Worcestershire, along with the majority of the county's industry and its five largest employers, as demonstrated by Table 4.

Table 4: Major Employers In Hereford And Worcester

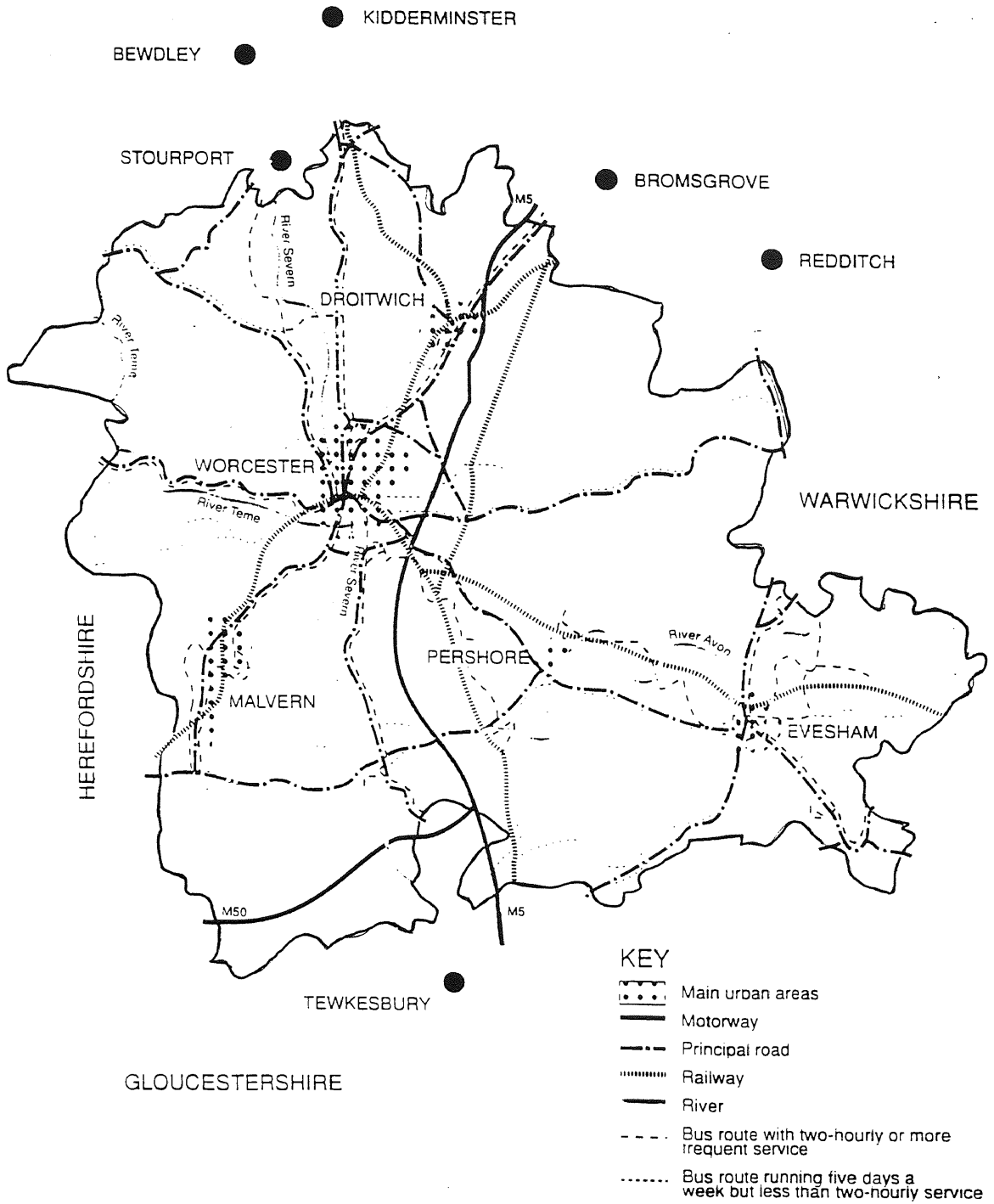
EMPLOYER	NUMBER. OF EMPLOYEES	LOCATION
Yamazaki Machine Tools	More than 500	Worcester
Kays Catalogue		Worcester
Cosworth Engineering		Worcester
Hereford and Worcester County Council		Worcester
NEI APE Allen Gears	Less than 500	Pershore

SOURCE: HEREFORD AND WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL 1995

Herefordshire, in contrast to Worcestershire remains very rural in nature with little or no heavy manufacturing or engineering industries and a comparatively high dependence on traditional farming and agricultural. Employment statistics for Herefordshire indicate that of the total working population over 55% are employed in horticulture, farming and agriculture.

The contrast between the counties continues when consideration is given to the travel to work patterns and lines of communication. Figure 3 details these patterns for Worcestershire and demonstrates that from the Malvern Hills to the Warwickshire border, they converge upon the City of Worcester, although there is trend in the north of the County for these patterns to move towards Birmingham and the West Midlands conurbation. Further, these travel patterns do not extend over the Malvern Hills into Herefordshire, and there is little or no travel from Worcestershire into Herefordshire.

Figure 3: Lines of Communication and Travel to Work Patterns for Worcestershire



Therefore, these travel patterns and the anecdotal observations of County Council meetings, as well as the County's different industrial profiles, indicate that Herefordshire and Worcestershire have retained different characteristics. This, however, complicates the production of a summary of the county's key characteristics and the identification of similar counties, who also have similar districts to Wychavon.

The answer has been to identify a range of general characteristics, such as:

- the artificial nature (i.e. created in 1974);
- the total population;
- the overall industrial profile (i.e. mixture of agriculture / manufacturing industries);
- the lack of single community identity;
- the lack of a dominant city and single focus for travel to work patterns and lines of communication;
- similar districts, in terms of disparate communities, artificial nature, total population and industrial profile (i.e. agricultural and rural).

The above characteristics are repeated in table 5, which also demonstrates that there are five other counties in England that display similar characteristics. Table 5 also has an additional category which identifies the Local Government Commissioners responsible for each review. The reason for including this category is because of a confidential comment by Geoffrey Filkin, former Secretary of the ADC. Mr Filkin stated in a private meeting with Wychavon's Chief Executive at ADC offices in London, that some Commissioners had strong views about the ideal type of unitary authority. He stated that in his opinion Commissioners such as Mary Leigh would favour district sized unitary authorities based upon local community identities. Whilst Commissioners such as Clive Wilkinson would favour larger county sized authorities that paid little attention to community identities and favoured considerations of costs and efficiency. It was further suggested that Clive Wilkinson felt that the larger the unitary authority the more efficient it would be, and the more money it would save (a matter which became highly contentious as the review developed). It was therefore decided to identify:

- county areas that would be reviewed by the same Commissioners responsible for Hereford and Worcester's review - i.e. Clive Wilkinson and Brian Hill); and
- similar areas that had been reviewed by different Commissioners, thereby indicating whether individual Commissioners had a specific bias towards large or small unitary authorities, and whether different Commissioners produced significantly different recommendations.

Table 5: Matrix For Choosing Sample Group

<i>Characteristics</i> <i>Hereford & Worcester</i>	<i>Authorities</i>		
	<i>Cleveland</i>	<i>Avon</i>	<i>Humberside</i>
Created in 1974 Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population Size 676,747	600,000	Larger - 900,000	Larger - 892,000
Industrial Profile Mix of agriculture / industry	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local Govt. Commissioners Brian Hill Clive Wilkinson Stan Szareletta	David Ansbro Ann Levick	Ken Ennals Mary Leigh	Howell Harris-Hughes Brian Hill
Similar Districts, to Wychavon in terms of: - Rural nature - Population of 101,716 - Created in '74 - No obvious community	Yes - For Example: Langbaugh	Yes - For Example: Northavon Wansdyke Kingswood	Yes - For Example: East Yorkshire Beverly Great Grimsby

Data from these county areas and their local authorities was collected through:

- interviews with local authority chief executives and local politicians;
- local authority submissions;
- reports and findings of the Local Government Commission;
- local press articles.

A complete list of all the interviews that were undertaken and all the submissions and reports that were consulted are provided in Appendix A.

Conclusion

The methodological approach for this thesis was, therefore, to conduct a case study of the impact of local government reorganisation upon Wychavon District Council, and the larger area of Hereford and Worcester. Data was gathered whilst acting as a participant observer in the Chief Executive's Unit of Wychavon District Council and was recorded in a diary which noted significant decisions, key actors and the reasons behind their decisions. An important part of this work was also the development and implementation of a community survey to determine whether community identities could be practically recorded and whether they could be used to reorganise the District of Wychavon. The data from this case study was then to be analysed to determine how Wychavon and to a more limited extent Hereford and Worcester County used the concept of the community and whether, in this review, it was a significant factor.

The conclusion from this case study was also to be compared against the results of reviews in a small number of similar county areas. Data on these reviews was collected through interviews and reviewing local authority submissions, reports of the Local Government Commissioner, and as an indicator of local opinions, comments in the local press. The aim was to conduct higher level reviews of the significance and role of the concept of the community and then compare the conclusion from these reviews against the data collected from the case study. A final conclusion could then be produced as to the role and significance of the concept of the community in this reorganisation of local government in England.

However, before discussing the results of this methodological approach, this thesis will continue by introducing local government and providing a background to this review and the concept of the community, in Chapter's 2, 3 and 4.

CHAPTER TWO - AN INTRODUCTION TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

"The British system of Local Government is recognised to be idiosyncratic, not based on any clear principles and constantly thought to be in need of change" (Birch, 1990).

The British system of local government is a rather unique system of local democracy, and there are few systems of local government that could be accused of being idiosyncratic, lacking in clear foundation principles and constantly in need of change. However, British local government can be described in this manner because of one special feature.

This feature is that the role, functions and purpose of British local authorities are not defined by a written constitution. Instead these aspects of local government are determined by Parliament, the only sovereign body in the U.K. This means that the role, structure and functions of local government are subject to change by Parliament and indeed throughout its long and varied history have been altered and changed many times. This point is emphasised by professors B.K. Lucas and P.G. Richards who have observed that the current institutions of British local government are not the result of any planned concept, but have grown haphazardly out of the institutions of previous centuries, being continuously "adapted, adjusted and democratised" (1978, page 12). This, therefore, conveys the impression that British local government does not have any clear guiding principles as to its role, functions and responsibilities, as these factors, like its structure, are being continuously developed and revised. This also has the effect of making the British system of local government seem rather peculiar or idiosyncratic when compared with its major Western European neighbours, whose role and responsibilities are more often than not enshrined in written constitutions.

This, however, does not mean that British local government has been unable to develop an important role within the unitary British state. Nor does it mean that British local authorities are without any defining features or characteristics. There are indeed many features that distinguish British councils and enable them to fulfil a valuable role in

diffusing political power, representing local interests and enabling local people to exercise an important degree of influence in the running of their localities.

This role has, however, developed over a period of several hundred years and is the result of thousands of reviews, reorganisations and Acts of Parliament. Therefore, in order to understand the nature, functions and role of British local government it is necessary to undertake an historical review of the various Acts, reviews and reorganisations that have contributed to its present shape.

The problem with undertaking this kind of historical review is knowing where to start, as the origins of the British Shires and their councils extend back beyond the middle ages. It has been observed by Professor Herwald Morris (1960) that;

"there was a local government system administered by the freeman of the Shires, the hundreds, the burghs and the parishes of England and Wales, long before there was effective central government" (1960, page 3).

This point is reinforced by Shire councils, such as Worcestershire, being able to trace their origins back to Saxon times. Whilst ancient boroughs such as York can go further back in history and demonstrate that they were originally old Roman cities, which had been strengthened as a defence against the Danes. This indicates that for a very long time government was overwhelmingly local and carried out by a diverse range of local institutions (Guy Hollis et al 1991). This however started to change when William the Conqueror began to centralise the kingdom in the eleventh century.

The Origins of Local Government

The Normans started this process of centralisation by developing the ancient system of Shires. The latter were easily adapted to accommodate the requirements of the feudal system and the assertion of the crown's place as the unique source of all temporal authority. The Normans began by building castles in every Shire and using the Shire Reeves or Sheriffs, as well as itinerant judges, to ensure that taxes were collected and that the King's orders were maintained. The Shires soon became an interconnected network of local areas that were simultaneously the recipients of royal writs containing the King's

command and bodies competent to transact local business (Guy Hollis et al, 1991). Whilst this represented a particularly rudimentary and crude system of local governance it was important because it created the first system of established local areas, with a basic power to govern their area in accordance with the King's commands and the King's law.

This situation was developed further by two other important historical innovations. The first of these was the creation of the position of the Conservator or Justice of the Peace (JP) in 1327 by Edward II, whilst the second was the gradual development of the principle that localities could (within centrally prescribed limits) be self governing.

The first innovation of the creation of the post of JP was prompted by increasing disquiet regarding the behaviour and role of the sheriffs. The JP was introduced to take responsibility for administering the rudimentary legal system and maintaining law and order (K.B. Smellie, page 9, 1963). However, as the feudal order began to decay so the JP became more important than the Sheriff and gained more powers and responsibilities. It was, in fact, through the JP that local areas became responsible for maintaining local roads and bridges and providing poor relief (Jackson, page 4, 1967). This established in a rather rudimentary form, the principle that the local area (through its governors) should be responsible for its poorest local citizens and basic aspects of its environment.

The second important innovation was the emergence alongside the principle of local responsibility, of local self government. This was initially obtained by Boroughs purchasing charters from impecunious monarchs in the middle ages, which gave them the right to self government (Guy Hollis et al, page 3, 1991). This specifically meant that these Boroughs could raise their own revenue (which could be paid direct to the crown rather than through the local sheriff), run their own courts and establish their own governing bodies (Guy Hollis et al, page 3, 1991). The structure of these governing bodies varied throughout the individual Boroughs, ranging from town oligarchies to self appointed councillors to Guilds of merchants, and whilst these were not democratic bodies they were highly significant. This is because they established the principle that local

Boroughs could (within limitations) be self governing and could levy their own rate to support this function.

Thus, throughout the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a rudimentary system of local government began to emerge. This was characterised by the fact that it consisted of a system of localities i.e. Shires and Boroughs, who were becoming responsible for their local citizens and environment and were in some instances self governing (within centrally prescribed limitations). It is also significant that these Boroughs were self supporting through their power to levy a rate. However, it was not until the Industrial Revolution that this network of Shires and Boroughs became transformed into a more coherent system of local government.

The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution brought a pressing need for social reform, as the large scale migration of people to the cities and increasing urbanisation also brought large scale crime, poverty, homelessness and disease (P.Richards, pages 14-15, 1973). Whilst central government did react to these changes with legislation aimed at both social reform and economic development, much of the reformist activity during this period took place at the local level. This was in fact, the period within which the features of modern local government were laid down and when the term 'local government' was first coined (Guy Hollis et al, 1991). Two particularly important pieces of legislation during this period were the 1832 Poor Law Amendment Act and the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act.

The first of these, the Poor Law Amendment Act, tackled the problem of poor relief by establishing a system of Poor Law Unions. The Unions usually consisted of groups of parishes and were controlled by local Boards of Guardians, who were democratically elected¹ by their local residents and were responsible for the supervision and provision of poor relief within their local area. The Boards and Unions were later joined by similar ad hoc bodies that were responsible for such services as street lighting, cleaning, sewerage,

¹ It is important to remember that during this period the franchise was only extended to ratepaying males over the age of 21.

paving and public health (through the creation of sanitary urban and sanitary rural districts).

Whilst this created a rather patchwork and chaotic system of local bodies it represented an important development. It established a network of local bodies who were democratically elected by their residents to provide valuable public services at the local level. Furthermore, they could also support this work by levying a local rate.

These principles were also extended, via the 1835 Act, to the Municipal Corporations. The 1835 Act legally established those cities that had already purchased royal charters, as independent self governing bodies (Guy Hollis et al, page 7, 1991). The new Municipal Corporations, like the various Boards of Guardians, were to be directly responsible for the welfare and protection of their citizens and environment, which meant granting them the independence and power - without having to consult Parliament - to provide such services as water, electricity and hospitals. The Municipal Corporations were also to be democratically elected by their local residents and had the power to raise their own finance through levying a local rate (subject of course to central government audit - Guy Hollis et al, page 7, 1991).

Therefore, it was through the problems created by industrialisation that a system of local government began to emerge. The system was characterised by the fact that;

- (i) it consisted of a network of local authorities with specific local areas - although this was rather a complex system of single function local authorities, such as Boards of Guardians, as well as multi-functional Municipal Corporations and later as a result of the Public Health Acts, rural and urban sanitary districts;
- (ii) its newly created Boards of Guardians, Municipal Corporations and sanitary districts were also democratically elected, self governing local bodies (within centrally prescribed limitations). This was government of the locality by its residents - in effect it was locally based government or local government;

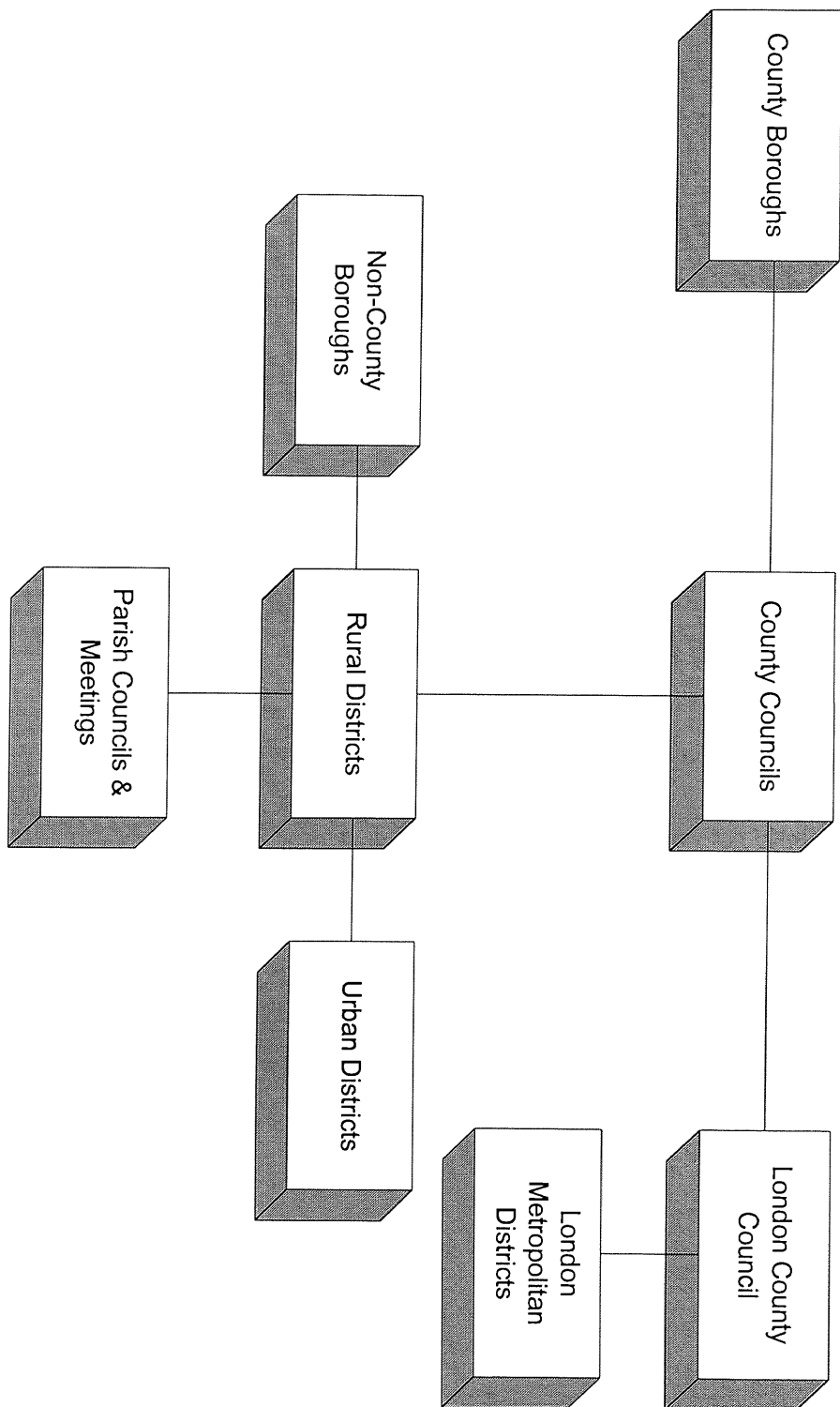
(iii) these bodies were directly and solely responsible for the local citizens and for providing valuable public services such as water, hospitals, electricity, gas, etc., at the local level.

This created rather a patchwork system of authorities alongside which also existed the non-elected Boroughs and Shires, which did not operate on the same basis as the Boards of Guardians and Municipal Corporations. Therefore, in 1888 and 1894 two Local Government Acts were passed which rationalised this system and extended the principle of democratic elections to all other local bodies (A. Alexander, page 1, 1982). The first of these Acts in 1888 began this rationalisation by transforming the existing Shires into County Councils, which resulted in the creation of London County Council and the establishment of all purpose unitary County Boroughs (Sheldrake, page 3, 1993)². The Local Government Act also made the County Councils responsible for those Boroughs and Municipal Corporations which had not yet achieved County Borough status (now named non-County Boroughs), as well as transferring all of the JP's non-legal responsibilities to the elected councillors and aldermen (Jackson, page 13, 1967). This clearly divorced the JP's from the administrative and welfare functions of councils and firmly placed these functions upon a democratic foundation. In 1894 this structural reform was completed with the transformation of urban and rural sanitary authorities into urban and rural district councils, responsible for health and housing³ (Jackson, page 14, 1967) as illustrated by figure 4.

²These unitary County Boroughs originally had populations of over 150,000, but due to protest some Boroughs with populations of 50,000 were granted County Borough status (Sheldrake, page 3, 1993).

³ It is also worth noting that this Act formally established parish councils and parish meetings below the urban and rural districts and thereby fully integrated these bodies into the system of local government.

Figure 4 : The Structure of Local Government Created by the 1888 & 1894 Local Government Acts



Therefore, by the end of the nineteenth century local government was characterised by the fact that it was based upon established localities, that were integrated into a network or system of local councils. Furthermore, it was also highly significant that these councils were democratically elected by their communities, had a direct responsibility to care for their citizens welfare and their local environment and could raise their own finance (subject to central government audit) through levying a local rate.

Therefore, by the start of the twentieth century, local government had a firmly established structure and a democratic role, which was to represent, protect and care for its local citizens and its local environment. This was rather a paternalistic role that was consolidated and developed throughout the early part of the twentieth century, with local authorities gaining more functions and responsibilities. For example, the 1902 Education Act abolished School Boards, enlarged the scope of this service and transferred the responsibility for its provision to County Councils and County Boroughs, although some large Urban Districts were also allowed to become educational authorities (B.K.Lucas & P.Richards, page 36, 1978). The 1919 Housing Act also gave Districts and County Boroughs the responsibility of providing houses for the working classes. The authorities were assisted in this duty by the award of a generous financial allowance and as a result between 1919 and 1939, the Districts and County Boroughs established themselves as the main providers of housing, building over one million homes (John Sheldrake, page 5, 1993). The Districts and Boroughs also gained responsibility for assessing the level of local rates (through the 1925 Rating and Valuations Act) and then finally the 1929 and 1930 Local Government Acts, abolished all Boards of Guardians and Municipal Corporations and transferred their responsibilities to the County, Borough and District councils (B.K.Lucas & P.Richards 1978).

Therefore, by the start of the second world war local government was established as the sole and direct provider of important health and welfare services, such as public health, education, housing, water and sewerage and the provision of gas and electricity. This role

was however to become subject to considerable change in the post war period of nationalisation in the 1940's and 1950's.

Local Government After the Second World War

In this period local government lost many important functions as the newly emerging welfare state took over responsibility for hospitals and public health. This was also accompanied by the newly nationalised public utilities taking over responsibility for gas, water and electricity, and the government centralising all aspects of public finance (including responsibility for the local rate) (Lucas & Richards, pages 48-49, 1978). The loss of these functions did not, however, spell the end for local government, as local councils began to acquire a new role in the developing welfare state. This was as a vehicle for providing a uniform level of important welfare services throughout the country's localities. This included the provision of such services as a police force and fire brigade, as well as education, personal social services, highways, housing and the responsibility for environmental health and trading standards (Lucas & Richards, pages 48-49, 1978). However, despite local government establishing this role there was still increasing disquiet within central government as to whether local authorities were performing this role effectively (Jackson, page 19, 1967). It was felt that the introduction of the welfare state and the centralisation of the political system and the economy, had created a rather complex process of policy making and government within which local authorities were unable to operate. It was the opinion of government departments, such as those for Health and Education and Science (P.Richards, page 44, 1973), that because of their small size and complex structure, local authorities were unable to effectively communicate with central government, which hampered their ability to efficiently provide centrally prescribed services and represent their communities at the national level. Therefore, in order to reform this situation a number of Commissions were appointed between 1940 and local government's major reorganisation of 1974.

Local Government Reviews and Reorganisations

The first of these Commissions - that is, the 1945 Boundary Commission and the 1958 Local Government Commission, were appointed to specifically re-examine the boundaries and only the boundaries of local authorities. (P.Richards page 40, 1973). However, despite this limitation both Commissions stated that their remit needed to be expanded to cover the functions and structure of local government (P.Richards page 40, 1973). This did not happen until 1963 when the Herbert Commission conducted a review of local government in London.

The Herbert Commission's review resulted in the 1963 London Government Act, which created a two tier system of local government for the capital (Lucas & Richards page 208, 1978). It specifically recommended the creation of one single Greater London Council (G.L.C) and below this thirty two London Boroughs, an Inner London Education Authority (I.L.E.A) and the City of London Corporation. The aim was to create a county council that was large enough to effectively communicate with central government and directly and efficiently provide such large scale and strategic services as a police force, fire brigade, public transportation and a comprehensive highways service. Below this the smaller districts could then deal with local housing problems, refuse collection and personal social services.

The review of local government in London was soon followed by the appointment of two further Commissions to review local government in Scotland and England. These were the Wheatley Commission and the Redcliffe-Maud Commission, both of which were appointed in 1966 and broadly operated under the same remit. The Wheatley Commission was to review the structure of local government in Scotland, whilst the Redcliffe-Maud Commission was to concentrate upon England, its specific terms of reference were to;

“consider the structure of local government in England, outside of Greater London, in relation to its existing functions; and to make recommendations for authorities and boundaries, and for functions and their division, having regard to the size and the character of areas in which these can be most effectively exercised and the need to sustain a viable system of local democracy” (Terms of Reference to Redcliffe-Maud Commission, PG Richards, page 44, 1973).

The work of this last Commission is worth examining in more detail because it was the precursor to the last major reorganisation of local government in the English Shires. It required the Redcliffe-Maud Commission to review a system of local government that consisted of 45 Counties, 79 County Boroughs, 227 Non-County Boroughs, 449 Urban Districts and 415 Rural Districts (Redcliffe-Maud, page 21, 1969, Cmnd 4040). The Commission's work began in 1966 and continued for three years before a final report was released. The report concluded that the existing system of government with its County Boroughs, Non-County Boroughs and Rural and Urban Districts had four important problems.

The first was that these local authorities no longer corresponded to the general patterns of life and work in modern British Society. The Commission felt that people were becoming increasingly mobile and there was no longer a strict separation between town and country, with people living in the country, whilst working, shopping receiving their education and spending their leisure time in the cities. Rural areas in particular were seen as becoming increasingly dependent upon the urban areas, especially for the provision of specialised and expensive services. Therefore, a pattern began to emerge of people in rural areas depending on the services provided by urban areas and not having to contribute to the cost of these services (Redcliffe-Maud, pages 26-27, 1969, Cmnd 4040).

The second fault was that in the Commission's opinion it was impractical to separate town and country when it came to such issues as planning and transportation. Generally, rural areas resented and opposed any developments they saw as encouraging or precipitating the expansion of urban areas. This often degenerated into political battles between Conservative rural areas and Labour urban areas (Redcliffe-Maud Commission, page 25, 1969, Cmnd 4040). This was perhaps best exemplified by the policy of slum clearance after the Second World War. The cities after destroying their slums built lower density housing and were therefore left with a shortage of accommodation, which they looked to outlying rural areas to solve. Such developments were fervently opposed by these rural districts on both party political and environmental grounds, thereby leaving a shortage of

accommodation within the towns and cities and a source of resentment and tension (Redcliffe-Maud Commission, page 26, 1969, Cmnd 4040).

The third fault was that there were considerable variations in the size of the authorities. For example, in 1961 Lancashire County Council had an estimated population of 2.2 million, as compared to Rutland County Council which had an estimated population of 23,000 (P.G. Richards, page 38, 1978). Similarly within the County Boroughs, Birmingham had an estimated population of one million, whilst thirty three other County Boroughs had populations of less than one hundred thousand (P.G. Richards, page 38, 1978). The Commission felt that such disparities created serious problems when it came to service provision. It was their opinion that the smaller authorities were often unable to employ the highly qualified manpower and provide the technical equipment required by modern welfare services (Redcliffe-Maud Commission, page 27, 1969, Cmnd 4040). Furthermore, government departments such as the Department of Education and Science had produced reports which stated that economies of scale and effective service provision really only occurred in areas with populations above three hundred thousand, and ideally with five hundred thousand (Redcliffe-Maud Commission, page 33, 1969, Cmnd 4040).

The fourth and final fault for the Commission was that there was too great a fragmentation of service provision. Responsibilities were divided between County Councils, County Boroughs, Non-County Boroughs and Rural and Urban District Councils. In the Commission's opinion this made the production of a comprehensive and integrated system of welfare services particularly difficult (Redcliffe-Maud Commission, page 27, 1969, Cmnd 4040).

The Redcliffe-Maud Commission also felt that local government had failed to establish a satisfactory relationship with either central government or its local citizens. The Commission observed that local government was too fragmented and divided to communicate effectively with central government and it was, "apt to be irrelevant to people's problems" (Redcliffe-Maud Commission, page 28, 1969, Cmnd 4040) and, therefore, unable to solve them. It was this last fault in particular, that for the Commission

was the cause of such problems as low turn outs at elections and a general lack of community involvement and feelings of apathy towards local government (Redcliffe-Maud Commission Short Report, pages 1-2, 1969, Cmnd 4040). It was, therefore, recommended by the Commission that these problems could be ameliorated by applying a number of important principles to the old system of local government.

The principles as outlined in the first volume of the Redcliffe-Maud Commission's final report were that:

- local authority areas must be so defined that they enable their citizens and their elected representatives to have a sense of common purpose;
- the areas must be based on the interdependence of town and country;
- all services concerned with the physical environment (planning, transportation and major development) must be in the hands of one authority and this authority should be large enough to meet the pressing land needs of the growing population, and their inhabitants must share a common interest in their environment;
- all personal services (education, personal social services, health and housing) must also be in the hands of one authority;
- ideally both 'environmental' and 'personal' services should be under the control of one authority because of their inter-relationships and inter-dependencies;
- authorities must be bigger to command resources and skilled power, and should have populations that range between 250,000 - 1,000,000;
- where the area for planning and environmental services is too large for personal services, responsibility must be clearly divided and related services should be kept together;
- the new local government pattern should, as far as practicable, be based on the existing system of local government, and wherever change is in doubt, the common interests, loyalties and traditions inherent in the present pattern and the strength of services as going concerns, should be respected.

(Redcliffe-Maud Commission, pages 3-4, 1969, Cmnd 4040).

The Commission felt that it was only after applying these general principles that they could create a system of local government that would;

“perform efficiently a wide range of profoundly important tasks concerned with the safety, health and well being.....of people in different localities; attract and hold the interest of its citizens;...develop enough inherent strength to deal with national authorities in a valid partnership; and.....adapt itself without disruption to the present unprecedented process of change in the way people live, work, shop and enjoy themselves” (Redcliffe-Maud Commission, page 1, 1969, Cmnd 4040).

It is significant that one of these principles included the need to ensure that any new system of local government should enable, ‘local citizens and their elected representatives to have a sense of common purpose’. The Royal Commission despite their preference for larger authorities, were also concerned that many new councils should, where possible, reflect existing senses of community identity. This was particularly noted by Morris Janowitz and John Kasarda, in their article, "The Social Construction Of Local Communities" (1974 T.Leggatt), where they observed that this Royal Commission;

"believed that public preferences as to the size and structure of local government should be taken into account" , because, "the structure of local government should articulate with the social organisation and social fabric of the local community" (page 207,1974).

The Royal Commission even appointed an independent opinion research company, Research Surveys Limited, to attempt to identify and assess the size and nature of local communities. The survey, was in 1967, one of the largest social surveys to be conducted, altogether it involved sampling 100 local authority areas (excluding London) and conducting face to face interviews with 2,199 electors. This work was also supplemented by a further 143 interviews in six municipal and urban boroughs, with the respondents being chosen as a representative sample of the then total population of England. The primary purpose of this survey was to identify the nature and geographical size of local communities, as well as to test accessibility and electors knowledge of, and attitudes towards local government (page 1, 1969). It was intended to provide the Redcliffe-Maud Commission with important information on whether communities existed and if they did what their attitude was towards the existing system of County Boroughs, Municipal Boroughs, Urban Districts and Rural Districts. In dealing with this last aspect of the survey, it concentrated upon;

- I. assessing electors knowledge of and satisfaction with local government, by primarily asking these electors whether they could identify which services were then provided by local councils and how well run they were;
- II. determining the overall accessibility of the then system of local government, by asking electors if they knew who to contact at the local council with a complaint and whether they knew who their councillor was and how to contact them;
- III. identifying local communities and ascertaining what these communities thought would be the ideal size for a local authority. That is, whether it should be larger or smaller, and whether the area represented by local councillors should be enlarged or reduced.

These questions produced some interesting results particularly that in 1967, respondents had a limited knowledge of local government, were generally apathetic towards it (indeed it was also found that only 6% of respondents participated in some way within local government page 82, 1969) and preferred the status quo, although a second preference was found for larger rather than smaller authorities (page 8, 1969). However, as interesting as these results may be, what is especially important is the attempt in 1967 to identify and measure the concept of the community, so that it could be used to restructure local government.

In tackling this issue Research Surveys started from the premise that in being asked to identify communities for a local government restructuring, they were being asked to measure a 'physical/geographical area', to which people, "feel they belong and where they feel at home" (page 11, 1969). Therefore, in this instance and for the purposes of reorganising local authority boundaries, the community had both a social and spatial aspect. In assessing these aspects, Research Surveys Limited produced two main indices.

The first revolved around individual electors subjective feelings and was described as the "perceived community area" (page 11, 1969). Whilst the second was termed "community influence" and assessed how active respondents were within their community and how strongly they felt they belonged. In assessing the first of these factors Research Surveys

Limited, began by asking each elector to provide a verbal description of an area where they were living and that they felt they 'belonged to' and 'at home in' (page 11, 1969). This resulted in 4 out of 5 electors producing a home area that they felt personally attached to, which in rural areas was found to be smaller than a parish and in urban areas only a street or a small collection of streets (pages 11-13). It was also generally found that these 'home areas', only corresponded to local authority areas when electors lived close to the centre of the local district or county, or in a small urban authority. Furthermore, the survey found that these home areas tended to be shaped mainly by physical landmarks and to a lesser extent by "sociability and/or social prestige" (page 24, 1969).

Research Surveys then developed this notion of a perceived community with their second indicator of community, which was termed "community involvement". This indicator as noted earlier assessed the nature and extent of each electors sense of belonging, as well as the nature and extent of their participation within local clubs and local events. It began by asking electors such questions as;

- How long had they resided in the home area?
- How sorry would they be to leave the home area?
- How interested were they in local events?
- Whether they would recommend a local school to friends?

The above questions, therefore, assessed attitudes towards the home area and the strength of belonging to its community, which was correlated against more formal behaviour patterns. That is, those of employment, shopping and leisure, as well as patterns of friendship and acquaintances. These behavioural patterns were measured by asking respondents whether they had friends/relatives within a ten minute walk of their home and how often they saw them. Finally, electors were also asked whether they were members of local clubs, churches and whether they read local newspapers. In this way it was possible to map out a range of behavioural patterns to determine whether they took place inside or outside of the home area.

The results of these questions were that the nature and extent of community involvement that is, the feelings of belonging and social behaviour, were very important in creating and holding together the community and its home area. It was found that the greater the number of activities within this area the greater the sense of attachment, in particular activities such as weekly shopping, visiting friends and relatives, attending local churches, having children at local schools and visiting local pubs, were found to be very important. Activities such as work were not found to be so significant, particularly since most respondents were employed outside of the local home area (page 79, 1969). Research Surveys, therefore, concluded that whilst the community could be measured in geographical terms, that is, an area respondents could identify as belonging to - this was not meaningful unless the factor of community involvement was taken into account. Research Surveys emphasised that it was the formal and informal activities within the community and the social fabric it created that really engendered a strong and communal sense of belonging to an area, thereby making it a meaningful community. This also meant that in 1969 for that particular reorganisation, a community was interpreted by Research Surveys as a geographical area whose, "social activities, attributes and patterns of behaviour" (page 212, 1969), engendered a shared sense of attachment from its residents. It was further determined that this should be measured by initially identifying the home area or perceived community and then the extent of belonging to and involvement within that community, which for Research Surveys lay within both personal feelings towards an area and formal and informal behaviour patterns.

An important consequence of this particular interpretation was that it led to the identification of small communities, which tended to be based around small spatial locations, such as a collection of streets and/or villages. This meant these communities could not be used as spatial areas for new local authorities because the Redcliffe Maud Commission wanted to create larger, more accountable authorities that integrated towns and the surrounding countryside.

The Commission was, however, also concerned that these areas took account of the variety of local communities that existed and integrated them in a manner that would be

recognised and accepted by their local residents. The Commission felt that this would allow local government to fulfil its role as the democratic representative of its community and an effective provider of important welfare services at the local level.

The Redcliffe-Maud Commission specifically felt that this could be achieved by replacing the network of county councils and county boroughs with sixty one new units of local government (excluding the already reformed Greater London Council). These sixty-one areas would be divided into fifty-eight, large multi-purpose unitary authorities, whilst the three remaining metropolitan conurbations of Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester would have a two tier system. In this system there would be three metropolitan county councils and twenty metropolitan districts, seven for Birmingham, four for Liverpool and nine for Manchester. It was also recommended that above these sixty-one areas and the Greater London Council (GLC), there should be eight provinces, each with a council partly elected by the local authorities and partly co-opted. The functions of these provinces would be to develop provincial strategies and plans for economic and social development in close co-operation with central government (Redcliffe-Maud Commission, pages 75-76, 1969, Cmnd 4040).

There was dissent from one member, Mr Derek Senior who produced his own report based upon a two tier system and despite the debate this document created, even generating the support of some MP's, it did not significantly affect the political actions that followed the publication of the Commission's report in 1969. The Labour government of Harold Wilson accepted these recommendations proposing three alterations. These were that two further metropolitan conurbations should be created - one for South Hampshire and another for West Yorkshire, that parish councils should not be involved in the delivery of major services and finally, that in the metropolitan areas the district councils should be the education authorities. A further proviso was also included that that the issue of regional government should be suspended until the Crowther Commission had produced its report on the constitution (Lucas & Richards, page 223, 1978). However, these recommendations and the main proposals of the Redcliffe-Maud

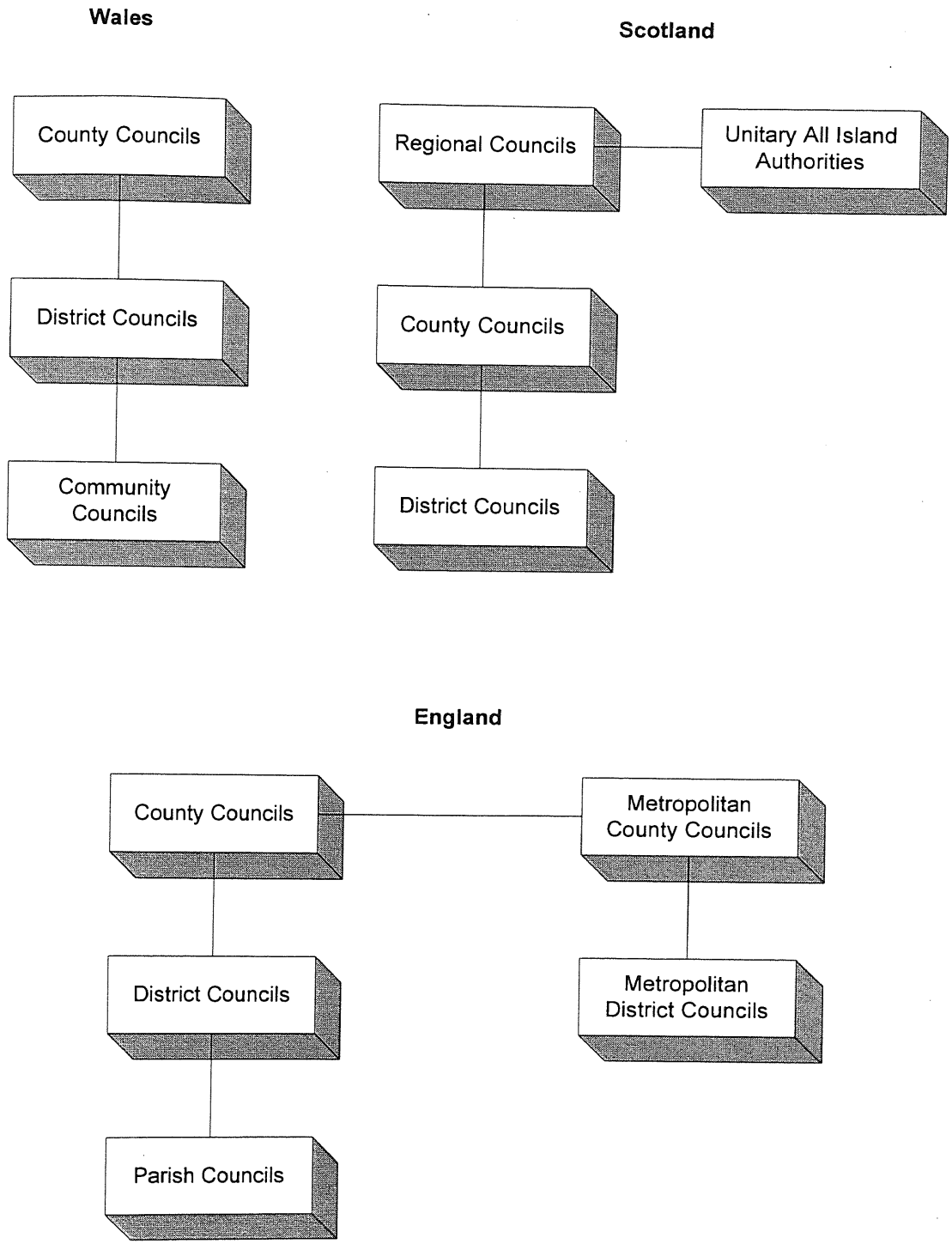
report were not implemented because Wilson's government lost the general election of 1970.

Reorganisation of 1974

The new Conservative government of Edward Heath and the then Environment Secretary, Peter Walker, rejected Labour's proposals for local government - particularly those for creating unitary authorities (Bruce Wood, pages 98-99, 1976). Professor Tony Byrne (1990, page 39) has noted that this Conservative government was anxious to avoid unitary authorities for a number of reasons. These included the general lack of enthusiasm for these proposals from the public, as well as councillors and officers who feared redundancy and loss of their seats. The issue of losing seats prompted many Conservative councillors to emphasise to the government that they could lose political control. The councillors were also supported in their objections by many MP's who were anxious that such a large reorganisation could prompt parliamentary constituency changes. This did not however, lead Edward Heath's government to reject the idea that local government needed to be reorganised, nor did they reject the main principles of Redcliffe-Maud's report, - that local government needed larger authorities, within a more integrated, understandable and accountable structure. Instead, this Conservative government decided that this could be better achieved by a two tier system of County and District Councils (Bruce Wood, page 98, 1976).

Therefore, in 1972 a new Local Government Act was passed, which, as demonstrated by figure 5, reorganised local government into a more comprehensive system of counties and districts. These authorities officially came into being on the first of April 1974 and a year later in 1975 this two tier structure was also extended to Scotland, with the creation of nine provincial councils, fifty three district councils and three independent all-island authorities (J.P. Mackintosh, page 187, 1982).

Figure 5: Structure of Local Government After 1974 Reorganisation



It is, however, particularly significant that this reorganisation rejected the Redcliffe-Maud Commission's recommendation that local authorities should be based on discernible communities. In this review and reorganisation of local government the key criteria was to develop a system of local government that was administratively efficient. The results of Research Surveys 1967 survey of community opinions and identities had indicated that the sampled communities were far too small to base larger, more administratively efficient authorities upon. This view was supported by contemporary management theory, which promoted the idea that efficiencies came from the creation of large organisations which could benefit from economies of scale, attract higher calibre staff and have access to a greater range of resources. It was noted earlier that this view was supported in government, with the Department for Education arguing that local councils who provided an education service needed to cover an area with a population of between 250,000 - 1,000,000. The recognition of these views and the management theory that supported it, resulted in the creation of large county councils and 'artificial' authorities. These were authorities that were not based on any discernible or recognisable community, but were designed to cover an average population of 500,000 plus, examples of these authorities included Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and Hereford and Worcester. These authorities were also created in the face of opposition from their local communities, indeed many councillors who are currently serving the local communities in Hereford and Worcester still hold strong views that these two counties should never have been united.

A consequence of this review was that in addition to arousing local hostility from some communities, it also resulted in an immediate expansion in the size and scope of local authorities. The new councils had to employ all of the staff and retain all of the resources necessary for the provision of such complex services as housing, education and social services (Newton & Karran, pages 59-64, 1985). This in turn led to local authorities becoming major employers and public spenders, with the result that by 1975 local government accounted for almost 30% of all public expenditure (G.Stoker, page 12, 1988) and employed one in every ten people in full time employment. A consequence of this considerable expansion was that local authorities rationalised their management and committee structures. The process was aided by the report of the 1972 Bains committee,

which offered practical guidance and advice upon the design of new management and committee structures. Whilst this report did not prescribe a single structural model for all authorities, it did advocate the adoption of the theory of corporate management (Butcher et al, page 24, 1990).

The theory was aimed at viewing the management of the activities of the authority as a whole, co-ordinating and integrating resources to produce an overall solution to its problems. In applying this theory to local government the Bains committee advocated the adoption of a more rationalised system of committees and departments. It advised that these committees should be co-ordinated and controlled by a single Policy and Resources Committee and that the work of the various departments should be co-ordinated by a senior level management team. This would be headed by the Chief Executive Officer and consist of all the authority's service directors.

The adoption of this corporate approach to local authority management resulted in local government developing a distinctive organisational culture (G.Stoker, page 12, 1988). It became dominated by professionals and councillors who believed that local services should be planned and determined along corporate lines, and only by the local authority. This created a rather paternalistic culture in which officers and councillors decided what was best for their communities, with limited local consultation.

Therefore, by 1974 a unique and distinct system of local government had emerged. This system was characterised by the fact that:

- it had a definite structure, which had developed from William the Conqueror's Shires and Boroughs, to the Industrial Revolutions Shires, Boroughs, Municipal Corporations, Sanitary Districts and County Boroughs, to a structure of County and District councils;
- its local authorities were democratically elected by their local communities and were responsible within the limitations imposed by Parliament for the protection and care of local residents and the environment.

- it had a distinct culture which assumed the continued planning and provision of local services by local officers and councillors;
- it had the power (again within limitations imposed by Parliament) to levy a local rate.

Thus, by 1974, modern British local government was defined by its strong democratic foundations, its comprehensive and integrated structure of local authorities, and a paternalistic culture in which local councils were the sole providers of a range of public services.

This last belief that local authorities would be the sole providers of local services with continued funding has, however, been challenged over the past ten to twelve years. It is currently argued that local authorities no longer need to be the sole providers of local services but should purchase services from other public, private or voluntary providers. This has had a significant affect upon the County-District structure, designed as it was to facilitate and support local authorities in their role of direct service providers. This chapter will go on to demonstrate that this change from providing services to purchasing them from other public and private organisations (when coupled with other key legislative changes) precipitated the need for the current structural review.

The Development Of The Enabling Council And The Challenge To The Two Tier Structure Of County And District Councils

The enabling council grew out of the idea that local authorities did not have to directly provide all local services from their own resources. Instead they could purchase some services off other public and private bodies, with their primary role becoming one of regulating and supervising the continued provision of these services. It essentially meant that councils enabled others to provide their local services. This idea has been used by both opponents of local government, such as the late Sir Nicholas Ridley, and supporters of local government such as Professor's Michael Clarke and John Stewart.

Sir Nicholas, in a publication for the Centre for Policy Studies (*The Local Right: Enabling Not Providing* 1988), proposed to use the enabling principle to create authorities that did

not provide any major services but merely met once every year to award and review contracts. In contrast to this position Professor's Stewart and Clarke, regarded the enabling council as an opportunity for local authorities to devote less time to the detail of local service provision and more time to focusing on community needs and co-ordinating all available public, private and voluntary resources to meeting these needs.

Whilst this argument over the enabling principle and how it should be applied to local government remains unresolved, there is no dispute over the fact that local authorities have adopted more of an enabling role. Exactly how this change has come about and the reasons why it contributed towards the need for a structural review remain to be explained.

The reasons for this change towards 'enabling' are grounded in a mixture of political ideology and a pragmatic response to the problems that had developed within local government by the late 1970's. Problems emerged soon after the completion of the 1974 reorganisation, when there was a national average rates increase of 30% (D. Mallen & M. Cross, page 60, 1978). The increase was partly due to the costs of reorganisation and also due to the oil led inflation crisis of 1974, which increased wage claims by public sector employees and their powerful trade unions. The early 1970's was in fact a peak time for trade union militancy, as the leaders of organised labour sought to challenge the Conservative Government (BK Lucas & PG Richards, page 240, 1978). Whilst it was the National Union of Mineworkers who were accredited with bringing down Edward Heath's Conservative government, local government had many strong trade unions. These unions varied from the traditional professional unions of the National Union of Teachers to the Transport and General Workers Union, which was only one union that represented local government's many manual workers.

Local government was also faced with a public that had become increasingly more articulate and demanding in their claims for better services (BK Lucas & PG Richards, page 240, 1978). A variety of local pressure groups had emerged by 1974, such as Shelter and local tenants associations, who continued to demand increased spending on local

services. Local government was initially successful in securing this extra money from the Treasury, even to the point that the amount of national grant aid approached twice the revenue obtained from local rates. However, by 1975 it was feared that local government expenditure was out of control consuming 14.9% of Britain's gross domestic expenditure (G.Stoker, page 9, 1988).

When Harold Wilson's Labour government was elected into office in 1975 it claimed to have established a new policy of co-operation with the trade unions, called the social contract, and began attempts to control public expenditure. This was made all the more important by ever increasing inflation and the government's loan from the International Monetary Fund, which had stringent conditions (G. Stoker, page 13, 1988). Local government in particular was targeted by the new Environment Secretary, Anthony Crossland, who declared that as far as local spending was concerned, 'the party was over' (G. Stoker, page 13, 1988). In 1977 the Labour government introduced a new Green Paper on local government expenditure, which proposed new central controls over local spending. It rejected the recommendations of the 1976 report of the Layfield Committee, which had been appointed in 1974 to examine local government finance and expenditure. This committee, which had undertaken one of the most comprehensive reviews of local government finance since 1914, (Burgess & Travers, page 67, 1980) felt that local government's financial crisis stemmed from the existing system whereby authorities received the majority of their finance from central government. This created a confused situation with no clear lines of responsibility or accountability - was local government who spent the money responsible or central government who provided the money? (NP Hepworth, page 77, 1987). This situation was further compounded by both parties apportioning blame to each other.

The Layfield Committee's proposed solution was that this confusion could only be ended if control was either passed entirely to central government or entirely to local government. The committee recommended a transfer to local government with a reform of the rating system and the creation of a new local income tax. It was felt that this could be the only

way to preserve local democracy and make local government clearly responsible and accountable for its expenditure (NP Hepworth, page 287, 1990).

The solution was rejected by the Labour government's Green Paper which recommended the creation of new controls over capital expenditure, the adoption of a unitary grant, and a transfer to capital valuation as the basis for domestic rating (Jones & Stewart, page 30, 1987). These proposals were never introduced and between 1977 and 1979 the relationship between local government, the local trade unions and central government gradually deteriorated. An attempt by the Labour government to impose a 5% norm for wages resulted in the breakdown of the social contract with the trade unions and a rash of strikes (Kavangh, page 130, 1988). The period became one marked by hyper-inflation, low economic growth, formidable trade union power and weak government, culminating in the Winter of Discontent⁴ and the election of the first Thatcher administration in 1979 and the start of the 'Thatcher Years' (Kavangh, page 130, 1988).

The Thatcher Years

The Conservative victory in the 1979 election marked the start of a new political era and the introduction of a political belief system which has been labelled "Thatcherism". This is a difficult concept to define, as it is a curious mixture of pragmatic statecraft policies and New Right values, stamped with the unique style and personality of Margaret Thatcher. A full critique of this phenomena will not be attempted by this chapter, instead it will concentrate upon identifying those core New Right values that provided the ideological basis for Thatcher's (and later Major's) social policies and reforms. These reforms are important because they challenged and altered the basic role, function and responsibilities of the existing system of local government to such a degree, that it eventually prompted a review of the value and relevance of the two tier structure of county and district councils. Essentially these core values consisted of :

⁴ The phrase 'The Winter of Discontent', was actually produced by the Sun newspaper in its coverage of the strikes of 1979

- *A belief in the economic theory of monetarism* and its explanation of inflation, which argued that inflation was caused when the money supply expanded at a greater rate than the supply of goods. The greatest cause of this increase in the money supply, was also identified as the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement or PSBR (Newton & Karran, page 21, 1985), to which local government was a major contributor. Therefore, the Conservative commitment to reducing inflation also required a major reduction on both public spending overall and more specifically in local government expenditure.
- *A belief that the welfare state and its various agencies and bureaucracies needed to be rolled back*, because it was argued that the extended welfare state - which included local authorities - had created too high a degree of dependency and a 'why work' syndrome. That is, it was felt by many Thatcherites that in the 1970's, many manual workers could derive a higher income and standard of living by relying on welfare benefits and the welfare services of local authorities (Kavangh, page 213, 1988). The consequences of this for Conservatives was an important undermining of self reliance and an expectancy that the state would continue to provide, which the state could not continue to do if public spending was to be contained and inflation and taxation were to be reduced (Kavangh, page 212, 1988). Thus, for Thatcherite Conservatives, it was important to reduce the extent and scale of welfare services, which included local authority services.
- *A belief that public bureaucracies were inefficient and ineffective*, because they were dominated by vested and bureaucratic interests and not by the most efficient and effective "mechanism for allocating goods and services" - that is, the free market (Gerry Stoker, 1988, page 225). This complemented the desire for a reduced welfare state and low public expenditure because it actively replaced heavily financed state provision with the independent private sector. Furthermore, it was also regarded as an effective method of breaking the control of vested interests - in the case of local government this was its powerful professions and trade unions. It was felt by Conservatives that these interest groups continually used consumers of their services as bargaining tools to force increased wage claims, which only inflated the cost of the service and public expenditure and hence increased inflation (G.Stoker, page 226, 1988). The consumer, therefore, ended up with an expensive service (which also meant

increased rates), which was inflated by wage claims over which they had no real control. Furthermore, the consumer also had no other choice but accept council services. A situation which for New Right purists could be resolved by breaking this public sector monopoly and introducing the free market (G.Stoker, page 228, 1988). The free market would provide a wider choice of services whose price and quality would be determined not by interested pressure groups, but by the operation of the laws of supply and demand, and the purchasing power of the individual consumer.

The New Right, therefore, challenged the assumption of local authorities that they should continue to directly provide services for their communities with continued expenditure. Instead they proposed to restrict local expenditure, as well as restrict the extent of local service provision and as far as possible to introduce the competitive market, which would expose the true cost of local services (Desmond S. King, page 206, 1988). The practical application of these beliefs to the County-District system of local government, realised itself through two main policy initiatives. The first was a policy of continually restricting local government expenditure, whilst the second concentrated upon restructuring the actual functions and responsibilities of local authorities. This last policy was specifically achieved by central government actually removing local authority functions and passing them to QUANGO's (quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations) or replacing the local authority with a private service provider (Desmond S. King, page 199, 1989). These combined initiatives when coupled with increasing financial controls, resulted in over 143 legislative changes being made to the functions and finance of local government. This occurred over a ten year period from 1980 to 1990, the effect of which was to destabilise the existing structure of local government and contribute towards the need for the current review. This will be demonstrated through a careful examination of these changes - starting with local government finance.

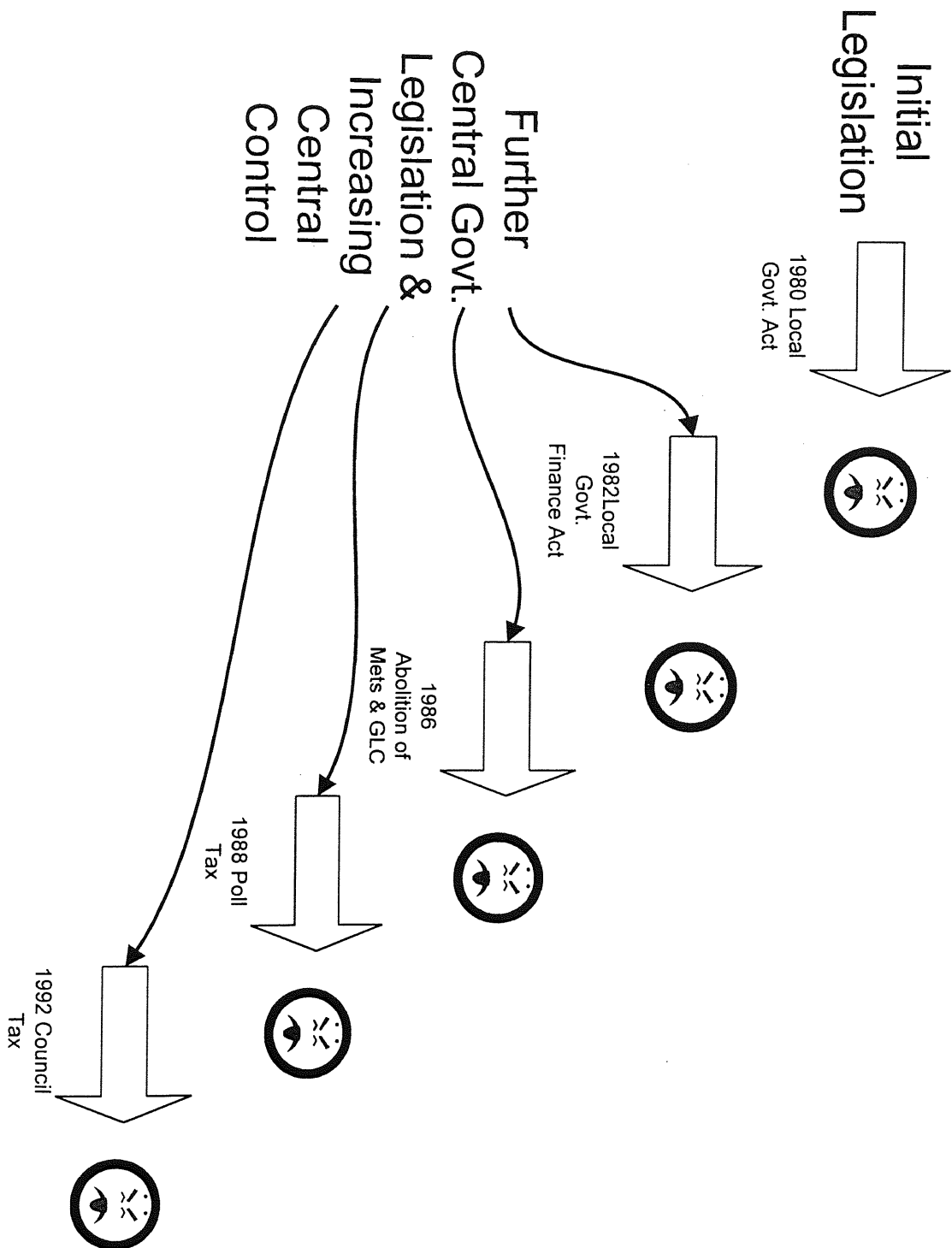
Legislative Changes Within Local Government Finance

The containment of both public and local expenditure was, as already stated, vitally important for reducing inflation and as such prompted increasing central government controls over local spending. This process was started by the 1980 Local Government and

Land Planning Act, which introduced stronger controls within both revenue and capital expenditure. In the revenue component of local spending, the resource element of the Rate Support Grant (RSG) was replaced by the Block Grant. Previously the resource element of the old RSG had ensured that any increase in local authority expenditure was met by a constant increase in the central government grant. This was now stopped and each authority was given an individual spending limit, with any additional expenditure having to be met from rates, which the government felt would be a particularly unpopular move (G. Stoker, page 155, 1988). Further, within capital expenditure the Department of the Environment legislated itself powers which allowed it to specify the level of an authority's capital payments in any one year (although these yearly allocations were also allowed, a 10% carry over from the previous year) (G. Stoker, page 155, 1988). In addition to this, controls were also imposed upon an authority's ability to spend its capital receipts (that is the money from the sale of assets such as council houses) (Ibid).

This legislation was accompanied by cutbacks, with authorities being deprived of £300 million in 1981, (T. Travers from M. Parkinson, page 15, 1987) which produced an angry response from both local authorities and particularly their trade unions. However, motivated by the need to control inflation the traditional method of government compromise and consultation with local government and its trade unions was abandoned in favour of confrontation and continued financial constraint. A process started to emerge whereby legislative action would produce a reaction from local authorities in which they tried to avoid financial cuts and. This led to further legislative action, with each step producing further confrontation and extending central government's influence, as demonstrated by figure 6.

Figure 6 - Central Government Restrictions on Local Government Finance and the Reaction of Local Government



For example, despite these cuts the government still found that there was an increase in local authority spending. The government's estimates for local expenditure for 1981/2 predicted a 5.3% increase above their specified targets (Duncan & Goodwin, page 112, 1988). It appeared that local authorities had reacted to the 1980 Local Government Act and its financial restrictions by increasing local rates, thereby pushing up local spending.

The government reacted to this move by singling out 13 local authorities as overspenders and producing a new piece of legislation - the 1982 Local Government Finance Act⁵ (Duncan & Goodwin, page 116, 1988).

The Act had three basic elements, firstly a power to single out extravagant authorities; secondly, a reserve power to control the spending of all councils; (with District Councils having an annual expenditure of under £10 million being excluded) and thirdly, it established the Audit Commission as an independent body to, "oversee the auditing of local authority finances and encourage value for money from local authorities" (G.Stoker, page 157, 1988). The first two of these controls became known as rate capping, with overspending authorities being penalised by grant withdrawal of between two to four times the overspend. This resulted between 1981 and 1984 in £713 million being held back from local authorities in England (G.Stoker, page 158, 1988). This was directly aimed at authorities, who because of a reduced grant, significantly increased their rates and consequently increased public spending. There was a vociferous reaction to this bill, indeed, the government was forced to abandon its first attempt to introduce this bill in the face of heavy parliamentary opposition and despite revisions it still provoked, "universal condemnation - not least from the government's own supporters on the backbenches and in local government" (Duncan & Goodwin, page 116, 1988). However, the bill still went through the House of Commons, aided by the government's large majority.

⁵In 1981 these 13 authorities were, the GLC, the ILEA, Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Manchester, South Yorkshire and Tyne & Wear (Duncan and Goodwin, page 116, 1988).

Local authorities reacted to this bill in a number of ways, again setting in motion this process of central action - local reaction and further central government action and legislation (as demonstrated by figure 6). In particular the thirteen councils the government had targeted as high spenders reacted by illegally raising their rates. This was followed by the mass resignations of councillors in some authorities and others running up debts (Dunleavy & Rhodes, page 121, 1988). Meanwhile, those councils whose expenditure came near to government targets, reacted by either switching items between capital and revenue accounts, or using 'creative accounting'. Creative accounting involved establishing special reserves of unallocated funds where money had already been raised in local taxes and counted as expenditure and then deploying it against new spending to prevent penalties (Dunleavy & Rhodes, page 121, 1988). Whilst the government could not instantly stop either of these practices they targeted those Labour councils such as the GLC (Greater London Council) and Liverpool City Council, who were continuing to run up debts and setting illegal rates. Despite these authorities continued resistance being backed by the TUC and Labour NEC, the government confronted these authorities and many backed down, apart from Liverpool City Council.

Liverpool was dominated by the hard left Militant tendency, whose initial reaction to the 1982 Local Government Finance Act, was to protest by refusing to reduce expenditure on local services and as a result run up a debt (Blunkett & Jackson, page 156, 1987). Inevitably this resulted in a confrontation with the government, with Liverpool at this stage retaining the support of other Labour authorities, the TUC and the Labour party. Whilst the government had initially reacted by making preparations to take over the council, they eventually granted this authority £8 million of new money and a 17% rate rise (Duncan & Goodwin, page 227, 1988). The Council in 1985 again refused to set a legal rate, but later under pressure did so, but at a level that ensured that the money would run out. This meant that confrontation set in again and this time Liverpool did not receive the support of other Labour councils, or the Labour party who expelled the Militant council members (D.Mallen & M.Cross, pages 74-75, 1987). After six months the situation ended when the workforce refused to support a closure of all but emergency services. The City Council was then immediately taken over by the government, the

councillors banned from public office and surcharged for the city's debts. Despite legal action against this last move by the forty seven surcharged councillors, they were still held liable for the city's debt and consequentially were faced with bankruptcy (D.Mallen & M.Cross, pages 74-75, 1987).

Thus, the government made clear that any reaction against their financial constraints would be met with considerable opposition. This was further demonstrated by the government's reaction to the continued opposition campaigns of other Labour controlled authorities such as the G.L.C. and some metropolitan counties. The government blamed much of the continuing overspend in local expenditure on these large authorities, estimating that their abolition would save up to £1 billion (Butcher et al, page 72, 1990). Furthermore, it was also noted by the government that these large metropolitan authorities only really had three main responsibilities - public transport, a police force and a fire brigade and that all of their other functions were duplicated at the district level, with whom they had (in the government's opinion) not really developed any kind of strategic role or working relationship. Finally, Conservative party Central Office claimed that the abolition of the GLC and the other Metropolitan Counties would lead to on going savings of £120 million per year after transitional costs of £20-£70 million had been paid (Duncan & Goodwin, page 197, 1988, quoting from the Local Government Chronicle 25/7/1983). Therefore, the government concluded that these large counties were, "an unnecessary and superfluous tier of local government", which needed streamlining (S. Leach et al, 1990, page 1).

The government's answer was, in 1983, to introduce the White Paper, 'Streamlining the Cities' (cmd 9063, October 1983), which proposed the abolition of the GLC and all the metropolitan county councils in England. This white paper was implemented (after the Conservatives were re-elected to a second term of office) through the 1984 and 1985 Local Government Acts. This was despite a vociferous and well organised public relations campaign, with consultants, Coopers, Lybrand and Deloitte estimating that such an abolition could actually cost £251 million (S.Leach, page 29, 1990). The campaign also stated that the districts would be placed in an untenable position by forcing them to

provide services for which they had no expertise and could not afford - thereby damaging service provision. Furthermore, it was noted that a public opinion poll conducted by MORI had indicated that the public actually wanted to retain these councils (S.Leach, page 188, 1990). Nevertheless, the government maintained that these councils were inefficient, wasteful and over expensive, and therefore, in 1986 they were abolished.

Therefore, once again within local government finance, there was a pattern of government action, such as rate capping, then a reaction against this by some local authorities maintaining expenditure, then further government action to restrict the most serious overspenders - in this case the GLC and the metropolitan counties. Importantly, this not only restricted local expenditure, but also affected the structure of local government, which for Steve Leach et al (page 1, 1990) actually became destabilised after the abolition of the GLC and the other metropolitan counties. This was because this particular reform implied that county council functions could be undertaken by unitary districts (or joint boards of districts), thereby prompting the ADC to begin a campaign for unitary districts and the abolition of county councils. This was supported by the 'big eleven' district councils (S.Leach et al, 1990, page 2), that is authorities such as Nottingham and Cardiff, which before 1974 had been unitary counties and cities.

Thus, increasing Conservative financial restrictions and particularly the abolition of the GLC and metropolitan counties, had brought into question the need for two tiers of local government. In particular raising the issue of whether single tier, unitary local authorities would be financially more cost effective than a system of County and District Councils. This, therefore, called into question and indeed destabilised this system on financial grounds, but this was not the only effect of this particular piece of legislation. It also caused considerable controversy, especially when the government had to pump large sums of money into London and the other metropolitan districts to maintain service levels (Dunleavy & Rhodes, page 122, 1988). Furthermore, the controversy continued throughout 1986, until in 1988 the government was faced with two important problems.

The first was that councils were using loopholes such as creative accounting and deferred purchase agreements (that is, selling buildings and equipment and then leasing them back), to maintain spending levels. This eventually caused a crisis which forced the release of previously held back capital receipts from, for example, the sale of council houses (Dunleavy & Rhodes, page 121, 1988).

The second problem was that in 1987 Greenwich Borough Council won a court case which led to the grant system, which had been used since 1981, being condemned as unlawful and consequently leading to a questioning of this system (Duncan & Goodwin, page 124, 1988). The government's response was to re-examine this grant system and put into practice a long standing pledge- to replace the rating system, with the 'Poll Tax' or community charge.

The 'Poll Tax', transferred the basis of local rating from property to a flat rate levied on each person, with stress being laid on the individual paying for the services they consumed. It was a regressive tax which caused a storm of protest from the authorities. However, what is most important about this legislation is that it strengthened central government's control over local expenditure. For example, it removed local government's power to raise property taxes from business and commerce with the introduction of the Unified Business Rate (U.B.R). The UBR was a nationwide property tax on all business premises, levied at the same rate in all localities and adjusted for inflation every year. The revenue was then pooled by the DoE who redistributed it on the basis of an area's total population, thereby redistributing finance from industrial inner city areas to heavily populated suburban areas (Dunleavy & Rhodes, page 124, 1988). Furthermore, this principle of redistribution according to population was also to be used to determine the basic element of the block grant, again favouring suburban rather than industrial areas (Ibid). Finally, to aid those councils whose financial resources set against their needs meant that they fell below the national average, a needs element was provided, but under the strict control of central government (Dunleavy & Rhodes, page 124, 1988, see also T.Travers, pages 14-15, 1989).

The government, therefore, reacted to the problems and challenges created by local authorities (in their attempts to avoid increasing financial restrictions) by re-evaluating the grant system and system of local rates. The result was the development of a stricter and more centralised system of control over grant expenditure and business rates. This emphasised figure 6's process of local authority's reactions to government legislation producing an even stronger reaction from the government and greater centralisation. In this instance the Conservatives also believed that the poll tax would, by making the individual directly responsible for their local tax (and not just home owners), prompt the individual into greater participation within local government (N.Ridley, pages 14-15, 1988). In particular, each person would directly feel any increased expenditure and would turn their attention upon the spending levels and service provision of their local councils, becoming more anxious to control these aspects themselves (Ibid). This act certainly stimulated greater activity, but it was directed at central government and resulted in widespread demonstrations and anger. The failure of the poll tax was even accredited as one of the factors that led to the downfall of Margaret Thatcher and to the appointment of John Major (Alderman & Carter, page 126, 1991), who ordered Michael Heseltine to undertake a review of this tax. Whilst the tax was abolished in the April of 1993, it still left important changes, for example, the actual mechanisms of central government's financial control over local government, such as centralisation of the UBR and revisions to the Block Grant, did not alter nor did it effect the governments continuing commitment to reducing local expenditure (see T.Travers from Jones & Stewart 1992).

However, what is particularly interesting is that when Michael Heseltine was reviewing this system of local finance he also felt it necessary to order a review of the structure of local government. He was particularly concerned to establish unitary authorities as had been done in the metropolitan conurbations and London. It was suggested by Heseltine in a speech to the Commons in March 1991 (Hansard 21/3/.91, columns 41-404), that such authorities were potentially more cost effective than two tier authorities. This demonstrated that as the Conservatives increasingly restricted the finance and spending of local authorities, so they increasingly questioned a structure which supported two tiers of local authorities. This stance was supported by the ADC and the 'big eleven' district

councils. These authorities and Michael Heseltine in particular, felt that the unitary concept would reduce bureaucracy, waste, duplication and overall expenditure. Therefore, on financial grounds a review of the structure of local government was justified - but this was not the only justification. The 1980's and early 1990's local government had also witnessed central government restricting the actual responsibilities of local authorities. This again stimulated questions as to whether local government needed two tiers of authorities providing services, or whether with fewer functions, a single unitary authority would be more efficient. Therefore, exactly what were the changes that stimulated this questioning of the structure of local government?

Legislative Changes Within Local Government Service Provision

It was noted earlier that another key feature of the Conservative's legislative reforms of local government was to actually reduce its functions and responsibilities. This was achieved through two methods, the first involved removing functions from local authorities and passing them to non-elected, non-governmental bodies, or QUANGOs. Whilst the second involved the introduction of the free market into local service provision, both of which require careful and detailed examination.

The first of these methods of passing local authority functions to quangos has been pursued with some vigour over the last ten to twelve years. The quango as defined by Patrick Dunleavy and R.A.W. Rhodes is a quasi non-governmental organisation, which is; "not formally part of the public sector; they retain their own systems of control, recruit their staff outside public sector guidelines and cannot be directly controlled by central departments or local councils which fund their activities. They are none the less funded largely or partly by the public sector, and their involvement may be crucial in the pursuit of key public policy initiatives" (Drucker et al. 1998, page 115).

Therefore, instead of using local authorities to provide local services, the government has replaced them by quangos. For example, within housing, district councils are largely being replaced by Housing Associations (HA) as the main providers and landlords of low rent, public sector housing (K.Spencer, page 147, 1992). HAs are good examples of a quango, as they are non-governmental organisations, which are either registered charities or Industrial and Provident Societies, managed and controlled by volunteers. The

volunteers, who cannot be paid by the HA, achieve this control by forming themselves into a management committee, which employs staff to run the HA in the same way that a council employs Housing Officers (Aldbourn Associates 1993). Housing Associations can also be established by local authorities and generally take on an authorities housing stock through a process known as Large Scale Voluntary Transfer, which also has to be approved by the Secretary of State at the DoE and by local tenants through a ballot (K.Spencer, page 153, 1992). However, once this is achieved then the HA becomes the sole landlord of all the housing stock and the sole provider of housing, under the overall supervision of not the local authority, but the centrally funded quango, the Housing Corporation - who become responsible for auditing and monitoring the HA's management and finance (Aldbourn Associates 1993).

Therefore, with Housing Associations increasingly developing the ability to provide social housing and also increasing in numbers (indeed there are now over 2,688 HA's - Local Government Chronicle 27/5/93, page 16) this quango is gradually rolling back the nature and extent of the local authority's role within housing - a process also aided by the large numbers of council house sales since 1981. Furthermore, a similar situation has also been occurring in other local services, particularly in two of the largest and most expensive, that is, education and social services. For example in education, schools are now permitted to opt out of local authority control and become grant maintained. This means that a school instead of receiving its grant from the local education authority, receives it directly from the government. This development has also been aided by the introduction of LMS or Local Management of Schools, where the school's Board of Governors now becomes responsible for all aspects of the school's finance, staffing and management. It essentially becomes a small quango, as it is independent of local and central government and retains its own systems of control (S.Weir, Local Government Chronicle 27/5/1994). In addition to this development, the 1993 Education Act further stipulated that once 75% of a local education authority's pupils are in grant maintained schools, then responsibility for the remaining non-grant maintained schools will pass to another quango, established by central government - the Schools Funding Agency (Choice and Diversity, Cmnd 2021, page 20, July 1992). This coupled with central government control over school's

curriculums, through the national curriculum, is significantly diminishing the role of local authorities within education.

A similar situation has occurred within social services with non-governmental organisations in the form of charities and voluntary associations, being used to care for and support patients being released back into the community. Dunleavy and Rhodes note that these organisations are a key part of the government's 'care in the community policy' (Drucker et al. 1988, page 115). This is achieved by social service departments now having a legal compulsion to consult with their clients and draw upon the available resources from all possible local care/voluntary associations, before directly providing that care themselves (ADC Advice Papers - Social Services, 1992). Thus, in social services the quango in the form of charities and voluntary care groups is being used to replace the services of the local authority and as already noted the results of these moves has been a dramatic increase in the total numbers of quangos. Stuart Weir the editor of "Democratic Audit of the U.K." (a large scale investigation into quangos by the University of Essex) has identified 5,521 executive quangos in operation in the U.K. today (Local Government Chronicle 27/5/94 page 16). This figure rejects the government's assertion that there are only 1,389 such bodies, by listing all non-governmental, independent bodies that provide public services and implement public policies. These include such bodies as Boards of School Governors, Training and Enterprise Councils and Housing Associations, all of which provide aspects of local authority services. This report which dubbed these bodies EGO's or extra governmental organisations, was also very critical of these bodies, because;

- "- only 14% of these EGOs were subject to investigation by any kind of ombudsman.
 - only a third.....are subject to public audit by the National Audit Office or the Audit Commission.
 - only2% observe the government's new open government code of practice.
 - only.....7% are obliged to hold at least one public meeting annually."
- (Local Government Chronicle 27/5/94, page 16).

Therefore, a whole new area of non-democratic and largely unaccountable bodies has arisen to provide such key local services as housing and education. This situation has been heavily criticised by all of the local authority associations and leading academics within

the field of local government, such as professors Stewart and Jones (Local Government Chronicle 18/2/1994). Nevertheless, the use of these quangos to restrict local service provision has continued, aided also by the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering or CCT.

CCT was originally introduced by the 1980 Local Government and Land Planning Act and placed a legal compulsion upon local authorities to enter specific services into the free market (Competing For Quality, page 3, 1991). This involved the local authority firstly producing a detailed description of the service within a contract, then advertising the contract and receiving tenders from all interested companies from both the private and public sectors, before finally awarding the contract according to the criteria of cost and quality (Competing for Quality, page 3, 1991). In this process the authority could only continue to provide the service if the appropriate department formed an 'arms length' trading company (separate from the local authority) and submitted the lowest tender. If the contract was won by the Council's trading company, it would be subject to audit by the DoE, which could actually specify rates of return on all capital employed (Competing for Quality, page 3, 1991). But, if the authority lost the contract then its role became one of supervising and reviewing the performance of the contract, to ensure that the contractor adhered to its regulations and the services statutory requirements. Thus, through CCT, the local authority's role became one of enabling others to provide their services and monitoring this through regular performance reviews.

In 1980 this enabling role only extended as far as new construction, buildings maintenance and highways, but this was later extended by the 1988 Local Government Act to include refuse collection, building and street cleaning, school welfare and catering, ground maintenance, repair and maintenance of vehicles and the management of sports and leisure facilities (K. Walsh, pages 71-72, 1992). This has been extended to a further three areas. These are firstly, Manual and Direct Public Services, which includes such services as the cleaning and maintenance of police vehicles, provision of home to school transport, the management of theatres and arts facilities, provision of library support services and the provision of parking services. Whilst the second area is construction

related services, covering property management and architectural and engineering services. The third and final area is corporate services (K. Walsh, pages 71-72, 1992), which encompasses administrative, legal, personnel and computing services (although, only a percentage of these services will become subject to CCT).

Whilst CCT will now be replaced by the new Labour Government's concept of Best Value, CCT has still affected almost all aspects of local government's service provision, becoming a powerful source of change. Its supporters such as the late Sir Nicholas Ridley (pages 8-9, 1988), argued that the introduction of the free market would break the expensive and inefficient monopolies of the public bureaucracies (in particular the local authority trade unions and professions) and reassert the power of the individual consumer. The consumer would only purchase from those contractors that efficiently and effectively catered for their needs, thereby sharpening service provision and reducing costs. This would also give control over service provision to the consumer (through their purchasing power) and not public bureaucrats. This theory was further based upon the assumption that there would be competition for all local services and that consumers would have full knowledge of all available choices and options. Furthermore, this radical interpretation of the 'enabler' entailed the market testing of every single local authority service. Sir Nicholas's text "Enabling not Providing" (1988), saw the authority of the future as one that only met to award and review contracts.

This interpretation of the enabling authority was, of course, rejected by the local authority associations and such supporters of local government as professors Stewart and Clarke (1990). The marketisation of services was criticised on the grounds that its assumptions of an ideal market did not exist, and that when it came to providing expensive welfare services to the disadvantaged and sometimes disabled, there was not always a competitive market and consumers were not always fully aware of their choices. Instead, they felt that essential social and welfare services should be exempt from CCT, which should instead focus upon such services, as construction, engineering and highways, which already had a market. Clarke and Stewart (1990) felt that applying the enabling principle to these areas could be advantageous, as it would free local authorities from the managerial and financial

commitments of these services, and provide them with more time and resources to focus upon local communities. In particular, councillors and officers could devote more time and resources to assessing community opinions and needs, which could then be fully incorporated into service contracts. This would provide an even stronger role for local authorities as the democratic representatives of their communities and the primary protectors of their welfare. However, whilst this debate and Best Value has added a new dimension to competition in local government, the enabling authority has still become firmly established. It has had a significant impact upon the functions and structure of local authorities, affecting the original purpose of the County-District structure when, in 1974, it was established as the sole and direct provider of all local services. In fact as noted earlier, it was the need to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of this function that led to the creation of two tiers of local authorities. Therefore, against this background of fewer services and no real need for large resource bases, the question soon arose as to whether local government needed two tiers. This was, most interestingly, a question again posed by Michael Heseltine in his March 1991 speech to the House of Commons upon the issue of local government reorganisation (Hansard 21/3/1994, columns 401-404). In addition, to questioning the validity of two tiers upon the grounds of cost, he also felt that fewer local functions and the emergence of the enabler had possibly justified a restructuring and the creation of unitary authorities. In particular he noted how effective a single tier of local government was in London and the metropolitan areas and stated that a review of local government would be instigated to determine whether this structure could be extended to the remainder of England, Scotland and Wales (Hansard 21/3/94, columns 401-404).

Therefore, the legislative changes of four Conservative governments led to a restriction of local expenditure, local functions and the emergence of the enabler, which significantly challenged the existing system of local government. In particular, it challenged and indeed altered the assumptions that local authorities should continue to be the direct providers of local welfare services. The result was a re-questioning of the County-District structure which had been specifically designed to facilitate this role of direct service provision, thereby leading to the current review.

Conclusion

Thus, through this chapter, it has been demonstrated that modern British local government is an institution or set of institutions whose defining characteristics, role and functions have developed historically through successive legislative reforms (rather than being specified within a written constitution). This has resulted in modern British local government developing (through continued Acts of Parliament) an integrated structure of democratically elected, self governing authorities who are responsible for the protection of their residents and local environment, thereby leading to local government having two primary roles. The first is the representation of the community and its interests, whilst the second is the provision of specific local welfare and protection services.

In 1974 when the County-District structure was created, it was envisaged that this second role of service provision would be best achieved by local authorities providing these services directly from their own resources, indeed the existing system of County and District Councils was specifically designed to facilitate this role. Therefore, when succeeding Conservative administrations sought to alter this role by restricting local expenditure, removing specific functions and replacing local provision with the free market, this structure was brought into question. This chapter demonstrated that calls for a structural review could even be traced back to 1987 and 1988, soon after the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. The ADC initially led these calls, which were also repeated in 1989 by the Adam Smith Institute in their paper, "Wiser Counsels: The Reform of Local Government", which argued for slimmed down, single tier authorities. This was accompanied, on the 14th of June 1989, by Edward Leigh MP, introducing a Ten Minute Rule Bill to create unitary authorities in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but it was opposed by the government. The then Secretary of State at the DoE, Chris Patten, stated that local government needed another review, "like we need a hole in the head" (ACC Conference 1989) - but this opinion soon changed with the downfall of Mrs Thatcher.

Michael Heseltine the Environment Secretary in John Major's new Cabinet, extended his remit to review the poll tax, to also include a structural review of local government. Heseltine, in his speech to the Commons in which he introduced this review (Hansard 21/3/1991, columns 401-404) argued that on financial grounds and owing to the important functional changes in local government (in particular the introduction of the enabling authority) local government needed a review of its two tier structure. Furthermore, he stated that the aim of this review would be to examine the feasibility of introducing the authorities that were already in existence in London and the metropolitan areas, that is, unitary authorities.

Heseltine's statement not only exemplifies how financial and functional changes created pressure within local government for a review, but also further demonstrates how it is the legislative actions of governments and Parliament that continue to define the structure and functions of local government. This reorganisation and Heseltine's March speech which started it, will now be examined by chapter 3, which will concentrate upon describing exactly how the review developed and how the key concept of the community came to be introduced.

CHAPTER THREE: THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW - ITS BEGINNINGS AND THE INTRODUCTION OF THE COMMUNITY

Chapter 2 has demonstrated that it was the significant changes that occurred within local government during the 1980s and early 1990s that contributed towards the Conservative government's belief that the two tier structure of county and district councils should be replaced by unitary authorities and (needed to be reviewed).

Therefore, the next important step for this thesis, is to explain how the local government review developed this initial belief and idea into a nationwide reorganisation which introduced 96 new unitary authorities. This chapter will also explain how and why the concept of the community was introduced.

The debate about whether the structural reorganisation of local government should proceed actually began in December 1990. It was in fact, on the 5th December 1990 (ADC Circular 5/12/1990) that the newly appointed Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine first announced that he was reviewing the 'Poll Tax'. It was also at this time that he announced that he was considering a wider review of the functions, role, management and most importantly the structure of local government. This initiated a debate in which the arguments for a structural review and possible reorganisation of all county and district councils gathered strength. It also initiated a debate in which the concept of the community was introduced as a factor that should guide and influence the outcome of this review, and the decision as to whether to introduce new unitary councils.

This debate was perhaps best exemplified by the statements and discussion documents released in the December 1990 and January 1991 by the two local government associations most affected by this change the Association of District Councils (ADC) and the Association of County Councils (ACC).

The ADC and the ACC broadly agreed that a reorganisation of local government could be used to strengthen local democracy and enhance the role of local communities. It was agreed that such a review could ensure that local government remained an "integral part of

a healthy participative democracy" (ADC March 1991) bringing "diversity, pluralism and decentralisation to government" (ACC Feb. 1991). However, their first comments on the type of structure that could support this move differed dramatically, the ADC wanted unitary districts, whilst the ACC wanted either the status quo or to mix this with unitary counties. The actual arguments behind these cases are worth briefly exploring, as they represented the first detailed arguments for reviewing the structure of local government and included the concept of the community within this process.

THE ADC and STRUCTURAL REFORM

The ADC's argument for unitary districts was derived from their document, 'Closer To The People', which first appeared in 1981, but was revised in 1987 and again in December 1990, to take into account Heseltine's statement to the House of Commons. It essentially began by advocating;

"the creation of a single tier structure of most purpose district based authorities in the shire areas, along the lines introduced elsewhere in the country following the abolition of the Greater London Council and the Metropolitan County Councils". (1990, page 2).

This was justified on the grounds that it was only unitary districts that could actually strengthen local democracy and local government, by acting as;

"vehicles for its community to govern itself - thereby maximising their position as units of local government rather than local administration". (1990, page 8).

Therefore, for the ADC, the concept of the community and the need to create a unitary system of community government was an important reason for their support of a large scale structural reorganisation. However, the question arises as to exactly how the ADC justified this position and the importance of the concept of the community?

The answer to this question, lies initially in the ADC's envisaged role for local government. This was as an enabler, whose primary role was the empowerment of its community to create a stronger system of local democracy. This conception of enabling was similar to the work of professors Michael Clarke and John Stewart as exemplified by their document "The Enabling Council" (Local Government Training Board 1988). In this document, Professors Clarke and Stewart initially agreed with the government that in its

most basic form, the enabling authority was one that did not directly provide all local services, instead it co-ordinates and regulates the work of other public, private and voluntary bodies to enable them to provide local services. However, Professors Clarke and Stewart differed from the government's view of enabling in that they saw this innovation as potentially expanding the role of local government. The enabling authority, by being freed from the necessity to directly provide services could devote more time and resources to the local community, with its main focus of activity being the assessment of community needs and interests. These specific needs and interests could then be satisfied by the authority working more closely with local agencies in and around the community. This, therefore, gave the enabler an important role as a co-ordinator, bringing together and distributing all of a community's available resources. Thus, for professors Clarke and Stewart - and also the ADC - it appeared that the introduction of the enabler had the potential to create a system of local government that was strongly based upon and centred around its local community. This consequently made the community an important concept for the ADC and its plans for the reorganisation of local government which, unsurprisingly involved the creation of unitary districts.

The ADC felt that the unitary district was the only solution because the existing system with its County Councils had two important deficiencies that prevented it from being an effective form of community based local government, and an effective enabler. The first was that the existing County-District structure and its division of functions between two tiers led to the unnecessary duplication of some functions such as tourism, which led to unnecessary bureaucracy, costs and an important lack of co-ordination. For example the ADC felt that effective economic development was hampered because;

"it requires an integrated approach involving planning, transport, environmental improvement, housing, social services and education". (1990, paragraph 2.4, page 3).

These services were split between two tiers, thereby preventing the provision of an effective and co-ordinated service. This led for the ADC to the second deficiency of this system - that is, it created too much confusion, especially within local communities. This consequently made local government inaccessible and unaccountable, and prevented effective community participation and a proper assessment of community needs.

Therefore, the ADC concluded that under the present system, in addition to local authorities being ineffective co-ordinators and enablers, their local communities were too distant from the local Government, especially the counties which the ADC saw as particularly remote and inaccessible. Commenting that;

"on matters such as social services, roads, traffic management and the libraries the public instinctively turns to the members and officers of their district council for help". (1990, page 3).

Therefore, for the ADC, if authorities were to be effective sources of community government, then they needed a structure that did away with the existing division and duplication of functions and that was easier for local people to understand, gain access to and participate within. The answer was to initially create the unitary authority that centralised all local services in one body and then to retain the District Council as that unitary body. The ADC stated that it was the district and not the county council that was closer to its local community and hence more accessible, accountable and a better source of 'community government'. Therefore, for the ADC, the unitary district was justified on the grounds that it would facilitate greater community participation and secure a stronger, more participative form of community government and hence a stronger system of local democracy. The end result of which, was that the concept of an existing and identifiable community, upon which new unitary councils could be based, became central to the ADC's case for structural reform. This situation was also true for the ACC, who again used the community to justify their specific case for restructuring.

THE ACC and STRUCTURAL REFORM

In contrast to the ADC, the ACC were not enthusiastic advocates of unitary local government - especially not of unitary districts! The association's basic premise as contained in their document, "The Strengths of the Counties" (ACC Dec. 1990) was that enhancing local democracy could not be achieved by simply creating unitary local government. It required first and foremost a thorough debate on role and functions, this should then be followed by a definition of these factors and finally a restructuring, which the ACC felt may not be entirely necessary in all areas. Unsurprisingly, it was their belief

that once the role and functions of local government were properly defined, county based government would be the best solution. This, therefore, required either unitary county councils or the retention of two tiers or a mixture of these two systems. The ACC's justification for this position was derived from what they saw as four qualities of county government and "four key criteria for good local government" (ACC Dec 1990, page 2) three of which utilised the concept of community. These criteria were:

i) Service Quality And Effectiveness. This was regarded by the ACC as particularly important, as one of local government's key roles was to ensure that effective and good quality services were provided to the community. This was something that the ADC felt that county councils could not do, because of their large size, which made them remote and unresponsive. The ACC countered this by stating that they were in fact closer to local communities than districts, because through schools, libraries and care homes, as well as the work of trading standards officers and social workers (amongst others), they had greater contact with their communities. Moreover, because of the services they provided the counties constantly had to be aware of community needs, interests and problems. Furthermore the ACC also asserted that the size of counties meant that they could uniquely satisfy these needs by combining the advantages of economies of scale and strategic planning with their commitment to enabling. The ACC particularly felt that the increased size of the counties meant that they were better enablers than districts, because they were not restricted by a 'small scale, parochial outlook' and could draw upon a wider range of public, private and voluntary resources, than a smaller district (ACC Dec.1990, page 3). Thus, for the ACC, the size of counties meant that their members were better able to provide high quality, effective services determined by the local community and its needs. This consequently introduced and established the concept of an identifiable community as an important justification for this aspect of county government and good local government.

ii) Enhancing Accountability. This second argument for county government again utilised the concept of community, but in this instance the ACC used it to demonstrate that county

government was highly and directly accountable to its communities and hence fulfilling an important role in enhancing local democracy. In proving this point the ACC pointed to; "Regular elections, the widespread use of councillors surgeries, increasing use of market research, the conduct of business in public, improved publicity by county councils, regular press coverage, the work of the Audit Commission and the facility to complain directly to the Local Government Ombudsman".(ACC Dec.1990, page 3).

The ACC noted that the abolition of county government and the creation of joint boards would jeopardise all of this, as these joint boards would not be directly elected by local people¹ and would therefore, generate problems of accountability. Local communities would therefore, be unable to identify the service provider. The ACC also highlighted research by INLOGOV into the abolition of the metropolitan county councils to support their claim (ACC Dec.1990, page 8). Thus for the ACC, county government's second important contribution to local democracy was the fact that it remained accountable to its local communities. Thus, retaining the idea that existing and identifiable communities existed and were central to the development of an accountable and effective system of local government.

iii) A Sense Of Place and Identity. The ACC explicitly stated that the structure of local government, "must be understandable. It must respect a community's sense of place and recognise the loyalties associated with it". (ACC Dec.1990, page 10). This was something that the ACC felt that counties could achieve better than districts, because they have a, "unique history, culture and acceptability with which people identify". (ACC Dec.1990, page 10). In particular the ACC quoted a Daily Telegraph opinion survey from October 1990 as proving that, "60% of the general public want county councils to be retained, with 15% undecided or with no view one way or another". (ACC Dec.1990, page 10). The ACC further asserted that this view and the place of the counties, was also recognised by private enterprise and voluntary organisations. The ACC noted that Training and Enterprise Councils had used county rather than district council boundaries, because they related to an, "identifiable social and economic community" (ACC Dec.1990, page 10), as

¹Instead they would consist of councillors elected by and accountable to their peers rather than directly elected by local residents - the democratic cornerstone of local government.

compared to districts which the ACC noted were (in many but not all cases) artificial creations from 1974, resulting from the amalgamation of old rural and urban councils that had never lost their traditional identities and rivalries. Thus, for the ACC these authorities lacked a sense of community and as a result, they felt that these authorities' decisions were dominated by the factions of the old communities and were based upon 'parochial advocacy', rather than the "proper assessment of needs and detached decisions" (ACC Dec 1990, page 10) that were undertaken by county councils.

Therefore, for the ACC, counties had a definite advantage, in that they best reflected the existing community identities and loyalties and their local areas or localities without bias, and would thus, form the best basis for responsive, community based local government.

iv) Reducing Bureaucracy and Costs. This criteria unlike the others it did not use the concept of community, thereby demonstrating that other factors were equally significant within restructuring, especially that of reducing bureaucracy and costs. This was important, because the ACC now explicitly recognised that reorganisation needed to be based upon something more than such a vague concept as the community. The ACC felt that county government would achieve financial savings, because unlike districts its size meant that it could achieve economies of scale, avoid duplication of services, provide specialist expensive services and use big business techniques to attract and retain high quality staff.

Therefore, whilst the ACC's first detailed statement on restructuring contained important reservations, particularly that it should only be conducted after the functions and role of local government had been defined and may not be necessary for all authorities, it was still a valuable, initial comment on restructuring. Particularly in the way it based three of its four arguments for county government upon the existence of an identifiable community, thereby introducing this concept as an important factor in considering the case for structural change. This was an emphasis that was also repeated by the ADC, who despite their differences with the ACC conveyed the same message - that the concept of community was important to the structural review - although they used it to draw different

conclusions. This also meant that several important assumptions were made about this concept, namely that restructuring around communities would enhance local democracy and that the practical measurement and identification of this concept was possible. This was also a message which, under instruction from the associations, was repeated by their individual county and district council members (this will be discussed in chapter 6).

In the meantime, the Environment Secretary and his advisors made their deliberations behind closed doors at the DoE, eventually reaching a conclusion in the March of 1991. This was communicated to the House of Commons by Michael Heseltine on the 21st of March (Hansard 21/3/1991, columns 401-404), when he declared that the government had found an alternative to the poll tax and would definitely be extending its review to the structure of local government

March 1991: The Government's First Commitment To Reorganisation

This speech made three important announcements, the first was that the government's alternative to the poll tax, was to be the council tax, which would consist of a single bill based upon the number of adults in the property and its value. The second was that the review would also encompass the internal management of local authorities, in particular investigating alternatives to the existing committee system that could accommodate local government's new enabling role. Whilst the third and most important announcement for this thesis, was that the government would definitely be reviewing the two tier structure of local authorities in Wales, Scotland and England. The primary aim of this review would be to determine whether the existing two tier structure could be replaced by a system of single tier, all purpose unitary authorities, as had been established in London and the metropolitan conurbations (when the Greater London Council and the metropolitan County Councils were abolished in 1986 Hansard 21/3/1991, columns 410-404). Mr Heseltine also went on to state that since these authorities had been abolished and their boroughs and districts established as unitary councils, there had been little demand for their restoration. Further noting that "it was difficult...to perceive any real role that they (the old counties) played" (Hansard 21/3/1991, columns 401-404). However, this belief in unitary local government was not the only reason that Heseltine advocated for

restructuring local government. It was also noted that some of the district and county councils created in 1974 had not succeeded in "inspiring local loyalty" (March 1991, page 2) and should be reorganised to reflect existing community identities. This, therefore, introduced the concept of community as a reason for reform, which was further reinforced when Heseltine proposed the method that this reform should take. It was stated that it would not involve nationally imposing a predetermined pattern. Instead whether an area would be restructured and the type of restructuring required, would depend upon local views, local conditions and local communities, with Heseltine stating that "local people should have an important role" in influencing this process (Hansard 21/3/1991, columns 401-404).

Heseltine's speech therefore, marked the introduction of the concept of the community to the review. It was both a reason for a structural review (in addition to the preference for unitary local government) and a factor that would potentially have an important degree of influence. The concept of community identity and local people's views would help to determine whether reorganisation should take place and what its outcome should be. This also meant carrying through into this reorganisation those earlier assumptions about this concept. That is, communities existed, with their own specific identities and localities which could be measured and should be used to determine the future structure of local government. However, at this point no details were provided on how this concept would be introduced to the process of reorganisation. This was left to the consultation paper, "The Structure Of Local Government in England" (DoE April 1991).

April 1991: The Structure Of Local Government In England A Consultation Paper

This paper was in fact one of three that were released during the spring and summer of 1991 and as with its sister publications on Finance (DoE April 1991) and Internal Management (DoE April 1991), it provided the first description of the government's specific aims and proposals regarding this review. The consultation paper on restructuring explained why the government thought reorganisation was necessary, the benefits that it could bring to local government and the process by which this change would be conducted. It was significant that all of these issues at some point, referred to and utilised

the concept of the community. However, before starting the analysis of these arguments, it is necessary to point out that this paper dealt only with England. In Wales and Scotland the responsibility for restructuring lay entirely with their respective Secretaries of State and as such outside of the remit of the DoE. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that this paper refers only to county and district councils in England.

The first time these concepts were mentioned was on page 5 of this consultation paper, when they were used to support the government's case for restructuring (DoE April 1991). It was stated that this reorganisation was designed to move towards unitary local government and should reflect local government's move from direct service provision towards enabling. That is, from directly providing all services towards enabling their provision by other public, private and voluntary bodies. The consultation paper noted that three important improvements could be made to the existing structure to enhance and recognise this role.

The first two improvements concentrated upon costs and service delivery, noting that the division of local services between two tiers led to the duplication of some services such as economic development, which increased bureaucracy and costs. It was also noted that in other areas this division of services led to a lack of co-ordination, with the paper quoting litter clearance and street cleaning, as well as social services and housing as examples (DoE April 1991, page 5). It was further stated that this lack of co-ordination created tension between the counties and districts and when this was combined with the existing duplication it led to public confusion. In particular local communities were unable to determine which tier provided a specific service and were therefore, unable to either participate within or properly hold an authority to account. Therefore, the concept of the community and the accountability of local government to its community became gradually introduced and utilised as an important factor in creating a more cost-effective, accountable and participative system of unitary local government. The concept of the community was also further developed as an important justification for reorganisation in the third and final area in which change was regarded as having the potential to improve

local government. This was in those authorities created in 1974 that, "have never been wholly accepted by the communities they serve" (DoE April 1991, page 5).

It was the opinion of this consultation paper that the reorganisation of 1974 had disregarded established traditions, histories and communities. It had, therefore, created authorities that neither inspired local loyalty nor won their communities respect, which for the consultation paper was something that had to be improved if local democracy was to be enhanced and community orientated government created. This, therefore led, the government to introduce the concept of community identity as a factor that justified this reorganisation and that should influence and shape the creation of new unitary authorities.

Thus, community identity became more than just a reason for a structural review, it also became a factor that should influence and determine its outcome. In this consultation paper the government concluded that community based, unitary authorities that reflected existing traditions, histories and community loyalties would increase, "interest in local affairs" and make "for more responsive and representative local government" (DoE April 1991, page 6). This specific use of community was also reinforced by the final section of the consultation paper which explained how the review would be conducted.

The final section, in line with Heseltine's earlier March statement, repeated the decision that whilst the ultimate aim of this review would be to create unitary local government, it did not mean the imposition of a predetermined pattern (DoE, April 1991, page 9). In fact, it was acknowledged that, this review would not necessarily result in the creation of unitary authorities for all areas. The reason for this was that the consultation paper proposed the creation of an independent Commission that would undertake an individual review of every county area, according to a timetable devised by the DoE. The Commission would then make a recommendation taking into account, "known community loyalties and local opinion" (DoE April 1991, page 8), derived from local consultation. An initial recommendation would be made, on which local authorities and other interested parties would be allowed to comment and submit their own proposals. This would, therefore, result in a final recommendation which would be suited to the

specific local conditions and views of each area and its communities. This emphasis on local views was further reinforced by the consultation paper's statement that where unitary authorities were established, it was not expected that they would be a specific size (DoE April 1991, page 9). Instead, this issue would be determined by local circumstances, thereby, also indicating that a community and the local area it covered could be an important factor in shaping the actual boundaries and size of new unitary authorities. However, it is also important to note that community identity and history were not the only factors that were to influence the Commission's recommendations, as the consultation paper stated that the Commission's proposals should be "worthwhile and cost effective" (DoE April 1991, page 9), also taking into account:

- long term costs and benefits;
- transitional costs;
- service arrangements;
- asset and staff requirements;
- plans for contracting out services;
- proposals to enhance the role of parishes;
- proposals for handling the functions or specialised facilities across an area wider than the authority (if appropriate) (DoE April 1991, page 9).

The point was also reinforced that the community was not to be the only factor in determining whether restructuring should take place. However, it is still important that (unlike the reorganisation of 1974) this consultation paper made the important steps of actually introducing the community as a primary factor with a valuable role to play. In the process also carrying through the key assumption that the community did exist, that it had a specific local area or locality, which could be practically identified and should be applied to this restructuring. It was however, still early days within the review and the development of community as a definite and practical measure was something that only really occurred over the following twelve to fourteen months. This was when the review and the concept of the community developed from a vague influence into a strong factor which was to influence reorganisation.

July 1991 - July 1992 The Consultation Period And The Development Of The Review

The twelve month period from July 1991 to July 1992 witnessed 1700 responses to the consultation paper, a general election, the release of a draft guidance on review procedure and three DoE commissioned research projects into the concept of the community, all of which eventually contributed to the DoE's final guidance and terms of reference for the Local Government Commission. This, therefore, means that all of this work needs careful examination, paying particular attention to the manner in which the concept of the community became introduced and developed as a significant and useful factor. A good starting point for this analysis will be some but not all of the responses to the consultation paper, of special importance will be the responses of the two main local authority associations most affected by this change, that is, the ADC and the ACC.

June 1991: Responses Of The ADC And The ACC

The official responses from the ADC and the ACC essentially restated the arguments and positions from their earlier statements. The ADC drew heavily upon their case for unitary district councils, as stated in "Closer to the People" (ADC Dec. 1990), whilst the ACC utilised their paper "Strengths of the Counties" (ACC Dec. 1990), to support their proposal for County based local government. This meant that the ADC in particular, were very enthusiastic in their support for the DoE's consultation paper and its proposal to create unitary authorities, welcoming the government's "clear support for a move towards a structure of local government based upon a single tier" and, "the recognition of the improvements this can deliver for accountability, cost effectiveness and democracy". (ADC June 1991, page 1).

The ADC also went on to support the use of the concept of the community and community identity in influencing this move towards unitary local government and used their arguments in "Closer to the People" (ADC Dec.1990), to advocate their belief that this would result in unitary districts. It was stated in their official response that:

"the objective of local government based upon communities with which people identify could not be secured on the basis of the inevitably much larger geographical areas covered by county councils, whose county and shire halls are inevitably perceived as remote". (ADC June 1991, page 1).

This support for the inclusion of community as a key influence within restructuring, also meant that the ADC supported the DoE's proposal to conduct reviews of individual areas. The ADC particularly supported the proposal of creating an independent commission that would consult widely with local people and take into account local conditions and views. However, the ADC did express reservations that a sequential area by area review could create too much uncertainty and could possibly break down. Furthermore they also noted that the identification of community identities could be a problematical, lengthy process open to undue influence by expensive PR campaigns, a situation which the ADC felt could be easily avoided by simply creating unitary districts! (ADC June 1991, page 2). However, despite these reservations the ADC felt that as long as the government kept control over these factors the review should go ahead as proposed in the consultation paper, with it being firmly grounded on local conceptions of community identity rather than costs.

The ACC were, however, less supportive in its official response to the DoE consultation paper which expressed strong reservations, initially declaring that "local government structure is not an end in itself" (ACC June 1991, paragraph 2). Instead, they felt that this change should only be undertaken after the role and functions of local government had been defined, which was a restatement of their earlier reaction to the review, in the December of 1990. The ACC particularly stressed that any review of the structure of local government should not be undertaken lightly nor without extensive research and debate. The association was critical of what they felt was the consultation papers lack of debate, stating that it did not make out a case for structural change, nor did it contain;

"an adequate empirical analysis of the relative merits of two tier and unitary systems. It merely asserts that the unitary principle was better" (ACC June 1991, paragraph 5).

The idea that the unitary principle was a better option was not acceptable to the ACC nor was the further assertion that the unitary districts in London and the metropolitan areas were a model for change. However, this did not mean that the ACC was completely opposed to the consultation paper and the structural review. Instead they felt that it required a more thorough debate, which should be as open as possible and should be prepared to accept that the status quo may be more preferable in some areas. A

consequence of which was that the ACC also supported the review being conducted on an area by area basis by an independent commission, taking careful account of local conditions and in particular the factors of:

- " * history, tradition, continuity, stability;
 - * identity with local community "
- (ACC June 1991, paragraph 12)

The ACC from their previous arguments in "Strengths of the Counties" (ACC Dec.1990), felt that these factors would validate County government, with most counties regarded as having strong histories and traditional community affiliations. However, the ACC also felt that the review should be enlarged to also consider the factors of:

- " * cost effective service delivery through a variety of means
 - * best use of scarce resources through strategic planning and monitoring
 - * broad base of resources; political, management and technical
 - * flexibility to permit change and development in local authority activity
 - * credibility with other agencies and commercial organisations".
- (ACC June 1991, paragraph 12).

The ACC felt that the sole concentration upon the concept of the community could create difficulties, especially if the independent Commission's considerations were initially based upon these factors, as they were too;

"random and capricious and in many cases unlikely to produce a proposal that would stand up to serious examination". (ACC June 1991, paragraph 16).

Instead, the ACC felt that the independent Commission's initial decisions should be based initially upon the views of local authorities and bodies such as the Audit Commission, taking into account a wide range of factors, before embarking upon local consultation and a consideration of local opinions and identities. Therefore, with these reservations the ACC supported a structural review, which like the ADC, they felt should be based upon a consideration of the community, but unlike the ADC, the ACC also felt that it should be expanded to include other factors such as costs and arrangements for service delivery. However, despite the inclusion of other factors, the ACC did agree that the review should be conducted by an independent Commission, examining individual areas to ascertain local opinions, views and identities, which should influence the review process. However,

neither the ACC nor the ADC stated exactly how community identities could be identified, instead it was more a case of using these factors to justify their individual cases for unitary districts and county based local government. Nevertheless, the full effect of these stances was to push the community firmly on to the agenda of structural reorganisation.

The emphasis upon the community was further reinforced by the build up to the general election of April 1992 and the reaction of the two main opposition parties towards local government reform, as in their election manifestos both the Labour party and the Liberal-Democrats, appeared to be in general agreement that;

"two tiers of county and district councils are inappropriate and should generally be replaced by unitary authorities" (Local Government Management Board LGMB July 1991, page 3).

Furthermore, it was also felt by both opposition parties, that there should be flexibility as to the size of these new authorities to take into account "geographical variations and historic communities" (LGMB July 1991, page 3). This support for local variations and identities was further reinforced by the Labour party's support for unitary authorities that would not be a 'uniform structure'. Instead they would consist of an amalgamation of counties and districts, which would be determined entirely by local circumstances. Similarly the Liberal Democrats also stated that unitaries were preferred and that these should be shaped by local conditions and 'local communities'. The last two concepts were particularly important to the Liberal Democrats as they were committed to the principle of subsidiarity, and the devolvement of decision making to the local community. In particular, the Liberal Democrats felt that power should originate from the community and the lower tiers of government and move up to its higher tiers, rather than "residing in the centre and being allowed to trickle down" (LGMB July 1991, page 13). Therefore establishing local authorities upon identifiable communities was important to both the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party, the latter also advocated the creation of other tiers of government - namely regions and assemblies for Scotland and Wales. However, it was at this point any agreement between the two parties vanished, as they developed different roles and functions for their unitary local councils and regional authorities.

Nevertheless a general consensus existed that unitary authorities were the way forward and that they should be based upon recognised communities, embodying their identities and responding to their needs and interests. This commitment was maintained by these parties right up until the general election of April 1992.

Therefore, it appeared that in the summer months after the release of the DoE's consultation paper on the structure of local government, a fragile consensus was emerging. It was based upon a shared belief that an examination of the two tier structure of local government was required. Furthermore, that this examination should take into account established community identities, developing new structures, wherever possible, around these factors. However, it was at this point that the consensus ended, with the ADC, ACC and the main opposition parties having their own ideas about how local government should actually be restructured and develop.

It was, therefore, against this background that the DoE commissioned three research projects into investigating methods of identifying and assessing communities and their local areas. The projects involved:

- Alan Hedges and John Kelly examining factors that influenced and stimulated a sense of community;
- University of Newcastle's Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, investigating whether a geographic information system could be used to identify the spatial boundaries of communities; and,
- CSL consultants assessing the methods that the independent Commission could use to evaluate the costs and benefits of change, which included research into such intangible factors as community identity and democracy.

This, therefore, established communities and their local areas as factors that required further research and consideration. This was reinforced by the release of a draft guidance paper on the review (DoE Nov. 1991), which for the first time described in more detail the factors that would influence each review - the first of which was the concept of community.

November 1991: Draft Guidance To The Local Government Commission

The guidance paper began by stating that "local authority areas should be based upon communities" (DoE Nov. 1991, paragraph 3) and that this should be an objective of the Commission's restructuring. It was acknowledged that this potentially meant combining communities and it was stated that this should be 'sensible and cohesive', providing arrangements for delivering local services that "secure an effective response to community requirements" (DoE Nov. 1991, paragraph 3). Whilst this was similar to the earlier consultation paper on structure in its emphasis of applying the concept of the community this guidance paper was important because for the first time it suggested a practical method of assessing and applying this concept. In particular, it described four main factors that could be used for identifying communities which included:

- " - people's expressed preferences
- people's work, shopping and leisure patterns
- topography and geography
- the history of an area". (DoE Nov. 1991, paragraph 3)

It was then recommended that the independent Commission should combine these factors with their personal judgement to produce a "pattern of community identities" (DoE Nov. 1991, paragraph 4). That is, local areas of identity and belonging determined by people's preferences and travel patterns, as well as established histories and topographical and geographical characteristics. The paper also noted that these patterns would usually be circles, formed around a focal point and widening out, with the strongest association and sense of community being at the centre of the circle and weakening as it expanded and finally running out at the circle's furthest point and the communities geographical boundary. Therefore the paper also advised that the strength of community and association should be taken into account when identifying patterns of community identity. The paper finally recommended that these patterns should be compared against other proposals from "authorities, other organisations or individuals" (DoE Nov. 1991, paragraph 4), to produce an area for a local authority.

Thus, for the first time, the paper expanded upon earlier statements on the community by explaining how this concept was to be practically measured and applied to this

restructuring, in the process providing an important insight into which factors were felt to identify local communities. The factors included work, shopping and leisure patterns, along with established histories, geography and topography. It was felt that these factors would produce circles of community which the Commission could then use to make more definite boundaries, after a comparison with proposals from other local authorities and local bodies. This also indicated that this method of evaluating communities was a subjective process, limited to specific areas at specific times. However, in using this element of judgement the paper stated that any possible change should be worthwhile and cost effective and involve balancing the community against other considerations. These were:

- *size*, whilst this paper repeated assumptions from earlier statements and the consultation paper that there was no maximum or minimum size for a new authority, it also asserted that any new authorities had to be large enough to be financially viable. That is, they had to be of a size and character that provided a stable grant and tax base and an adequate basis for providing reliable and consistent information for financing arrangements, such as assessments for spending needs. It was also acknowledged that whilst the new enabling unitary authority would not have to provide all services, it should be large enough to effectively provide such emergency services as a fire brigade and police force. However, it was not stated what would happen when patterns of community were either too large or too small to fit the government's ideal size, or even what that ideal size was.
- *cost*, this guidance paper also asserted that this change must be cost effective. The independent Commission were particularly instructed to estimate:
 - ⇒ the transitional costs of any change;
 - ⇒ subsequent running costs;
 - ⇒ long term benefits in terms of savings and non-monetary benefits such as quality improvements.

The paper further stated that a consistent methodology for assessing costs would be released at a later date. This, therefore, indicated that finance and cost effectiveness were equally as important as the concept of the community and a balance between the two

would need to be achieved. However, despite this last reservation, what this guidance paper did achieve, was to ensure that the community developed as an equally significant factor to those of cost and efficiency. It was still significant that even at this stage there was no consistent methodology on how the community and other factors, such as finance, could be measured and applied. This came later after the DoE had digested the results of its three main research programmes.

RESULTS OF DoE RESEARCH: FEBRUARY 1992

The first of these reports was Hedges and Kelly's (1992) study into the concept of the community, and was specifically commissioned to examine two key areas. The first was an examination of those factors and influences that shaped people's conception of community identity. The second was to compare any existing identities and their local areas against the boundaries of local authorities and those areas where people worked, shopped and spent their leisure time. These objectives were achieved by Hedges and Kelly surveying ten main locations throughout the country which varied between regions and encompassed small rural and large urban communities, new and historic towns as well as areas which were and were not radically affected by the reorganisation of 1974. The data from these areas was then collected through twenty group discussions involving one hundred and twenty six people, selected through quota sampling designed to take into account different demographic groups and different degrees of personal mobility.

The main results of this survey were that there was no single and fixed idea of what a community was, as it differed not only between areas, but also between individuals. Furthermore, of the individuals surveyed, they generally had no preconceived idea of the territory and community they belonged to, and needed to talk it through. When they had talked it through, Hedges and Kelly, noted that two conceptions of community emerged. The first was the 'real community', that is the immediate local area within which individuals lived on a day to day basis, whilst the second was a 'conceptual community'. This last sense of community was a perceived image that individuals carried around with them and prompted Hedges and Kelly to state that "community was a conceptual entity with a name" (1992, page 4). It was noted that conceptions of community were

determined by the interaction and overlaying of a series of mental maps, which were identified by Hedges and Kelly as being:

- i) *A CLAN MEMBERSHIP MAP*: That is, the regional or national group that individuals felt they belonged to, for example whether they were Scottish, Welsh or from Cornwall or Yorkshire, which tended to be determined by birth and tended to remain with individuals wherever they moved.
- ii) *A SOCIAL MAP*: That is, the areas where individuals have the greatest level of social interaction, which could be their home or work or around their family.
- iii) *MAP OF FAMILIARITY*: That is, the area or place that individuals feel comfortable enough with to call home. This need not necessarily be the place where they live, but could be areas where they work or have lived previously.
- iv) *ROOTS MAP*: That is, the area where people have established families or family histories.

In addition to the various maps interacting to determine the nature and area of an individual's conceptual community, Hedges and Kelly (1992) also noted that the strength of belonging to a community and its development could be affected by a further sixteen factors, which were:

- Personal mobility and life history;
- Social factors, i.e. contacts with relatives and friends;
- Peoples lifestyle;
- Nature of the existing community i.e. its size, spirit, stability and clearness of boundaries;
- Character of the community i.e. local history, traditions, physical landmarks, distinctive shops, customs, ceremonies, buildings and local organisations;
- Public image of the community;
- Sporting clubs and associations;
- Specific culture;
- Accent;
- Personal attitude towards the area;
- Familiarity with the area;

- Security i.e. a sense of comfort and feeling that the area is 'home';
- Travel patterns for work, shopping and leisure;
- Postal address;
- Local media;
- Topography i.e. major roads, rivers, hills, etc.

Hedges and Kelly (1992) further noted that the most identifiable sense of community really occurred when the perceived or conceptual community correlated with the real community, within which individuals lived their daily lives. This, in turn, appeared to be more prevalent in the smaller rural communities or in communities with a strong focal point, such as a town or landmark. However, for Hedges and Kelly (1992) this process of identifying the community depended a great deal upon the identification of the conceptual community which was a difficult task, particularly when it came to identifying community boundaries for local authorities. Hedges and Kelly found that on the whole their respondents had little knowledge of their local authority boundaries, which did not seem to be particularly important. The exceptions were in instances where those boundaries coincided with an emotionally significant area, such as an established town, with respondents from Bristol, Blackburn and Lichfield identifying with the council area that had the town's name (1992, page 11). This was in contrast to the respondents from Peterlee, Alston and Diss, where the authority was larger than the town and had a different name.

Therefore, this research concluded that a sense of community was "to a large extent intuitive rather than rationally defined" (1992, page 13), with the most powerful loyalties belonging to "wider areas which seem to have little if any day to day practical significance, but a good deal of historical and cultural meaning" (ibid). Furthermore, it was found that participants rarely identified strongly with local government itself unless the authority's boundaries coincided with "emotionally more important territories - perceived communities and clan territories". (1992 page 13). Whilst this research provided a valuable insight into the concept of the community it still left the proposed Local Government Commission with the complex task of determining how to accurately

identify these various local communities. This task was to be aided by the research conducted by the University of Newcastle's Centre for Urban and Regional Studies. The research project investigated the possibility of identifying a community's locality or local area by using a geographic information system (GIS). That is, a system that permitted the storage and manipulation of maps, allowing them to be overlaid and worked together. The general conclusion of this paper was that this proposal was hampered by the fact that there was too little national information and there was an over supply of local information, which would have to be placed into a single and consistent format.

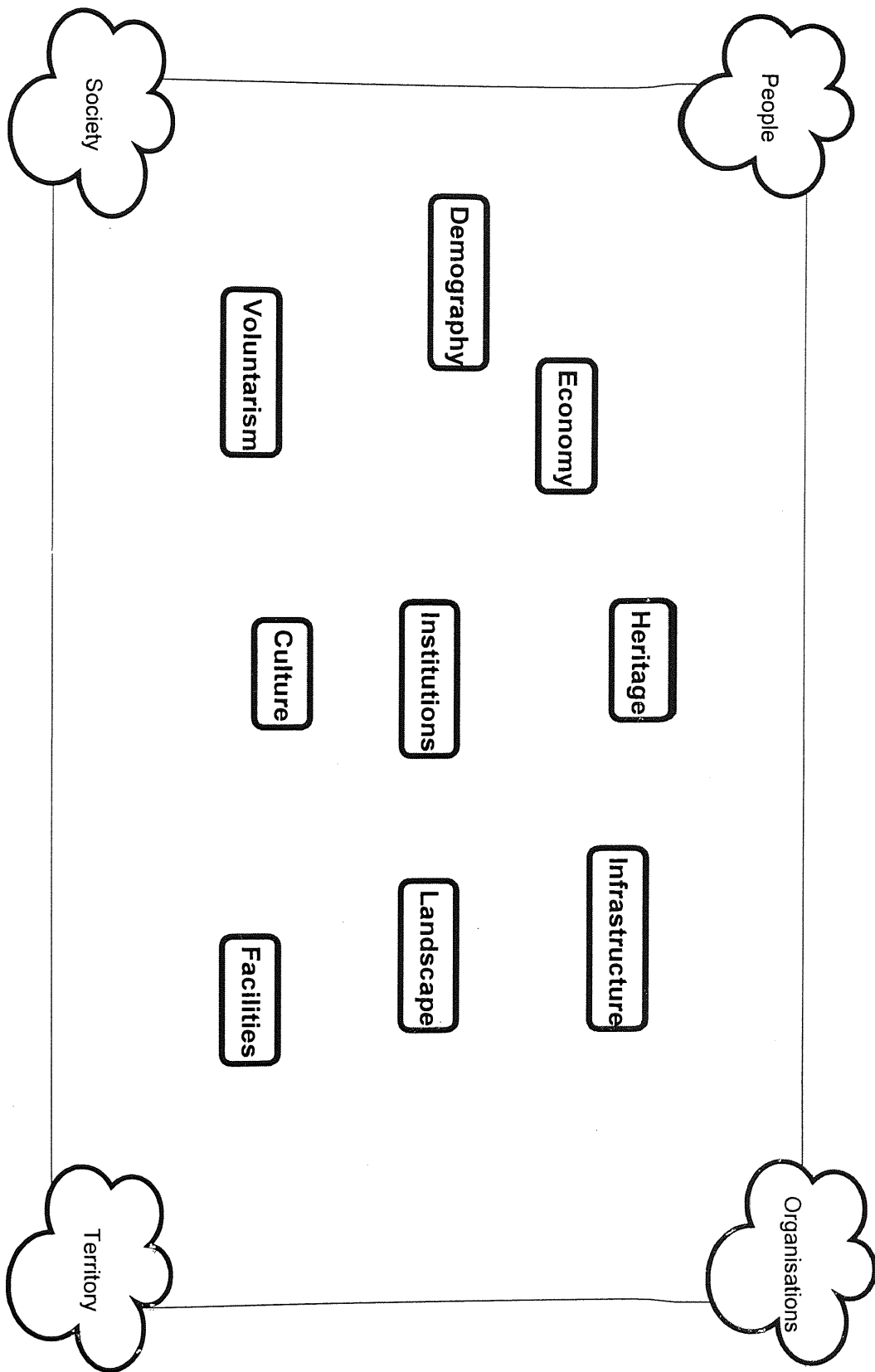
The research team in reaching this conclusion not only had to undertake a data survey of available information, but more importantly had to define the concept to be measured - namely the community. This task produced one very definite conclusion and that was that the community lacked a single definition and was very difficult to 'pin down'. Therefore in undertaking this task the research team began by assuming that what they were most basically concerned with, was a "spatial territory", and the first task was to ascertain the factors that could identify this territory and as such would have to be worked into a GIS programme. This research team began their analysis with a study of Cooke's work (1986) in which he identified thirty one proposed locality studies being undertaken for the Economic and Social Research Council. These studies were aiming to establish the aspects of socio-economic life that defined a locality and its community. More than half of these studies used local labour markets, whilst the remainder used local authority boundaries and areas defined by local, social or economic history. The research paper found that throughout these studies the most important and common factor that characterised a community and its spatial area was interaction between people. The research team also found that all of the definitions of communities were grounded upon social interaction, which become articulated into the form of a society, which was characterised by its local institutions. Therefore, in identifying, the community, the Newcastle research team concluded that what was required was to identify four basic factors - firstly *People*, then their *Society*, then (prompted by social interaction) the *Organisations* they produced and finally the *Territory* they covered. It was also concluded that from these four basic factors there were a further nine factors which aided in the

demarcation of a locality and its community. These were demography, economy, voluntarism, culture, institutions, heritage, facilities, landscape and infrastructure, all of which are demonstrated by figure 7.

Thus, from these two studies it appeared that the community and its spatial territory were complex concepts which could potentially be measured through the identification of such factors as individual's subjective feelings, behavioural patterns, their society and its organisations, institutions and infrastructure. Therefore, with this research having promoted methods of measuring and identifying communities, the third and final piece of research by CSL concentrated upon examining methods of assessing the costs and benefits of changing these factors. However, it must also be noted that in their report CSL went beyond a mere assessment of applying the concept of the community, as the company's brief from the DoE was to identify all possible "costs and benefits that it would be appropriate for the Commission to take into account in coming to its recommendations", complete with "the means by which such cost and benefits could be measured" (Feb. 1992, paragraph 1.2), thereby also including such considerations as finance. In achieving this task, CSL worked in close consultation with the DoE and produced a list of factors that were divided into two broad sections - the measurable costs of change and the intangible costs and benefits.

The first section of measurable costs concentrated upon finance and covered two broad areas. The first was referred to as the transitional costs and benefits, that is, the costs of change which occur in the years immediately preceding and following any change. Whilst the second area for consideration were the on-going costs and benefits that is, the changes in costs which exist beyond the transitional period, essentially a long term assessment of the possible savings or costs of change.

Figure 7 - Factors Determining the Size and Scope of a Community



CSL then went on to break these two factors into more specific costs and benefits that included considerations of accommodation changes, alterations to administrative systems, staff costs, costs associated with increasing or decreasing the number of elected members and general removal costs. The actual methodology for assessing these costs was to be based on the premise that there would be no change to service delivery, then to determine whether a new structure would increase or decrease the overall costs of this service provision. The second set of costs and benefits termed 'intangible' by CSL, moved away from this financial analysis and towards that much discussed concept of community. The aim of this assessment was to provide a series of measures which the Commission could apply to a given area to determine whether change would enhance existing senses of community identity. The measures were initially grouped into four main headings, and labelled the community index. These headings addressed four issues:

"Identity: How well do proposals for change reflect community identities and loyalties.

Accessibility: Will change permit services to be more or less accessible to individual communities.

Responsiveness: Do proposals for change enable the creation of responsive community government.

Democracy: Will different proposals enable the introduction of democratic units of local government accountable to their communities." (Feb. 1992, paragraph 3.4).

Each of these four headings were then subdivided into a number of other factors that could be used to assess whether change would reflect community identities, enhance democracy and enable accessible and responsive local government. This was achieved in the following manner:

IDENTITY: The relevant factors for assessing this concept were listed as history, topography, personal mobility (i.e. work, travel or leisure patterns), sporting clubs, established industries, transport and demography.

ACCESSIBILITY: It was felt that this concept could be assessed by considering the location of council service points, the location of the decision making centre, existing understanding of the system, numbers and locations of one stop shops, receptiveness to the public and the overall clarity of the structure of local government.

RESPONSIVENESS: This particular concept was to be assessed by evaluating the extent to which the following factors could be improved;

- The co-ordination of local services;
- The focus that was given to community needs within these services;
- The allocation of resources;
- Whether the council was 'seen to act' by the community;
- Whether a relationship of trust existed between the council, the voluntary sector and the community, and would change result in a loss of experienced officers and members.

DEMOCRACY: This concept could be assessed by considering whether change could enhance the ability of local interest groups to influence the system, whether it would increase electoral turn out, enhance member/officer relationships, increase elector knowledge and overall accountability.

CSL felt that by incorporating these factors into their decision making, the Commission could assess whether change would enhance community identities and create a structure of local government that was more democratic, responsive and accountable to these communities. In order to aid this assessment CSL also produced three possible methodologies that would ensure a certain level of consistency in using the above concepts.

The first of which involved ascribing a monetary value to each factor and then choosing the cheapest option, but it was noted that problems occurred when deciding what monetary value to give to each factor. The second methodology was to use a scoring system, presenting every single factor with a score, but again the problem was to determine scores. Finally CSL proposed ranking each factor. This depended on the Commission determining the significance of particular factors in their overall assessment and placing them in order, such as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc . However, this again called for the Commission to use its personal judgement in determining what the most significant factors would be within each reorganisation.

The DoE was therefore left at the end of these pieces of research with the task of welding them into one practical guidance on how to measure and apply the concept of the community. This was a problematical task made all the more difficult by the fact that one strong conclusion from both Hedges and Kelly (1992) and the University of Newcastle (1992), was that the concept of the community depended upon people and social interaction, which meant that this concept could mean different things to different people. Therefore, the DoE needed to find not just one single definition of this concept, as this could not possibly be applied to every person in every area, but a consistent method for identifying and assessing these concepts across a wide range of local areas. This meant having a list of factors that could be used to identify communities and then a method for assessing whether change would reflect these identities and provide local people with a more democratic, accessible and responsive system of local government. It was these problems that really determined the fate of the community within the review.

Whilst a general consensus had been building up that this concept should be applied, no practical guidance had been offered by either the ADC, the ACC or the main political parties on how this concept could be practically assessed. Therefore, whilst the concept of the community developed with the review, the question of whether it would continue and rank as an equally important factor as costs, depended upon its final position within the DoE's official guidance on how the review would be conducted. The Conservative government had by the summer of 1992 been returned to office and the Local Government Act of 1992 had received Royal Assent. This, therefore, established the legal framework for the review and specified that the Commission had a statutory duty to consider the identities and interests of local communities (1992 Local Government Act section 15). However, whether this would be realised in practice depended on the role that this concept would be given by the new Environment Secretary Michael Howard, in the Commission's final guidance.

The Final Development Of The Review And Community And Locality: July 1992

The official guidance² for the Local Government Commission was released just before the members of this body were appointed. It represented, at this point in time, the DoE's final statement on the factors that should influence each review, and as such gave the concept of the community its final interpretation. It essentially stated the extent to which this concept should be considered and how it could be practically applied.

Policy and Procedure Guidance to the Local Government Commission: July 1992

The first thing to note, is that this guidance came in the form of two separate documents. The first of these documents was the Procedure Guidance (DoE July 1992), which established the various stages the Local Government Commission had to go through in conducting their reviews, and the local bodies and organisations that had to be consulted. It prescribed that each review had to begin with a public announcement of its intentions, informing all affected and interested parties. The Commission then had to prepare an initial report and consult widely with local communities, whilst receiving proposals from local authorities and other interested parties. The report was then to be made available for further public consultation before a recommendation for reorganisation would be produced for the Secretary of State, who would retain the ultimate decision on whether an authority would be restructured and what form this would take.

The procedural guidance was supported by a Policy Guidance (DoE. July 1992), which described in detail the factors that would influence the Commission's decisions. Prominent amongst these was the concept of the community, with the first page of the paper instructing the Commission to consider whether a unitary structure would, "better reflect the identities and interests of local communities" (DoE July 1992, paragraph 3). However, in the same sentence the Commission was also instructed to ensure that any

²Whilst this guidance was preceded by draft copies in the June of 1992, it is the final guidance on the policy and procedures of each review, released in the July of 1992, that will be examined. As it was these guidance documents that really shaped the initial work of the Local Government Commission.

change would also have to "secure effective and convenient local government" (DoE July 1992, paragraph 3). It was stated that this last issue was to consider:

i) Financial costs: That is, any change had to be cost effective, which involved taking into account both the short term transitional costs of change and the long term on going costs.

ii) Local Authority Functions: Any new unitary authorities had to be able to perform all local authority functions, and whilst this did not have to be direct provision, all new authorities still had to be large enough to ensure that they could adequately maintain large and strategic services such as law and order.

iii) Boundaries: Any change had to be for "structural or strategic reasons", not to "correct minor boundary anomalies" (DoE July 1992, paragraph 16).

iv) Parish and town councils: All reviews had to consider where parish and town councils could fit into the new structure and the role they could play.

v) Electoral Arrangements: All recommendations would have to comply, "so far as is reasonably practicable with the rules in schedule 11 of the Local Government Act 1972". (DoE July 1992, paragraph 20). That is, "the ratio of councillors should be as nearly as possible the same in every electoral division or ward in an authority" (ibid). The actual timing of elections was, however, left entirely to the Commission's discretion - as were the finer details of each of these considerations, which all had to be balanced against community identity.

In contrast to the consideration of costs and efficiency, the second page of this paper was mainly occupied with the need to incorporate community identities into the structures of new unitary authorities. It restated earlier comments from the first draft guidance paper in November 1991, that, "local authorities should be based upon communities", and that "the Commission should assess the extent and strength of local people's loyalties and interests" (DoE July 1992, paragraph 4). This guidance firmly established the concept of the community as having an identity and a spatial area or locality that could be practically measured and applied to each review.

When it came to identifying these communities this guidance paper also reasserted that work, shopping and leisure patterns would be useful, as would histories and demographical and geographical features. The guidance paper again noted that these factors would produce widening circles of communities, whose boundaries would be determined by the strength of association with the main focus of the circle. However, for the first time this guidance paper also instructed the Commission to remember that "people's sense of identity with a community is often intuitive" (DoE July 1992, paragraph 4), which could be stimulated and influenced by a variety of factors, including "traditional counties, historic cities, districts and towns" (DoE July 1992, paragraph 4). It was acknowledged that whilst these perceived and imagined communities could have little or no relevance to the boundaries of local authorities, they were still significant issues and had to be considered. It therefore appeared that the research by Hedges and Kelly (1992) influenced the DoE into acknowledging that there were two aspects to the concept of the community. The first consisted of emotional and subjective feelings, which could be stimulated by a variety of factors and could really only be measured by identifying people's expressed preferences - which was a process prescribed by the Procedure Guidance (DoE July 1992), in the form of enforced local consultation. Whilst the second aspect was the 'real community' that could be identified by geographical landmarks or travel patterns, which were to be measured by CSL's community index.

This last method of assessing the 'real community' and also the factors of democracy, responsiveness and accessibility, were in fact taken exactly from the CSL report that was discussed earlier, and used all of the factors described by CSL. Therefore, in line with CSL's conclusions, the government felt that community identity could be established by identifying an area's geography, history, demography, industry, travel patterns, lines of transportation and communication and associations with sports and leisure clubs. all of which could acts as focuses for 'community circles'. In assessing whether these factors and the community it produced would be improved by structural change, the DoE (as recommended by CSL) also provided a methodology, which involved the Commission using its judgement, to rank the value of each factor within a particular area. That is, whether travel patterns or history or geography were the most important, in establishing

the 'real community', or whether demography and industry were more significant. Once a conclusion was reached, it had to be combined with the perceived communities to identify a community and its local area, so that an assessment could be made of whether these factors would be enhanced by reorganisation.

Therefore, in this last guidance paper the Local Government Commission were finally instructed to include the community in their reviews - although they had to be balanced against functional, electoral and boundary considerations. However, this concept definitely had to form part of the Commission's deliberations. It was significant that the Commission did not work against a prescribed definition of community, but instead had to use their personal judgement based upon information gained about people's expressed preferences (determined by local consultation) and patterns of communities based around the factors listed within the community indexes heading of identity. This would in turn be integrated with the index's other three main factors of democracy, responsiveness and accessibility, to finally assess the advantages to the community of restructuring.

Conclusion

Therefore, from a single suggestion in December 1990 that local government would be reviewed the structural reorganisation developed and with it the concept of the community. Its inclusion as a determinant of structural change gained continued support from the local authority associations, that is, the ADC and the ACC, as well as the main opposition parties. It was also felt (particularly by the government) that in 1974 a mistake had been made by creating authorities based purely on administrative considerations. It had resulted in artificial authorities that neither won over nor inspired local loyalty, instead it was felt that local democracy could be improved by unitary authorities based upon communities. It was the DoE's belief that these authorities could reflect community identities and interests, inspire a greater level of identification and improve local participation. The identification of local communities became an important priority for the review, (but one that had to be balanced by costs). The DoE felt that this task could be achieved by combining local consultation - which identified people's perceived communities, with the Community Index - which identified those communities based

around the slightly more measurable factors of travel patterns or geography. The Commission would then use their judgement to produce one single conception of the community and the local area it covered.

Therefore, armed with this proposed use of community and a methodology for its identification and assessment, the Local Government Commission began its work in the summer of 1992. However, before examining the results of its first wave of reviews and evaluating the practical effectiveness of this methodology, it is worth briefly examining this interpretation of the community and its proposed application in more detail. In particular, gaining a more thorough understanding of the concept of the community, and the previous interpretations and applications of this concept to local government.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE COMMUNITY

"Community tends to be a God word, we are expected to abase ourselves before it rather than attempt to define it" (Bell & Newby, 1971)

The concept of the 'community' has been studied and debated by almost every social science discipline, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, geography and political science (to name but a few!). The main result of this study has been the publication of millions upon millions of pages of text. Dennis Poplin (1979) has observed that;

"a vast body of literature has emerged pertaining to communities", which is, "so widely scattered throughout textbooks, monographs, scientific journals and even popular magazines that is, for practical purposes inaccessible to all but the most serious student of community life. To search it out requires months, if not years of effort" (Poplin, 1979, page 81).

It also appears that these texts, articles and monographs have tended to reach one conclusion regarding the 'community', and this is that it has no single and universally recognised definition. The respected sociologist Hillery even conducted a study whereby he took ninety four different definitions of the 'community' in an attempt to produce a universally accepted and satisfactory definition of this concept. Hillery was unsuccessful and came to the conclusion that the only common factor was that the community dealt with people (Bell & Newby 1971). However, even this statement has been called into question by Macfarlane, Harrison & Jardine (1971) who observed in their text, 'Reconstructing Historical Communities', that there are 'community' studies of animals other than man. Therefore, faced with this problem where does this literature review begin its examination of the community?

The answer is provided by Bell and Newby (1971) and Macfarlane, Harrison and Jardine (1971), who agree that the emergence of the 'community' as a subject for academic study and debate occurred during the turmoil of late nineteenth century industrialisation. Bell and Newby (1971) have commented that it was during this period that theories of the 'community' were developed which have;

“the most relevant theoretical inheritance for modern community studies and must be the starting place for more recent conceptualisations of the concept”(1971).

It was during this period that intellectuals such as Marx, Durkheim, de Tocqueville and particularly Tonnies (Macfarlane, Harrison and Jardine 1971) developed a conception of the community which was used to criticise modern society and its evils of poverty, conflict and inequality. The best example of this use of the ‘community’ can be found in the work of Ferdinand Tonnies and his ideas of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gelleschaft*.

Gemeinschaft and Gelleschaft

Tonnies used the idea of *Gemeinschaft* to represent the community. It referred to an homogenous group of people, living in a distinct local area, who were united by the common ties of blood, kinship, friendship and land. This group was also distinguished by the strength of these common ties, which created a shared feeling of solidarity and belonging, and was backed by a strong moral code enforced by the church and the family. Tonnies regarded the community as man’s natural state and painted a picture of a rural idyll in which human relationships were intimate and enduring. The opposite of this idea of the ‘community’ was *Gelleschaft*, which for Tonnies represented the industrial and urban societies that had accompanied the industrial revolution and were growing rapidly. This society was characterised by competition, inequality and conflict in which individuals were isolated and alienated. It was also a society in which human relationships were based on impersonal contracts which discouraged feelings of commonality and solidarity and encouraged social divisions.

Therefore for Tonnies the ‘community’ represented a group of people within a defined locality who were enmeshed in a tight knit web of meaningful relationships with their fellow human beings, and were united by a common feeling of belonging and concern for each other. Tonnies thought this occurred naturally in young people, peasants, artisans and women, and was man’s natural state. This was in contrast to industrial society where individuals exercised their rational will and were concerned solely for their own well being. A consequence of living in this state was continuous competition and tension where open conflict was avoided only through the media of convention, legislation and public

opinion. Tonnies thought that this occurred naturally in business people, aged persons and scientists.

Tonnies was, however, careful to acknowledge that these were ideal types which rarely or never occurred, instead he had developed these ideal types to explain the affect of industrialisation, urbanisation and the social change that it had introduced. Tonnies was in effect using these ideal types to explain that as communities become larger, more complex and more urbanised a fundamental change occurs in the nature of human relationships. This particular use and interpretation of the community was highly significant for future academic studies of the community for two important reasons.

The first is that it established the 'community' as a *theoretical concept*, in this instance representing a group of people living in a defined territorial area who were united by strong common ties and bonds, such as kinship and friendship. The second reason is that Tonnies used the community as a *method* of explaining changes in society and in particular, the manner in which social relationships and institutions had been altered.

Tonnies had, therefore, established a benchmark for interpreting and applying the community which was later used in a plethora of community studies. The problem, therefore, arises as to which studies should be reviewed and how this review should be structured. The solution again lies in the work of the sociologists Colin Bell and Howard Newby, who in their text entitled 'Sociology of the Community' (1971) observed that there were six main approaches to studying the community. These approaches included:

- the ecological approach;
- treating communities as ideal types;
- treating communities as microcosms;
- the community study as method;
- treating communities as organisations;
- the community and networks.

These, categorisations, therefore provide a useful template for introducing and reviewing a selection of the most significant studies of the community. The purpose of which will be to provide an overview of the different interpretations and uses of the community, and to

develop a better understanding of this concept. However, it must be stressed that this review will only be covering a relatively small number of the thousands of community studies that have been undertaken since the turn of the century.

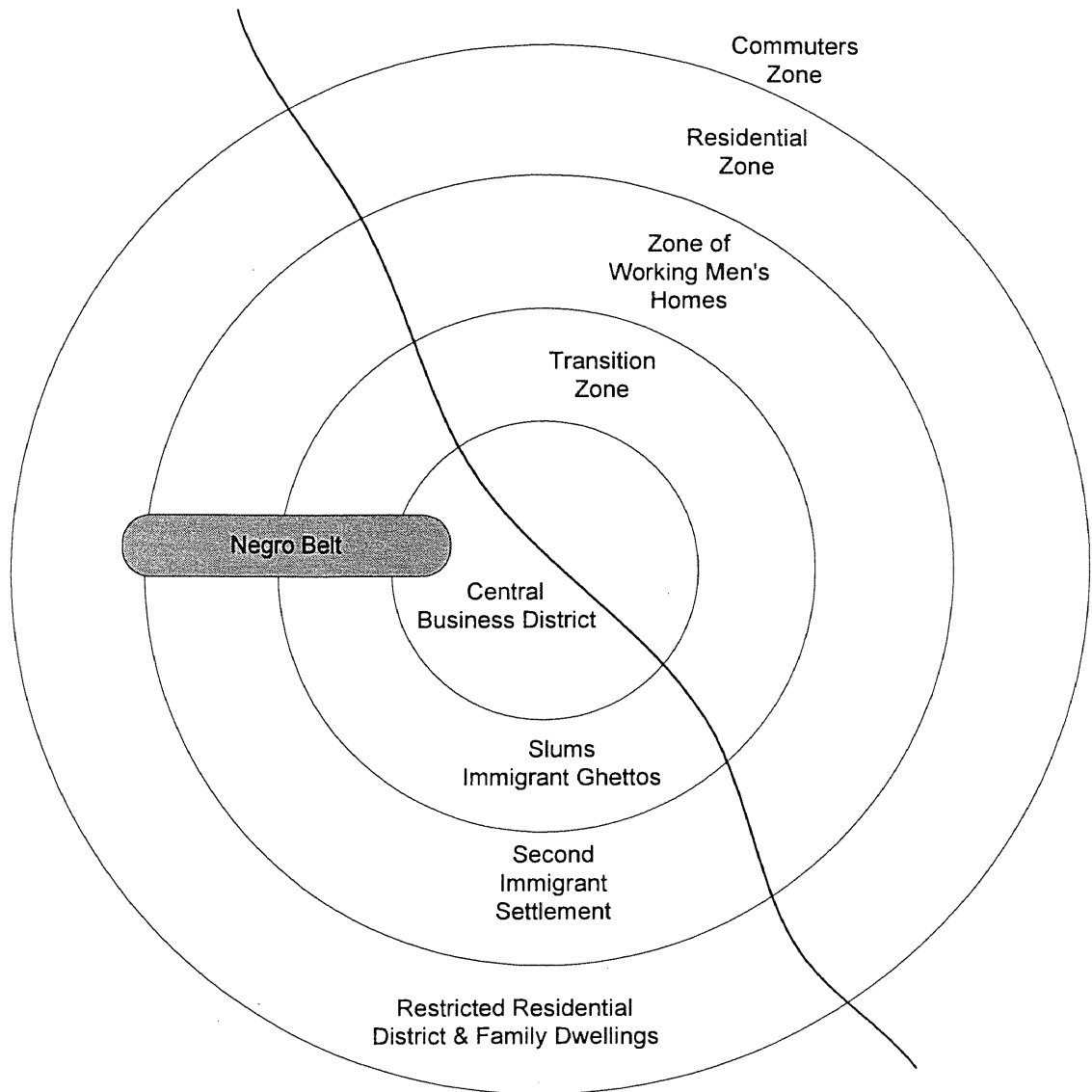
Community Studies

The Ecological Approach

A good example of the ecological approach towards studying communities can be found in the work of the 'Chicago School'. This school consisted of a team of academics and sociologists, based at the University of Chicago, who studied the social and spatial growth of communities within Chicago during the 1920's and 1930's. Leading members of this school, such as Robert Park and E.W. Burgess, used biological analogies and metaphors throughout their analysis and studies.

For example, Park and Burgess (1925) started from the position that communities occurred wherever living things shared a common habitat. In particular, Park (1925) and Burgess (1925) advanced the thesis that in the struggle to survive in a limited space, living organisms including people, entered into impersonal patterns of co-existence and interdependence. This interdependence united everyone into unconscious dependencies and social relationships which became the basis for a community. In the case of people, these unconscious dependencies and social relationships were strengthened through more conscious and willed social relationships, such as friends and membership of clubs and associations. This eventually led to the creation of a single large group with its own growth pattern and natural history. Park (1925) also asserted that like individual organisms, change in one part of the community would be felt throughout the entire group. The result of using this approach to analyse the social and spatial structure of the communities within Chicago was that E.W. Burgess (1925) and Robert Park noted that in the struggle for space and land, the City of Chicago had become divided into a series of concentric zones, as demonstrated by figure 8.

Figure 8 - Burgess' Diagram of City Ecology



Burgess (1925) further observed that each one of these zones had its own distinctive physical and social characteristics. In the competition for space those in the dominant position who controlled the Central Business District could afford to live in the affluent residential zones. Whereas the unemployed, immigrants and those with no control and influence ended up in ghettos and rundown areas outside the business district, which were areas that the wealthy had abandoned as they migrated outside of the city.

A significant criticism of the work of the Chicago school is that it was solely concerned with space and regarded competition as the key explanatory variable for the location and development of urban communities. This, therefore, led in the mid-1940s to the emergence of neo-orthodox ecologists such as James Quinn (1950). Quinn regarded human ecology as a branch of sociology that investigated one facet of human interaction, the non-consensual, impersonal interaction which occurred within society. Quinn felt that this interaction, which structured social relations and determined an individual's position within the community was shaped largely by economics rather than space. This was however, challenged by other ecologists such as Walter Firey (1947), who in his text entitled, "Land Use in Central Boston", observed that it was social and cultural values which determined social interaction and the structure of the community.

However, despite these variations within the ecological approach there remains a general consensus. Bell and Newby (1971) observe that this consensus is best expressed by Amos Hawley in his text, "Human Ecology: A Theory of Community Structure". Hawley (Bell and Newby 1971) repeats Park and Burgess' observations that the community occurs wherever individuals congregate, and is the result of these individuals entering into a series of impersonal and yet dependent relationships in order to provide for their daily needs. This interdependence becomes consolidated by more conscious and willed relationships, such as clubs, associations and friendships. The community then emerges as a single, yet complex organism with a life of its own and a natural history and growth pattern. In recent years this theory has been used by British academics such as Rex and Moore (1967) to study the growth and development of communities such as Sparkbrook

in Birmingham. The ecological approach however, remains one conception of the community and one approach to explaining the social and spatial development of the community. Respected sociologists such as Redfield and Alwyn Rees have used an alternative approach, and that is using communities as ideal types.

Community as Ideal Types

Sociologists such as Redfield (1956) and Rees (1950) leaned heavily on the work of Ferdinand Tonnies, the forefather and pioneer of the ideal type. Redfield (1956) in particular used the idea that the community was characterised by its distinctive nature, small size, homogeneous population, strong ties of kin and friendship, and economic self sufficiency to identify groups of people for his sociological and anthropological research. Redfield (1956) also suggested that other characteristics which defined a community were frequent inter-personal contact between its population, wives taken from within its area and a group feeling when confronted with an emergency. This led Redfield to identify rural primitive communities, such as the Mexican village of Tepotzlan for his studies.

Alwyn Rees (1950) similarly used the idea that the community could be identified by a cluster of traits derived from an ideal type to structure his study of a rural village in mid-1940s Wales, which he termed Llanfihangel. This village despite being vastly different to Redfield's Mexican village was used because Rees could identify it by its small size, its homogeneous population, strong ties of kinship and friendship and having a strong moral code backed by the church. Gideon Sjoburg (1968) and Robert MacIver (1970) also adopted the same approach and used the ideal type to identify communities which they studied in order to understand social development and interaction.

The advantage of defining the community in this manner is that it can provide more easily identifiable social groups for research and sociological study. This view of the community as an ideal type is however distinctly different to the next approach to be discussed, in which the community is viewed as a microcosm.

The Community as a Microcosm

A good example of a sociologist who views the community as a microcosm of a society is Maurice Stein (1972). In his text "The Eclipse of the Community", Stein demonstrates this view by tracing the foundations of community studies through the early research conducted by the Chicago School to more contemporary studies such as Seeley, Sim and Loosley's study of suburban America in the 1950's and John Dollard's (1957) study of class and caste in the Deep South of America.

Stein's (1972) reason for undertaking this research was to show how various community studies could be fitted together to provide a mosaic picture of American Life. Each community study in his opinion was a microcosm of American society as a whole, which contained, "vital information about broad social changes", and when pieced together provided a valuable commentary on American history and social trends. The ultimate aim of Stein's work was to transform passing observations into important social insights, and was not dissimilar to the studies and work of Ronald Frankenburg (1971) in the UK.

Frankenburg (1971) in his text, "Communities in Britain: Social Life in Town and Country", attempted to chart a morphological continuum of community studies. The continuum is morphological because as Frankenburg (1971) notes, 'whilst each stage is structurally more complicated than the one before, and each one has a more diversified economy and technology, there is no assumption that any one of them will necessarily become more like the next one on the continuum'. Frankenburg (1971) also acknowledges that this continuum is not a straight line and that the studies in this continuum such as Aldwyn Rees (1950) study of rural Wales and Mitchell and Lutpon's (1954) study of a Liverpool housing estate, are very different. Frankenburg (1971) argues that whilst each of these community studies are different they all have something very important to say about the development of British society as a whole. It is Frankenburg's assertion that whilst the communities that are studied were very different they do in fact highlight changes that are common to a number of the UK's diverse societies and provide an invaluable commentary upon British social trends and development. This research was

part of Frankenburg's work to develop a theory of social change for which he drew heavily upon the idea that the community could be used to understand contemporary social developments. This view was not dissimilar to the next approach to studying communities, although the next approach actually went a stage further in viewing the community as a distinct empirical method of conducting social research.

The Community Study as Method

Bell and Newby (1971) observe that one of the best examples of this approach using the community can be found in the work of Arensberg and Kimball (1940). Frankenburg (1971) calls the work of these two sociologists pioneering and notes that they studied two townlands in the West of Ireland, which were distinctly rural and agricultural in nature. Arensberg and Kimball lived within the communities in these two townlands and their surrounding areas, collecting data on the social lives, interaction, institutions and the development of these communities. The purpose of these studies was to collect data on how people lived and interacted in the community and to test the results from this fieldwork against established theories of human behaviour and interaction. Examples of this approach can also be found in the work of Ruth Glass and Maureen Frenkel (1946), where urban communities such as Bethnal Green in London are studied in order to understand human interaction rather than to study the concept of the community and community identity. Other urban sociologists that followed such as Peter Dickens (1986) and Hodges and Smith (1954), also used the community as a method of identifying urban social groups and then studying interaction and behaviour within those groups rather than the formation and meaning of the term community.

It is significant that the purpose of this approach was not to study the community and understand what factors defined a community or how and why communities developed. Instead the community was used to identify a specific social group and through immersion in the life of that group collect data on social and psychological interaction. In this approach the aim was not to understand how communities could be identified but to collect data and test known theories on human behaviour. The question of whether this is a valid approach towards conducting social research has been raised and debated many

times with no definite conclusion. This approach does however stand in direct contrast to the idea that communities are organisations whose definition and structure can be defined by its social organisation and deserves study in its own right.

Communities as Organisations

Bell and Newby (1971) have observed that a good example of using this approach to defining communities can be found in the work of the sociologist Hillery. It was noted earlier in this chapter that it was Hillery who attempted to produce a universally accepted definition of the community by sampling 94 different interpretations, and was ultimately unsuccessful. Hillery did, however, have his own theories on what constituted a community and in his opinion, as expressed in his text “Communal Organisations: A Study of Local Societies” (1968) a community is a social organisation designed for the achievement of specific goals. This has made this approach popular for sociologists and political scientists who wish to study community power, and in particular, to determine where community power lies, how it is used, who uses it and what its goals are.

Examples of sociologists and political scientists who have used this conception of the community to study ‘community power’, include Robert and Helen Lynd (1937), Lloyd M Warner (1941), William Foote Whyte (1955), Floyd Hunter (1957) and Anthony Birch (1954).

The Lynds (1937) examined the effects of the 1930s depression in “Middletown in Transition” and the use of exploitative power in Middletown. The husband and wife team found that within the community, positions of power and influence were determined by economics and wealth. A view that was also supported by Whyte in “Street Corner Society” (1955). An alternative conclusion, as advanced by Lloyd Warner (1941) in his study of ‘Yankee City’ was that it was social class and its elite who controlled communities, which was a view that was also favoured by Floyd Hunter. Warner (1941) and Hunter (1957) found a number of hierarchies within communities that were determined not by economics but by class and controlled by an upper class elite. However, another alternative can be found in the work of Anthony Birch (1954), a

pluralist who argued that community power was becoming increasingly located in competing political institutions. Birch (1954) noted that this had been made possible by increasing participation in political decision making institutions, such as local government, which had diffused power amongst a variety of political groups. Birch's (1954) study of Glossop in the Derbyshire peaks, found community power to be located in local political groups and local political elites.

However, whether the community was to be characterised by politics, social class or economics the one common theme of this approach was that the community was a social organisation united by the desire to achieve common goals. This, therefore, made this approach somewhat different to the last of Bell and Newby's (1971) categories for distinguishing between community studies. This last approach defined communities in terms of its networks.

Communities as Networks

Bell and Newby (1971) and Macfarlane (1977) have observed that this approach to identifying communities was actually pioneered by the sociologist Barnes in his study of a Norwegian fishing village. Macfarlane (1977) notes that Barnes in his attempt to identify the local community and observe its social life observed three regions in the social system. The third and most significant region for Barnes was made up of 'the ties of friendship and acquaintance' (Macfarlane 1977). Barnes continued by observing that each person had a number of friends, and these friends have their own friends, and when these lines of friendship and communication were mapped out they formed a series of complex *networks* which delineated and characterised the local community.

Elizabeth Botts (1957) and Roland Warren (1971) are also exponents of this approach to identifying communities arguing that communities are characterised by the relations that take place between social institutions and organisations. Warren (1971) further argues that over time these relations build up into a structured web of formal relations and networks which become the community. Therefore, for sociologists such as Botts, Warren and

Barnes the key to identifying the community is to identify the social networks that exist between its people and key social institutions.

The main problem with this approach to identifying communities is that in modern complex communities, especially those in large cities such as Birmingham, the data that would need to be collected would be huge. People's networks and those of their friends could stretch out not just over the city but also into surrounding counties, making the identification of a single community problematical. This approach does, however, emphasise that a key issue when examining and identifying communities are social networks which should not be ignored. Similarly, the other approaches so far discussed also have important contributions to make to understanding the community and providing a range of factors to take into account. Furthermore when considered together these factors could present a range of indicators that a body like the Local Government Commission could take into account when identifying communities.

For example, listed below are the six approaches to interpreting and using the community, complete with a number of key factors in identifying local communities.

Summary of the Six Approaches to Identifying Communities

Approach	Key Factors in Defining & Identifying Communities
Ecological Approach	Space & the competition for space
Community as an Ideal Type	Small spatial area Homogeneous population Strong ties of kin and friendship Strong sense of belonging & commonality Strong moral code backed up by the church and family
Community as a Microcosm	Social trends and relationships
Community Study as Method	Geographical area Distinguishable social institutions
Community as Organisations	Local Wealth Local Class Structures Local Politics
Communities as Networks	Patterns of networks and social relationships between individuals and organisations

The previous list, therefore, reveals that when identifying communities there are a number of common themes, which are that communities have:

- defined geographical space;
- distinguishable social institutions, ranging from local councils to clubs and associations;
- identifiable social networks between friends and family;
- shared sense of belonging and commonality.

The question therefore arises as to how the community, as identified through these themes and ideals has been applied to the research and study of local government. This can only be ascertained by a further review of a range of texts that have considered the role and significance of the community in local government.

The Community and Local Government

An initial review of literature relating to the community and local government has revealed that the community has a lengthy history within local government. It was, for example, determined in chapter 2, that the basic purpose of local government and local democracy was to safeguard the interests of local communities, thereby placing the community at the heart of local government. Furthermore, recent changes such as local decentralisation and the emergence of the enabling authority has re-emphasised the importance of the community. Peter Willmott (1989) observes that for the purposes of decentralisation the community becomes an identifiable unit to which local services can be decentralised. Whilst Professors Clarke and Stewart (1988) regard the advent of enabling as an opportunity to strengthen local government by turning it into community government. However, New Right theorists have also utilised the community to support their more radical and altogether different proposals for the enabling authority. The New Right's alternative proposes to use the community to create a more market driven and consumer orientated system of local authorities.

The community, therefore, becomes a concept which appears to be at the heart of local government, and at the heart of a number of local government texts. This thesis will, therefore, use three categories to structure the review of these texts, these are:

- New Right and the community;
- local decentralisation and the community;
- community government.

Each of these categories will be individually examined, starting with 'community government'.

Community Government.

Community government has been termed 'democratisation' by Robin Hambleton (1989), who notes that it involves not just extending service responsibilities, but actually extending political power and democracy itself.

In recent years the idea of community government and the increasing devolvement of political power to local communities has been continually repeated as an argument against increasing centralisation. Professors Stoker, Clarke and Stewart in articles such as "A Future for Local Authorities as Community Government" (Clarke and Stewart, 1989) and "The Future Of Local Government" (1989 G.Stoker and J.Stewart) have argued that current changes in local government should be utilised to facilitate 'community government'.

A key part of this move towards community government is the introduction of enabling and empowerment, as these are two initiatives that are vital in creating a more active level of mass participation from local people and a more community orientated system of local authorities. For example, it has been argued that enabling would result in a greater emphasis upon local communities, as the enabling authority (in not directly providing services) would have to become more aware of local needs and problems in order to develop contracts that matched these against existing public, private and voluntary resources. (Local Government Training Board 1988). Furthermore, it was also argued that this new focus upon the community and its needs, would have to involve greater

empowerment of the community. That is, encouraging the community to actively communicate their needs and problems.

Therefore, in this interpretation of community government, the community is elevated as the focus of the new enabling authority and the key to revitalising local democracy. Chapter 3 has demonstrated that this argument was also advanced by the ADC in their case for reorganisation. In chapter 3 and the review of the key ADC text "Closer To The People" (1990), it was argued that a new enabling, community orientated system of local government would need to reflect the identities and interests of its local communities particularly if it was to be successful in encouraging greater participation from local people. The ADC unsurprisingly thought that the best method of achieving this was, of course, unitary district councils. However, what is important is that the ADC had recognised that the community was a significant concept when considering reforming local government and local democracy and should be used to create new local authorities, (even if it was to be used to further the ADC's objectives of survival). However, what the ADC did not do was suggest methods by which the community could be identified, as this could have meant the demise of some District Councils which were created in 1974, such as Wychavon District Council. Instead, the community was assumed to exist as a distinct spatial area, with its own social institutions and networks, as well as an identity that engendered a common sense of belonging from its residents.

The argument for community government was also advanced in a more radical form by the urban left and Blunkett and Jackson in "Democracy In Crisis" (1987). This viewpoint (as described by Jackson and Blunkett - 1987), involved promoting local government as the tier of government that was closest to 'true democracy'. True democracy was regarded as lying within communities, and for these authors, the best representative of these communities both in terms of geography and social identity, (despite its faults) was local government. Therefore, this institution should be given the widest possible powers of policy and finance to allow local communities to govern themselves and achieve the most participative and democratic system of government. Blunkett and Jackson (1987) were also highly critical of the 'elitist Parliamentary system of democracy'.

Therefore, in this viewpoint the community became a key part of democratic government, with local authorities being the best vehicle for representing and empowering people and their communities. This viewpoint did, however, stand in direct opposition to that of the New Right who had altogether different proposals for using the community within local government.

The New Right and Community in Local Government

New Right theorists argued that public sector bureaucracies, such as local authorities were inefficient, unresponsive, unaccountable, prone to excessive expenditure and open to control by vested interests. This was in contrast to the free market which was the "optimal mechanism for allocating goods and resources" (G.Stoker page 225, 1988).

New Right theorists also argued that it was the free market that provided the greatest level of freedom and choice for consumers, as they could dictate what the market supplied and how it supplied it through their purchasing power. This meant that for the New Right the most efficient method of providing public services, whilst maximising individual choice and freedom, was to replace public bureaucracies, such as local councils with the free market.

The question, therefore, arises as to how the community would help New Right theorists and politicians to justify such a significant change? The answer to this question lies in the work of the Adam Smith Institute and such theories as the Tiebout thesis.

The Tiebout thesis, for example, (Desmond King 1989) argued that local councils should be based on natural communities. The thesis advanced the idea that these natural communities were formed by individuals searching around to find the community that best satisfied their needs, and that the local council should reflect these community needs through its local services and local taxation. If people did not like local services or considered taxes to be too high they would move to another community. Therefore, authorities needed to be based upon and responsive to the specific needs of their

individual communities. This theory did, however, overlook the fact that those living on income support and below the poverty line cannot move so freely and have no choice but to live on decaying council estates.

The Adam Smith Institute (1989) also argued that local authorities should be based on natural communities and reflect these communities identities. It was felt that this would encourage greater recognition and identification from local communities and hence greater participation. The local community could then utilise such mechanisms as the Citizens Charter and league tables to evaluate the performance of their councils and act more like consumers. Furthermore, the Adam Smith Institute (1989) argued that the community represented a useful tool for the fragmentation of local government and local bureaucracies. The idea was advanced that the creation of authorities based on natural communities would have the potential to create smaller authorities with populations between 40,000 - 60,000 or even less. This would consequently break up the infrastructure of local authorities, and result in authorities too small to provide services themselves, forcing them to purchase public services from the competitive market.

The community, therefore, appears within the ideology of the New Right as a natural social unit with its own geographical area, social networks, institutions and identities. Furthermore, New Right theorists also argue that this natural community could be used to consumerise local services and fragment the service provision and infrastructure of local government. However, as with the community government theorists the same problem occurs within this interpretation of the community, that is, no mention is made of a methodology that could be used to identify these communities. This problem is, however, tackled by the academics and texts that fall into the final category of academic studies and the local community.

Local Decentralisation

The issue of decentralisation was actively researched by the Policy Studies Institute and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in the late 1980's, who observed that the label of community had been appearing in local government services e.g. community care,

community policing, community education and even the ill fated community charge. The Rowntree foundation sponsored the research which was summarised in two important texts written by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI). These are "Local Government Decentralisation and Community" (1987), edited by Peter Willmott, and "Community Initiatives: Patterns and Prospects" (1989), also edited by Peter Willmott. These texts are significant because they defined the community and noted how it was related to the issue of local government and the decentralisation of local services. Therefore, they will both be examined in detail paying particular attention to their interpretation of community and most importantly Peter Willmott's (the editor of both texts) proposals for actually identifying these communities.

The PSI Studies: Community and Local Decentralisation

The aim of both, "Local Government, Decentralisation and Community" (1987) and "Community Initiatives Patterns and Prospects" (1989), was to draw together examples of decentralisation within local services. A key objective was to examine situations whereby, "the powers and influence", of a service had been transferred "to a number of geographically smaller units" (Bob Davies page 8, 1987). That is, where power and influence move from the local authority down to a lower level and not from central government to local government. The aim of this type of decentralisation has been to move service management and service delivery to the level of the community.

Therefore, a central part of this research was also to examine the nature and impact of the concept of community (R. Hambleton page 9, 1987). This is even though (as observed by Peter Willmott) this concept has in some cases been regarded as anachronism no longer relevant to today's geographically and increasingly mobile society (P. Willmott, page 9, 1989). Nevertheless, this movement of services to the community still appeared and in explaining this trend towards decentralisation and community, Robin Hambleton (1987) and Peter Willmott (1989) noted that it was a reaction to increasing centralisation.

Robin Hambleton (1987) observed that local authorities had been decentralising services to communities in order to win back public support for local government, whilst Peter

Willmott noted that decentralisation had occurred to counter the perceived remoteness of public services.

The driving force behind both of these reasons for decentralising services was however to give ordinary people a greater input into the services they received and in particular the actual process of service delivery. This led to the process of sub local authority decentralisation, which in turn required an effective social unit to decentralise to, which was the 'community'. Peter Willmott (1987) notes that this process was particularly aided by two important developments in society which encouraged the growth of communities.

The first was the formation of groups of people united by common problems or interests who became interest communities that acted as pressure groups and mediators between ordinary people and the welfare state. This was not as such a new phenomena, but for writers such as Willmott (1989) had become more prevalent because of the increasing failure of the welfare state to cater for individual's problems. Therefore, these individuals formed themselves into interest communities or allied themselves with organised social groups, to lobby agencies of the welfare state. This also meant that there were ready made interest communities for the decentralisation of specific services (Willmott 1987).

The second and perhaps most important development, was that significant changes in employment, demography and local economies had encouraged the growth of more stable geographical/territorial communities and ready made units for decentralisation. For example:

- demographic changes had increased the numbers of elderly people and produced more stable and less mobile populations;
- economic changes stressed the importance of the local area as an economic base - encouraging entrepreneurs to remain within their local communities;
- employment changes had resulted in increasing numbers of the unemployed, self employed and those taking early retirement, thereby forcing more people to remain in their local areas (page 14, 1987).

However, Willmott (1987) also noted that these changes in addition to forming more geographical communities and special interest communities for the process of decentralisation, also created a new type of community - the "attachment community". This community was seen as occurring because people not only remained within their locality but also developed a shared interest in that area. That is, they participated in social activities, institutions and relations that produced a common sentiment or sense of belonging. This in turn stimulating a recognisable identity and ready made social and geographical unit for the decentralisation of local services (or even to base a new unitary authority upon).

Therefore, for Peter Willmott in its application to local government and the decentralisation of local services, the most meaningful definition of community was as a: "geographical unit, whose residents were united by a common identity and sense of belonging - that was stimulated by existing social relations, activities and institutions" (Willmott, 1989).

An interpretation that contained themes already identified as characterising a community that is, limited geographical area, social institutions and networks, and a common sense of identity and belonging.

This meant, that for Willmott, *the community was a concept that was identifiable through its unique geography and identity*. This was the same interpretation that was the same as that produced by the community government and New Right theorists. However, Willmott differed from these theorists by advocating a series of measures that could be used to identify these communities. These generally revolved around local social activities and institutions and involved determining the following factors:

- a relatively stable population where large numbers of people have lengthy continuous residence in the area;
- whether residents had kin and friends in the local area;
- whether local people were alike in social clans or united by a common local industry;
- whether a large proportion of the residents had the specific social skills and appropriate values to get to know others quickly;

- whether local residents and their area were under threat, particularly when this resulted in local campaigning organisations;
 - whether there were many locally based organisations;
 - whether a local area was particularly isolated and whether the physical layout and design of that area, encouraged rather than discouraged casual neighbourly meetings.
- (page 15, 1987).

Therefore, for Peter Willmott the community was identifiable through its social institutions and activities. These institutions and activities gave rise to a *unique geographical area, with a social identity* and shared sense of belonging that differentiated one local community from its neighbours. This interpretation meant that a criteria could be developed which would have the potential for identifying local communities, although problems existed as to how to assess such intangible factors as social relationships and feelings of belonging. However, an attempt has already been made to identify such factors and identify local communities. Furthermore, the purpose of this attempt at identifying communities was also to support a re-structuring of local government in England.

This happened in 1966 when the Redcliffe-Maud Commission undertook its review of local government, which was instrumental in leading to the reorganisation of 1974.

Whilst it has been demonstrated that this reorganisation, (which created the existing county and district councils) was primarily dominated by the desires for administrative uniformity and the achievement of economies of scale (see chapter 2) it did not mean that the issue of community was totally overlooked. In fact another review of texts related to this reorganisation, reveals that the Royal Commission under Lord Redcliffe-Maud appointed a private research company to investigate the concept of the community. Morris Janowitz and John Kasarda, in their article, "The Social Construction Of Local Communities" (1974 T.Leggatt) observed that this Royal Commission:

"believed that public preferences as to the size and structure of local government should be taken into account" , because, "the structure of local government should articulate with the social organisation and social fabric of the *local community*" (page 207,1974).

This aim is not dissimilar to the present government's instructions in their Policy Guidance to the Local Government Commission (DoE 1992), which specifies that the current review should; "take account of people's expressed preferences" (page 1, DoE 1992) and create a structure of local government, "that would better reflect the identities and interests of *local communities*" (page 2, DoE 1992). Whilst the work and report of Research Surveys Limited has already been reviewed in chapter 2 it is worth reviewing again to re-emphasise the interpretation of the community that was produced and the method by which this concept was identified.

Research Surveys Limited: A Community Attitudes Survey: England

Chapter 2 has already observed that this survey, was in the 1960's, one of the largest social surveys to be conducted, altogether it involved sampling 100 local authority areas (excluding London) and conducting face to face interviews with 2,199 electors. This was in addition to a further 143 interviews in six municipal and urban boroughs, with the respondents being chosen as a representative sample of the then total population of England. The first page of this survey stated that its main aims were to identify the nature and geographical size of local communities, as well as to test accessibility and electors knowledge of, and attitudes towards local government (page 1, 1969). The intention was to provide the Redcliffe-Maud Commission with important information on whether communities existed and if they did what their attitude was towards the existing system of County Boroughs, Municipal Boroughs, Urban Districts and Rural Districts.

The issue of individual's attitudes towards local government and local councils accessibility was addressed by the survey asking respondents:

- whether they could identify which services were then provided by local councils and how well run they were;
- whether they knew who to contact at the local council with a complaint and whether they knew who their councillor was and how to contact them;
- what the ideal size for a local authority should be and whether the area represented by local councillors should be enlarged or reduced.

The results to these questions were particularly interesting and revealed that in 1967 respondents had a limited knowledge of local government, were generally apathetic towards it (indeed it was also found that only 6% of respondents participated in some way within local government, 1969) and preferred the status quo. A second preference was also found for larger rather than smaller authorities (1969), but as interesting as these results may be, they are not as important as the investigation into community.

In tackling the thorny problem of how to identify communities Research Surveys started from the premise that they were being asked to measure a 'physical/geographical area', to which people, "feel they belong and where they feel at home" (1969). Therefore, in this instance and for the purposes of reorganising local authority boundaries in 1969, the community (as with the DoE and Peter Willmott et al) had both a social and spatial aspect. Research Surveys then produced two key criteria for identifying these communities.

The first revolved around individual electors subjective feelings and was described as the "perceived community area" (page 11, 1969). Whilst the second was termed "community influence" and assessed how active respondents were within their community and their sense of belonging.

Research Surveys assessed the first of these factors by asking each elector to provide a verbal description of an area where they were living and that they felt they 'belonged to' and 'at home in' (1969). This resulted in 4 out of 5 electors producing a home area that they felt personally attached to, which in rural areas was found to be smaller than a parish and in urban areas only a street or a small collection of streets (1969). It was also found that these 'home areas' only corresponded to local authority areas when electors lived close to the centre of the local district or county, or in a small urban authority. Furthermore, the survey found that these home areas tended to be shaped mainly by physical landmarks and to a lesser extent by "sociability and/or social prestige" (1969).

Research Surveys then developed this perceived community with their second indicator of community, which was termed "community involvement". An assessment of this second

indicator included an assessment of the nature and extent of each elector's sense of belonging, as well as the nature and extent of their participation within the community of the home area. It began by asking electors such questions as;

- How long they had resided in the home area?
- How sorry would they be to leave the home area?
- How interested were they in local events?
- Whether they would recommend a local school to friends?

Research Surveys also correlated the results from these questions against more formal behavioural patterns, that is, those of employment, shopping and leisure, as well as patterns of kinship and acquaintances, that is, whether they had friends/relatives within a ten minute walk and how often they saw them.

The overall results of these questions were that the nature and extent of community involvement that is, the feelings of belonging and social behaviour, were very important in creating and holding together the community and its home area. It was found that the greater the number of activities within the home area the greater the sense of attachment, in particular, activities such as weekly shopping, visiting friends and relatives, attending local churches, having children at local schools and visiting local pubs, were found to be very important. Activities such as work were not found to be so significant, particularly since most respondents were employed outside of the local home area (1969). Research Survey's main conclusion from these results was that whilst the community could be measured in geographical terms, that is, an area respondents could identify as belonging to - this was not meaningful unless the factor of community involvement was taken into account. A strong message from the survey was that it was *formal and informal activities within the community and the social fabric it created that really engendered a strong and communal sense of belonging to an area, thereby making it a meaningful community*. This meant that in 1969 for that particular reorganisation, a community was interpreted by Research Surveys as a geographical area whose, "social activities, attributes and patterns of behaviour" (1969), engendered a shared sense of attachment from its residents. Further, that this should be measured by initially identifying the home area or

perceived community and then the extent of belonging to and involvement within that community, which for Research Surveys lay within both personal feelings towards an area and formal and informal behaviour patterns.

A consequence of this particular interpretation was that in 1969 it led to the identification of small communities and home areas, which eventually led to the rejection of these communities in the final reorganisation in 1974. The then Conservative government wanted to create large self sufficient authorities with populations of a quarter to a half a million, so that they could directly provide all local services. Therefore in undertaking their assessment of communities Research Surveys Limited had produced social and spatial units that were not applicable to the process of reorganisation.

The question therefore arises as to whether this problem would also be encountered by the Local Government Commission and their review of English authorities?

Conclusion

This literature review has determined that the community has been identified by a number of themes in recent studies of the community. These themes include:

- a defined geographical space;
- distinguishable social institutions;
- social networks;
- a shared sense of belonging and commonality.

It has also been observed that, in relation to local government, the community and the above themes have had a long and varied history. The community has been used by advocates of community government to justify their proposals and ideas for local democracy, it has also been used by New Right theorists to justify the 'consumerisation' of local government and by those advocating local decentralisation. A key theme of all of these studies is that communities exist as distinct social groups with their own specific local area, social institutions, social networks and are distinguished by a common sense of belonging.

Peter Wilmott (1987) has also suggested that communities can be identified by isolating a range of factors including:

- a relatively stable population;
- kin and friends in the local area;
- common social clans or a local industry;
- residents having the specific social skills and appropriate values to get to know others quickly;
- locally based organisations;
- geographical isolation and whether the physical layout and design of that area, encouraged rather than discouraged casual neighbourly meetings.

At least one of these factors is, without doubt, difficult to identify, that is whether residents have 'appropriate values' and 'social skills' to get to know each other. However there are a number of good indicators of the community. These indicators include the

existence of friends and kin and social networks, and the existence of locally based organisations and a common local industry. The work of Research Surveys in 1967 developed other indicators with the idea that communities could also be identified by sampling people's subjective feelings of belonging through direct questioning and a range of more formal behavioural patterns, such as shopping, and leisure.

Therefore, it appeared from this literature review that the community when applied to local government was a spatial area whose social networks, organisations and patterns of behaviour generated a common sense of belonging and attachment. Further that this could be measured through identifying:

- social networks with friends, family and neighbours;
- social organisations, local clubs, associations, churches and schools;
- behavioural patterns, for example where did people shop and work;
- subjective feelings of belonging, by asking people what area they felt that they belonged to and how strong this sense of belonging was.

The question, therefore, arises as to how the above factors and interpretation of the community compared with the manner in which the community was to be interpreted and applied by the Local Government Commission.

Chapter 3 demonstrated that the intention of the local government review was to identify communities as distinguished by their distinct geographical areas, distinct identities and common interests, which broadly accords with the above interpretation of the community. Further, that the Commission had to use a community index which took into account significant factors such as:

- history;
- topography
- personal mobility, i.e. work, travel and leisure patterns;
- sporting clubs;
- established industries;
- transport;

- demography.

These were factors that covered the need to identify social organisations and behavioural patterns, but did not provide the Commission with the opportunity to directly sample local people's subjective feelings of belonging, or their social networks, that is, whether they had friends and family in the area.

The question therefore arises as to how successful this application of the community would be when it was used by the Local Government Commission. This question will now be addressed by chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY UPON THE FIRST YEAR OF REORGANISATION

Chapter's 2, 3 and 4 of this thesis have, so far, produced some important conclusions. The most significant of these are that the concept of the community appeared to be a significant factor in the guidance documents that were issued to the Local Government Commission, and that its purpose was to identify a significant social and spatial area.

The next important step for this thesis is to review each of the authorities in the sample group and determine how the concept of the community was actually used and whether it was a significant and influential factor.

The Start of Local Government Reorganisation

The process of reorganisation began in the July of 1992, when the DoE finalised the membership of its Commission, by announcing that its Chief Executive would be Martin Eastal and its Chairman Sir John Banham. The DoE also announced that each Shire County would be reviewed individually by two or three Commissioners at a time, with the aim of initiating a non-stop rolling programme of reviews. These reviews were to be conducted according to a strict timetable that divided all of the English Shires into five tranches, as demonstrated by Table 6. A closer examination of the first tranche in Table 7 exemplifies the system of allocating specific commissioners to individual areas and also demonstrates that all of the authorities that have been selected for this thesis sample group, were included in this first tranche of reviews.

Table 6: The Five Tranches For The English Shires

<p><i>TRANCHE 1</i></p>	<p><i>ISLE OF WIGHT DERBYSHIRE CLEVELAND & DURHAM AVON, GLOUCESTERSHIRE & SOMERSET HUMBERSIDE, LINCOLNSHIRE & NORTH YORKSHIRE</i></p>
<p><i>TRANCHE 2</i></p>	<p><i>CAMBRIDGESHIRE CUMBRIA LANCASHIRE DEVON HAMPSHIRE LEICESTERSHIRE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE STAFFORDSHIRE</i></p>
<p><i>TRANCHE 3</i></p>	<p><i>BEDFORDSHIRE BERKSHIRE OXFORDSHIRE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE CHESHIRE, KENT EAST SUSSEX, WEST SUSSEX</i></p>
<p><i>TRANCHE 4</i></p>	<p><i>DORSET ESSEX HEREFORD & WORCESTER NORFOLK SUFFOLK WILTSHIRE</i></p>
<p><i>TRANCHE 5</i></p>	<p><i>CORNWALL HERTFORDSHIRE NORTHUMBERLAND SHROPSHIRE SURREY WARWICKSHIRE</i></p>

Table 7: First Tranche

<i>AUTHORITY TO BE EXAMINED</i>	<i>START DATE</i>	<i>END DATE</i>	<i>COMMISSIONER APPOINTED</i>
<i>ISLE OF WIGHT</i>	<i>3 AUGUST 1992</i>	<i>25 APRIL 1993</i>	<i>DAVID THOMAS</i>
<i>DERBYSHIRE</i>	<i>7 SEPTEMBER 1992</i>	<i>19 SEPTEMBER 1993</i>	<i>C. WILKINSON M. CHISHOLM</i>
<u>CLEVELAND & DURHAM</u>	<i>14 SEPTEMBER 1992</i>	<i>21 NOVEMBER 1993</i>	<i>D.ANSBRO A.LEVICK</i>
<u>AVON, GLOS. & SOMERSET</u>	<i>28 SEPTEMBER 1992</i>	<i>23 JANUARY 1994</i>	<i>K.ENNALS M.LEIGH</i>
<u>HUMBERSIDE, LINCS & NORTH YORKSHIRE</u>	<i>28 SEPTEMBER 1992</i>	<i>23 JANUARY 1994</i>	<i>H.HARRIS HUGHES B.HILL</i>

All authorities in bold and underlined were selected as a sample group for comparisons with Hereford and Worcester and Wychavon District Council

The first review in the Isle of Wight was not particularly contentious, as there was general island wide support for the Commission's recommendation for a single unitary authority. However, when the Local Government Commission started their review of Derbyshire problems began to arise around the issue of costs and community.

The County and District Councils in Derbyshire both claimed to have used the methodologies in the Commission's policy and procedure guidances, and both claimed that these methodologies supported their radically different cases for reorganisation.

The County Council for example, had produced financial costings and evidence of community identities that supported their case for a unitary County Council. Whilst the districts each produced different submissions that also included financial costings and evidence of community identities that supported their alternative cases for unitary districts.

In their considerations of costs for example, the Municipal Journal (18-24/9/92) reported that the County Council was arguing that its proposal for a unitary county for Derbyshire was the cheapest option. In its submission the County Council was arguing that a unitary county would only incur transitional costs of £15 million and would then realise ongoing savings of £20 million per annum. In contrast to this the County observed that individual unitary districts would incur transitional costs of £23 million and ongoing costs of £17 million per annum (Municipal Journal 18-24/9/92, page 9). The districts naturally denied this and each district produced their own proposals on how much reorganisation would cost. For example, the Derbyshire Dales concluded in their submission that a unitary authority based upon their existing boundaries would save £5.7 million per annum (1993, page 30). Furthermore this disparity and dispute between the county and districts in Derbyshire was repeated in all of the other areas under review in the first tranche, who all argued that they had produced their costings according to the instructions in the Policy Guidance (DoE July 1992).

The same dispute was repeated with regard to the concept of the community, which was used by both the county and all of the district councils in Derbyshire to justify their different cases for reorganisation. The county's submission emphasised that Derbyshire was an historic county that it had been in existence for over one hundred years, whereas many of the districts were creations of the reorganisation of 1974. The districts responded with the official ADC line, that they were in fact closer to their communities, as their smaller size made their officers and councillors more accessible to local residents, as compared to the remote and inaccessible county council.

The Commission was, therefore, faced with an impasse in which both costs and the community were being used to promote different forms of unitary local government. In order to break this impasse and provide the Commission with more objective tools for evaluating costs and community, the DoE made two highly significant appointments. MORI were appointed to conduct opinion surveys that could objectively identify communities and Ernst and Young were appointed to produce a universal costing methodology.

The development of the costing methodology and opinion survey slowed down all of the reviews, as both the community opinion polls and Ernst and Young's financial model were used by the Commission in all of their first tranche reviews (and indeed in later reviews). In fact, these two methodologies became the predominant methods by which the Commission assessed the issues of cost and community identity. This meant the MORI opinion polls and their approach to identifying communities became the primary methodology for determining whether the community was a significant factor and could be used to reorganise the local authorities in the first tranche. Therefore, before examining the individual reviews of each of the authorities in this thesis sample group, it is important to conduct a critique of MORI's methodological approach and specialist questionnaires.

MORI and The Identification of Local Communities

The survey that MORI developed to identify local communities and assess strength of feeling regarding significant social and spatial areas, measured four main factors:

1. local people's knowledge of local government and the review;
2. the level of contact with the county and district councils, and hence the overall accessibility of the current system of local government;
3. local people's effective sense of community i.e. behavioural and administrative communities within which people worked, shopped and generally lived their lives;
4. local people's affective sense of community i.e. subjective and personal perceptions of community and belonging.

The last of MORI's measures addressed an important deficiency in the Commission's methodology, which was mentioned at the end of chapter 4. This was that the Community Index provided no opportunity for the Commission to sample individual's subjective feelings of commonality and belonging. The literature review in chapter 4, the work of Research Surveys Limited (1967) and the research of Hedges and Kelly's (1992) had already emphasised that people's sense of community was shaped by these feelings of commonality, belonging and personal sentiment. Therefore, the inclusion of a survey to address this and other issues was an important step forward for the Commission and their approach to identifying the community. However, the question arises as to exactly how MORI intended to transfer this and other assessments into a questionnaire.

An example of the questionnaire developed by MORI for this survey is contained in appendix B. The questionnaire was completed through face to face interviews with a sample of residents identified by MORI, and contained 21 questions which can be divided into five broad sections.

The first and opening section of the questionnaire began by asking residents how long they had lived in the local area and which local government services they used from a list which covered:

- schools/colleges;
- social services;
- car parks;
- council housing;
- recycling sites;
- sports / leisure facilities / swimming pools;
- libraries.

The above questions provided a useful introduction and indicators such as contact with council services and length of residence could also be correlated against subjective feelings of belonging, behavioural patterns and knowledge of local government, to determine whether residence and contact could affect senses of community and belonging.

The second section of the questionnaire then probed individual's effective sense of community, that is, their behavioural patterns. MORI achieved this by asking residents where they:

- shopped for food and clothes and household goods;
- sent their children to school;
- worked;
- spent their leisure time.

The above questions, therefore, provided a useful indicator of individual travel patterns and social networks, although residents were not asked whether they had any family or friends in the local area and how often they visited them. Hedges and Kelly (1992), Peter Wilmott (1987) and Research Surveys (1967) all identified the location of friends and family as an important indicator in generating a sense of community.

The third section of the questionnaire then supplemented this effective sense of community with the affective sense of community, that is, what area residents felt they belonged to, and the strength of this belonging. MORI researchers asked residents:

- which area or community they felt they belonged to;

- where they thought their nearest town was;
- how strongly they felt they belonged to a range of areas which included the neighbourhood, village, town, district council, county council and any significant larger area;
- how strong their sense of community was with the local neighbourhood, village, town, district council and county council.

Residents were also asked if they had any negative feelings towards an area, as hostility towards a neighbouring area can often engender or prompt a sense of community.

The affective community was therefore measured by resident's subjective emotions of belonging and community being probed, as well as their negative feelings towards specific areas, thereby filling an important hole in the Commission's evaluation of communities and community identities. The Commission, as a result of asking the above questions, would be able to test the most subjective and yet most significant factor in determining a community, that is, whether residents felt a shared sense of belonging to a specific area.

The final sections of the questionnaire, sections four and five, completed the survey by asking respondents whether they knew how to contact their district and county councils, when they had last contacted these councils and whether they knew about local government reorganisation. However, what is significant is that in sections four and five, residents were also asked whether they would support the principle of unitary local government, whether they would oppose a merger with neighbouring areas and what they thought should be the most significant factor in local government reorganisation. The last two sections of this questionnaire, therefore, also probed whether residents would support reorganisation and what they would regard as their ideal area for a new authority.

The MORI survey, therefore, aimed to gather a significant amount of additional information for the Local Government Commission. The survey would particularly indicate to the Commission:

- whether support for unitary local government existed;
- which areas stimulated a sense of belonging and community;
- local behavioural and travel patterns;
- areas that could be merged and combined without stimulating opposition from local residents.

The MORI survey, therefore, had the potential, as commented by MORI Director Brian Gosschalk, to 'fill in any gaps' and support the Commission's local consultation and application of the Community Index.

Therefore, the issue arises as to whether MORI were any more successful in identifying communities than Research Surveys in 1967? In particular were MORI able to reconcile feelings of belonging and individual's behavioural patterns and the areas they produced, with the need to find suitable areas for new unitary authorities? Or did this interpretation of the community again result in communities that were too small to be practically useful? The answer to these questions can only be found by a careful examination of MORI's work in Cleveland and its results.

The Reorganisation of Cleveland and Durham

The preparations for local government reorganisation in both Cleveland and Durham began with joint officer initiatives.

In Durham for example, there was an initial consensus of opinion that the status quo should be retained and the county and district councils began a joint programme to develop their submissions to the Local Government Commission. This however, soon broke down when Sedgefield and Darlington District Councils stated that they were going to campaign for unitary status. This was also followed by Durham City Council and Easington District Council declaring that they were undecided as to whether they could

continue to support the case for status quo. It appears that this was prompted by a statement from the County Council that whilst they supported the status quo, they felt that if unitary local government had to be implemented then they and not the districts would be the most appropriate authority. Eventually all of the districts abandoned the case for the status quo and through the County Branch of the ADC started campaigning for district based unitary authorities. This message was repeated in all of the district councils separate submissions to the Local Government Commission on reorganisation. However it is also important to note that the position of the district councils in Durham changed after Martin Easteal's speech in the January of 1993, which criticised the first tranche submissions for not providing alternatives to the straight choice between unitary counties or unitary districts. This resulted in the Durham districts, again through their ADC County Branch, producing an alternative for the Commission which involved creating four unitary authorities, to be based upon:

- Darlington District Council;
- Easington District Council;
- a merger of Durham City, Chester-le-Street and Derwentside District Councils;
- an amalgamation of Teesdale, Sedgefield and Wear Valley District Councils.

This was, however, very much a secondary option for the districts whose first choice was still for unitary status. Meanwhile, in Cleveland, the County Council and its four District Councils also began work for their review with a joint study into the effectiveness of reorganisation. This joint work explored a range of options from creating a single county wide unitary authority, to establishing 2, 3 or 4 district based unitary authorities. However, despite the development of these different options, the two final submissions to the Local Government Commission, were for either a unitary County (or the status quo) or for four unitary district based authorities to which there was no change or modification. A review of the submissions made by the Cleveland districts to the Local Government Commission, revealed that the districts utilised the community index to demonstrate support from the local communities.

Middlesborough for example, noted that when taking into account each of the community index factors the district could demonstrate that it had a unique industrial heritage and history, which was not shared by its neighbouring districts and therefore differentiated its community. Middlesborough (Submission to the Commission, 1992) also noted that in demographic terms the district and city had a population equivalent to some existing metropolitan districts and had socio-economic characteristics and problems that were also not shared by its neighbours. Therefore, it was concluded that Middlesborough stood as a separate and distinct community with its own identity. Similarly, Hartlepool (Submission to the Commission, 1992) distinguished itself in terms of history, heritage and industry by referring to its traditions as a fishing port, which Hartlepool District Council argued gave it a unique identity and community. Langbaugh, however, faced the most difficult task in identifying a discernible community, because it was created in 1974 from several disparate communities.

Langbaugh (Submission to the Commission, 1992) countered this problem in their submission by noting that whilst the district was a creation of 1974 and had a limited history and heritage, it was distinguished by its agricultural nature. The District Council further asserted that this rural and agricultural nature sharply contrasted with its neighbours, such as Middlesborough, and had produced a different community with a distinctly different identity and different needs and interests (Submission to the Commission, 1992).

The Commission responded to the districts' submissions and to the county council's submission for the status quo by recommending that Cleveland should have four unitary authorities based upon the four district councils and that Durham should have two unitary authorities - one based upon the district of Darlington and the other covering the remainder of the county. The Commission also produced the following alternatives for Cleveland and Durham:

- Cleveland, the creation of two or even three unitary authorities;
- Durham the retention of the status quo or the creation of a unitary county.

Whilst these options were to be placed out to consultation with local people, the Commission's preference was still for four unitaries in Cleveland and two in Durham. Therefore in order to understand exactly how the Commission arrived at this decision and to what extent it was affected by considerations of community it is necessary to carefully examine their, "Report to Local People".

Local Government Commission: 'A Report To Local People'

The Commission began their review by asking two questions, the first was 'would a system of unitary local government benefit the counties of Cleveland and Durham?', and if it would 'how should the new unitary authorities be structured?' In both cases the answers were determined by three important considerations:

- I. local community identity and interests;
- II. the need for convenient and effective local services;
- III. the requirement that the costs of any change should be justified by lower administrative costs and/or enhanced accessibility of the new councils to local people.

(Report to Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 18)

Therefore, in order to understand why the Commission recommended six unitary authorities for Cleveland and Durham, it is necessary to understand, exactly how each of these considerations were interpreted and applied to the Commission's two basic questions of 'is change necessary' and 'how should it be achieved?'.

Question 1 - Is Change Necessary: Should Unitary Local Government be Established?

In answering this question the Commission really only applied two of the three considerations described above, that is, community and costs. It appeared from their report that the Commission accepted the government's arguments that unitary local government was potentially more convenient, accountable and effective than the existing two tier system. The Commission's report stated that "the present structure is perceived to be confusing and difficult for people to understand" (Report to Local People: Cleveland &

Durham, page 29). The Commission also commented that the, "effective provision of public services requires an emphasis upon the needs of local people" and "a combined and effective approach", (ibid) between services which could be best achieved by unitary local government. Therefore when it came to this initial consideration of whether a unitary local government should be created the Commission assumed it was potentially more effective than two tiers and based its considerations primarily upon costs and community identity.

The issue of community identity was addressed by the Commission sampling local opinion towards the principle of unitary local government which involved:

- advertising the review upon local television and radio and in the local press, as well as taking submissions from all the local authorities;
- sampling the opinions of national special interests such as the ADC and the ACC;
- drawing upon one question from the MORI survey of community identities and attitudes.

The widespread advertisement of the review resulted in a total of 3,600 responses from the general public, local businesses, local interest groups and parish and town councils (with 1,200 of these representations coming from Cleveland and 2,400 from Durham). The Commission concluded from these responses that the 'great majority' of these replies supported the principle of unitary local government. For example, 80 of Durham' parishes and 20 of Cleveland's parishes were noted as supporting change towards a unitary system (Report to Local People: Cleveland and Durham 1993, page 13), as were all of the local authorities within Cleveland and Durham. This even included Durham County Council, who conceded that if the status quo was not an option then they would prefer unitary local government in the form of a unitary county.

The Commission found further evidence that reinforced this 'majority opinion' for unitary local government, by noting that there were also a number of supporting 'special

interests¹. These interests included the ADC and the ACC, (although they had their own views on how unitary authorities should be structured) as well as the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the employees of local authorities. The latter's support being identified through an employee opinion survey that was conducted by MORI in the March of 1993.

The third and final approach to assessing community opinion (one question from the MORI survey) found evidence that supported change towards a unitary system of local government. This was achieved by the Commission drawing upon a single question from the MORI survey that asked respondents to identify the factors that they believed were important in creating a new structure of local government. The results are detailed overleaf in table 8.

¹These special interests were included because the Commission found that in Cleveland only 4% of those surveyed by MORI claimed to know a great deal about the review, with 6 out of 10 respondents knowing nothing about reorganization. Therefore the Commission felt that they had to draw upon more informed special interests. (Report to Local People: Cleveland and Durham, page 14).

Table 8: Factors Determining The Local Government Structure In Cleveland

	% of responses
Responding to local people's wishes	68%
Cost and quality of services	54%
Accountability	28%
Level of information about the council and its services	28%
Ease of contacting the council	20%
Access to local councillors	20%
Sense of local community	16%
Historical or traditional boundaries	13%
Access to council	12%
Size of population covered	10%
Other	1%
Don't know	6%

(Report To Local People: Cleveland and Durham, page 13).

The Commission noted from these results that their criteria of community identity was not as important to local people as the criteria of a responsive and accountable system of local government, providing cost effective and quality services. Furthermore, if the government's views were to be accepted this could be best provided by unitary local government. Therefore, from this question the Commission concluded that local opinion was in favour of a new system of unitary local government. This was despite the fact that this opinion only referred to a sample of approximately 4,000 residents in Cleveland, as the Commission refused to conduct a similar exercise for Durham. This was because MORI had undertaken a poll of community attitudes in Durham for the County Council and the Commission decided to use the results of this survey instead of asking MORI to conduct a new poll, similar to Cleveland's. Nevertheless, the Commission still decided that

based upon these views there was support within the local communities for reorganisation and the principle of unitary local government.

The decision was reinforced by the Commission's consideration of the financial impact of reorganisation. The application of the costing methodology developed by Ernst and Young led the Commission to observe that in comparison to the existing system of two County Councils and 12 District Councils, (costing £1.5 billion), the creation of fewer, large unitary authorities would produce financial savings. It was concluded by the Commission, that a unitary system of local government would reduce the number and costs of senior management, as well as the total number of councillors and their support costs. In particular, the Commission stated that the, "the clear general pattern is that the fewer the number of authorities, the greater the annual savings and the faster the payback on transitional investment" (Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 27).

Therefore, having concluded in general terms that unitary authorities were beneficial in Cleveland and Durham in terms of costs, as well as operational efficiency and community opinion, the Commission then described their preferred options for the reorganisation of these areas.

Question 2 - How Should These New Unitary Authorities Be Structured?

The Commission dealt with Cleveland and Durham separately, although in both cases the same three factors were applied - costs, operational efficiency and community identity.

The Commission found in Cleveland that the application of their financial methodology produced the greatest level of savings from a unitary county, as it would have one set of senior staff, one set of councillors and one set of support costs. This then followed by two unitary authorities and then by four unitaries, as demonstrated by Table 9.

Table 9: Financial Implications Of Reorganisation In Cleveland

	£Million: Annual Savings	£Million Transitional Costs
Unitary County	14.2	11.7
Unitary Hartlepool & Unitary Teeside	12.2	13.0
Four Unitary Districts	10.0	10.3

(Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 32).

Whilst this table demonstrates that a unitary county would save the most, it also indicates that the lowest transitional costs would come from creating four unitary districts. The ADC were, nevertheless, highly critical of these results and the tendency of the Ernst and Young methodology to favour large authorities. The ADC felt that this methodology assumed too many senior members of staff in the new authorities. Instead, they drew the Commission's attention to the fact that District Councils had fewer senior staff than County Councils, and would require fewer senior staff if they achieved unitary status. In order to demonstrate this the ADC commissioned the consultants KPMG to produce a consultancy document (1993) that discussed future management structures for unitary authorities, and in all cases there were no more than 5/6 senior posts and in some examples only 3. Nevertheless, the Commission continued to apply their methodology, which in this case tended to favour large unitary authorities - as did the Commission's examination of the issue of operational effectiveness.

In this instance, when it came to determining the ideal size for a unitary authority in terms of convenience and effectiveness, the Commission began by noting that there were services that required larger authorities. These were:

- those carried out over a large geographical area, such as land use planning, plans for mineral extraction, waste disposal, highways and transportation;

- public protection services, for example the police and fire service which the government did not want to cover an area, 'smaller....than at present';
- services that require specialist and expensive technologies and staff, such as trading standards, local archives, child psychologists and child protection officers.

(Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 24).

The Commission observed that the creation of a large number of small unitary authorities would require a complex series of joint arrangements, where accountability would be blurred, difficult for local people to understand and difficult to access. Furthermore, the Commission felt that the more authorities that were involved in service provision, the greater the potential problems for co-ordinating the delivery of local services. The Commission also stated that all new unitary authorities had to be large enough to work with local Health Authorities and Training and Enterprise Councils and most importantly, large enough to act as an enabling authority. It appeared that whilst the Commission had stated that for enabling, "there was no link between the size of a local authority and the efficiency with which services are provided" (Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 24), they felt that when it came to a local authority purchasing services, they needed to be larger rather than smaller. In the Commission's opinion authorities needed to be larger, in order to employ the necessary specialist staff and benefit from the principle of "the larger the contract the better the price" (Report To Local People, page 25). The Commission went on to support this principle by reference to the work of the Audit Commission from 1987, which stated that, "small authorities obtained particularly poor prices unless they formed purchasing consortia" (Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 25). The Commission also referred to the work of T.Travers et al (1993) for the Joseph Rowntree foundation and their assertion that, "there is strong evidence that larger contracts for local services are likely to be cheaper than smaller ones" (Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 25).

These assertions were hotly contested by the ADC, who stated that their district members were experienced in producing cost effective contracts, and that the Audit Commission

and the work of T.Travers et al, had been misquoted. The ADC commented that in both of these works it was admitted that there was no direct correlation between the size of an authority and the cost of either providing or purchasing services. (ADC Response To Commissions Report, page 14). Nevertheless the Commission continued to apply these criteria in Cleveland and Durham when considering the effectiveness of local authorities. This resulted in a bias towards larger rather than smaller unitary authorities, although the Commission never actually stated what in their opinion, would be the ideal size for a new unitary authority. This bias should have led the Commission to recommend either one or two unitary authorities for Cleveland, but instead they recommended the creation of four unitary, district based authorities for Cleveland - which was made after a careful examination of their third and final consideration, community identity.

The Commission was instructed in the Policy and Procedure Guidance to address the issue of community identity by applying the community index and consulting local opinion. It was noted earlier that the Commission had already undertaken their initial consultation and used this information to support their recommendation for the principle of unitary local government. However, this information did not appear to be re-used, as there was no detailed description of how many from this 'majority', supported either one, two or four unitary authorities within Cleveland. Furthermore from the Community Index, the Commission only considered two factors, that is the history and industrial characteristics of Cleveland (and also Durham). Further, the factors of history and industry were examined at the start of the Commission's report and really acted as a background and introduction, noting that Cleveland was an authority that was created in 1974, out of the most industrialised and urban areas of the ancient county of Durham. It was also noted that this new county was still resented by some towns such as Stockton and was one of the smallest and most densely populated counties within Britain whose "current needs and problems are closer to those found in the metropolitan counties than to those in the typical English shire" (Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 5). The Commission further noted that deindustrialization had hit Cleveland particularly hard, with the county suffering from high levels of unemployment.

Therefore, from these factors the Commission broadly concluded that Cleveland was an artificial authority created in 1974, that suffered from high unemployment and did not stimulate a sense of belonging from some of its towns. Instead of applying the remainder of the community index to this information and the representations from the initial consultation exercise, the Commission then relied entirely upon the community opinion survey conducted by MORI.

The results of the first section of this survey, which assessed behavioural effective senses of community, were that

"- over 70% of local residents use the shops in their local town for their main food shopping.

- over half go to the local shops for clothes and household goods.

- over 1 in 4 of the heads of the households work in the local town.

- over 60% look to their local town for their sporting and leisure activities."

(Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 32)

Therefore, it appeared that behavioural patterns of work, shopping and leisure in Cleveland centred around the nearest towns. The Commission also found in their assessment of the affective community, that senses of belonging and attachment resulted in a 'circle of community identity'. Further, that this circle started with respondents identifying most strongly with the neighbourhood and village, then to a lesser extent with the local town and then the local authority borough, then the county council area and finally the region of Teeside, as demonstrated by Table 10.

Table :10 Percentage Of Residents Identifying 'Very And Fairly Strongly' in Cleveland

	Very Strongly %	Fairly Strongly %
Neighbourhood/Village	52	30
Town/Nearest Town	50	30
The Borough Council Area	28	36
The County Council Area Of Cleveland	17	33
The Area Of Teeside	22	32

(Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 19).

The Commission broke down the results into individual boroughs, identifying how strongly residents, within each of the four boroughs felt a sense of community identity with their local town, the County Council area of Cleveland and the larger area of Teeside, this produced the results in Table 11.

Table 11: Community Identity Within Cleveland's Borough % Of Residents Identifying Very Strongly

	Local Town	Teeside	Cleveland
Hartlepool	64	4	3
Langbaugh	36	6	7
Middlesborough	61	40	29
Stockton	47	31	24

(Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 31)

Therefore, when it came to recommending a unitary structure of local government, the Commission were faced with a situation in which the main focal point for people's lives was the local town, towards which people felt a strong sense of belonging - exceeded only by their neighbourhood or village. Thus, the affective community pointed to the local

town and the effective community pointed to either the local town or the smaller area of the neighbourhood. Therefore, this survey as with the one conducted by Research Surveys in 1967 produced communities which (in this instance) were too small for the Commission as they lacked the size and resources, in the Commission's opinion, to become unitary authorities. This meant that in Cleveland when it came to balancing the effective and affective communities and choosing a social and spatial area, the Commission produced a compromise. That is, they opted for existing districts as they generated a sense of belonging that was stronger than the county area or the area of Teeside and had as their main focal points the main towns within Cleveland. This even involved granting unitary status to Langbaugh, a borough where MORI conducted an additional 200 surveys, which found that there was in fact a low level of identification with the borough (8%). This was also mirrored by the respondent's sense of belonging to the county of Cleveland (6%), the neighbouring town of Middlesbrough (7%) and the area of Teeside (6%), but there was a very strong sense of identification with the local town of Redcar. Therefore the Commission recommended renaming Langbaugh - 'Redcar and East Cleveland', to reflect the importance of the main town in a predominantly rural area. In addition to these recommendations the Commission also proposed extending the system and role of parish councils to reflect the level of identification with the neighbourhoods, villages and towns.

Therefore, in Cleveland it appeared that MORI's surveys had not been effective in identifying communities for any new unitary authorities. The Commission were left with a choice between either the county or the district councils. In this instance they chose the districts as their new unitary authorities, as the county had produced a very low sense of community and the districts appeared to be centred around the important local towns, which engendered a strong sense of community. This was despite the bias in the Commission's assessment of efficiency and costs towards large and possibly county based unitary authorities, with the Commission stating in their report that, "the operational and cost advantages of retaining Cleveland County Council are not sufficient.....to offset the disadvantages in terms of community identity and interest that would result from

denying the claims of Hartlepool, Langbaugh, Middlesborough and Stockton to unitary status" (Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 33). This was despite Martin Eastal's claim in January 1993 (see page 135), that the Commission wanted to create brand new unitary authorities and their preference in terms of costs and efficiency was for large unitary authorities. It also appeared from this report that the Commission's emphasis upon community identity over costs and efficiency was extended to the district of Darlington in Durham, as this authority was also awarded unitary status because:

- "its history and urban nature reflects that of its neighbours to the east" (i.e. Cleveland);
- there was a "natural link" here (*with Cleveland*) and "good east-west communications", "with recent population movements strengthening this affinity";
- "Darlington has a proud municipal history and enjoyed unitary status as a County Borough until 1974"(Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 33-34).

However, before going too far in regarding these decisions as a triumph of community identity over costs, there are three important criticisms of the Commission's deliberations and their results.

The first is related to the Commission's reliance upon the MORI survey, as this only accessed a small percentage of Cleveland's population and represented the views of a small section of the community. The survey, through its face to face interviews, only gained access to 1,018 residents out of a potential population of over 400,000. Whilst it is true that the constraints of time and money could not possibly allow the Commission to access this entire population, the Commission could have cross referenced this survey against their other method for identifying communities - the Community Index. This cross referencing would also have allowed the Commission to test their conclusions against the other factors connected to the issue of community identity such as, demography, topography, sporting links, etc. Instead, the Commission relied upon this survey and used it to supplement the local authorities submissions, which provided a straight county or district choice. Therefore, the MORI survey merely appeared as a tool for allowing the

Commission to determine whether community identity was stronger within the county or districts and then to choose between either a unitary county or unitary district.

The second criticism lies within the Commission's interpretation of the community in the MORI survey. It was important that the Commission and MORI recognised the two key elements of 'the community', that is, behaviour and sentiment, and devised questions that reflected this duality. For example, their questionnaires established respondents' behavioural patterns, by asking them where they worked, shopped and spent their leisure time, whilst also asking respondents what areas they felt they belonged to and felt a sense of community with, as well as areas they had negative feelings towards. This, therefore, tested local behaviour and both positive and negative emotions, but the problems arise in using the final results to redefine local areas. For example, in Cleveland the 'community' was an area that at its smallest was a neighbourhood and at its largest a town. The result of which was (as in the work of Research Surveys in 1967) the identification of communities that were too small to base new authorities upon, forcing the Commission to opt for either a pre-established district or county, depending upon which was the most popular.

The third and final criticism is that the options for four unitary authorities in Cleveland and a unitary Darlington whilst being based upon the community rather than costs and efficiency, were not totally inefficient and ineffective in terms of cost (Report to Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 32). The Commission estimated that a unitary Darlington would produce ongoing savings of 10% per annum and would only take four years to repay its transitional costs. Whilst in Cleveland four unitary districts also had the lowest level of annual savings, and the lowest level of transitional costs of £10.3 million, which it was estimated would be paid back in one year. Therefore, these recommendations would not result in high levels of costs, indeed they both produced savings of some kind. It was also felt that five unitary districts working together would not be substantially inefficient when providing large scale and strategic services, as they would require few joint agreements and arrangements (Report to Local People: Cleveland and Durham, page 32). Therefore., this was not entirely a case of the Commission's interpretation of the

community being more important than their preference for cost effective and efficient unitary authorities, instead it was a cost effective and efficient option that also appeared closest to the existing sense of community sentiment (that pointed towards the local town and district rather than the County).

Therefore, it appeared that costs and efficiency were as equally important to the Commission as the community and when they could compliment each other the Commission would opt for the solution that generated a sense of community. The result was a recommendation for four unitary authorities in Cleveland and one in Darlington. Furthermore, this type of solution and the emphasis upon cost savings, efficiency and the MORI opinion surveys was again exemplified by the Commission's recommendation for Durham, when it was proposed that there should be one unitary authority to cover the county area outside of Darlington.

This decision was justified on the grounds that this unitary authority:

- was more cost effective than seven unitary districts, as it would produce the highest level of annual savings of £13.6 million, as compared to £2.2 million for the districts (Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 36);
- would be more efficient as it would require no complex joint arrangements and it would benefit from economies of scale, which for the Commission was particularly important for its enabling role of producing and purchasing contracts (this was in comparison to the seven districts who for the Commission would need a whole series of joint arrangements and agreements for contracting and service provision, Report to Local People: Cleveland and Durham, page 35);
- had a strong sense of community identity - in fact stronger than any of the counties in the first tranche, with 84% of surveyed respondents identifying with the County of Durham. The Commission noted in their report that the 'County of Durham' aroused feelings slightly stronger than those with the neighbourhood, with 83% of respondents feeling a sense of community at this level. (Report To Local People: Cleveland & Durham, page 22). This, therefore, meant that outside of the neighbourhood the

strongest effective community was the County and therefore when faced with a district or county choice the Commission opted for the County. This again was without applying the Community Index, which would have been particularly important in this case as the survey within Durham had been conducted by the County Council and not the Commission.²

Therefore, the overall result from Cleveland and Durham, was that in terms of operational efficiency and costs the Commission appeared to favour large unitary authorities, and in terms of community identity relied solely upon their MORI survey. The main aim of which was to provide additional information around the local government submissions proposals and apparently to enable the Commission to make a choice between the options that were presented by local councils. However, this conclusion is only drawn from the first review and the question arises as to whether the Commission would adopt a similar approach in Avon.

Local Government Reorganisation in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset

Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset were reviewed together, because in 1974 the County of Avon and its districts of Bristol City, Wansdyke, Woodspring, Bath City, Kingswood and North Avon were created out of the historic counties of Somerset and Gloucestershire (as well as the County Borough of Bristol).

The Local Government Chronicle observed that of the three counties Avon was regarded as being "artificial and unloved", and was struggling "to convince those brought together from Bristol City and County, Somerset and Gloucestershire to identify with it" (Local Government Chronicle 17-1-1992). This lack of identity and any kind of future after the review was even recognised by the County Council itself. An interview and conversations with Mr Stephenson the Chief Executive of Woodspring District Council, at the ADC

² The original survey had been conducted in 1992 to measure the performance of the County Council and not to specifically measure community identities and did not aim to measure the same factors as in Cleveland. Instead in Durham respondents were asked for their identification with the County of Durham, referring to an historic and traditional county, rather than the modern 'county council area of Durham'. Thus it appeared that in Durham (as in Cleveland), the Commission used no other method than a survey, to make a choice between the County and District councils.

National Local Government Review Advisers Group, revealed that officers had no mandate to fight for Avon County Council's survival. Furthermore, members also refused to explicitly fight for its continuation. This situation gave all of the districts extra impetus to campaign for unitary status, especially Bristol City Council, who pointed to over a thousand years of independent local government within the city. The submission of Bristol City Council drew heavily upon the city's history and heritage, as an ancient dock and port that had been mentioned in the Domesday book and had had a City Council since medieval times. The City Council's submission also drew upon other factors from the community index to justify its case for unitary status on the grounds of community.

For example, the City Council noted that over two thirds of residents worked in the city and a higher percentage shopped and spent their leisure time in the city. Furthermore, Bristol had a strong local economy with business parks being located to the north of the city, the Ministry of Defence building, a new office complex, on the outskirts of the city for over 3,500 civil servants and a significant amount of industry being located in Avonmouth. The City Council argued that Bristol had a distinct heritage, history, economy and community which the City Council had represented for hundreds of years and could continue to represent (Submission to the Commission: Bristol City Council). Bristol City Council was also supported by the local paper. The Evening Post, which in January and February 1993 carried a number of editorial comments that supported the City Council's case for unitary status. For example, the Evening Post ran editorials that described Avon County Council as an 'unwanted mistake' which should be 'despatched to the dustbin'. (Evening Post 12/1/93),

Bath City Council, in their submission produced similar arguments to Bristol. Bath City Council argued that as a Roman settlement Bath had a unique history and heritage and had been a significant social and economic centre for surrounding rural communities for much of its history. The result was that Bath had developed its own community, with its own traditions quite distinct and separate to its larger neighbour Bristol. The City Council also produced evidence that local people who lived in Bath and the neighbouring district of

Wansdyke, as well as Keynsham just outside of Bristol, travelled to Bath for work, and to spend their shopping and leisure time. Bath was also described as having a distinct and healthy economy as a tourist destination, with the Roman Baths being the second most visited attraction in the UK (Submission to the Commission: Bath City Council, 1992). Therefore, on the grounds of history, heritage and economy it was argued that Bath was a distinct and separate community which should be recognised by awarding unitary status to the City Council (Submission to the Commission: Bath City Council, 1992).

Avon County Council's submission to the Local Government Commission was, however, a more subdued affair, using the community and the community index to justify its case for unitary status or the retention of the status quo. The County Council began by acknowledging that as a creation of 1974 reorganisation it had little history or heritage, but it had achieved some positive success. The County Council felt that it could represent the diversity of local communities in the county through its localised services, such as schools, social care facilities and libraries, and argued that to abolish the County Council could place these services in jeopardy. The County Council argued that its abolition would result in the loss of economies of scale, and a plethora of joint arrangements in education, social care, emergency fire services and libraries and reduced accountability for local communities. (Evening Post 10/2/93)

This campaign was also repeated in varying ways by the county councils in Somerset and Gloucestershire, who could argue that they had a greater sense of identity and history than their districts. The argument was based on assertion that the district councils in Gloucestershire and Somerset were creations of 1974, unlike the county councils that had been in existence for hundreds of years. Gloucestershire and Somerset County Councils also argued that if both counties had unitary status they could produce ongoing savings of £10 million per year each. This was in contrast to the districts who, according to the counties' costings, would result in high transitional costs and increased annual costs (Gloucestershire & Somerset Submissions on Reorganisation). The counties felt that their cases for unitary status were considerably strengthened when the Commissioners for this

review Ken Ennals and Mary Leigh asked the districts to produce a plan for eleven unitary authorities - rather than 17 unitary districts (Local Government Chronicle 19-2-1993).

It appears that this request was prompted by Martin Eastaals' speech in January 1993 which asked districts to consider merging and dividing their districts. The importance of this request was reinforced at a private meeting between the Chief Executives and Leaders of Wychavon and Tewkesbury District Councils. Interviews with Chief Executive of Tewkesbury District Council Mr Davis revealed that the Commission wanted districts to produce proposals that involved more than unitary districts and actually merged authorities into larger units. Mr Davis also strongly suggested in these interviews that if all of the districts within an area could produce such proposals, then they would be accepted over any County Council submission. Mr Davis further commented that it was this consideration that had prompted the districts in Gloucestershire to produce a secondary proposal that suggested a boundary change to the Forest of Dean, a merger of Cheltenham and Tewkesbury and a merger of Gloucester City and the District of Stroud.

Interviews with Mr Stephenson, the Chief Executive of Woodspring (February 1993), also revealed that the districts in this county believed success lay in a move away from their original stance that unitary status should be awarded to all districts. Instead, the districts believed that it was better to produce an option that suggested merging some smaller districts and had support from all district councils. This was on the grounds that the Commission did not want unitary districts unless, they had 'an exceptional sense of community identity'. Mr Stephenson reported that this comment had been made by the Commissioner for Avon, Mr Ken Ennals, who had also commented that an ideal unitary authority would in all probability be merged districts, with a combined population of at least 250,000. The proposition was then put to Mr Stephenson that it appeared that the community was not an overriding factor in the Commission's consideration and that an unofficial size criteria was being used. Mr Stephenson responded that privately he thought that this could be the case. However, he also felt that if a district with a population of 100,000 could demonstrate a truly exceptional sense of community identity, then it may

have a slim chance of getting unitary status. Otherwise, Mr Stephenson believed that the Commission would be looking for authorities that they thought were economically and operationally viable, that is with populations of 250,000 and up. Mr Stephenson did, however state that this was very much a private opinion which was not shared by some of his fellow Chief Executives and certainly not by his leader, who wanted a unitary Woodspring, 'come hell or high water'.

The other districts in Avon had, however, come up with an alternative option which proposed a unitary City of Bristol, a merger of Bath and Wansdyke and the merger of the districts of Northavon and Kingswood. The districts within Somerset also followed the lead of the Avon districts and proposed a merger of Taunton and West Somerset with part of the Mendips which would also be split between a merged Sedgemoor and South Somerset (Local Government Chronicle 19-2-93).

The Commission eventually announced on the 14th of June 1993, that their preferred option was to firstly abolish Avon County Council and create the following unitary councils:

- City and County of Bristol;
- North West Somerset (Avon's old district of Woodspring);
- North East Somerset (the city of Bath and district of Wansdyke, including parts of the Mendips);
- South and West Somerset (all of the county of Somerset excluding parts of the Mendips);
- South Gloucestershire (Avon's old districts of Kingswood and Northavon);
- Mid Gloucestershire (the district of Stroud and Gloucester city);
- East Gloucestershire (the districts of the Cotswolds, Tewkesbury and Cheltenham - which the Commission suggested could be renamed 'The Cotswolds');
- Forest of Dean, based upon existing boundaries.

The Commission's other options included the status quo for Gloucestershire and Somerset but with extended boundaries to take in the districts from the abolished county of Avon, or creating two unitary authorities in Gloucestershire and dividing the County of Somerset into three unitary authorities. The question, therefore, arises as to why the Commission recommended eight unitary authorities in preference to any other combination and how was this affected by the concept of the community? The answer to which again lies within a detailed examination of the Commission's report.

Local Government Commission: Report To Local People

The report followed the same pattern as those produced for Derbyshire, Cleveland and Durham. It began by determining whether unitary local government would be beneficial for Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset and came to the conclusion that it would. The conclusion was based on the same factors as those used in the reports for Cleveland, Durham and Derbyshire. These were:

- the assumption that unitary local government had the potential to be more efficient than two tiers;
- an assessment of community opinion based upon one question from the MORI poll, which produced almost the same answers as it had in Cleveland, Durham and Derbyshire. These were that for local people the three most important criteria in creating a new system of local government were this it responded to local people's wishes, provided cost effective and quality services, and was accountable;
- the repeated views of national special interests;
- a small sample of views from local authorities, interest groups, MP's and a limited number of local residents, in this instance there were a total of 6,000 responses from the three counties, with, "the great majority.....supporting the establishment of unitary authorities" (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 12);
- the general conclusion that a fewer number of large unitary authorities, meant lower costs and greater savings and thus overall, unitary local government was more beneficial. (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos & Somerset, page 13).

Therefore, having applied these factors and determined that unitary authorities should be created in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset, the Commission then had to create an 'appropriate unitary structure'. The Commission appeared to use the same approach to tackling this problem that they had used in Cleveland and Durham.

The approach involved the Commission determining what size of unitary authority would ensure the continued provision of effective and convenient local services, would be cost effective and would reflect existing community identities.

The Commission's examination of the first two issues of efficiency and cost appeared to repeat a bias towards large almost county based unitary authorities. For example, when considering the issue of efficiency the Commission stated that any new unitary should be large enough to:

- efficiently act as an enabler i.e. be able to obtain larger, cheaper contracts;
- provide specialist and expensive services, emergency services and services that had to be carried out over large geographical areas;
- effectively work with other public bodies such as health authorities and training and enterprise councils;
- reduce the need for joint arrangements - the commission were, therefore, particularly critical of the district council's proposals for "forty joint working arrangements" (report to local people: Avon, Glos and Somerset), that would have to be instigated if the proposal for eight unitary districts was approved.

Therefore, in terms of convenient and efficient local government the Commission definitely appeared to favour large unitary authorities, as they did in their financial analysis. The Commission argued that (based upon their financial methodology) the most cost effective reorganisation would be the creation of only a few large unitary authorities. The general application of their financial methodology had led the Commission to restate that the fewer the number of authorities, the greater the savings and the faster the payback of transitional costs. This principle was demonstrated when the Commission observed, in

their report, that the creation of three large unitary counties would save £44 million per year, whilst the creation of seventeen smaller unitary districts would in fact cost an additional £16 million per year (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 25). Therefore, in terms of costs it was clear that the Commission did not favour unitary districts, but larger counties, the Commission acknowledged this in their report and stated that it was because of the high costs of creating unitary districts. Therefore, purely in terms of cost and efficiency the Commission definitely favoured large unitaries and it was possible that if there was a weak or unclear sense of community then these considerations would dominate and as in Durham a large unitary authority would be created. However, the Commission did also admit that whilst, " a large number of small unitary authorities are unlikely to meet the requirements set out in the government's guidance" (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset page 27), they would be considered if they had a very strong and clear community identity.

The Commission commented in its assessment of community identity that this review involved the consideration of an area, "larger in population than several states in the United States", and one characterised by considerable diversity (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 17). The Commission observed that the county of Gloucestershire, including the northern part of Avon (originally part of Gloucestershire until 1974) was a county of contrasts. In the east and touching upon Oxfordshire and Wiltshire were the Cotswolds, then to the west were the Vales of Berkeley and Gloucester, where the majority of the population lived and worked, particularly in and around the towns of Cheltenham and Gloucester. Finally, sandwiched between Vales and the River Severn was the Forest of Dean. The Commission also observed that Gloucestershire was bordered by both historic Somerset and the city of Bristol, with the latter having a population of over 376,000 and being, "a major economic driving force within the region" (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 17). The Commission further noted that the historic county of Somerset (which until 1974 comprised of southern Avon) was the most rural county deriving much of its character from Exmoor, the Mendips and the Quantocks, with the majority of activity revolving

around the small cities and towns of Bath, Weston, Taunton, Yeovil and Bridgwater - not one of which had a total population of over 80,000 (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 18). However, having described this diversity and acknowledged the complex task of identifying community identities the Commission again relied upon one measure - the MORI poll. Therefore, despite its initial description of the history and characteristics of these counties, the Commission inevitably drew its final conclusions almost exclusively from the work of MORI in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset.

The main conclusions from this report were, that in terms of personal belonging the greatest sense of community again lay with the neighbourhood/village, followed by the town/nearest town, then the District Council area and finally, the County Council area. The Commission labelled this division of belonging between neighbourhood, village, town and county, a 'hierarchy of community' and the hierarchies for Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset are detailed in Table 12.

Table 12 Community Identity In Avon, Glos. & Somerset % of respondents belonging 'very strongly' and 'fairly strongly'.

	AVON		GLOUCS		SOMERSET	
Neighbourhood/ Village	39%	77%	41%	78%	33%	78%
Town/Nearest Town	33	74	34	65	23	65
District / Borough Area	14	49	19	56	11	55
County Council Area	5	25	13	47	15	58

(Report To Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 19).

Table 12 also demonstrates that Somerset was something of an exception in that the County Council area elicited a greater sense of belonging than the district council area. Furthermore, when this sense of belonging to Somerset was compared to the other counties in the first tranche it came second only to Durham, as demonstrated by table 13,

which also demonstrates that Gloucestershire came fourth from bottom and Avon had the lowest sense of identification.

Table 13: Identification With County Council Areas % Of Respondents Identifying 'Very Or Fairly Strongly'.

DURHAM	84%
SOMERSET	58
CLEVELAND	50
NORTH YORKSHIRE	50
LINCOLNSHIRE	49
GLOUCESTERSHIRE	47
DERBYSHIRE	41
HUMBERSIDE	34
AVON	25

(Report to Local People: Avon, Gos. & Somerset, page 20).

These results as identified in table 13 above, prompted the Commission to conclude that the creation of Avon in 1974 had, "not captured the loyalties of the people living there" (Report to Local People: Avon, Gos. & Somerset, page 18). This information was, however, also supplemented with the results from MORI's survey of the affective sense of community.

In Avon it was found that for this sense of community, respondents in and around the city of Bristol had a high level of identification with the City (78%), but not with the 'City Council area' (40%) and especially not with the county of Avon (24%) (Report to Local People: Avon, Gos & Somerset, page 32). The Commission also found that in terms of the effective community, 75% of respondents used the city to purchase food and clothes, 44% for their main food shopping and 38% for sporting and leisure activities (Report to Local People: Avon, Gos & Somerset, page 33). Therefore, the Commission decided from these statistics there was both an effective and affective sense of community with the city of Bristol and, as such, the city council should have unitary status, but should be

renamed the 'City and County of Bristol' (to reflect the importance of the city, rather than the city council area). The Commission then re-questioned the validity of the remainder of the county of Avon, with its economic and population centre gone, particularly since the Commission felt that Southern Avon i.e. the districts of Bath, Woodspring and Wansdyke still looked towards Somerset, whilst those in Northern Avon i.e. North Avon and Kingswood still, "had common roots in Gloucestershire" (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 39). Therefore, the Commission recommended the abolition of the county of Avon and the recognition of the traditional ties of its districts.

In Somerset this meant that the District of Woodspring became the new unitary authority of North West Somerset. The Commission justified this change on the grounds that it included the town of Weston-super-Mare and had a gross budget of £170 million, with a population of 177,000 and an "acceptable degree of self sufficiency for the provision and purchase of services" (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 42). The Districts of Bath and Wansdyke then became merged into North East Somerset, on the grounds that this would make the authority, "more self sufficient in resources and skills than separate authorities and would be better able to meet the needs of its area without joint arrangements" (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 42). The Commission also stated that this merger reflected "patterns of community and interdependence that exist between town and country" (ibid page 42) - although no details were provided on what these patterns were. Finally, the Commission recommended the creation of a unitary county of Somerset, which was justified on the grounds that there was a higher level of identification with the county than any other area (despite earlier representations for unitary districts) and because it would:

- " - Minimise joint arrangements and disruption
- Be able to benefit from economies of scale and from economies within purchasing and producing contracts
- Be able to link effectively with Health Authorities and Training and Enterprise Councils."

(Report to Local People: Avon, Glos. & Somerset, page 44).

In Gloucestershire, the Commission recommended unitary status for a combined Kingswood and Northavon because this would provide a convenient and cost effective unitary authority, which would be renamed South Gloucestershire. The districts of the Cotswolds, Tewkesbury and Cheltenham would also be combined to create East Gloucestershire or 'The Cotswolds', on the grounds that it would make this authority self sufficient, be able to achieve important economies of scale and ongoing savings and thereby become cost effective and efficient. The Commission also felt that this would reflect the existing interdependence between the town of Cheltenham and its surrounding rural areas. The same arguments were repeated for combining Gloucester, Stroud and originally the Forest of Dean but the Commission found a unique a sense of community within the Forest of Dean, in their MORI poll.

The poll concluded that, within this area, over 75% of respondents identified with the district of the Forest of Dean. The Commission, therefore, eventually recommended granting unitary status to the Forest of Dean and combining the districts of Gloucester and Stroud into the Vale of Gloucester (Report to Local People: Avon, Glos & Somerset, page 41).

Thus, it appears, that unless the Commission had a clear sense of belonging and opinion through their MORI polls, they would opt for the most efficient and cost effective option. The Commission demonstrated this by creating unitary East Gloucestershire, Mid Gloucestershire and the unitary authorities within Somerset. In these cases, because there was no strong and overwhelming sense of community with a specific area, the Commission aimed to create unitary authorities based upon the administrative principles of cost and efficiency and in the process did not attempt to use any other method of identifying communities. It was only in areas such as the Forest of Dean and the City of Bristol where there were exceptionally strong senses of community that the Commission awarded unitary status to a district, which in the Forest of Dean (unlike Bristol) was clearly not large enough to meet the Commission's criteria of operational efficiency, self sufficiency and cost effectiveness.

Therefore, as the Commission's reviews progressed, it appeared that the Commission were developing two important assumptions, which were:

- that the only way to assess community identity's was through the MORI surveys; and,
- that large unitary authorities, particularly unitary counties were more cost effective and operationally efficient than several unitary district councils.

The application of these assumptions meant that in areas where the MORI surveys could not readily identify large social and spatial areas, particularly in rural areas where the MORI surveys identified large numbers of small and complex communities, the Commission created large, cost effective unitary authorities. It was only in specific areas, such as the Forest of Dean, where there was a clear and exceptionally strong sense of community that the Commission would consider creating a small unitary authority. The Commission would, however, create unitary authorities based on district councils, in areas such as Cleveland. This was an area where there was some degree of identification with district councils and more importantly, where these authorities would achieve some costs savings over the status quo and would not require a large number of joint arrangements. However, the final decision as to whether to award unitary status to a smaller district based unitary or a larger county based unitary authority ultimately rested with the Commission and the Commissioners conducting the review. This, therefore, introduced a degree of subjectivity and arbitrariness into the Commission's work and recommendations, as will be demonstrated by an examination of the final review in Humberside, North Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

Reorganisation of North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire And Humberside

North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire And Humberside was the final review in the first tranche and began in Humberside against a background of "controversy and resident protest" (Local Government Chronicle 17-1-92). It appeared that, like Avon, Humberside was an artificial authority that had never been accepted by its local residents, indeed in the July of 1991, a re-examination of an old Boundary Commission report by the DoE revealed a previous recommendation to divide the county in two. The report recommended that the

four districts south of the Humber should be transferred to Lincolnshire and the districts north of the Humber should be transferred to North Yorkshire.³

The north/south split within Humberside became particularly apparent when the districts in Humberside separated into north and south groupings in their campaigns for unitary status. The districts in South Humberside wanted unitary status, and to become recognised as part of the county of Lincolnshire (although throughout this process the districts of Glanford, Scunthorpe and Cleethorpes were also engaged in inter-district boundary disputes). However, the districts north of the Humber steadfastly refused to become part of North Yorkshire and wanted to remain as independent separate unitary authorities with their own distinct identities, which in their opinion, were significantly different to North Yorkshire.

Hull City Council for example, argued in their submission to the Commission that this city was an independent historic community with a proud maritime heritage that could trace its origins back to the 12th century. The City Council further argued that this history had given rise to a unique culture and identity which had been developed by the city's location on the Humber estuary and its pre-eminence as 'Northern Europe's principal port to Europe. (Submission to the Commission: Hull City Council, 1994). The City Council commented that its docks and harbour had resulted in the city developing 8km of industrial development around along its waterfront. The effect of which had been to make Hull an industrial city with a growing urban population, which in 1993 was the 10th largest urban area in England (Submission to the Commission: Hull City Council). Hull City Council also commented that the City Council had become an integral part of community life and the drive to revitalise the city by attracting £1.1 billion worth of new investment for its local community from 1987-1993 (Submission to the Commission: Hull City Council). The City Council further observed that Hull was the economic centre of North Yorkshire and Humberside, containing over half of the commercial office space in

³ These were the two counties from which these northern and southern districts were originally taken in 1974 to create the county of Humberside.

the County. Hull City Council also quoted from the MORI poll they commissioned to demonstrate that over 70% of young people regarded the city as their key destination for work, shopping and leisure. The City Council therefore argued that in terms of history, heritage, travel to work patterns, leisure patterns and economic profile Hull had a readily identifiable community.

York City Council adopted a similar approach to Hull when identifying and proving that the city had a readily identifiable community. Whilst the City Council was not prepared to forward a final copy of their submission, the Chief Executive of York City Council, Mr Cairns did agree that, when attending the ADC National Advisers Group in London an opportunity would be provided for a brief review of their draft submission. This review revealed that in terms of using the community to justify their case for unitary status, York relied on three main factors, these were:

- history, with the City Council emphasising that York's history went back to Viking times and had resulted in an established tradition and heritage for the city and its community;
- economy, York was an important regional centre for surrounding villages, with a vibrant tourist trade;
- travel patterns, more than 70% of local residents worked, shopped and spent their leisure time in the city.

Mr Cairns also commented that he thought that demonstrating that York had a discernible and identifiable community would be an important factor in winning unitary status for the City Council. Mr Cairns commented, that in his opinion, the Commission were looking to recreate the Yorkshire Ridings as unitary authorities, but if York could prove that it 'stood out' as a separate community, distinguishable from its rural neighbours then there was a good chance it would get unitary status. Mr Cairns did not believe that the other districts in North Humberside, such as Hambleton, Richmond, Ryedale and Scarborough stood much of a chance, because they were 'too small' and in his opinion had no discernible community identities. (October 1993). When Mr Cairns was asked to explain what he

meant by the comment 'too small' he replied that in his opinion the Local Government Commission did not believe that district councils were viable unitary authorities, capable of providing county council services such as education, social services and supporting an adequate police and fire service. Mr Cairns added that this was rubbish but regardless of what anyone thought this was the Commission's viewpoint, so districts had better be able to prove that they have strong and discernible communities, or else they were 'buggered'. (October 1993).

York and Hull were, however, opposed to the drive by North Yorkshire County Council to create new unitary authorities by North Yorkshire County Council. Humberside and Lincolnshire County Councils were also (unsurprisingly) active in opposing campaigns from their districts for unitary status. Lincolnshire in particular was marked by a acrimonious dispute between the district and county councils. The County Council's stance was tempered by doubts about, "the practicality of one council for Lincolnshire and the four districts south of the county" (Local Government Chronicle 17-1-92). This prompted the county to consider options for the creation of up to three separate unitary authorities. The Commission's response to these proposals was to produce two reports and two sets of recommendations.

The first concentrated upon the area North of the Humber and recommended the creation of five unitary authorities. This involved the establishment of three ridings - North, West and East Yorkshire - along with awarding unitary status to the cities of Hull and York. Whilst the second dealt with the area south of the Humber and recommended the creation of two unitary authorities to cover the southern area of the old county of Humberside, and for the first time status quo for Lincolnshire. The recommendation for Lincolnshire was especially important as it appeared that the Commission had previously been favouring unitary authorities. This, therefore, raises the question of why the status quo was preferred in this instance, and how the 'community' was used to justify this decision as well as those for unitary authorities in the North of the Humber.

Local Government Commission: Report To Local People: North of the Humber & South of the Humber

The Commission, in both of these reports, began by using the same factors for their initial considerations, these factors were:

- Ernst and Young's (1993) financial methodology;
- the submissions of local authorities, which as already noted, saw the district and county councils locked in a battle for unitary status;
- representations from local residents, towns and parishes, interest/voluntary groups and local businesses;
- evidence from the MORI poll;
- evidence from special interests.

The application of the Ernst & Young financial methodology again produced the assumption that potential financial and savings could be accrued from reducing the total number of authorities both North and South of the Humber and creating a smaller number of large unitary authorities. However, the polling of local interest and a sample of the local community through MORI revealed different answers for the areas north and south of the Humber.

The Commission observed in their report for the North of the Humber that of the 1500 representations from Humberside and North Yorkshire, three quarters of these representations came from Humberside. Furthermore, whilst the majority of respondents in Humberside favoured the abolition of the county and the creation of unitary districts, there was "a significant minority who asked the Commission to leave Humberside as it is" (Report to Local People: North of the Humber, page 12). The comments from respondents in North Yorkshire were, however, slightly different, with an even larger minority, that is, 40% wanting to retain the two tier system. (Report to Local People: North of the Humber, page 12). The Commission did, however, note that the remainder of the responses in North Yorkshire favoured unitary local government based upon district councils. The

Commission then supplemented these responses with the results of a MORI poll, which backed the case for change in Humberside.

The MORI poll that was used was not however, conducted on behalf of the Commission, as Humberside County Council had commissioned MORI to conduct an opinion survey for the review, very similar to the Commission's in the February of 1992. Therefore, the Commission refused to do a second poll in Humberside and utilised the results of this survey instead. The results of this MORI poll were that 61% of respondents 'agreed' that there was a need to change from the status quo, and 43% of this total wanted separate authorities for the North and South banks of the Humber (Report To Local People: North of the Humber, pages 13-14). The Commission then re-used this same evidence for their review of local opinion south of the Humber, where it was also noted that general opinion in south Humberside was that the County of Humberside should be abolished.

The Commission did not, however, find such a significant and overwhelming degree of public opinion for the abolition of Lincolnshire, where as in Yorkshire, 40% of respondents wanted to retain the existing two tier system. (Report To Local People: South of the Humber, page 20). However, as in North Yorkshire the Commission also found that the majority of special interest groups wanted unitary authorities and wanted these authorities to be based on district council boundaries.

The Commission did not automatically recommend unitary authorities for Lincolnshire, instead the Commission appeared to make a subjective judgement that unitary status was not appropriate for this county. Mr Cairns, The Chief Executive of York City Council, suggested in conversations at ADC headquarters in London, that the Commission had an obvious solution for Yorkshire when it came to creating unitary authorities. The solution was to reprise the Yorkshire Ridings as unitary councils. Mr Cairns commented that this type of solution did not present itself in Lincolnshire and the Commission could not find an obvious and easy solution for introducing new unitary authorities, therefore they opted for the status quo. The Commission's reasons for opting for the status quo in Lincolnshire

and unitary authorities in Yorkshire were briefly outlined in the second part of their reports for north and south of the Humber.

It appeared in this part of their report, that the Commission had determined how they would reorganise the counties of North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Humberside by again establishing:

- the ideal size of authority for securing convenient and efficient local government;
- the ideal size for producing cost effective local authorities that would secure ongoing savings; and,
- the areas that produced a strong sense of community and belonging.

The Commission in their previous reviews, had found that in terms of establishing effective units of local government that were capable of producing savings and generating low transitional costs, the best structures were large, unitary counties. This theory was again applied in North Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire, with the Commission again arguing that these authorities could;

- "- minimise joint arrangements
- benefit from economies of scale
- provide emergency and specialist services as well as those that needed to be provided over a large area such as mineral extraction plans and highways.
- produce and purchase cost effective contracts"

(Report to Local People: South of the Humber, page 24).

The Commission also repeated its dictum that large unitaries reduced transitional costs and, in particular, produced ongoing savings. The Commission stated that for both the north and south of the Humber they had found that the greater the number of authorities the lower the savings and the higher the costs. This conclusion inevitably worked against the districts - unless of course they had a very strong sense of identity and/or were highly urbanised and densely populated.

In the North of the Humber the Commission found two such urban and densely populated areas Kingston-upon-Hull and York. In the case of Hull, the Commission found that this

authority would be larger than most metropolitan authorities and therefore, able to deliver "most local government services efficiently and effectively" (Report to Local People: North of the Humber, page 36). The Commission's MORI poll also found that 90% of respondents identified 'very or fairly strongly' with the city and 73% were satisfied with sports and leisure facilities, with a further 85% being satisfied with the city's shops⁴. Therefore, in Hull, (an urbanised and densely populated area) the Commission felt that they had found strong effective and affective senses of community.

A similar situation was also found in the city of York, which for the Commission generated a 'very/fairly' strong sense of belonging from two thirds of local residents, thereby resulting in a strong affective community. This was also matched by a strong effective community, with the MORI poll finding that:

- 90% of respondents used the city for buying clothes and household goods;
- 63% used the city for their main food shopping; and,
- 59% used the city for their sporting and leisure activities.

(Report to Local People: North of the Humber, page 40).

Therefore, faced with this evidence and the evidence from Humberside County Council's opinion polls that only 34% of those sampled actually identified with Humberside, the Commission recommended the abolition of the northern part of this county. It was further recommended that the area outside of Kingston upon Hull should be transferred into the West Riding of Yorkshire, with North Yorkshire (barring York) being transferred back into the East and North Ridings. The Commission recommended a return to the old structure of local government in North Yorkshire, that existed before 1974. The decision appears to be based on the grounds of cost and efficiency savings and only marginally on community identities.

⁴It is important to note that this MORI poll which had been commissioned by Humberside County Council and not the Commission, relied upon individuals senses of satisfaction and their senses of belonging or community. Nevertheless the Commission used these measures as an indicator of community and identification

The Yorkshire Ridings only generated a moderately strong sense of community, as demonstrated by table 14. However, for the Commission their large size⁵ and the potential efficiency gains and cost savings of £314 million per year justified the case for introducing three new unitary authorities. Therefore in North Yorkshire and North Humber, it was apparent that considerations of cost and efficiency predominated over community, especially when the local communities were considered to be too small and too complex by the Local Government Commission.

Table 14 Community Identity In Yorkshire % Of Respondents Identifying Very Strongly With The Following Areas.

Yorkshire as a whole	55%
neighbourhood/village	39
town/nearest town	35
The Ridings of Yorkshire	33
district council area	17
county council area	15

(Report to Local People: North of the Humber, page 20)

The same method of assessing community identity was also applied to the area South of the Humber, where the Commission again found considerable support in southern Humberside for the abolition of this artificial county. This is demonstrated by table 15, which exemplifies that the majority of respondents agreed that it was necessary to change to a unitary system of local government, with table 16 demonstrating that throughout (both the northern and) southern areas of Humberside few respondents actually identified with this County.

The Riding of North Yorkshire had a population of 300,000, the East Riding had a population of 360,000 and the West Riding had a population of 189,000.⁵

Table 15 Level Of Support For A Unitary Authority Throughout The Southern Humberside Districts

DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA	AGREE WITH UNITARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT	DISAGREE WITH UNITARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT
CLEETHORPES	72%	13%
SCUNTHORPE	70	15
GRIMSBY	66	15
GLANFORD	65	20

(Report to Local People: South of the Humber, page 33)

Table 16 Community Identity In South Humberside % Of Respondents Who Identify 'Very Strongly' With The County Council Area Of Humberside

DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA	% OF RESPONDENTS
CLEETHORPES	11
SCUNTHORPE	10
GLANFORD	8
GRIMSBY	8

(Report to Local People: South of the Humber, page 34).

Therefore, the Commission concluded that, as in north Humberside, the southern area of this county should also be abolished and become part of Lincolnshire. In its place the Commission proposed creating two new unitary authorities. One would consist of the two districts of Cleesthorpes and Grimsby and be called North East Lincolnshire, whilst the other would cover the remaining southern districts and be called North Lincolnshire. This decision again appeared to be based primarily upon costs and efficiency, however this solution did have the support of three of the four district councils and the Commission

claimed to have found local community support in the fourth district for these two unitary authorities.

The Commission estimated that the creation of the unitary authorities of North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire would produce “modest” savings and be large enough to deliver cost effective services (Report to the Local People: North of the Humber, page 34). Thus, these authorities were again primarily designed to save costs and increase efficiency with community feelings being appeased by reference to the support of the districts and the adoption of a traditional county name, in this instance Lincolnshire. The Commission had again rejected the community as the primary factor because MORI had found circles of identity in rural south Humberside that were highly complex and based around localised areas such as villages and no greater than parishes and therefore, were of little or no use to their Commission with their preference for large unitary authorities.

The Commission encountered similarly complex patterns of community identity within Lincolnshire. Table 17, exemplifies the way these circles of community originate in the neighbourhood and village and spread out through the towns, but instead of then moving onto the district in Lincolnshire, the Commission observed that the circles bypassed these areas and took in the county instead.

Table 17 Community Identity In Lincolnshire % Of Respondents Identifying Very Strongly

VILLAGE/SETTLEMENT	43%
TOWN/NEAREST TOWN	34
THE LOCAL RIDING OR PART	8
COUNTY COUNCIL AREA	17
DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA	15
HISTORIC COUNTY (i.e. including Southern Humberside)	6

(Report to Local People: South of the Humber, page 38)

Table 17, therefore, exemplified that neither the district, nor the county, nor any other large area in Lincolnshire evoked a strong sense of community, indeed this appeared to lie solely in localised towns and villages. Therefore, in the absence of any viable alternative to these small areas (as the Chief Executive of York City Council had commented earlier, 'the Commission did not know what to do in Lincolnshire') the Commission concluded that Lincolnshire was a special case. It was a largely rural county with no real sense of community and any reorganisation would incur substantial costs which the Commission wanted to avoid. Therefore, for the Commission the only solution that would make substantial savings was a single unitary authority, which had no real support, as even the county council wanted the status quo. It was further noted that the case for 4 unitary authorities, (which again appeared to have no support within Lincolnshire) would only achieve marginal annual savings of £2 million and incur transitional costs of £13 million (Report to Local People: South of the Humber, page 39). Therefore the Commission concluded that whilst, "the retention of the existing structure would forfeit the advantages of unitary authorities perceived in the government's Policy Guidance", these were outweighed by the lack of community support and disruption in terms of cost (Ibid).

Therefore, in their recommendations for this review the Commission retained the two tier system in Lincolnshire, abolished the artificial county of Humberside, recreated the traditional Yorkshire Ridings and created four completely new unitary authorities - North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, York City and Hull. The announcement of these recommendations, also marked the end of the first tranche and immediately raises the question of how was the concept of the community practically applied to each of these reviews, and how significant a factor did it prove to be?

Conclusion

At the end of the first year of reorganisation and the reviews in Avon, Cleveland, Durham and Humberside, it appeared that the Commission had developed their own methodology for applying the concept of the community to their reviews. The methodology was not prescribed in any of the reviews' guidance documents, but was developed by the Commission as the review progressed and consisted of two key sections.

The first section, began with an initial assessment of whether unitary local government would prove beneficial to a specific area, taking into account the three key factors of community, costs and efficiency. The Commission dealt with the issues of cost and efficiency through repeated assumptions that in terms of operational efficiency unitary authorities were potentially more efficient, accountable, responsive and convenient than the existing two tier system. It therefore appeared that the Commission accepted the government's arguments (again from their Policy Guidance, July 1992), that there were definite advantages to be gained by implementing a system of unitary local government. This conclusion was supported by the Commission's assessment of costs, as they concluded from their financial methodology (Ernst and Young, May 1993) that large unitary authorities would be more cost effective than a county and several district councils. Therefore, through these two factors the Commission appeared to have a bias towards unitary local government but this had to be reconciled with the issue of 'the community'. However, at this point of their methodology the Commission was not actually assessing the strength and nature of community loyalties or trying to identify existing communities, instead they were simply assessing the level of support for unitary local government amongst local communities. This was achieved by the Commission considering three factors:-

(i) the representations of interested and affected parties, which involved the submissions of local authorities and the written and oral views of interested local residents, local businesses, town and parish councils, local interest/voluntary groups and local MP's. In

every review these invariably advocated unitary local government, and in most cases unitary districts.

(ii) a single question from the Commission's MORI poll, which did not actually ask respondents whether they preferred unitary local government. Instead it asked which (three factors from a list of twelve) should be the most significant in influencing reorganisation. In every single review the same answers were produced, that is, respondents wanted a system of local government that was responsive to local people, able to provide cost effective and quality services and finally was accountable to local residents. The Commission consequently concluded in every review that, based upon these responses, local residents wanted unitary local government, as their costing analysis concluded that unitary authorities were more cost effective and their assessment of operational efficiency concluded that unitaries were potentially more efficient, accountable and responsive.

(iii) evidence from special interests', that is from NALC, the ADC, the ACC and national institutes, all of whom wanted unitary local government and were included because the Commission recognised that they only gained the views of a minority of residents through their MORI polls and local consultation. However, it must be stated that as an attempt to supplement local attitudes, this final factor was not an adequate measure, as it merely repeated the same evidence from national associations and gave absolutely no indication of whether there was locally based support for change.

Therefore, in this first stage, the 'community' became the views of a minority of residents and the views of interested and affected parties. This meant that, in the first part of their methodology, the Commission had not attempted to interpret and apply the government's original ideal of the community. That is, they did not attempt to identify existing communities and sample their attitudes towards unitary authorities. Instead they relied upon general and non-specific evidence from national bodies, a single question from the MORI survey (from which support for unitary local government was inferred), representations of interested parties and the subjective judgement from the Commissioners. Therefore, in this first part of the Commission's reviews, the community

was not a concept that was measured, assessed and as such was not significant. Instead it was the views of a minority of local residents, interested parties and the Commissioners themselves that determined whether a unitary system of local government would be established, thereby indicating the 'community' as interpreted in the Commission's Policy and Procedure Guidances was not a significant factor.

The second stage of the Commission's methodology progressed from, an almost universal decision to create unitary authorities (Lincolnshire being the only exception), to determining the size and shape of these new authorities. This again involved applying the three factors of community, costs and efficiency, but this time a more detailed examination of each of these concepts was undertaken. In the case of costs and efficiency this resulted in the Commission favouring the creation of large (almost county based), unitary authorities. The reason for this was that in terms of costs, large unitary authorities meant minimal disruption and low levels of indirect staff costs and other associated indirect costs. Only 2 or 3 unitary councils would require fewer councillors, fewer senior staff and a lower level of support costs than 7, 8 or even 9 unitary authorities. The Commission found that such large numbers of unitary authorities would, in fact, cost more than the status quo. Therefore, the Commission favoured large unitary authorities on the grounds of cost. This preference was also supported by their assessment of operational efficiency. In dealing with this factor, the Commission stated in all of their reports that efficiency would be improved if authorities were large enough to:

- (i) achieve economies of scale and savings in both providing and purchasing services from other bodies in accordance with their enabling role;
- (ii) minimise joint arrangements, particularly for emergency services, specialist services and those that covered large areas, such as transportation and highways;
- (iii) be able to work effectively with other large public bodies, such as Training and Enterprise Councils and Health Authorities;
- (iv) minimise disruption to essential services such as education and social services.

This meant that in terms of efficiency and costs the Commission favoured the creation of large unitary authorities. When it came to testing this preference against community identities the Commission relied entirely on the results of MORI's opinion polls.

Whilst the Commission had been instructed to use their 'Community Index' in their Policy Guidance (July 1992) this was largely ignored other than to use its factors of local history and topography to briefly introduce the areas under review. The Commission felt that it was better to rely on the MORI polls because;

"it is better to address the issue of community identity directly, through opinion research amongst local residents, than to rely on inferences drawn from some community index. These would be open to challenge on three grounds: the relative importance or weighting and the inferences to be drawn from these results". (Report to Local People: North of the Humber, page 20).

The MORI polls specifically measured such factors as, "the strength of personal affiliation with various areas.....the perceived sense of community in various areas, patterns for work, shopping, school and leisure" (Report to Local People: North of the Humber, page 20). These were all important measures of community, as they measured the affective communities that people felt an emotional sense of belonging to, as well as the effective behavioural communities within which respondents worked, shopped and spent their leisure time. This represented a good interpretation of the community, because earlier commentators such as Peter Willmott (1987), the DoE Policy Guidance (July 1992) and Hedges and Kelly (1992), noted that the community was defined by both everyday behavioural patterns and feelings of belonging. Therefore, when the MORI survey asked respondents which areas they belonged to, how strongly they felt this sense of belonging and where they worked, etc. they were assessing all aspects of the 'community'. Furthermore by directly asking these questions in the areas under review, MORI and the Commission were also directly, 'addressing the issue of community' and not 'drawing inferences' from their community index.

Thus, whilst the Commission and MORI had theoretically produced a good interpretation of the community and a good method for measuring the concepts, there were two

important practical problems which affected its overall significance. The first problem, was related to the results that the MORI surveys produced. That is, these surveys tended to identify circles or hierarchies of community, in which the strongest sense of belonging was found to lie with the neighbourhood, then the village and then the nearest town (as Research Surveys had found in 1967), then the district and finally the county. (However, on two occasions in Durham and Somerset, the county elicited a very strong sense of community, but mostly the community was at its strongest at the level of the village and town). This meant that in rural communities such as Durham, Lincolnshire and Somerset, communities were centred around small rural towns and villages which were often isolated from their neighbours. This resulted in an unclear and complex series of communities, whose identification with the larger districts and counties outside of the local towns and villages tended to be low, which created tremendous problems for the Commission. In these situations the Commission felt that it was impossible to identify a community large enough to base a new unitary authority upon and therefore impossible to reconcile the social aspect of the community with an appropriate spatial area. Therefore in these situations the Commission based decisions purely upon the concerns of costs and efficiency - or, as in Lincolnshire, did not attempt to reorganise the county because of its cost implications. This meant that, in cases where communities were complex and unclear (that is, in most rural areas with small, isolated and localised communities), this concept was not significant in affecting the process of reorganisation.

The second problem, which affected the significance of the community, was related to the manner in which the concept was applied to the review. It was stated earlier in the chapter, that the purpose of the MORI poll was (according to the Director of MORI Brian Gosschalk and the Local Government Commissioner John Pearson), to 'fill in the gaps and inconsistencies in the local authorities submissions' (Local Government Chronicle 28/5/1993). The reason for using the survey in this manner was that every submission for either a unitary county or unitary district was supported by the local community, therefore the Commission wanted a representative sample of the views of local residents to determine exactly where community loyalties lay. Unfortunately, this meant that the

MORI surveys became used as tools to choose between the options of interested parties, that is, county and district councils. This was demonstrated by the fact that outside of the town and village, the Commission only tested community identities with either the county or district in their questionnaires. Thus, when it was discovered that districts were not cost effective and efficient, the Commission did not to produce their own communities from their surveys, but asked the districts to produce other options. This indicated that the purpose of the MORI survey was to enable the Commission to choose between options rather than to identify communities or groups of communities and their boundaries, so that they could be used to shape the boundaries of unitary authorities. This again weakened the significance of the community, as it became a concept for choosing between options, whose size and shape was predetermined by the issues of cost and efficiency.

Therefore, whilst the concept of the community appeared as a theoretically significant concept in chapters 2 and 3, and a potentially good indicator of new social and spatial units for the process of reorganisation, there were important practical problems (particularly within MORI's attempt to identify communities). The problems were that, outside of the urban areas, the community was difficult to measure and only became applied as a method of choosing between options which were predetermined by the issues of costs and efficiency. Therefore, overall the community was not as significant as the more practical concerns of costs and operational efficiency, unless of course it complimented these factors as in the urban cities or was very strong as in the Forest of Dean. However, this small district was the only rural district in the first tranche to achieve unitary status and this was only because it had possibly the strongest sense of community of all the local authorities reviewed. But, outside of exceptions such as the Forest of Dean, the practical problems of measuring and then applying the community undermined its significance and importance with uncertainty and complexity forcing this concept to be relegated behind the issues of cost and efficiency.

Thus, whilst the national overview indicated that during this first year of reorganisation the community was generally the least significant factor, exactly how were individual

authorities applying the community? In particular how far did exceptions such as the Forest of Dean spur rural districts (under the greatest threat of abolition) into making the concept of the community the most important factor in their submissions.

CHAPTER SIX: WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THE FIRST YEAR OF REORGANISATION

Wychavon District Council welcomed the local government review, which was not surprising, as Wychavon was a strong Conservative district and almost universally welcomed all central government initiatives. Wychavon had, in fact, had a Conservative majority since political parties were first formed there in 1984 (Wychavon The First Ten Years). Whilst this Conservative majority was lost in the May 1995 elections when a Liberal-Labour alliance took power, for the purposes of this case study, all of Wychavon District Council's preparations for its review were conducted by the old Conservative party, when they held 32 seats out of a potential 49. The remaining 17 seats were split between 9 Liberals, 6 Labour councillors and 2 independents.

Wychavon's Conservative group also maintained a very tight control over the process of policy making within the Council. The large Conservative majority had allowed them to control full council and all of the authority's committees, and even led to the emergence of an elite group of Conservative councillors, who controlled political activity within the authority. At the centre of this group was naturally, the Leader of the Conservative party within Wychavon and the Leader of the Council, councillor Lawley (who was not re-elected in May 1995) and then around him were a small number (no more than 6 or 7) of long serving Conservatives and committee chairmen. The activities of this group took place behind closed doors and, on the whole, they maintained a strong grip upon the Conservative party with all disputes and discussions being settled internally and before committee meetings. This also meant that, if the political opposition were to have any significant influence over council policy, then they had to be accepted by this elite group and negotiate with them. Therefore, when it was decided by the council that a specialist Local Government Review Working Group was required to co-ordinate and direct Wychavon's preparations for reorganisation, it was no surprise that it was dominated by the ruling Conservative elite.

It has already been noted that this ruling Conservative group were keen advocates of local government reorganisation, or rather of a unitary Wychavon, as were the other district councils in Hereford and Worcester, who all wanted unitary status. The County Council rather unsurprisingly opposed the districts and the review as a whole. The County Council also argued that as the county and districts in Hereford and Worcester were not to be reviewed until 1994 all of the local authorities in the county should ignore the review and carry on with providing local services.

The district councils in Hereford and Worcester did not, however, share this view and by the summer of 1992 had already begun work on their joint case for 9 unitary district councils. This joint working created a unique consensus which united Labour, Conservative and Liberal-Democrat districts alike. For example, in addition to Wychavon's support, Labour Redditch Borough Council also responded to the DoE consultation paper by supporting:

"the general direction of central government policy to secure a larger number of unitary local authorities", and by further stating that, "the forthcoming reorganisation should be designed to establish local authorities serving communities to which citizens can relate and identify".

(Response to DoE Consultation paper - "Structure of Local Government in England").

Similarly Liberal-Democrat Hereford City Council also responded by stating that the Council was in:

"complete agreement that local government services should be delivered by a single tier of local government i.e. unitary authorities", and that "such unitary authorities should be based as far as possible upon natural communities".

(Response to DoE Consultation paper - "Structure of Local Government in England").

These statements are particularly important because they not only demonstrate the unique consensus amongst politically opposed councils, but also that the concept of the community initially appeared to be a significant factor to these district councils. Interviews with all of the district council leaders and chief executives within Hereford and Worcester revealed that there was unanimous support for using the community as a significant factor for justifying the creation of unitary districts. The Chief Executive of

Bromsgrove District Council, Mr Bob Bradshaw, stated that demonstrating that the local community identified strongly with district councils would be the 'key to success'. A sentiment that was also echoed by the Chief Executive of South Herefordshire District Council, Mr Alan Hughes, and by the Labour leader of Redditch Borough Council Mr Albert Wharad.

The interviews also revealed that every single one of the nine district councils within Hereford and Worcester were being heavily influenced by the ADC. In response to the question, 'why was the community regarded as an important factor?', all of the district council chief executives stated that the ADC felt that identifying and providing evidence of support from the local community would be a key factor in achieving unitary status. Therefore each district intended to follow ADC advice and utilise existing senses of community identity. This response raises questions as to why ADC guidance favoured the concept of the community, and exactly how did they instruct individual districts to identify such a vague and nebulous concept.

ADC Advice

In practical terms, ADC advice, at the start of the review did not involve any instruction as to how districts could measure existing communities or prove that discernible communities existed. The Chief Executive of Wychavon District Council, Mr du Sautoy, suggested that this was because the ADC were unconvinced that all district councils could readily identify such communities. Instead districts were instructed that communities already existed and that their localities, identities and interests were best represented by existing district councils (essentially the basic message of 'Closer To The People'). Therefore, the ADC advised districts to concentrate on building a submission that proved that they were closer to their communities than counties and could provide all county services in a more efficient, cost effective and accountable manner. The ADC then instructed districts to communicate this message to the local community through a well orchestrated public relations campaign that would win the support and notice of the

Commission. This advice is perhaps best exemplified by the first ADC newsletter on the review, released in the July of 1992, which instructed districts to;

- demonstrate that they could provide all county council services, especially the most expensive and specialist services, with this being achieved by stressing the new enabling role and by providing good examples of effective joint working between districts;
- prove that unitary districts would be more efficient and less bureaucratic, especially in management terms, with this being achieved by providing new management structures that "rebut allegations of duplication and bureaucracy" (July 1992, page 2);
- highlight that the existing two tier system creates confusion within local communities, by commissioning market research that reinforced, "evidence that the public do not understand the two tier structure". (July 1992, page 2);
- demonstrate that there is an important affinity between districts and their communities, which could be proved by "illustrating the relevance and history of the district and the remoteness of shire and county halls". (July 1992, page 2);
- ensure that the target audience for communicating these messages should be both the community and its key opinion formers, such as "professional groups, voluntary groups, parish and town councils, MP's". (July 1992, page 2).

The ADC released a number of further advisory papers in the summer of 1992, that reinforced this advice, these papers included:

- "Towards Unitary Authorities" (June 1992), which summarised the main responsibilities of every major county service and described the ways in which districts could provide each of these services in an efficient and effective manner; and,
- "A Campaign Kit for Districts", which provided districts with guidance on how to conduct a public relations campaign that would raise their profile and win over local communities. In particular, it stressed the importance of districts working together within each county area to produce joint campaigns that would send a single, clear message to all of their different and diverse communities.

In the July of 1992, the advice from these papers was strictly adhered to by Wychavon and its neighbouring district councils. Each authority was determined to achieve unitary status by proving that they could best represent and provide for the needs of their communities, whilst all the time assuming that their district boundaries corresponded to the existing communities and their identities. An assertion that was questionable in

Wychavon but this authority continued to support this line of action, actively participating in all of the committees and working groups that the ADC sponsored and used to communicate their advice. These committees included:

- National ADC Local Government Review Advisors Meeting, which drew together Chief Executives and senior officers from all over the country (which also included Wychavon's Chief Executive, Mr Du Sautoy). Its aim was to establish a pool of expertise that could be used to address the problems and issues that were created by the review. It was also to act as a forum for communicating ADC advice and instructions to chief executives and senior officers, which was to prove important within Wychavon, as the Chief Executive was always well informed as to ADC responses and instructions on the review;
- ADC County Branch, which drew together all the chief executives and leaders of the district councils in Hereford and Worcester. There was also a sub group of this committee comprising of just the district chief executives, who were to research specific problems and issues thrown up by the review.

The committees were all up and running by the end of July 1992, the ADC County Branch in particular had already drawn all of the districts in Hereford and Worcester into a united group who had agreed to produce a joint submission. It was further agreed by the districts that the primary objective of this submission was to produce a joint case for creating nine unitary district councils based on their existing boundaries. It was proposed that this submission would consist of a joint first section describing how the districts would provide county services, with each district taking responsibility for researching a specific service (Wychavon took responsibility for education and libraries). The joint case for unitary status would then be followed by individual submissions that allowed every district to present their own detailed case, which in Wychavon was initially being prepared by the Local Government Review Working Group.

Whilst this working group was, at this stage, only an informal working party it still had sole control over Wychavon's preparations and was supported by senior councillors and

the Chief Executive. The list of members in table 18 demonstrates that this group contained Wychavon's Leader of the Council and his deputy (they were non-voting members but were invited because they were the authority's ADC representatives), in addition to the Chairman of the Council and his deputy and the Leader of Wychavon's Labour group. Furthermore this group was solely administered by the Chief Executive and the Policy and Performance Review Officer Mrs Kirby, who monitored all the reports and information that were provided.

The first observed meeting of this group (and only its second meeting) on the 6th of July 1992 revealed ADC advice as to how the council should begin its preparations for the review. It was also observed at this meeting that the meeting was controlled by three principle characters, the Chief Executive, Mr du Sautoy, the Leader of the Council Don Lawley and his deputy Jean Brackston.

It was in fact councillor Lawley who started this meeting with the suggestion that a public relations campaign should be started to win support from the local community for Wychavon's bid for unitary status. This was in line with the ADC's original advice of targeting the local community. The Leader proposed starting with community opinion formers, such as towns/parishes, voluntary organisations, MP's, local businesses and even schools. The Leader felt that winning over a county council service such as schools would be an important blow to any case that the county was preparing. This last suggestion was well supported, with the committee Chairman and Council Chairman, councillor Barnett, adding his support and then the rest of the committee then unanimously agreeing.

The Chief Executive also proposed that Wychavon should produce a community profile of the district and the council to raise awareness of the district and the work of the authority (another ADC strategy).

**Table 18 Local Government Review Working Group,
Wychavon District Council.**

Councillor	Political Party
Gerry Barnett - Chairman of the Council and a respected political figure	Conservative
Paul Coley - Vice Chairman of the Council, a long standing and respected local figure	Conservative
Ron Cartwright, a councillor since the creation of Wychavon in 1974	Conservative
Don Lawley - Leader of the Conservative group in Wychavon, not a voting member of the working party, but included because he sat on the meetings of the ADC County Branch group	Conservative
Jean Brackston - Deputy Leader of the Conservative group, again not a voting member of the working party, but included because along with councillor Lawley she attended the meetings of ADC County Branch group	Conservative
Eileen Hope - a respected and very active councillor in her Droitwich ward	Conservative
Vic Isaacs - the Leader of the Labour group in Wychavon, who had a good informal working relationship with councillor Lawley	Labour
Liz Tucker - the Leader of the Liberal - Democrat group in Wychavon, who again had a good informal relationship with councillor Lawley	Liberal - Democrat

The Chief Executive further suggested that Wychavon should conduct a public opinion survey that provided the following evidence:

- proof that the two tier system created confusion (as suggested by the ADC); and,
- support within the local community for a unitary district.

This suggestion immediately generated a debate on the cost of such an exercise with the Labour Leader councillor Isaacs stating that it was too early and too costly to undertake such a project. He was opposed by councillor Barnett and the deputy Chairman of the Council, councillor Coley, who stated that if it was ADC advice that such surveys and community profiles be undertaken, then these projects should be started. The remainder of the Conservative councillors then added their support and when councillor Lawley, the Conservative Leader, gave his support to the survey and suggested distributing it through the local high schools the Conservative members immediately passed a majority vote that these projects should be started.

Therefore, at the start of the review it appeared that Wychavon's initial preparations were determined largely by ADC advice to conduct community surveys and canvas support from local community opinion formers. Furthermore when it came to proposing these courses of action they came mainly from the Leader of the council, who was not a voting member of the group but attending as an ADC representative and the Chief Executive, who attended the ADC national advisors group. It also appeared that Wychavon's Local Government Review Working group continued to assume that the identification of communities and their support was central to the success of their case for unitary status. An assumption that was maintained throughout the first six months of Wychavon's preparations for reorganisation, and in the Local Government Review Working Group meetings that took place between July 1992 and December 1993.

Wychavon's Preparations For The First Six Months July 1992 - December 1993

At the next meeting of the Local Government Review Working Group on the 22nd of September 1992, the first item on the agenda was the approval of a joint marketing

strategy compiled at the ADC County Branch on the 6th of September. The strategy was specifically designed to ensure that all districts were communicating the same message on reorganisation and mobilising all communities throughout the county - as requested in the ADC's, "Campaign Kit For Districts". It basically repeated the ADC instruction that districts needed to prove that they could provide county services, that county councils were too remote and that district councils better reflected the different identities of the existing communities. In implementing this advice the County Branch group decided upon a gradual campaign divided into four main phases, these included:

1. raising public awareness of the work undertaken by each district and the review in general;
2. targeting local opinion formers MP's, voluntary organisations, etc - to obtain their approval and support;
3. targeting the local communities and initiating a public relations campaign;
4. mobilising all supporters to actively back the district's cases for unitary status.

The strategy received unanimous support from Wychavon's councillors at the Local Government Review meeting on the 22nd September. Councillor Barnett the Chairman started the meeting by declaring that Wychavon's consultation programme had to raise awareness of the work of the district council and that this would be a priority for the working group. Councillor Barnett was unanimously supported, as was councillor Lawley and his suggestion that this consultation should invite opinion formers such as the schools and parishes to presentations at the Civic Centre. Councillor Lawley stated that this would provide the Chief Executive with the opportunity to introduce the review and Wychavon's proposals for reorganisation. The suggestion was immediately supported by the Chief Executive and whilst councillor Vic Isaacs, the Leader of the Labour Group and councillor Tucker from the Liberal Democrat group called for a discussion, there was an immediate vote. The Conservative councillors all voted for the presentations, with councillor Lawley then producing a timetable in which presentations would be made to local schools in October/November and parishes in December/January.

The Chief Executive further suggested that this consultation programme could be improved and supported through newsletters that discussed the review and Wychavon's case. This was immediately supported by the Leader, councillor Lawley, who felt that it would be useful to start with a parish newsletter. Councillors Isaacs and Tucker called for details on the cost of these newsletters and a debate as to whether this would be an effective course of action. The committee Chair, councillor Barnett, responded by calling for a vote as to whether the newsletters should go ahead and was supported by all the Conservative councillors who agreed that it would be a useful method of promoting Wychavon's case. Therefore, it was agreed, in a majority vote that a sample newsletter should be produced by the next meeting on the 26th of October.

A confidential discussion with the Leader of the Council, Don Lawley, immediately after this meeting of the Local Government Working Group, revealed that the Conservative group had planned their preparations for local government reorganisation in an earlier group meeting. Councillor Lawley also stated that these preparations had been based entirely upon recommendations from the ADC which he had discussed with the other Conservative members of the working party before the meeting. Councillor Lawley was aware that there would be disagreement from councillors Isaac (the leader of the Labour group) and Tucker (the Liberal Democratic representative), but it had been agreed that as soon as this disagreement was voiced the Conservative group would stand firm and pass a vote that they would all support. This reflected the nature of the control that the Conservatives, as a group, had over practically all council meetings. Whilst some Conservative councillors would occasionally voice criticism and dissent, when it came to a vote they almost always voted with the rest of their colleagues.

The next meeting of the Local Government Working Group on 26/10/92 had as its main topic the parish newsletter and whilst this document generated a debate on its presentation and layout, it still survived the meeting as an important part of Wychavon's public relations campaign. However, this was largely due to the support of the Leader - that is, councillor Lawley who with the backing of the group's chairman councillor Barnett,

suppressed a debate on the cost of this newsletter. Whilst Conservative councillors Ron Cartwright and Eileen Hope started to question the cost of this exercise their leader councillor Lawley and Council Chairman councillor Barnett were quick to call for a vote, knowing that these councillors would, despite their dissent, support the party line.

In addition to this document, the group also reaffirmed its commitment to the public opinion survey and requested that by the next meeting of the working group a draft of the survey should be presented for detailed consideration.

Therefore, up until the January of 1993 and for the first six months of Wychavon's preparations, the community became the main focus of their activities. In particular, Wychavon was embarking upon public relations programmes to increase community awareness and win support for their case, as well as a survey to establish community opinion and prove that there was considerable public confusion with the existing two tier system. However, it must be stressed that whilst the community appeared important, Wychavon always remained committed to the ADC line that (unsurprisingly) districts were the best unitary authorities. A consequence of which was that Wychavon's emphasis upon the community meant using it as a factor to support their case, rather than firstly identifying communities through their emotional and behavioural characteristics, and then building a case around the communities that this produced. Nevertheless, this still meant that that the community, albeit in a vague and undefined way, was significant to Wychavon in the first six months of its work for a unitary district. It is significant however that this commitment to a unitary district was called into question in the later part of the year, after the Local Government Commission had begun to release their initial recommendations for the first tranche authorities.

Wychavon's Preparations For The Review January 1993 - July 1993

At the first meeting of Wychavon's working group in the new year (4th January 1993), there was initially no change in Wychavon's position. The review at a national level had only produced one solution and that was for a single unitary Council on the Isle of Wight.

This proposal had been expected and was seen as having general support on the Island and as such did not affect Wychavon's emphasis upon the community. Therefore, the group remained committed to their consultation programme, and in particular, the presentations to all parish and town councils within Wychavon. The Chief Executive reported that the initial presentations to schools in the October/November had gone quite well, with generally good attendances from the Middle and High Schools. He also mentioned that all four of the district's High Schools had expressed an interest in participating in Wychavon's opinion survey, with the greatest interest coming from Droitwich High School. Therefore, the Chief Executive suggested that this school should be used to distribute the pilot survey within the Droitwich area. Councillors Coley, Hope, Brackston and Isaacs supported this proposal, all of whom represented wards in and around Droitwich.

The group then debated this survey and councillor Lawley and the rest of the Conservative group decided that its primary aims should be to identify existing communities within Wychavon and opinions upon reorganisation. In particular, it was decided that it should establish the level of local support for a unitary district, so that the working party could then plan the Council's public relations campaign and prove that two tiers created too great a level of public confusion. It was also decided by the Conservative group that the final approval of the survey could be delegated to the Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Council and the Working Group, councillor Gerry Barnett.

The same decision was also taken with regard to the final copy of Wychavon's community profile, with all members agreeing that the profile was necessary to increase an awareness of Wychavon and its services.

Wychavon therefore began the new year committed to a unitary district. Private discussions with councillor Lawley after this meeting on the 4th January again revealed that all decisions had been discussed and agreed before hand in the Conservative group meetings and the working party was something of a formality. It was stated by councillor

Lawley that he did not mind the opposition and Tucker 'sounding off' because all decisions had been made before councillors Isaac and everything was 'done and dusted'. He stated that Wychavon was committed to a unitary district and would in the short term continue to follow ADC advice.

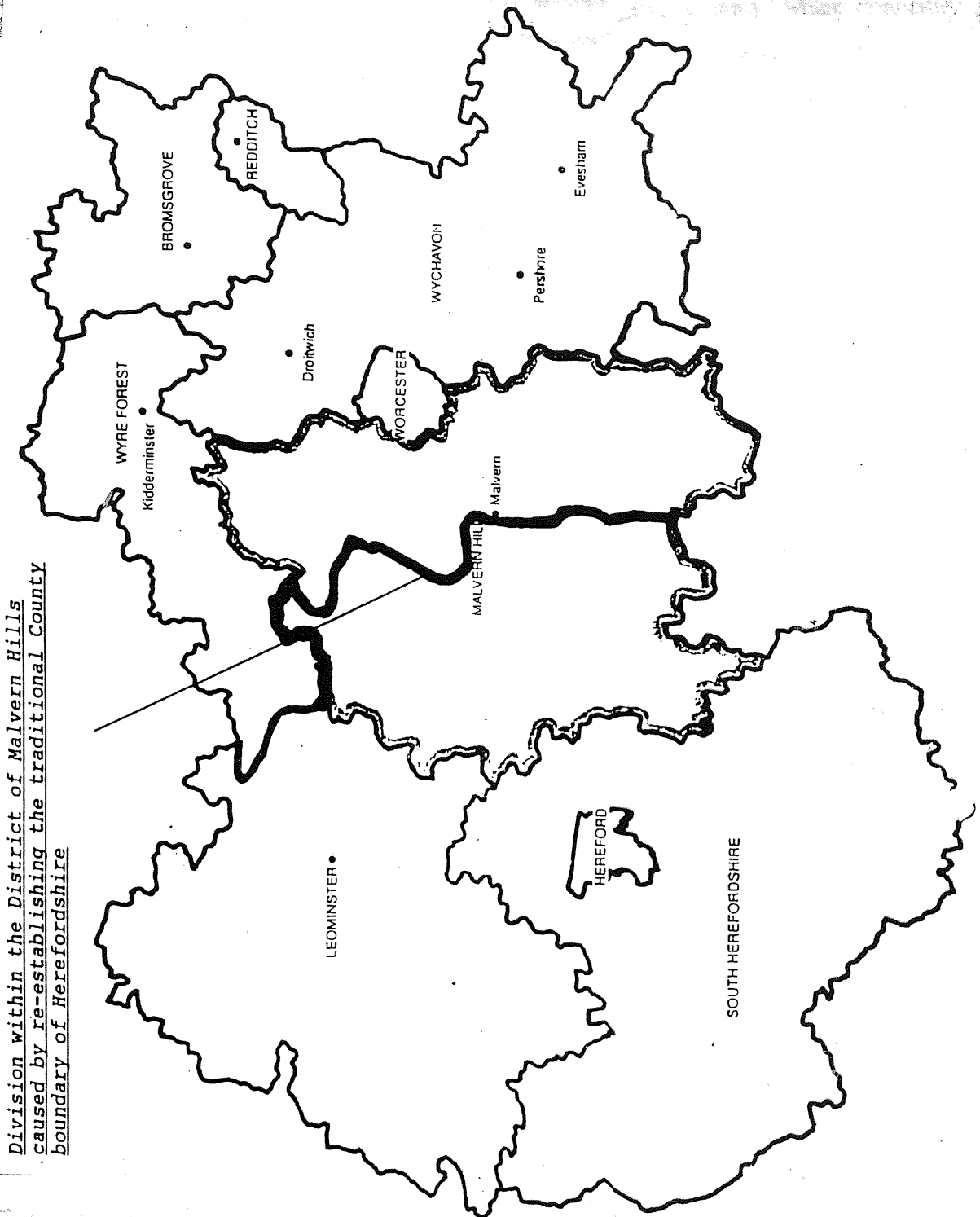
However, important national and local events were occurring which did in fact change this position. The most significant of these events was a speech delivered at an ADC symposium on the 18th of January 1993, by Mr Martin Easteal the Chief Executive of the Local Government Commission (this meeting was also attended by the Chief Executive and Leader of Wychavon District Council).

Mr Easteal, in his speech, began by stating how impressed he was with the district council submissions in the first tranche of the review, although he was disappointed by the fact that these submissions only presented one option of unitary districts. Instead he felt that all submissions should present 2 or 3 options and these should include the merging or splitting of districts. Mr Easteal stated that the Commission's job was to consider the creation of unitary authorities, which could well mean the abolition of all districts and counties and the creation of new unitary councils with new areas (ADC Circular 21/1/1993). Therefore, it was important that districts looked beyond the unitary district option and towards creating brand new areas of amalgamated or even divided districts. This was a message that had also been conveyed on the 8th of January 1993, when the Chief Executives' group of the ADC County Branch committee, met their counterparts from Gloucestershire, who had already completed their submissions to the Local Government Commission. The ADC group from Gloucestershire, in addition to passing on advice concerning costs, also advised that the Commission wanted more than one option to be presented, which entailed looking beyond existing boundaries. Whilst this last piece of advice was rejected by the next meeting of the ADC County Branch Review Committee in late January, it became an important topic for Wychavon's Local Government Review Working Group when they met on the 15th of February 1993.

The working group, at their meeting on 15th February, considered for the first time the suggestion that Wychavon should consider extending its eastern boundary. This would involve encompassing the Worcestershire side of the Malvern Hills and taking almost 50% of the District of Malvern Hills (see Map 3). The suggestion was in fact made by councillor Lawley, as he felt that this would increase Wychavon's population size and provide it with a new community base. The Leader, supported by the Chief Executive, felt that Wychavon lacked a definite community identity. Therefore, he proposed that the solution was to possibly extend Wychavon's boundaries to create a new area that could reflect a larger community, based on or around the traditional County of Worcestershire. The Leader felt that, harking back to the traditional Worcestershire county boundary was important in the light of a growing movement to split Herefordshire and Worcestershire into its traditional counties. The idea gained unanimous support from the working party, although the idea of merging with Worcester City was rejected (as it was a Labour authority). The Chief Executive then suggested renaming this area South Worcestershire (upon the suggestion of Mrs S.Kirby), thereby definitely reviving the traditional identity of Worcestershire, which he suggested could have the potential to weld all the different communities within Wychavon and the eastern half of Malvern Hills into a single community with a shared identity. The result was that this idea of an enlarged area of South Worcestershire was seen as an excellent idea by all members of the group, who resolved that it should be further researched by the Chief Executive, ready for a more detailed consideration at the next working group on the 6th of June 1993.

In confidential interviews after this meeting, with the Chief Executive, Mr du Sautoy and councillor Lawley, it was revealed that the Conservative group and the chief executives in Hereford and Worcester, had already discussed the idea of expanding Wychavon's eastern boundary into Malvern Hills a week before the meeting. The Chief Executive and his colleagues at the Chief Executives Sub-Group (of the ADC County Branch) had tentatively discussed the possibility of re-creating the old counties of Herefordshire and

Map 3 - Merged Wychavon and the Eastern Half of the District of Malvern Hills



Division within the District of Malvern Hills caused by re-establishing the traditional County boundary of Herefordshire

Worcestershire, which would involve splitting Malvern Hills in two. A similar discussion had also gone on at the county meeting of the Conservative party, where councillor Lawley stated that it received a positive response from the Conservative MP's Peter Luff and Eric Forth. Councillor Lawley then raised this issue with the Chief Executive and it was agreed that a combination of Wychavon and the eastern half of Malvern Hills could be an attractive proposition, particularly as the Commission were looking for solutions that were new and considered merging districts to create larger unitary authorities. It was also suggested by the Chief Executive that this larger authority had the potential to generate community support, drawing upon sentimental feeling for Worcestershire and negative feelings towards Herefordshire. Councillor Lawley then took this suggestion to Wychavon's Conservative group and it was agreed that an expanded Wychavon and the recreation of one of the ancient boundaries of Worcestershire should be an option for Wychavon to consider.

This was an important change of position as it was based, at this stage, upon the concept of generating a new community identity and community sentiment and producing an option that would find favour with the Commission. Whilst an enlarged Wychavon renamed South Worcestershire was still only an idea at this stage, a number of important events were happening both locally and nationally to strengthen the validity of this new authority.

At the national level by the 6th of June 1993, the Local Government Commission had released its initial recommendations for Derbyshire, Durham, Cleveland, Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset. The recommendations produced a mixture of results, proposing unitaries as large as the entire County of Derbyshire (barring an independent Derby City), with a population of approximately 709,000, and as small as the Forest of Dean, with a population of approximately 75,000. In particular, the Commission's decision to create large unitary counties - such as Derbyshire, had prompted immediate protest from the ADC. The nature of this protest was best summarised at a presentation

Civic Centre 18/5/1993) to that Mr Filkin, the Secretary of the ADC gave (at Wychavon the ADC County Branch Committee, soon after the release of the Commissions' proposals for Cleveland, Durham and Derbyshire. In this presentation Mr Filkin felt that the Commission's reviews were becoming dominated by a set of criteria. Mr Filkin stated that under John Banham's guidance the Commission were seeking to create authorities that had populations of 150,000 or more, on the grounds of cost and efficiency. Mr Filkin, noted that this immediately placed any concept of community secondary to these factors and it was only those areas such as the Forest of Dean, that had very strong senses of community that would gain unitary status. Mr Filkin, therefore, went on to warn that weak or ill defined conceptions of community would loose out to considerations of size. This meant that for Mr Filkin, it was even more important that districts continued to back their claims for unitary status with strong public relations campaigns that won communities over. He also encouraged districts to write to the Environment Secretary and their local MP complaining about the review's 'hidden criteria'. Mr Filkins advice was further reinforced when the Commission's recommendations for Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset were to create unitary authorities that all (bar the Forest of Dean) had populations of 150,000 or more.

The period from February to June also witnessed a number of important local events. The first was a definite and growing lobby from the Herefordshire districts for a unitary and independent Herefordshire, based upon its traditional boundaries. It was also rumoured that Hereford and Worcester County Council had new proposals for the review, as a result of the change in political leadership in May 1993 from Conservative to a Liberal-Labour alliance. Mrs Liz. Tucker the leader of Liberal-Democrats in Wychavon was in fact the new Leader of the County Council and therefore resigned from Wychavon's Local Government Review Working Group to ensure that there was no conflict of interest. This was particularly since rumours now abounded that under Liz Tucker's leadership the county was going to propose a new option for the review, which in addition to the status quo was to split Hereford and Worcester into its traditional counties which would be administered by a series of area committees.

Therefore by June 1993 Wychavon's Working Group was faced with a new situation regarding the review. Officially the authority was still advocating unitary status on existing boundaries, but they were also now actively considering a new expanded South Worcestershire. Councillor Lawley confirmed that this had been prompted by Mr Filkin's reference to the Commission's 'hidden criteria' that favoured larger authorities and by the growing belief that Herefordshire and Worcestershire would be split. The result of which would be the abolition of Malvern Hills District Council and large areas to be taken over in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

At the next meeting of the working group on the 14th of June 1993¹, there was a change of leadership. The working group, had by this stage, become an official committee of the council, a move which had been instigated by the Leader of the council Don Lawley. Councillor Lawley had persuaded the Conservative group that the preparations should be conducted by a full committee rather than a working group which had been accepted and duly agreed by the council. When this new committee met, the first issue it tackled was the need for a committee chairman, as councillor Barnett the former chairman of the working group had agreed to stand down because of other council commitments. Councillor Brackston, now a full member of the committee proposed councillor Lawley for committee chairman which was agreed without any debate or dissension, not even from Labour councillor Vic Isaacs. Councillor Lawley began the meeting by proposing that Wychavon should place greater emphasis upon developing a case for a larger unitary South Worcestershire, rather than a unitary district.

Councillor Lawley supported this proposition by referring to Geoffrey Filkin's comment (presentation Civic Centre, Wychavon, 18/5/1993) that the Commission had a 'hidden criteria' which favoured large unitary authorities, and the results of the review that in

¹It was also at this meeting that councillor Mrs Tucker (the new leader of the County Council) was replaced by councillor Malcolm Gardiner - a Liberal Democrat - and that the Chair of the Group, councillor Barnett, resigned from this post. He was replaced by the Leader of the Council Councillor Lawley, who was unopposed.

general, tended to favour authorities with populations of 150,000 or more. It was also his belief that a unitary and enlarged South Worcestershire could engender a stronger sense of community than Wychavon by drawing upon the traditional identity of Worcestershire. The Chief Executive supported this proposition as did the remainder of the committee who unanimously agreed that South Worcestershire could be the best unitary option. Therefore, the Leader suggested that it was time to hold an initial meeting with Malvern Hills District Council, to assess their reaction to the division of Herefordshire and Worcestershire, and hence their district. The Chief Executive duly agreed to organise this meeting for early July, lending his full support to such a discussion.

An interview with councillor Lawley, his deputy councillor Brackston and councillor Coley after this meeting again revealed that the Conservative group had decided in a private meeting that South Worcestershire was their preferred solution for reorganisation, and that this had tentative support from local MPs Eric Forth and Peter Luff. It was also confirmed that this group thought that they could easily take over the eastern half of Malvern Hills because it had a Conservative majority, but would not consider including Worcester City in their plan for an enlarged Wychavon, renamed South Worcestershire. The Conservatives at Wychavon refused to consider this option because Worcester City had a Labour majority and would reduce the size of their potential majority in the new South Worcestershire. Councillor Lawley also stated that he had the support of the Conservative councillors representing wards on the eastern half of the Malvern Hills.

However, when the meeting did take place between Wychavon's councillors and their counterparts in Malvern it was a very subdued and polite affair. Wychavon's councillors only hinted at an expansion of their district towards the Malvern Hills and Malvern's councillors (even its Conservative councillors) refused to consider any splitting of the county and their district. That is, until one of Wychavon's councillors stood up and told Malvern to 'face facts' that they would be split and to agree to Wychavon expanding its boundaries in their direction. The meeting was then politely but immediately concluded and despite the reaction of Malvern Hills, Wychavon's councillors still seemed

determined to consider an enlarged South Worcestershire. This plan and all further preparations were however, immediately placed on hold when in July 1993 the review was temporarily called to a halt by the government, so that they could conduct a 'review of the local government review', which also led to rumours that it would be called off entirely.

Conclusion

Wychavon in the first year of the review, had undertaken a great deal of work, even though their county and district was not to be reviewed for another two years. This work initially involved the authority adhering closely to ADC advice and working towards the goal of a unitary district. ADC advice also stated that the community was an important factor and Wychavon initially appeared, like its neighbours, to accept the ADC's assertion that district councils were automatically the best representatives of their communities. Therefore, this meant that Wychavon's initial preparations revolved around ADC advice to actively win over their local communities with public relations campaigns and a community survey. The aim of these actions was to prove that there was considerable local confusion with two tiers of local government and that local people preferred districts to counties. A consequence of this commitment was that for the first 6-7 months of the review Wychavon never actually attempted to identify their local communities through the emotional and behavioural characteristics of their local people (as was being attempted by MORI for the Local Government Commission). Nor did Wychavon question whether their district was the most appropriate local area. However, when it became apparent to Wychavon's Leader, Chief Executive and Working Group that national events were favouring authorities larger than existing districts, the case for a unitary Wychavon was called into question. This doubt was also prompted by the increasing possibility of splitting Herefordshire and Worcestershire into two counties, which, as demonstrated earlier by Map 3 would also split the District of Malvern Hills in half, leaving the eastern half open to absorption by Wychavon, thereby creating a much larger authority. It was felt in Wychavon that this authority could be justified on two important grounds. The first was that it would expand Wychavon's area and population to over 150,000 and potentially be

more acceptable to the Commission in terms of costs and efficiency. Whilst the second was that by taking in a traditional Worcestershire boundary and renaming the area South Worcestershire, Wychavon could possibly revive the traditional sense of community identity with the County of Worcestershire. The Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council were strongly in favour of this option and had the support of the controlling Conservative group within Wychavon's Local Government Review Working Group. Plans to conduct detailed research into South Worcestershire, in either terms of community or costs, were temporarily halted when the government, 'reviewed the local government review'.

Therefore, the question arises as to what effect this review of the review would have upon Wychavon and the development of a case for a larger South Worcestershire? In particular, would it alter the significance of the community and its application to their preparations? The answers to these questions will be explored in chapter 7 when it describes the government's 'review of the local government review' and its effect upon Wychavon and Hereford and Worcester.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE 'REVIEW OF THE REVIEW' AND ITS IMPACT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The Conservative Government's review of the progress of the local government review was an important turning point within the reorganisation of local government, especially for Wychavon District Council. Therefore, it is important to determine exactly what happened during this 'review of the review' and why it had such a significant effect upon Wychavon.

The review was instigated because the ongoing reorganisation of local government had come under many months of sustained criticism, there had even been calls for it to be abandoned only 2-3 months after the Commission's first review in the Isle of Wight. Professor Jones of the London School of Economics (LSE) had prompted this call when he criticised the review for being an over expensive exercise which divided Counties and Districts at a time when they should be uniting to defeat further government restrictions (Local Government Chronicle 2/10/1992).

The pressure on the review increased as the Commission made further recommendations, arousing the opposition of, amongst others local MP's particularly in Derbyshire where all six Conservative MP's protested against the Commission's proposals. This was in addition to the opposition of Counties where County Councils were abolished and Districts where District Councils were abolished, or as in the case of the Yorkshire Ridings both the County and District Councils. The respective complaints also gained the support of the ADC and the ACC, both of whom criticised the Commission for failing to stick to their guidance and being inconsistent within their reviews. The ADCs and ACC's criticisms were further reflected in the work of Professors John Stewart and Michael Clarke of the Institute of Local Government Studies, at the University of Birmingham.

Professor Stewart for example, produced an article entitled "Off The Rails" with Professor Jones of the LSE, which criticised the Commission for inconsistent decision making, stating that;

"The government should either rewrite its Guidance to the Commission or put an end to it" (Local Government Chronicle 9/7/1993).

It was the opinion of these authors that the review should seek limited change, only applying the unitary concept to urban towns and cities. A view that was also repeated by Professor Clarke in his address to the Joint Local Authority Conference (13/7/1993). Professor Clarke further observed in this conference address that the whole principle of unitary local government required further research and intellectual debate - particularly with regard to the issue of why unitary authorities should be established and where they would be most effective. Professor Clarke argued that if such a review as the current one, was to be successful in its aim of marrying, "local solutions to local needs.....it needs a rigorous intellectual foundation" (Joint Local Authority Conference 13/7/93), which he felt was lacking in the current review.

Rumours also abounded that the review would have to be abandoned because of dissent within the Commission and protracted arguments between the DoE and Sir John Banham. The dissent and arguments were apparently caused by Sir John's attempt to impose a size criteria upon each review, and whilst these rumours were never substantiated they must have contributed to the Conservative Government's decision to re-examine the review. The then Environment Secretary, John Gummer, began this re-examination in the July of 1993, against a background of sustained pressure and intense lobbying by some of the review's severest critics, that is, the ADC and the ACC. However, whilst these associations had criticised the review they still wanted it to continue but with very different ideas about how this should be achieved.

The ADC commented that the creation of large rural counties, as in Somerset, Durham and Derbyshire, would result in a system of local authorities that were, 'large, remote and artificial', thereby perpetuating the mistakes of 1974. A message that was re-inforced at the ADC's annual conference in the June of 1993, when the then Chair of the ADC, Lady Anson, condemned these authorities as;

"monster sized authorities that will savagely cut representation, take decision making further away from the communities and further tend to reduce the influence of councillors" (Opening Address : ADC Annual Conference, June 1993).

Lady Anson further stated that these recommendations were caused by the Local Government Commission;

"overstressing management efficiency and cost rather than the need for an effective democratically accountable all purpose authority". (Ibid)

Therefore, the ADC proposed that the government should institute the following revisions:

- instruct the Local Government Commission to identify the best single tier structure in order to test public views;
- clarify the relative weight between community identity and cost effectiveness;
- make clear that proposed structures should be convenient for the public, not service professionals;
- give much more attention to the issues of democracy, accountability and community as required by the Policy Guidance;
- undertake much more policy work and research in an objective way to give a firmer basis to their work. (Geoffrey Filkin, ADC Secretary, June 1993 Conference)

The ADC also used their conference as an opportunity to communicate this message to the new Local Government Minister David Curry MP, as well as the Labour Spokesman for Local Government, Jack Straw MP and the leader of the Liberal-Democrats, Paddy Ashdown MP. The message was further accompanied by circulars and advisory notes to their member districts to lobby their local MP's and the DoE.

Meanwhile the ACC was also lobbying for the continuation of the review, but they were promoting the idea that the government should re-instruct the Commission to favour the status quo or large unitary counties, operating under systems of devolved management. The ACC also used their summer conference to lobby the government, this time specifically targeting the Chairman of the Commission, Sir John Banham and the new Secretary of State at the DoE, John Gummer MP.

John Gummer's instant response to this pressure and lobbying was to issue a statement in the Commons on the 21st July 1993, stating that there was, "no question of abandoning the review". He further commented that the government were considering several options for its continuation, one of which was for authorities to 'opt in'. This option would involve only those Shires in tranches 2-5, and they would not be reviewed unless they requested it and there was evidence that such a review was supported by half or two thirds of their resident adult population. The ADC opposed this proposal on the grounds that the positive vote from the population was too high, whereas the ACC fully supported this move and felt that authorities should only be allowed to opt in, if "75% of their residents voted for it" (Municipal Journal 23-29th July, page 6).

Faced with these opposing positions and lobbying campaigns by Districts and Counties, the DoE deferred making a final decision until after Parliament's summer recess. A consequence of this decision was that the review was brought to a halt on the national level, but work still continued within Wychavon, with this authority remaining actively committed to preparing for its reorganisation.

It was decided in Wychavon by the Leader of the Council, councillor Lawley, that even though the review's future had not been confirmed it was important that meetings of the Local Government Review Committee should continue after the summer. Therefore on the 9th of September 1993 this group was reconvened and the Chief Executive opened it by stating that whilst it appeared that the review was on hold, he had reliable information from the ADC that the review would in fact be accelerated. The Leader, councillor Lawley, also added that this decision would be announced at the Conservative Party Conference at the end of the month. Therefore, both the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council felt that it was important that Wychavon should have definite options to begin work upon. The Leader stated that Wychavon would need these options to open discussions with the County Council as well as with the other districts. Councillor Lawley felt that a county wide compromise and joint submission between all local authorities within Hereford and Worcester, would be 'rubber stamped' by the Commission (Review

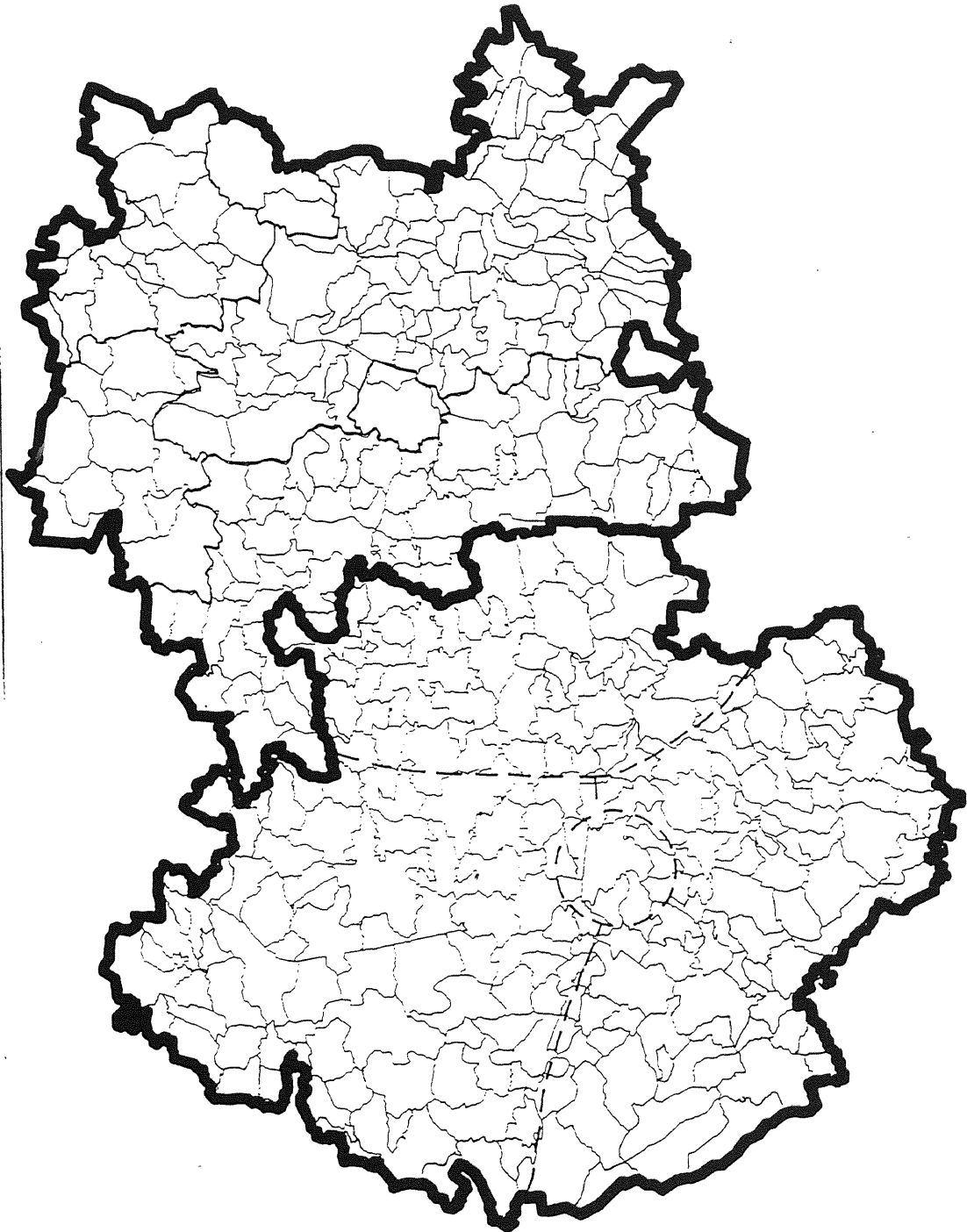
Meeting Minutes 9/10/1993). A private interview with the Leader after this meeting revealed that he had received this message from the Conservative party, who in his words, 'wanted a compromise solution with little or no controversy, which left a Conservative majority in Hereford and Worcester'. It was also stated by councillor Lawley that all of the Conservative councillors in Wychavon were aware of this message and in their group meeting had produced two options to discuss with the County Council and neighbouring districts. There was however one issue that the Conservative group in Wychavon were not prepared to compromise upon and that was for an enlarged and unitary Wychavon which would take in the eastern half of Malvern Hills and exclude Worcester City.

Therefore, the two options that were presented at this meeting were:

- a unitary Wychavon based upon existing district council boundaries, but now renamed South Worcestershire, which was designed not to alienate those districts still committed to unitary status on existing boundaries, such as Redditch; and,
- an enlarged South Worcestershire. This was particularly favoured by the Leader who pointed out that the Districts of South Herefordshire and Hereford City, wanted a unitary County of Herefordshire, which would as demonstrated by Map 4, split Malvern Hills in half (Review Meeting Minutes 9/10/1993). Wychavon's Conservative group felt a new authority could be created by merging their district with the remainder of Malvern Hills.

Interviews with Conservative councillors after the group meeting revealed that they favoured an enlarged Wychavon because it would still (in their opinion) have a Conservative majority and was also large enough to satisfy the Commission's apparent desire for authorities larger than existing district councils. Malvern Hills District Council were naturally opposed to any proposal to split their district, therefore councillor Lawley proposed that informal and unofficial discussions should continue with Malvern Hills Chief Executive and Leader and the specialist committee dealing with the review.

Map 4 - Division of the County into Historic Herefordshire and Historic Worcestershire



Councillor Lawley was immediately supported by all of the Conservative councillors but opposed by councillor Isaacs the Labour Leader, who did not believe that any action should be taken until the DoE had completed their review of the local government review. Councillor Isaac was thanked for his contribution and then ignored by the Conservative group, who turned their attention to councillor Lawley. He stated that he would continue to negotiate with the leader of the Conservative group in Malvern Hills and elicit the support of those Conservative councillors that represented wards on the eastern half of the Malverns.

The committee, also agreed under the prompting of the Chief Executive and councillor Lawley, that this option needed further investigation in terms of community support. The Chief Executive, Mr du Sautoy, stated that in his opinion the Commission would need proof that an enlarged South Worcestershire would generate a stronger sense of community than a unitary Wychavon. The Chief Executive was supported by councillor Brackston and councillor Lawley, with the rest of the Conservative group then agreeing without any debate. It was therefore finally agreed by the committee that the community survey of local identities and opinions should continue. (Review Meeting Minutes 9/10/1993).

The community survey now became Wychavon's only method for assessing community identities and therefore requires a detailed review of its aims, objectives and structure.

Wychavon's Community Survey

The main aims of this survey and its questionnaire had already been prescribed by Wychavon's Local Government Review Committee, back in the October of 1992. It was agreed that this survey would identify the nature and size of local communities within the district, as well as sample the attitudes of local residents towards reorganisation (Review Meeting Minutes 20/10/1993). The information was to be used to provide Wychavon with

information upon the pattern of community identities within the district and the type of authorities that would be preferred by local communities.

The first step in transferring these aims into a practical survey, involved the division of the questionnaire into three main sections:

- I. would aim to identify existing communities and their localities.
- II. would sample respondents understanding of the two tier system and their overall satisfaction with it, with the aim (for Wychavon) of gathering evidence to support their premise that there was too much public confusion and a strong case for reorganisation into unitary authorities;
- III. would directly ask respondents if they wanted unitary local government and if this change had to be implemented, what locality these new authorities should cover.

Therefore, with the survey's key sections determined, questions were produced which would enable each section to meet its objectives.

Community Identities: Section One

In conjunction with the MORI surveys (Pearson and Gosschalk Local Government Chronicle 28/5/93) and the research of Peter Willmott (1987) and Hedges and Kelly (1992), this survey accepted that the community was defined by two basic factors.

The first was emotional feelings of belonging, termed the affective community by MORI. This was based on the premise that individuals would only feel that they were part of a community if it generated an emotional and subjective sense of belonging. Hedges and Kelly (1992) noted that this could be caused by any number of factors that varied with each individual, ranging from family to cultural ties - but the key was that individuals felt that they belonged. Therefore, the only way to assess this factor was to directly identify individual's areas of belonging.

The questionnaire in Appendix C, demonstrates that this was achieved by firstly asking respondents where they would say that they came from and thereby directly challenging respondents to describe their emotional community. Secondly probing the strength of belonging by asking respondents how strongly they felt they belonged to these local areas (which included South Worcestershire), and then asking additional questions relating to length of residence¹, reasons for moving into the area and likes and dislikes. The purpose of these additional questions was to test whether there was any correlation between the emotional feeling of belonging and length of residence in a locality and negative and positive feelings towards the same area. These questions were also placed first, so that the respondent would give an answer that was unaffected by any other considerations - such as existing local authority boundaries or the second defining factor of the community, that is, behaviour and behavioural patterns.

Behavioural patterns (i.e. the areas within which individuals lived their daily lives), were also recognised by MORI, Peter Willmott (1987) and Hedges and Kelly (1992) as an important aspect of the community. It was felt that a sense of belonging with a local community was affected by individual's shopping, working and leisure patterns, as they encouraged senses of familiarity and belonging. Therefore, the questionnaire in Appendix C, continued by asking respondents where they shopped, firstly for food and secondly for major items such as clothes and furniture. Respondents were then asked whether they visited a leisure centre and if so where they went². Finally, respondents were asked where they worked, but this question was placed at the end of the questionnaire to compliment the final questions on age, gender and occupation. It was felt that this question fitted more naturally after the final set of questions and it reduced the number of questions in the main body of the questionnaire and the possibility of respondents being overloaded at an early stage of the survey.

¹This issue of length of residence was particularly important as chapter 5, page 217, had noted that Wychavon had a long standing and established population that could effect its sense of community identity.

²This probe into leisure patterns was limited to leisure centres by Wychavon District Council, because the authority provided this facility and wanted to test the extent to which respondents used these centres

The questionnaire was therefore structured in its first section to establish respondents' emotional and behavioural senses of community. The results from these questions could then be transferred into rough maps to identify existing patterns of communities that could be compared against existing local authority boundaries and be used to establish new boundaries. In this way, the survey would test whether these senses of community could in fact be mapped and used to create new authorities. Or whether it would encounter the same problems as MORI and the Local Government Commission, that is, the production of communities that were too complex and too small.

The questionnaire, after addressing the effective and affective sense of community, continued by testing public understanding and satisfaction with the existing system of local government and asking respondents what area a new local authority should cover. The purpose of these sections were to supplement any information regarding patterns of communities with further opinions on the need for change and the scale of that change - that is, exactly what locality a new authority should cover. Therefore, if the communities produced by this survey were too small and complex, Wychavon would possibly still have evidence that proved that change was needed and what type of locality would (in the opinion of local people) best serve that change, although the potential was still there for respondents to call for very small areas. The questionnaire, in Appendix C, then continued by testing respondent's knowledge of local government.

Knowledge of Local Government: Section Two

The assessment of this issue was achieved by question number 5 of the questionnaire, (see Appendix C) which provided respondents with an even number of County and District Council services and asked them to state who provided each one. A second question then asked respondents to state their satisfaction with these services, thereby providing an overall picture as to local understanding and satisfaction with two tiers and hence whether there was public confusion within this area and inherent problems of accountability and accessibility. It was anticipated by the Chief Executive that these questions would reveal a

sense of confusion regarding which tier of local government provided a specific service, and possibly some sense of dissatisfaction with key county services such as education and social services. Having then prompted respondents to question their satisfaction with the existing system of local government, the questionnaire in Appendix C asked them to directly state whether they were wanted to change this system.

Attitudes Towards Reorganisation: Section Three

Local attitudes towards a possible reorganisation of local government were addressed by firstly, explaining to respondents that "new arrangements for local government..... may include the abolition of County or District Councils and their replacement by one new unitary authority" (Question 6, questionnaire in Appendix C). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they would prefer "no change" or "responsibility for all services transferred to a single council", or even for some specific services to go to towns and parishes, thereby directly determining whether respondents wanted unitary local government or the status quo or a modified status quo. A second question then followed that asked respondents: "if unitary authorities had to be established, what area should they cover?" Respondents were initially asked to state whether it should be a larger or smaller area than Wychavon and to draw upon a blank map the rough boundaries of their ideal unitary authority.

The above questions and others from sections one and two of the questionnaire meant that the survey would provide the following information:

- the nature and size of local communities, in both emotional and behavioural terms and whether such communities were practically useful to Wychavon's preparations;
- details of respondent's knowledge upon the existing system of local government and whether there was a case for reorganisation;
- whether it was felt that local government within Hereford and Worcester should be reorganised into unitary authorities; and
- what the preferred local area for any new councils -thereby establishing the most popular localities.

Therefore, at this stage of the review it appeared that Wychavon regarded the concept of the community as measurable and useful, and having the potential to determine whether the authority should opt for a unitary district or an enlarged South Worcestershire - or even another area. However if the community was not so easily applicable then Wychavon also had local opinion on the type of locality that should be used to create a new unitary authority. The need for this data (so that it could contribute to Wychavon's final decision on reorganisation) was confirmed by the Chief Executive's desire to have the pilot survey distributed as soon as possible in the autumn of 1993. The Chief Executive began actively planning meetings with the Headmaster of Droitwich High School so that the survey would be piloted in the November of 1993. It was also reaffirmed that, as instructed by Wychavon's Committee, that the school's sixth form would distribute the questionnaires. However, in order to prevent this becoming a survey of sixth form parents it was further agreed with the Chief Executive that each of the 500 students would distribute four questionnaires (Minutes of Meeting with School 18/10/93). Each of these questionnaires would have one of the following age ranges upon the front - 18-29, 30-44, 45-59/64 and 60/65+. The aim of this was to get the students to distribute these questionnaires to all possible age groups, thereby potentially increasing the size and scope of the survey.

Therefore, with this sampling methodology established and its method for distribution, Wychavon were by the September of 1993 ready to pilot their community survey. An indication that before the review of the local government review was complete, Wychavon was committed to using the concept of community in two ways. One involved identifying communities and their attitudes through the survey, whilst the other involved using this information to build a public relations campaign that would use community opinion to support Wychavon's final submission on reorganisation.

However, with the government's 'review of the local government review', yet to be completed, the question arises as to whether the completion of this review would significantly alter this application of the community?

The Effect of the 'Review of the Review'

The Environment Secretary John Gummer eventually brought all uncertainty regarding this review to an end, when he announced on the 30th September 1993 at the Conservative Party Conference (as predicted by Wychavon's Chief Executive), that the review would continue under a revised guidance and with a greatly accelerated timetable. John Gummer also stated that these reviews would only apply to those authorities in tranches 2-5 - the first tranche would be completed under the original guidance. The Environment Secretary then announced that whilst the government was accelerating the review, they would not accelerate or reduce in any way the period of time for public consultation. This meant that despite shorter periods for the preparation and evaluation of submissions, the government was still committed to obtaining and listening to the views of local communities. It therefore appeared that the community (or rather community opinion) was still an important factor. However, the question arises as to whether this significance was also reflected in the revisions that John Gummer made to the Commission's Policy Guidance?

Revisions To The Policy Guidance To The Local Government Commission

The government's initial revisions to this document (which had yet to be finalised) began by reinforcing the point that, whilst they accepted that the Commission could recommend the status quo, they expected;

"that to be the exception and the result will be a substantial increase in the number of unitary authorities in both urban and rural areas" (Revised Policy Guidance, page 2, September 1993 - *revisions in italics*).

It was also added that in establishing these unitary authorities the Commission would give extra weight to submissions that firstly, had a local consensus and secondly thoroughly

examined, "*amalgamations of districts or disaggregations of counties*" (Revised Policy Guidance, page 2, September 1993)

The DoE also added an instruction that any proposals for unitary districts or counties had to make it clear that they had considered other options and could provide 'special justification', as these proposals would "demand special scrutiny by the Commission" (Revised Policy Guidance, page 2, September 1993).

It therefore appeared that the DoE had become more 'directive', that is, they specifically directed the Commission towards creating unitary authorities in all areas, which should, unless there were exceptional circumstances, be new medium sized authorities. Furthermore, the Commission were also directed to give special preference to proposals that had a local consensus amongst an area's local authorities. The revised Policy Guidance also went on to re-emphasise the importance of the community - particularly the community index. The DoE added the statement that even if the Commission did not use a formal index within its reviews, it should;

"specifically address the four issues of identity, accessibility, responsiveness and democracy" (Revised Guidance, page 3, September 1993).

In this way the DoE re-emphasised the importance of the Commission creating a system of unitary authorities that were based upon recognisable communities and were community orientated, that is, accessible, accountable and responsive to local citizens, all of which could be assessed by the Commission using the above four factors which were originally from the 'community index'. The community therefore again appeared to be a theoretically significant factor to the Commission and their reviews. An emphasis which was further re-iterated by the DoE adding the advice that the Commission should not be;

"precluded from recommending an option which would be marginally more expensive than the status quo if the extra cost would be outweighed by other considerations" (Revised Policy Guidance, page 4, September 1993)

The Commission were therefore freed from always having to place the factors of cost and efficiency above all others, in particular the community and therefore, having to

recommend the most cost effective unitaries, which as demonstrated by chapter 5, were unitary counties. The Commission were also instructed that, "*very large unitary authorities would need special justification in terms of community identity*" (Revised Policy Guidance, page 4, September 1993).

Therefore, in their revisions to the Commission's Policy Guidance, whilst the DoE became more directive they also re-emphasised the importance of the concept of the community. The revisions now made it possible for the Commission to place the community above costs if it 'outweighed' financial considerations. It was further stressed that the Commission should aim to create unitary authorities that were 'community orientated' and based upon discernible community identities'.

Therefore, what effect did these changes and the decision to accelerate the review have upon Wychavon and its preparations? The answer to this question is that it had a significant effect upon this authority. At the next meeting of the Local Government Review Committee on 20th October, the key topic was, which option Wychavon should choose for its final submission to the Local Government Commission (particularly in light of this revised guidance from the DoE).

The Chief Executive began this meeting by summarising the main changes to the review, and the main points of a speech, that the Commission's Chief Executive, Martin Eastal had delivered at an ADC Conference on the 18th of October 1993.

The Chief Executive noted that, in this speech, Mr Eastal had reinforced the revisions made within the Commission's Policy Guidance, firmly stating that the Commission wanted:

- options that examined the amalgamations of districts and the disaggregations of counties, with populations of between 150,000-250,000 - and not options for unitary counties and districts. It had been declared by Mr Eastal that any proposals for unitary districts would require exceptionally strong cases in terms of community identity, with

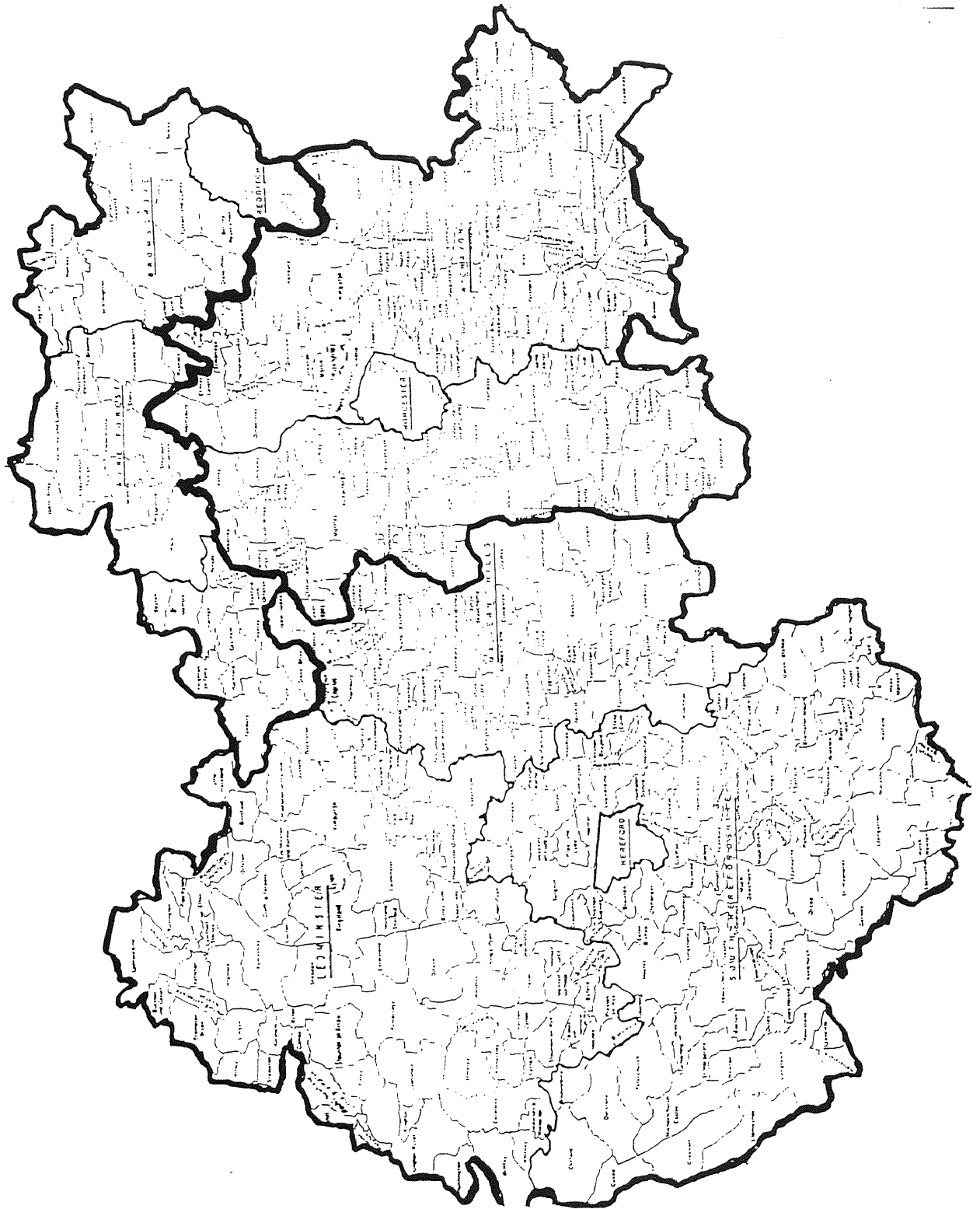
Mr Easteal also acknowledged that this could for 'strategic' or 'historical' reasons mean splitting districts;

- solutions that promoted between 3-5 unitary options and were based upon a local consensus. Mr Easteal was quoted as saying that if a local compromise could not be reached then he would, 'put on his size nine boots and kick one into local councils'.

The Chief Executive concluded this summary by noting that Wychavon's submission to the Commission had, under the new accelerated timetable, to be completed by the end of February, therefore Wychavon had to begin work as soon as possible upon a specific option. The Leader and Chair of the Committee added that these changes had weakened the inter-district consensus for nine unitary councils and authorities such as Wyre Forest and Bromsgrove were considering extending their boundaries to push their populations up to the level of 150,000. Furthermore and most importantly the Leader noted that South Herefordshire and Hereford City had taken heart from Martin Easteal's statement that districts could be split for historical reasons, and now felt that the recreation of the traditional and historic County of Herefordshire would justify splitting Malvern Hills. The Leader, councillor Lawley, noted that when these local factors were coupled with the Commission's size criteria, it further strengthened Wychavon's case for South Worcestershire and a three ridings scenario. That is, creating a South Worcestershire authority, then recognising a traditional and unitary County of Herefordshire and merging the remaining northern districts into a North Worcestershire, as demonstrated by Map 5. Councillor Lawley particularly felt that moving Wychavon's boundaries towards Herefordshire and creating these authorities would produce a solution that merged and split districts and created three unitary authorities all with population ranges between the Commission's new figure of 150,000 and 250,000³.

³South Worcestershire would have a population of 246,000, whilst North Worcestershire would have 266,000 and Herefordshire 159,000.

Map 5 - The Three Ridings

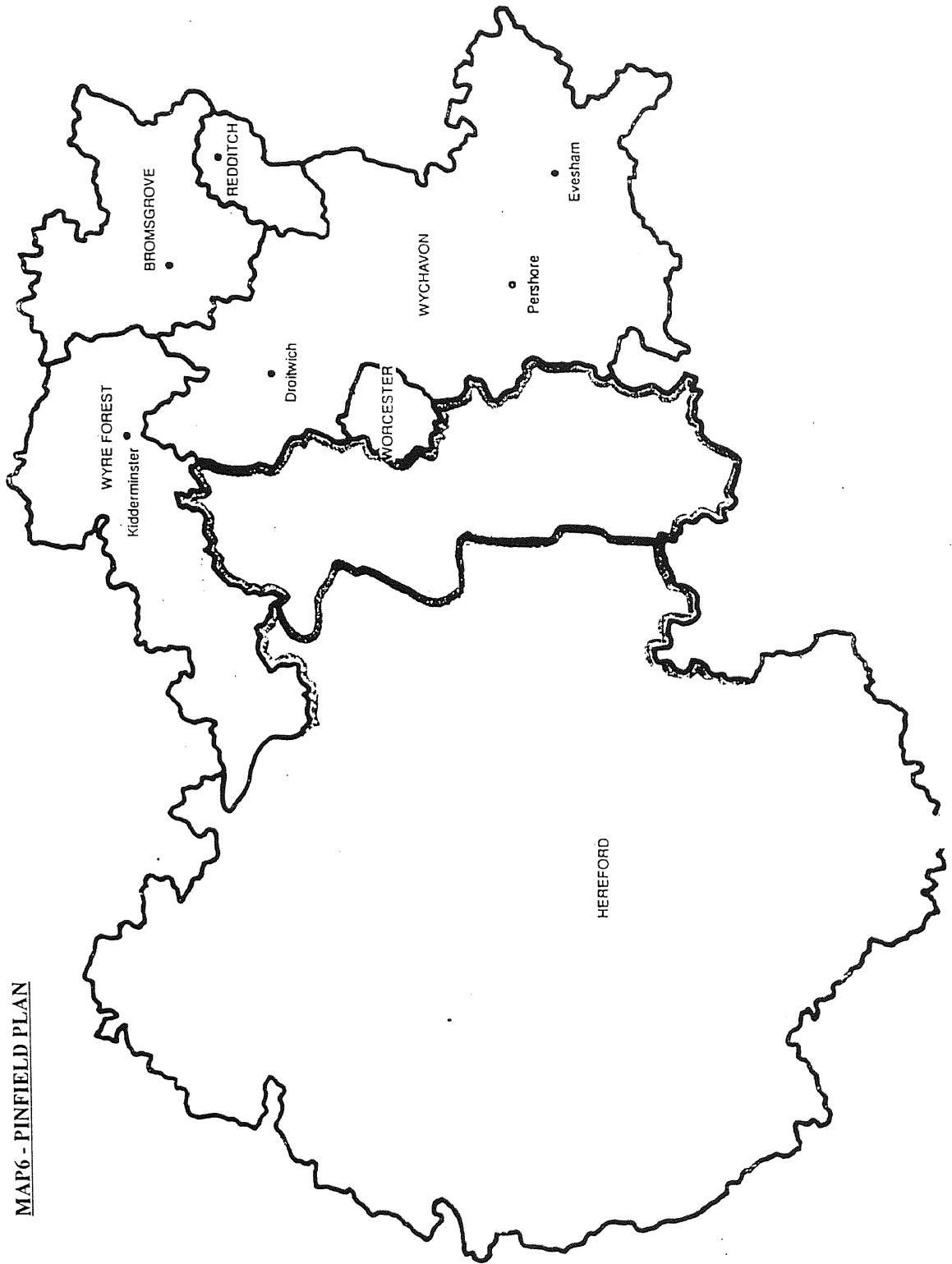


The committee almost unanimously agreed that the three ridings was a more feasible option than a unitary Wychavon, because it corresponded so closely to the Commission's criteria. However, there was dissension from the labour councillor Vic Isaacs, who suggested that Wychavon consider the 'Pinfield Plan' (Review Meeting Minutes 20/10/1993). The plan had been proposed by the Labour, Deputy Leader of the County Council and it involved creating a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire (that is, a county of Worcestershire and the existing Worcestershire district councils), as demonstrated by Map 6.

The Pinfield Plan was instantly rejected by the committee who responded that it was an ACC proposal that merely ensured the continued survival of the County Council. Instead the committee agreed that the three ridings should be discussed as soon as possible with all the other districts, particularly Malvern Hills, but still only as a second option for reorganisation. The reason for keeping the three ridings a secondary option in public was so that Malvern Hills and other districts such as Redditch who wanted unitary status for districts on their own boundaries were not alienated. It was however, agreed that all work should concentrate upon the three ridings. The committee agreed extra funding, without any debate, for further newsletters and presentations to promote the three ridings and to the continuation of the community survey to test and collect evidence for this case. The committee also agreed to the Chief Executive's proposal that a special Local Government Review Team should be established to start detailed work upon this new option.

The team would consist of officers under the control of the Chief Executive that would primarily consist of the Performance and Policy Review Officer, the authority's two Directors, their assistants and other officers as and when seconded.

Map 6 - The Pinfield Plan



MAP 6 - PINFIELD PLAN

Interviews after the committee meeting with all the councillors and the Chief Executive confirmed that the decision to start work on the Three Ridings option had been decided a week in advance of the committee at the Conservative group meeting. Councillor Lawley confirmed that the Conservatives wanted the three ridings, which would now include Worcester City, for three main reasons. These were:

- it was a politically acceptable solution. Despite the inclusion of the labour councillors in Worcester City, the Leader of Wychavon, councillor Lawley, had the support of the Conservative councillors in Worcester and the eastern half of Malvern Hills, because it was believed that South Worcestershire would give the Conservatives a political majority;
- it would satisfy the Commission's size criteria and their preference for authorities that had populations of between 150-250,000, as well as their preference for merging districts;
- Wychavon had no real sense of community and was an artificial authority created in 1974. However, councillor Lawley felt that a South Worcestershire with a traditional Worcestershire boundary could draw upon sentimental feelings of belonging to an ancient county, and negative feelings towards Herefordshire and a desire to be split from this county.

Therefore, as a result of the government's 'review of the local government review', it appeared that Wychavon had become strongly committed to a case for three unitary authorities, which had consequently altered the role of the community. The authority had specifically chosen an option that first and foremost was politically acceptable and satisfied the Commission's new criteria on size and their request for new authorities. It was assumed by the Leader of the council that a new South Worcestershire would automatically have some sense of community. The community was therefore displaced from its potential role as a factor that could possibly determine the nature and shape of Wychavon's proposals for unitary local government. Therefore, whilst Wychavon remained committed to using this concept, it appeared that the community was to be an

important factor in justifying, rather than shaping Wychavon's proposals. For example, the continuing publicity campaign was also to try and gain community support for the three ridings and the survey was to collect evidence of identities and attitudes that could further strengthen the case for this scenario.

The Development Of The Three Ridings And The Role Of The Community

Whilst Wychavon was starting its case for the three ridings, this was still very much a private option, with the Leader of the Council, privately and gradually introducing it to other council leaders. It was, in fact, at the end of October that Councillor Lawley and the Chief Executive publicly introduced this option at an ADC County Branch meeting of all the district council Chief Executives and Council Leaders. It was then that councillor Lawley requested approval for the County Treasurers to cost this option (ADC Meeting October Minutes 1993). In conjunction with the County Council, the ADC County Branch had brought together Treasurers and senior accountants from all local authorities to cost their options for reorganisation, which at this point consisted of nine unitary districts. It was agreed that the three ridings could be costed and it appeared that councillor Lawley had been successful in his private discussions. The discussion had involved councillor Lawley talking with districts such as Bromsgrove about moves to extend their boundaries slightly into Wychavon in support for the principle of three or four unitary authorities. It even appeared from private discussions that Malvern Hills could be persuaded to agree to the three ridings, so long as their entire district was placed within the County of Herefordshire (which South Herefordshire and Hereford City did not want) (ADC Meeting October Minutes 1993). The three ridings therefore became gradually introduced as an option for discussion whose development, was at this point, open to be influenced by negotiations with other local authorities.

The districts were still committed to finding some kind of consensus and to produce a single submission. It appeared from this meeting that a single option and joint submission was still an important priority of the ADC County Branch. It was even agreed that the County Council should be invited to participate in these discussions and the joint

submission. However, it was stated by all the districts that they would never accept the County's options of two unitary counties or a unitary county and two tier Worcestershire. Nevertheless, it was still agreed at this meeting that a local consensus was important, and at the district's half yearly meeting with the County Council on the 29th of October, the County Council would be invited to participate within a joint consultation exercise. Such an exercise had been used by the county and district Councils in Hampshire, and the district councils in Hereford and Worcester felt that it would be a useful exercise to repeat in order to identify unitary authorities that were:

- " - Appropriate to communities within Hereford and Worcester;
- In accordance with the government's policy guidance;
- Attractive to the Local Government Commission;
- Acceptable to all ten councils in Hereford and Worcester."

(Paper for Information: Half Yearly Meeting with the County Council - Joint Consultation and Option Generation Exercise 29/10/93).

Thus, the districts in Hereford and Worcester were, like Wychavon, significantly affected by the Commission's revisions to the review. The revisions had prompted them to place, as a priority, a joint submission that could result in a reconsideration of their case for nine unitary districts. It was also seen that Wychavon were even prepared to alter the boundaries of the three ridings in order to achieve an acceptable consensus, thereby establishing the Commission's criteria of joint working and a local consensus as another factor that had the potential, unlike the community, to reshape the boundaries of Wychavon's three ridings. Despite this apparent rejection of the community as a significant factor, it was still stated in the objectives of the consultation exercise that it was important for the districts to produce a joint submission that was, "appropriate to *local communities*". But, did this mean that joint working would be determined primarily by assessments of community identities and opinions? Or did it mean that the Commission's criteria would predominate, with the community being used to justify a particular case for reorganisation, as appeared to be happening in Wychavon?

Unfortunately, there was no immediate answer to this question, as whilst the County agreed in principle to joint working with the districts, they refused to begin an active role

at this stage. It was stated by the Leader of the County Council at the half yearly meeting, that they had not yet decided on their official position with regard to the review, despite the fact that proposals for two unitary counties and a unitary Herefordshire and status quo Worcestershire had been privately adopted in September (this was revealed by the Labour councillor and leader of Wychavon's Labour group, Vic Isaacs, in a brief and confidential conversation). Therefore, the County would only open joint discussions after their Policy and Resources Committee had determined their official stance upon reorganisation, which would be in November or December (Minutes Half Yearly Meeting November 1993).

The districts were annoyed and at a meeting immediately after their discussions with the county, decided that the County Council were stalling and attempting to slow their work down (ADC Minutes Nov. Meeting 1993). Therefore, they all agreed that they should go ahead with their joint consultation exercise and negotiations, as if they all produced a joint solution then it would stand a greater chance than a minority county submission. The three ridings was to be included in this joint discussion, as was the case for nine unitary district councils. However, before examining this joint consultation exercise, it is necessary to examine the government's final revisions to the Commission's Policy Guidance which were ratified in the November of 1993 in a reprinted Guidance Paper. The final revisions were important because they confirmed exactly what the government's criteria for the review were and therefore, what factors had to be considered within the joint consultation exercise.

DoE's Final Revisions to The Policy Guidance to the Local Government Commission

The final revisions were practically identical in substance to the alterations made in the September of 1993. The Commission was again instructed to favour unitary authorities that were amalgamations of districts and disaggregations of counties and were based upon a local consensus. It was also reaffirmed that any proposals for either unitary districts or a unitary county would require special justification in terms of community, as the government was concerned about the issues of remoteness for unitary counties and effective service delivery for unitary districts (Revised Policy Guidance, page 4,

Nov.1993). Furthermore, in arriving at their decisions the Commission were again instructed to consider the factor of community identity, with the use of the community index being firmly advocated by the DoE. It was, however, recognised that such a formal index could create problems, but it was stressed that the Commission should at least consider its four key issues of community identity, responsiveness, accessibility and democracy. The DoE again stated that the Commission did not have to always choose the cheapest option and always place finance over community. The DoE added that any proposals such as unitary districts or unitary counties could be implemented, but only if they had a strong justification in terms of community identity.

The DoE therefore reaffirmed its earlier revisions and again directed the Commission towards favouring new, medium sized unitary authorities, that were supported by a local consensus. The revisions did, however, raise the question of whether, this re-emphasis upon size and consensus would result in the districts in Hereford and Worcester subordinating all the issues of community, cost and efficiency to arriving at a joint solution? Whilst using the community as an important factor to justify rather than determine their case for reorganisation. This was a dilemma that was further complicated by the Local Government Commission releasing in November 1993 their own procedural advice on what they wanted from the local authority submissions.

Local Government Commission: Procedural Advice on the Preparation of Proposals

The Procedural Advice document was designed by the Commission to;

"explain the procedures it wishes to ask local authorities to adopt in relation to the governments accelerated programme of area structural reviews" (Nov.1993, page 1), and to, "provide guidance on the content of the local authority proposals to the Commission" (IBID).

It initially established that deadlines for submissions would be negotiated locally and that these documents would be produced according to a standard format. It was specified that this format would consist of two main sections, the first would be a 10-20 page executive summary that would summarise the proposed case for reorganisation, whilst the second

section would provide detailed supporting papers and evidence. The Commission then re-emphasised that in addition to the DoE's instruction in the Revised Policy Guidance (Nov 1993) to use the community index, they would continue to assess community identities and opinions through their MORI polls. It was confirmed that these would be extended to all of the remaining areas under review. The Commission further commented that if local authorities wished to, they could conduct their own opinion polls, thereby reinforcing the point that evidence of community identities and attitudes was still to be an important factor.

The Commission also reinforced the point that, in addition to sampling communities, they would also give extra weight (as instructed by the DoE) to any proposals that looked beyond the unitary district and unitary county case and had a local consensus. Ideally, the Commission wanted only one joint submission which should suggest between 3-5 unitary authorities with populations between 150,000-250,000.⁴

The procedure paper therefore gave out two significant messages to local authorities. The first was that the Commission would continue to sample community identities, by combining community surveys conducted by MORI with the community index and its factors of community identity, responsiveness, accessibility and democracy (thereby indicating that the community was still a significant factor). Whilst the second message was that it was extremely important that local authorities worked together to produce one submission, that emphasised that factors of consensus, population size and presented an ideal range of between 3-5 unitary authorities.

Therefore, Wychavon and its neighbouring districts had to decide which set of factors should finally influence and shape their submissions or find a method for integrating the

⁴ It is suggested that this last proposal occurred because chapter 5's analysis of the first year of the review led to the Commission concluding that savings were only made on options with a maximum of five unitary authorities, anything above this meant higher costs and no savings. Therefore the Commission ideally wanted between 3-5 unitary authorities because this was automatically cost effective.

two to produce a case for reorganisation - their solution was the Joint Consultation and Option Generation Exercise, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8.

Conclusion

The idea that Wychavon District Council should consider enlarging their district to include the eastern half of Malvern Hills was an interesting proposal and an option for further consideration when the DoE halted the local government review. However, by the time the DoE had re-started the review the idea that Wychavon should engulf the eastern half of the district of Malvern Hills and Worcester City, and be renamed South Worcestershire, was the preferred option of the Conservative majority group and therefore, the whole council. It appeared that this proposal for a new South Worcestershire and the creation of the old county of Herefordshire and a North Worcestershire (made up of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest) was prompted by three key influences.

The first was political, in interviews with the Leader of the Council, councillor Lawley and the deputy Leader, councillor Brackston, it was stated that South Worcestershire was regarded as a good political solution. The Conservative group at Wychavon felt that with the Conservative majority in the eastern half of the Malvern Hills and the small group of Conservative councillors at Worcester City they could establish a Conservative majority in South Worcestershire. It was also stated by both councillors Lawley and Brackston that this solution had the support of the local Conservative MP Peter Luff.

The second influence was more pragmatic. In interviews with the Chief Executive and councillor Lawley it was stated that South Worcestershire would better suit the Commission's criteria and the Commission's preference for amalgamations of districts, that had populations of between 150-25,000 and could elicit some sense of community identity. Councillor Lawley in particular was confident that South Worcestershire could draw upon negative feelings towards Herefordshire and positive feelings of belonging to traditional Worcestershire to generate a sense of community identity. He noted that this

was in stark contrast to Wychavon which had been created in 1974 and had no real sense of community.

The third and final influence was the potential that South Worcestershire, Herefordshire and North Worcestershire unitaries offered for a producing a single submission and a shared consensus. The Leader of Wychavon confirmed in his private negotiations with the Herefordshire districts that they wanted a unitary Herefordshire, whilst Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest might consider North Worcestershire, if it had the potential for a Conservative majority. The only opposition was from Redditch and Malvern Hills, although Malvern Hills would agree if their entire district could be included in Herefordshire. Therefore, the three ridings offered the opportunity for the districts to reach a decision which appealed to almost all of the district councils in Hereford and Worcester and would therefore, be more appealing to the Commission.

Thus, by the time the local government review had re-started, Wychavon District Council was favouring the creation of three unitary authorities for a variety of reasons, which were both political and pragmatic, and most importantly were not dominated by considerations of community identity. The question arises as to whether this situation was altered when the local government review began again and the Commission produced new recommendations based upon their revised guidance.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE THREE RIDINGS

Watching the districts make a joint decision is like stuffing nine rats into a sack and seeing which one survives
(Councillor Liz Tucker - Leader of the County Council)

Wychavon and its neighbouring district councils progressed their initiative to develop a joint solution through a joint consultation exercise. The exercise was held on the 29th of November at Wychavon's Civic Centre. It was prompted by the fact that individual districts seemed to be developing different cases for reorganisation, upon which the ADC County Branch wanted to impose some kind of a consensus. For example, Wychavon was campaigning for the three ridings, whilst Malvern was campaigning for a three ridings that placed their entire district within Herefordshire, whereas South Herefordshire and Hereford City wanted Malvern split and Redditch wanted unitary status based on its existing boundaries (Minutes 29/11/1993). The District Chief Executives therefore decided that they would conduct an option generation exercise that had been successfully used within Hampshire. The County Council were also invited to attend this exercise but only as observers, as the County had stated in mid-November that they did not want to produce a joint submission with the districts. This was due to the fact that the County Council had agreed their two options¹ which the districts would not accept and the County would not alter.

It was decided by the district Chief Executives that this exercise would involve every district presenting two of their own options for reorganisation. The options would then be pooled and duplicates discarded, with the remainder being scored against a previously agreed criteria. For example, each option would be tested against such criteria as financial effectiveness and community, being awarded say 8/10 if it was a good reflection of existing community identities, but 5/10 if it achieved no real savings. The scores would be added up and the option with the highest score would be the most effective and the one that all participants assisted in choosing. It was therefore assumed that this exercise would

¹ This was for firstly two unitary counties and then secondly for a unitary county of Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire

enable the production of a single submission, with a local consensus, that also allowed all of the Commission's various criteria to be fairly and equally judged. The criteria which were used within this exercise are listed below and were produced by the District Chief Executives, (with a lead role being taken by Wychavon's Chief Executive, Mr du Sautoy), they included the factors of:-

- local history;
- local topography;
- homogeneity (i.e. factors of mobility, sport, industry, employment base, transport and demography, that is the degree of self containment for social and economic activity);
- location of council offices and service points;
- clarity of proposed option (i.e. understanding the system);
- responsiveness;
- focus (i.e. factors of member/officer relationship, turnout and elector knowledge);
- accountability;
- democracy;
- whether there were between 3-5 unitary authorities;
- whether the populations in every option ranged between 150,000-250,000;
- whether there was any co-terminosity with the boundaries of other public bodies such as Health Authorities and TEC's.

It was also suggested that the additional factors below should be taken into account and whilst it was recognised that they could not really be scored, it was suggested that these factors could be used to choose between options which achieved the same, or very similar scores. The additional factors included:

- geographical consistency (extent to which it makes sense on a map);
- rural/urban compatibility (i.e. high score for a generally urban/rural character, low score for mixed area with potential for town and county conflict);
- political acceptability (i.e. will the council be prepared to accept this taking into account party politics);

- avoidance of complexity (i.e. easily understood: "using districts as building blocks and status quo score highly, whilst splitting districts scores low");
- parish/Town Councils (i.e. probable level of acceptability).

(Guidance notes for Consultation Exercise 29/11/93)

All of these criteria are important, particularly the first set because they concentrate primarily upon the community index and its factor of community identity. The first nine factors are in fact the DoE's approved measures of community as specified in their community index (Policy Guidance Nov. 1993). The inclusion of these factors indicated that for the district councils it was important that their submission fully examined and considered the issue of the community. Further, by concentrating upon this concept and integrating it alongside the Commission's other criteria of the number, size and boundaries of authorities, the districts gave the community a significant role in developing their case for reorganisation. The joint consultation exercise therefore gave the community an opportunity to play an equally important role as the criteria of costs and size - but what was the practical outcome of this exercise?

The community did not realise its potential as a significant concept within this exercise for two main reasons.

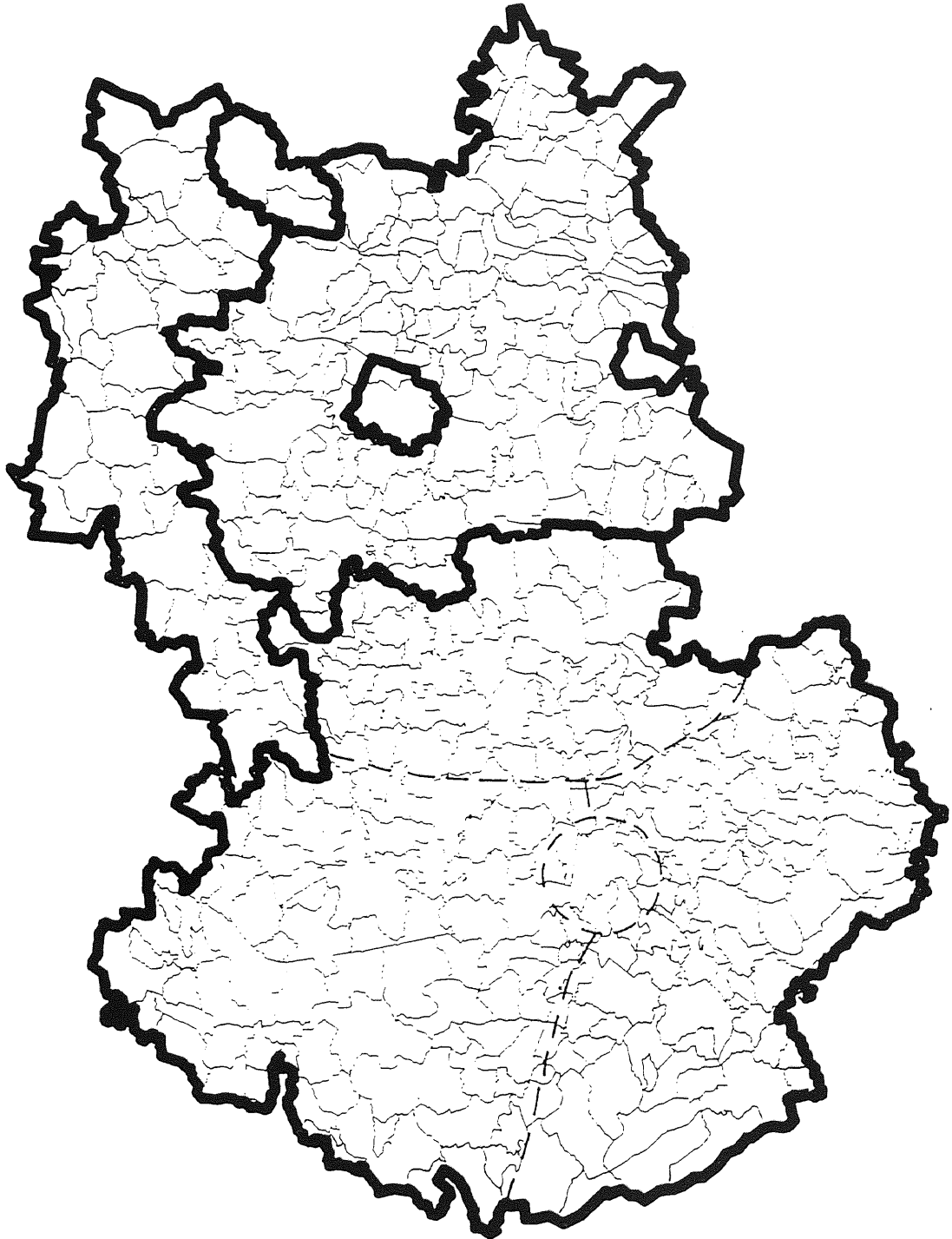
The first was that every councillor involved in the exercise had their own subjective views on which option was the best reflection of community identity and the most democratic, responsive and accessible. The result was that every councillor felt that their council's option was the best and should have the highest score. The result was that discussions as to why a particular option should score highly gave way to acrimonious arguments with compromises being made to stop these arguments rather than because an option was particularly reflective of community identities. The process became very subjective, with the observed discussions being dominated by the most argumentative and vociferous councillors.

The second problem was that, it was observed that councillors were negotiating with each other to ensure that their options got the highest scores and were selected (Notes of Meeting 29/11/1993). For example, the Labour councils of Wyre Forest, Redditch and Worcester City supported each others options for unitary status and ensured that they got high scores. Whilst the districts of South Herefordshire and Hereford City were negotiating with these Labour districts and Wychavon to ensure that their option for a traditional county of Herefordshire scored highly.

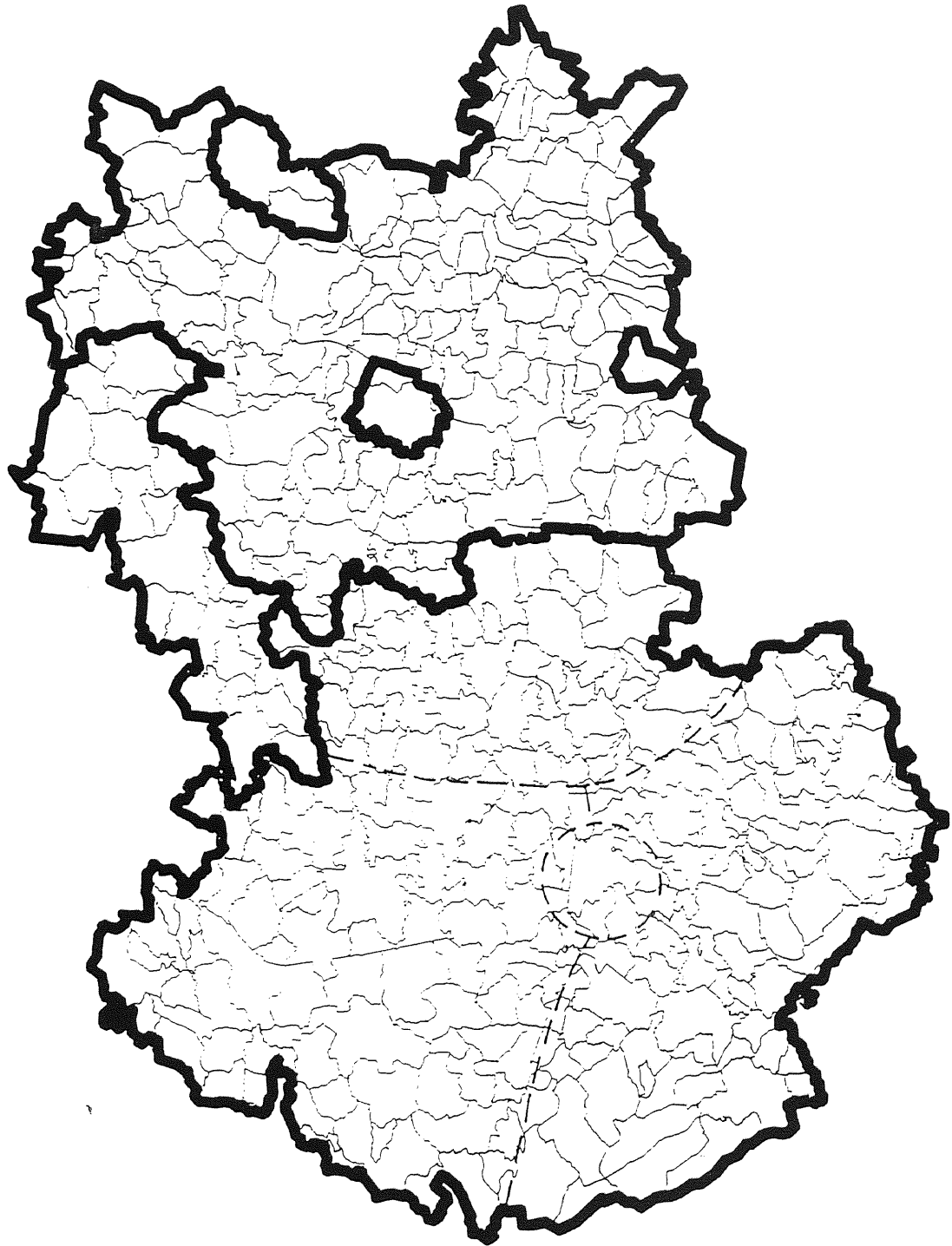
Therefore, during this exercise, the significance and role of the community was greatly diminished because an assessment of community identity gave way to subjective arguments and political bartering. Furthermore, not one of the district councillors provided any community based evidence for their options, other than it was what their councils and they personally felt was the best solution for their area. The arguments between these councillors caused significant delays and it was not possible to complete this exercise in one day. Therefore, it was agreed that it would be finished the following week on December the 6th.

The meeting on December 6th was no different to the previous meeting on the 29th of November, in fact it gave some councillors more time to cement their alliances and ensure that their options were chosen. For example, of the five options (demonstrated by maps 7-11 overleaf) for reorganisation that were chosen, Wyre Forrest, Redditch and Worcester City ensured their case for unitary status succeeded in at least three of these options and South Herefordshire and Hereford City ensured that their option for a traditional county of Herefordshire was presented in four of the options. The remainder of the options included Malvern's three ridings and Wychavon's three ridings. Wychavon was successful because of careful negotiations by the Leader Don Lawley with the Herefordshire Districts, whilst

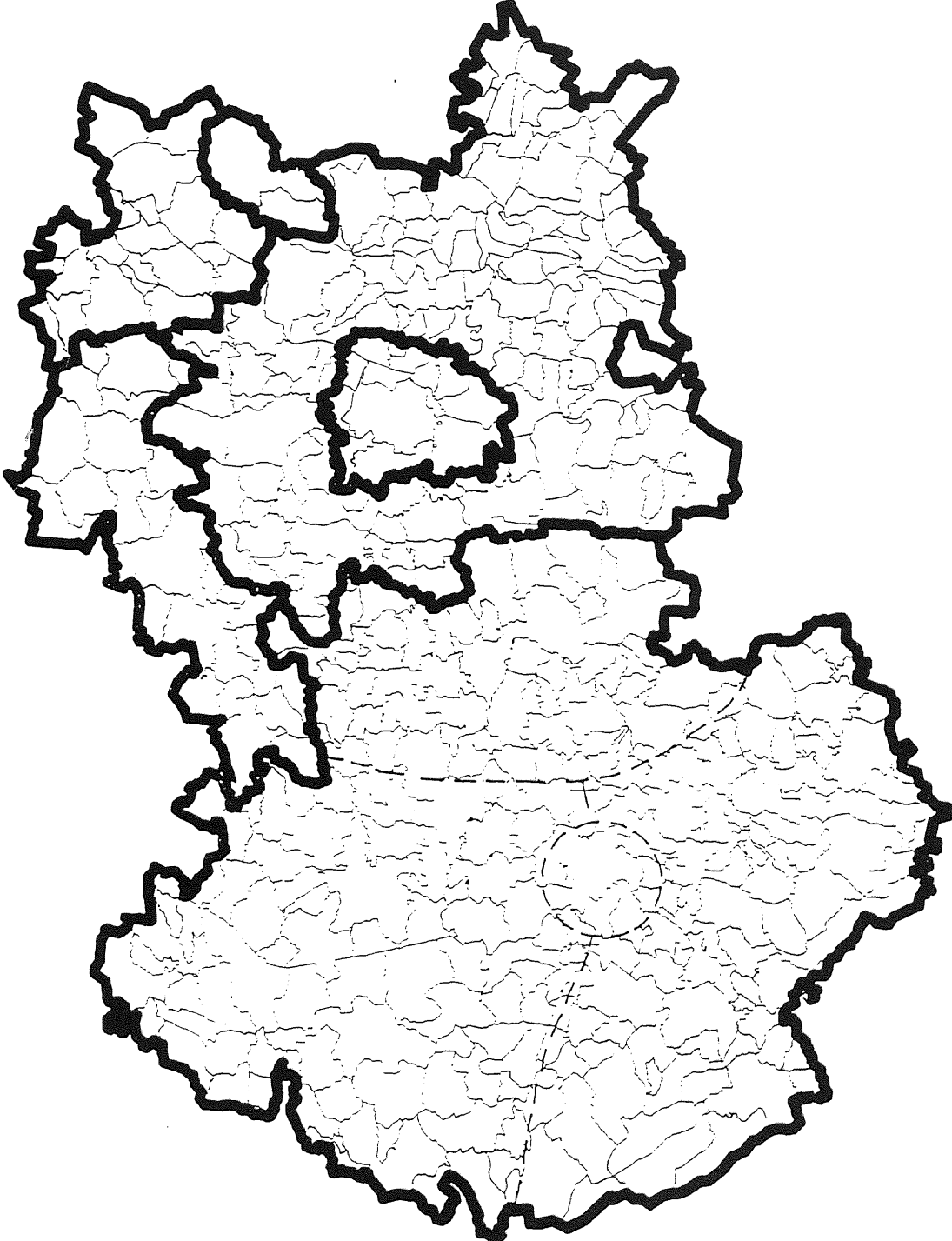
Map 7



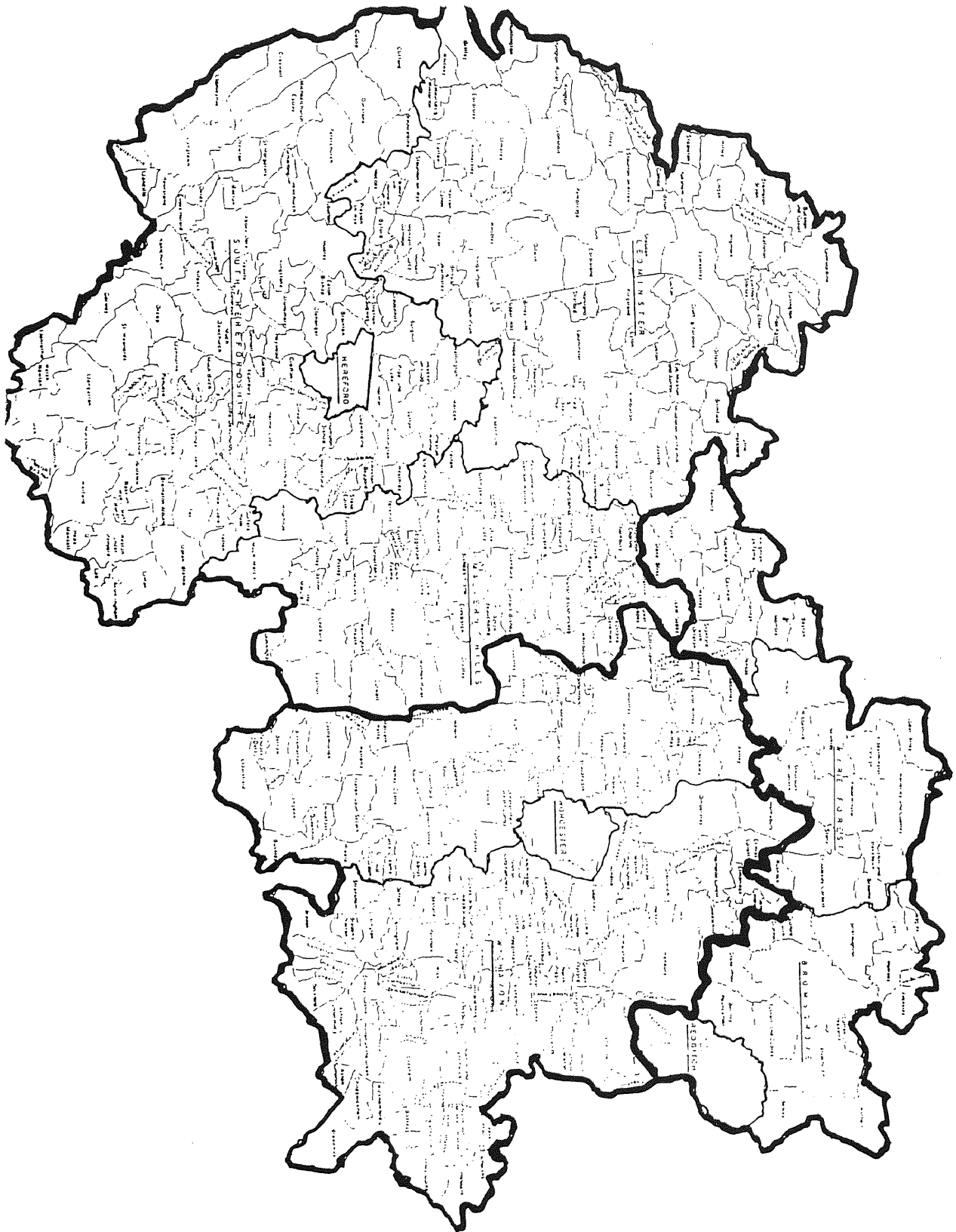
Map 8



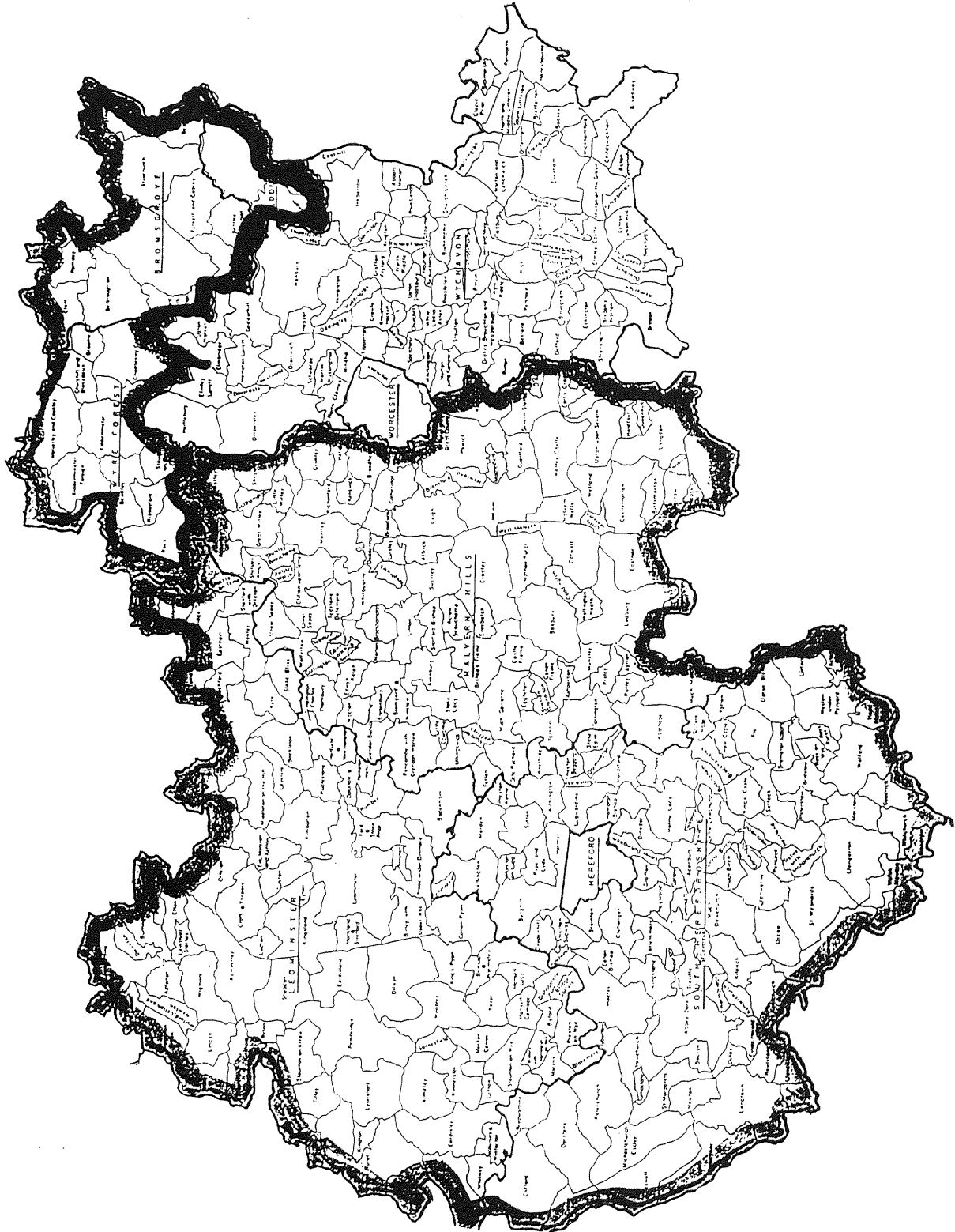
Map 9



Map 10



Map 11



Malvern negotiated with Redditch, Wyre Forest and Worcester City. It was also agreed at this meeting that the County Treasurers would cost all of these options which would be narrowed down after the districts and county council had their initial meeting with the Local Government Commission on the 7th of January 1994 at Wychavon's Civic Centre.

The district councils within Hereford and Worcester had therefore chosen a range of options through a process that had tried, but failed to adequately integrate the concept of the community. Instead, options had been selected through a subjective and political process of negotiation by councillors, who, without any real evidence, assumed that they knew what was best for their communities. The county council at this point also announced that their official options for reorganisation would be developed within their own submission and would definitely be for firstly, a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire and secondly, for two unitary counties. Therefore, with the community playing a diminishing role in determining the district's case for reorganisation, how was it being used within Wychavon.

At the next meeting of Wychavon's Local Government Review Committee, the Leader, councillor Lawley updated the group by describing exactly what had happened at the joint consultation exercise on the 29th November and 6th December. Councillor Lawley reinforced the point that, despite the other options thrown up by this exercise, the way forward was still the three ridings. He justified this by again noting that the three ridings met the Commission's criteria in its pragmatic proposal to create three unitary counties, with population ranges between 150,000-250,000. Councillor Lawley also noted that the boundaries of the new South Worcestershire were coterminous with Health Authorities and the local TEC and that he was negotiating for the support of the Conservative politicians in Worcester City and for the support of South Herefordshire and Hereford City in return for supporting their case for splitting Malvern. He also felt that, after the meeting with the Commission on the 7th January, more districts would come to support

the three ridings once the Commission had told them there was no real case for unitary districts (Review Meeting Minutes 15/12/1993).

Councillor Lawley was supported by all of the committees councillors with again only one dissenter - the Labour councillor Vic Isaacs. Councillor Isaacs stated that whilst he would continue to support the three ridings, he felt that Wychavon should keep an open mind with regard to the county's two options. The Conservative members of the committee unanimously rejected councillor Isaacs suggestion and councillor Lawley and the Chief Executive reasserted that, according to the Commission's criteria the way forward was the three ridings solution and this would become apparent to the other authorities after meeting with the Commission (Review Meeting Minutes 15/12/1993).

The unanimous support that the Conservative members of the committee gave to councillor Lawley demonstrated that the Conservative group still thought that there was a political advantage to creating South Worcestershire. The support also demonstrated that Wychavon's case for the three ridings was determined primarily by the Commission's criteria, of the number of unitary authorities, population size and co-terminosity of boundaries with other public bodies, and that the community was not a significant factor in shaping and influencing this submission. It did, however, appear that this concept was developing another role, as a factor that would justify and support this submission. This was exemplified by the publicity campaign which the review committee continued to support in its aim of winning community opinion. The committee also unanimously supported the community survey with councillor Lawley stating in a private meeting that he wanted this survey to collect important evidence of community identities and opinions that supported the three ridings (Review Meeting Minutes 15/12/1993).

The survey had not, however, been distributed by Droitwich High School. Despite further meetings with the Head and his deputies (and the School receiving 2,000 questionnaires to distribute) at the last minute the Headmaster pulled the school out of the survey, stating in a letter to the Chief Executive that reorganisation was too politically sensitive. The Chief

Executive was unable to talk to the Head, who became mysteriously very busy and unavailable, but replied in writing that he was prepared to take up any problems with the Chief Executive of the County Council. The Headmaster of Droitwich did not respond and councillor Vic Issacs revealed that the school had been pressurised into withdrawing by the deputy leader of the County Council Peter Pinfield. Instead, it was reported to the Committee that a grant maintained High School, Prince Henry's in Evesham had been contacted and were prepared to pilot the survey, but this time only 1,000 questionnaires were to be distributed through the High School, because of a smaller number of sixth form students. The committee still approved this course of action and wanted results from the questionnaire as soon as possible.

Therefore, despite this set back, Wychavon were still committed to the community survey, although it was very much a case of using all evidence of community identities and attitudes to support their established case for the three ridings. Similarly for the joint district submission it became a case of their options being determined not by the concept of the community but political bargaining and negotiation.

This political bargaining was further demonstrated at the meeting of the ADC County Branch on 20th of December, where it was decided that the five options for reorganisation, which had been produced at the joint consultation exercise, would be reduced to three. The committee then chose the three options without consideration of any further evidence as to which option was the most beneficial in terms of reflecting community identities or even the most financially beneficial, but by a vote, with the options securing the highest number of votes being accepted. The result was the rejection of Wychavon's three ridings which was voted against by the three northern districts, Worcester City, South Herefordshire and Hereford City (ADC Meeting Minutes Dec. 1993). Brief interviews with the Chief Executives of South Herefordshire and Hereford City revealed that the Leaders of these authorities had agreed to vote with the northern districts to ensure that Wychavon's option was rejected, along incidentally with Malvern's option. A confidential interview with the Leader of Hereford City, councillor Vimes

revealed that this deal was based upon the argument that the northern districts and Worcester City would stop Malvern being placed in Herefordshire, if the Herefordshire districts agreed to stop them being merged into one authority.

The final three options, detailed earlier in Maps 7 - 10, were therefore determined by the desire of the northern districts to remain separate and for Worcester City to remain independent and for South Herefordshire and Hereford City to have a traditional County of Herefordshire (the other Herefordshire district of Leominster remained uncommitted to a specific option at this stage but appeared to be favouring the three ridings). Furthermore, none of these districts offered any evidence that these solutions would reflect existing community identities and attitudes, it was the opinions of their representative councillors (under authorisation from their council) that determined their options. It was very much a case of political bargaining and cliques voting against each other rather than using any other factor, particularly the community to determine their final options.

Therefore, by the time Wychavon, their neighbouring districts and the County Council met their Local Government Commissioners - Brian Hill, Clive Wilkinson and Stan Szaroletta, there were four separate cases for reorganisation. These were:

- I. the County Council's case for either a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire or two unitary county councils.
- II. the District's joint case for their three options (maps 7-10)
- III. Malvern's Three Ridings, which placed their district entirely within Herefordshire.
- IV. Wychavon's case for the Three Ridings. This commitment was reaffirmed at a meeting of Wychavon's Local Government Review Committee on the 5th of January 1994.

It was also at this meeting that councillor Lawley reported that Malvern (Review Meeting Minutes 5/1/1994) were considering pulling out of the districts' joint submission to produce their own proposal. Councillor Vic Isaacs then stated that Wychavon should do the same and produce a submission whose second option should be for a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire (as preferred by the County). The suggestion

was rejected by the entire group and the Chief Executive stated that Wychavon would remain committed to the districts' joint case. In his view there would be one single document dealing with the agreed option and then individual letters from districts advocating their options - it was at this point that Wychavon would be able to promote their case for three ridings. The Chief Executive continued to state that this was an important option because, at a pre-meeting with the Commissioner Stan Szaroletta on the 4th of January, the point was reinforced that the Commission would not favour unitary districts. Instead, Mr Szaroletta indicated that the Commission wanted submissions that advocated between 2-4 unitary authorities, within their established population ranges of 150,00-250,000. Therefore, the Chief Executive stated that as Wychavon's three ridings reflected these criteria, they should also begin to cost this option and prove its financial effectiveness (Review Meeting Minutes 5/1/94). Wychavon's Treasurer and his assistant reported that this could not be done before the deadline for local submissions, which had been moved to the 25th of March. Therefore, the Committee unanimously agreed that this was an important enough exercise to warrant the appointment of consultants. This underlined the importance of costs to Wychavon's case for the three ridings, but again it was a case of choosing the option first and then providing the information to support it, as had happened with the issue of community.

When the meeting ended it was agreed that the committee would reconvene after the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council had met with the Local Government Commission on the 7th of January.

The First Meeting with the Local Government Commissioners 7/1/94

The meeting with the Commissioners did not substantially alter any of the cases for reorganisation, indeed for Wychavon it confirmed that the Three Ridings was the best option for the reorganisation of Hereford and Worcester. This was due to the Commissioners, Brain Hill and Clive Wilkinson, stating that whilst the status quo could be an option, they were primarily interested in finding a solution for Hereford and Worcester that promoted options for between 2-4 unitary authorities. It was also stated

that a case for 5 or more unitary authorities would need special justification. Clive Wilkinson, in a brief conversation after the meeting, also added that unitary districts did not, "stand a snowflakes chance in hell". The Commissioners further stated that their main criteria was to ensure that any change was:

- '- **more cost effective than the status quo;**
- **more convenient and efficient**, with extra weight being given to options that had few joint arrangements and whose boundaries corresponded as closely as possible to other public bodies - particularly the Health Authorities and TEC's;
- **created authorities based upon recognised communities**, as measured by MORI's community surveys and public consultation.

The Commission further commented that those proposals which did not have the support of the local communities would in all probability be unsuccessful. This meant that local authorities needed survey evidence that demonstrated that their options reflected existing identities and countered any negative results from the MORI polls - along with a public relations campaign to win over community support during the consultation period.

A brief interview with both Clive Wilkinson and Brian Hill at the end of this meeting confirmed that these Commissioners ideally wanted options that presented between 2-4 unitary authorities, that minimised joint arrangements, were cost effective and also had local support and evidence that they had taken account of local identities and opinions. Brian Hill further reinforced the point that those options that could not elicit any degree of community support would be unsuccessful. Worcester City and the northern districts used this last comment at the following ADC County Branch meeting to argue that despite the Commission's dismissal of unitary districts, this could still be a feasible option if it had strong support from the community⁵. Furthermore, Hereford City and South Herefordshire urged Malvern to drop their three ridings plan, as they stated that it would not have the

⁵This was an interesting statement because it revealed that these cases were not established upon knowledge of community opinion. As these districts felt success lay in obtaining community support, rather than being confident that they already had community support.

support of local communities within Herefordshire, although no real evidence of this was offered. These positions then prompted arguments that could not be immediately resolved and it was decided to keep the three options and discuss them at a later date.

The meeting with the Commissioners therefore failed to immediately alter the districts position, but it did encourage Worcester City, the northern districts, South Herefordshire and Hereford City to use the community as an exceptional factor to justify their proposals. This stance appeared to give the community a new role (in the form of community opinion), as a significant factor in justifying rather than shaping proposals for reorganisation. The community had already begun to adopt this role within Wychavon's case for reorganisation, which also remained unchanged by this meeting, as can be demonstrated by examining a special meeting of the Local Government Review Committee called on the 18th of January.

At this meeting councillor Lawley and the Chief Executive summarised the events of the 7th of January and the Commissioner's comments. The feasibility of the three ridings was again reinforced and supported with statements that this case should continue to be further supported by evidence of community support and well presented costings (Review Meeting Minutes 18/1/94). It was confirmed that the consultants Touche Ross would produce and present a financial case for the three ridings, and the Chief Executive presented the Committee with the results of the community survey.

A total of 400 questionnaires were returned by Prince Henry's High School in Evesham, The results of the analysis of this survey did not prompt Wychavon to revise their case for reorganisation, but its results did not particularly favour the three ridings either.

Community Identities Within Wychavon

The Perceived Sense of Community / Emotional Sense of Belonging

The first question to test this sense of community asked respondents to describe the area where they lived to a person from another part of the country, thereby testing their sense

of belonging. Unfortunately, the majority of respondents felt that they belonged firstly to Worcestershire and then secondly to their nearest town or village. Figure 8 demonstrates that Wychavon's proposed South Worcestershire generated a very weak sense of belonging.

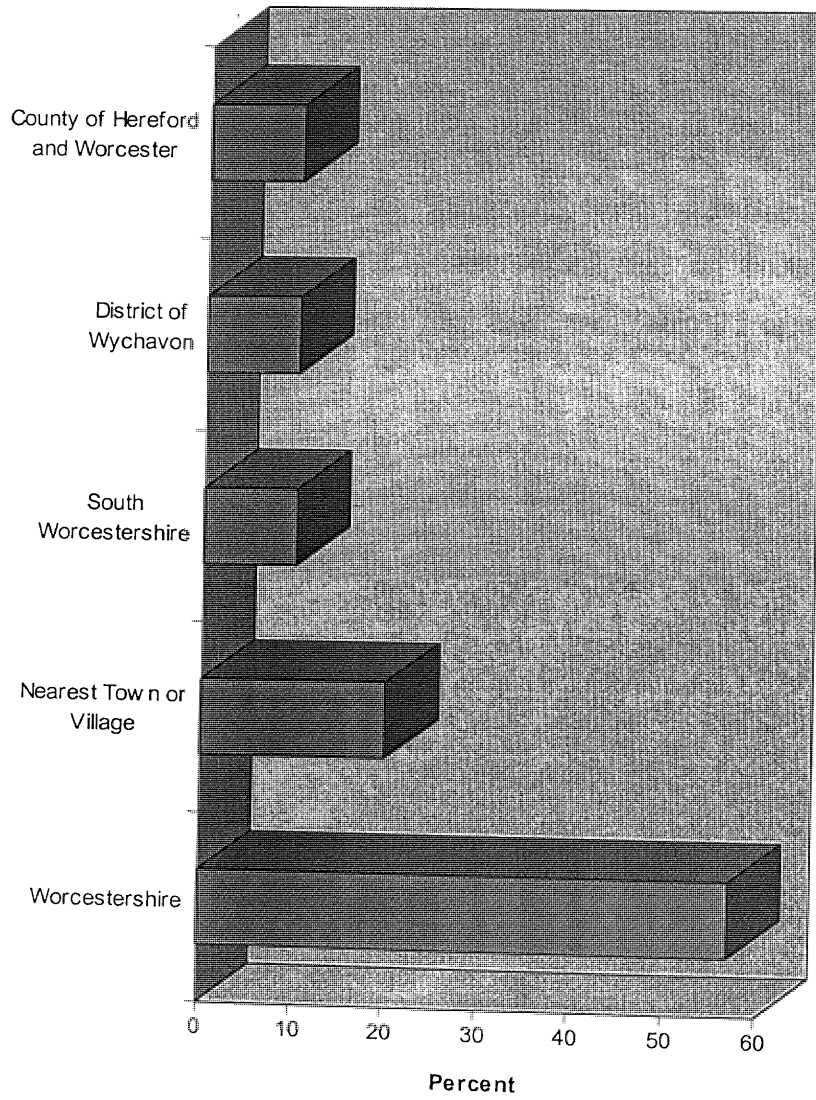
The lack of an effective sense of community identity with South Worcestershire was also re-emphasised when respondents were asked how strongly this sense of belonging was to another range of areas. Table 19 demonstrates that the most popular answers were again Worcestershire and the immediate neighbourhood, village or town. However in this instance, the immediate locality elicited the strongest sense of belonging, whereas again South Worcestershire, the District of Wychavon and the County of Hereford and Worcester elicited a weak sense of belonging.

Table 19 Effective Community

	Very Strong %	Fairly Strong %	Not At All %
Neighbourhood/ Village	41	42	6
Nearest Town	17	53	17
Worcestershire	16	50	16
Wychavon	5	27	30
South Worcestershire	5	28	36
Hereford & Worcester County	3	28	40

This unfortunately meant that for Wychavon when it came to the emotional or perceived community, the senses of belonging and identification were based around two areas. These areas were the immediate locality and the large County of Worcestershire but not South Worcestershire. When these statistics were examined in close detail to determine whether they were affected by age, or length of residence or like or dislike of the district, it was found that the identity of Worcestershire and the locality was not significantly affected by these factors. These identities were felt by all ages, regardless of length of residence and attitude towards their local area.

Figure 8 - Sense of Belonging to South Worcestershire



The emotional sense of community therefore revolved around two very contrasting areas, which also needed a further comparison against the behavioural sense of community.

Behavioural Community

The behavioural or effective community concentrated upon identifying those areas within which people lived their daily lives. It started with those areas within which respondents shopped for food and other major items, then it asked respondents which leisure centres they used (at the request of Wychavon) and finally, where they worked. The results to these questions are detailed in Table 20, which describes individuals' shopping preferences. Table 21 provides further information on leisure patterns by asking respondents which leisure centres they used and Table 22 examines the areas where people worked.

Table 20 Areas Where Respondents Shopped

	Food Shopping	Clothes & Other Shopping
Evesham	71%	26%
Cheltenham	13%	69%
Pershore	13%	3%
Worcester	15%	40%
Redditch	5%	6%
Droitwich	0	0

Table 21 Leisure Patterns

Leisure Centre	Percentage Of Respondents Who Used Centre
Evesham	53.5%
Pershore	33.6%
Droitwich	5%
Other - Cheltenham, Tewkesbury & Gloucester	20.2%

Table 22 Areas Where Respondents Worked

Areas Inside District		Areas Outside District	
Evesham Area	63.1%	Worcester	7.9%
Pershore	17.1%	Cheltenham And Gloucester	6.7%
Droitwich	1.3%	Redditch And Birmingham	3.9%
TOTAL	81.5%	TOTAL	18.5%

Thus, in behavioural terms, respondents generally worked, visited leisure centres and shopped for food in and around their main town of Evesham. However, for major items such as clothes and furniture, it was clear that the main destinations were the neighbouring towns of Cheltenham and Gloucester, both in the neighbouring County of Gloucestershire. However, respondents lives on the whole, tended to revolve around the main local town of Evesham. This meant that, overall, in terms of community identity, the main patterns of identity and activity were centred around the small town of Evesham which was the immediate locality, in contrast to the strictly emotional community and its locality which was the larger area of the County of Worcestershire. Unfortunately, this did not provide a viable area to base a new local authority upon, and this did not reflect the

Commission's criteria, with Worcestershire being too large and remote and the locality being too small. Therefore, perhaps Wychavon were correct in not using the concept of the community, as measured in this survey, to determine their case for reorganisation.

It was apparent from this survey that the senses of community identity that were produced formed two localities that were not practically useful to Wychavon and this reorganisation. A similar deficiency had already been noted by the Commission in the MORI surveys in the first tranche, but Wychavon still had important data to extract from the remainder of this survey, especially with regard to the issue of respondents' knowledge of local government and their preferred area.

Knowledge of Local Government

Respondents' knowledge of local government was tested by providing an even mixture of county and district council services and asking them to identify who they thought provided each one. The results are provided in Table 23 and demonstrate that, as far as the first five services are concerned, the majority could identify who provided them. This is probably due to the fact that these are services with which respondents have some regular contact. However, problems began to occur half way down the table with social services, this was despite social services being the County Council's second major service, indeed only 55% of respondents correctly identified the provider, with there being less and less correct responses as the table descended to environmental health. The table, therefore, demonstrated that there was some public confusion over service provision and problems of accessibility and accountability within the two tier system.

Therefore, having established that a problem existed within the two tier system, the survey finally tested whether respondents wanted unitary local government.

Table 23 Respondents Knowledge Of Local Government Services

Service	Authority	% Of Correct Responses
Schools	County Service	85.7
Libraries	County Service	85.7
Household Rubbish Collection	District Service	62.2
Local Road Building	County Service	62.2
Council Tax Collection	District Service	57
Social Services	County Service	55.2
Leisure Centres	District Service	53
Planning Applications	District Service	47.4
Council Housing (*)	District Service	46.4
Trading Standards	County Service	41.4
Waste Disposal	County Service	34.7
Environmental Health	District Service	30.2

(*) At the time this survey was conducted the provision and maintenance of council housing was a district council function, which has since been taken over by two local Housing Associations.

Attitudes Towards Unitary Local Government

Table 24 demonstrates that respondents were marginally in favour of the status quo, but if change had to come then Table 25 demonstrates that respondents wanted authorities to be smaller than districts and ideally based around parishes.

Table 24 Support For Unitary Local Government

No Change I.E. Retain Hereford And Worcester County Council And Wychavon District Council	48.5% of respondents
Responsibility For All Services To Be Transferred To A Single Council	38.1% of respondents
Some Services To Go To Town Or Parish Council	13.4% of respondents

Table 25 Area To Be Covered By A New Authority

Area To Be Covered	% Of Respondents
Same Area As Wychavon District Council	47%
Same Area As Hereford And Worcester County Council	23%
Smaller Area Than Wychavon District Council	21%
Larger Area Than Wychavon District Council	9%

The two tables above demonstrate that respondents wanted a unitary authority that was small enough to correspond to their localised sense of community which, unfortunately, was an authority based on or around the town of Evesham and its surrounding wards and parishes. This was confirmed by the fact that of the respondents who chose to use the blank map at the back of the questionnaire 55% drew in a small authority based on or around Southern Evesham, as demonstrated by table 26.

Table 26 Size Of The New Areas

For those respondents who wanted a smaller or larger area than Wychavon, a map was attached for them to indicate exactly where they felt the new boundaries should be. It produced the following results:

An Area Encompassing Southern Wychavon Only	55%
Traditional County Boundaries	15%
Area Encompassing Only Evesham Town And Surrounding Parishes	5%
The Three Ridings	25%

Thus, whilst this survey identified both senses of the community, that is, emotional and behavioural, and attempted to identify a useful locality, it did not really produce an area that could be used for the reorganisation of local government, particularly under the Commission's revised criteria. Even when respondents were asked to identify their ideal area for a local authority upon a map the result was not useful. However, despite these conclusions Wychavon's Local Government Review Committee having seen these results still considered the survey to be important.

Councillor Lawley opened the discussion of these statistics on the 18th January by stating that he thought that the survey provided important community evidence. Councillor Lawley felt that it demonstrated that there was initially no evidence that there was any sense of community identity with either the District of Wychavon or the County of Hereford and Worcester. Therefore, both should be abolished in favour of the three ridings. This was also aided by definite proof from Table 23 that this two tier system created confusion and weakened accessibility and accountability, which were two of the Community Index's key criteria. Councillor Lawley was immediately supported by councillor Brackston, then by councillor Coley and followed by the remainder of the group with little debate. Therefore, for the Local Government Review Committee, there

was definite community based evidence for the abolition of two tiers, albeit in a rather indirect manner.

Councillor Paul Coley noted from this evidence that what the Three Ridings really needed was a higher public relations profile. Councillor Coley questioned whether respondents really knew what was meant by this new area and in his opinion this accounted for its low levels of identification. Councillor Coley was supported by councillor Lawley and the remainder of the group, with councillor Brackston suggesting that a full scale survey should be conducted after a more intensive public relations campaign.

The results of the pilot community survey did not alter the desire of Wychavon's councillors, or rather the Conservative group to promote the three ridings. The councillors merely ascribed its results to the fact that the community simply did not know that they wanted a new unitary South Worcestershire and as soon as they learnt more about this option, they would be happy to support this change. Therefore, whilst the publicity campaign for the three ridings and South Worcestershire continued to inform the public through public presentations and council pamphlets, councillor Lawley authorised the Chief Executive to appoint consultants to interview a wider sample of respondents from throughout the district. This eventually led to the appointment of Foresight International, who provided the lowest quote for conducting a telephone survey of at least 600 of Wychavon's residents. The data from this exercise was to be returned to the Council on disks to be analysed and a report produced before February 1995.

Thus, by the end of January, after completing a pilot community survey and an initial meeting with the Local Government Commissioners, Wychavon had established a new role for the community within their preparations. It was to support rather than determine their case for reorganisation which was exclusively shaped by the Commission's revised criteria and emphasis upon size and efficiency. Therefore this made the community insignificant in determining Wychavon's options for reorganisation, but potentially very significant when it came to justifying this case to the Local Government Commission. In

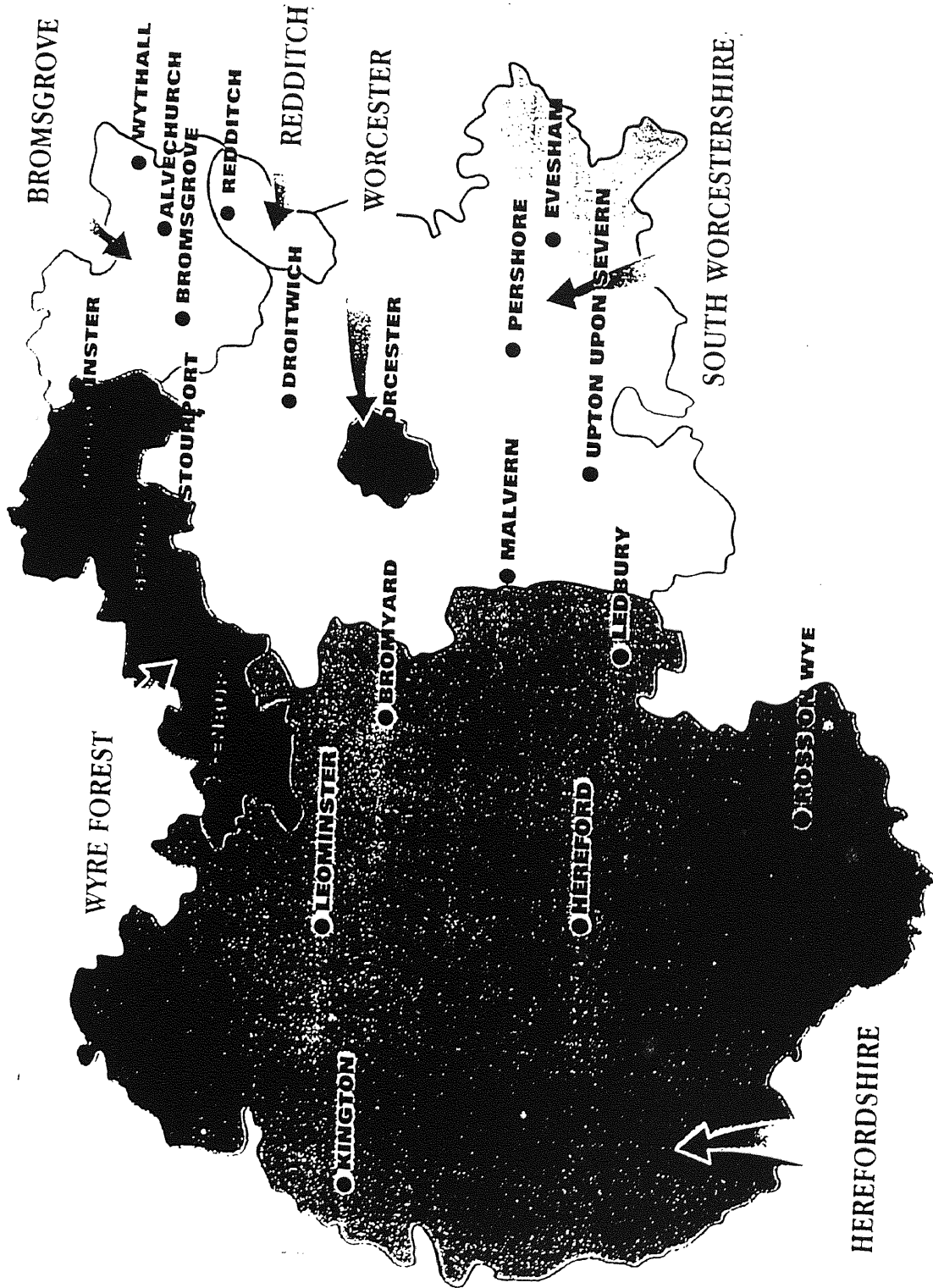
particular this 'justifying evidence' was to be obtained by Wychavon conducting a public relations campaign. These actions now became the primary method of using the concept of community to justify change. Therefore, with Wychavon having established this particular role for the community, was this role also reflected within the joint work of the districts?

The next meeting of the ADC County Branch on the 26th of January 1994, was dominated by the northern districts and Worcester City, who would not accept any other option than unitary status for their districts. In conjunction with South Herefordshire and Hereford City they voted through an option for six unitary authorities (ADC Meeting Minutes Jan. 1994), this is demonstrated by map 12 overleaf. The adoption of 6 unitary authorities and the rejection of three ridings caused Wychavon to withdraw from the joint submissions and like Malvern to decide to produce their own case for reorganisation. However Malvern, like Leominster⁶, did later agree to co-operate upon the joint submission but only on the grounds that they would have the opportunity to add their own proposals for reorganisation. Interviews with Councillor Vimes the Leader of South Herefordshire and Councillor Foot from Malvern Hills revealed that the joint submission was mainly determined by a political deal between Worcester City and the northern districts and Hereford City and South Herefordshire.

This was also confirmed by brief conversations with the Chief Executive of Worcester City Council, David Wareing, the Chief Executive of Wyre Forest, Stan Baldwin and the Leader of Redditch Borough Council, Albert Wharad. The district's joint case was an option that ensured the continued survival of Worcester City, Redditch, Wyre Forest and Bromsgrove (who refused to be merged with Redditch and Wyre Forest because they were Conservative and these authorities were Labour). Whilst Hereford City and South Herefordshire gained a unitary County that excluded Malvern.

⁶ Leominster wanted a three ridings scenario like Wychavon, but wanted their local town of Tenbury to be placed into South Worcestershire and North Worcestershire or Herefordshire.

Map 12 - Districts Joint Case for Unitary Status



This meant that the community did not appear as an important factor that determined and shaped this joint case. Worcester City, Bromsgrove and Redditch, did not, in fact start collecting evidence of community identities and opinions until this joint case had been finalised. The districts achieved this by appointing consultants (the pollsters NOP) to conduct opinion polls to prove that there was a special justification in terms of community for their cases for unitary status. Therefore, for the district's joint case the community also appeared to be a concept that supported rather than determined their case for reorganisation. It is worth noting that for these districts (including Malvern) their second option was for the County Council's unitary Herefordshire (which satisfied the Hereford districts) and for two tier Worcestershire. This again ensured the continued survival of the Northern Worcestershire districts and Worcester City - apparently their main criteria during this review, which was confirmed by their Chief Executives in brief discussions after the ADC meeting.

Therefore by the end of January 1994 there were four main submissions being produced for the Local Government Commission, which were:-

- Wychavon's case for the three ridings, which then became the official policy of the council in the February of 1994;
- Malvern's case for the three ridings, which placed their district entirely within Herefordshire;
- the joint district's case for six unitary authorities;
- the County Councils case for either a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire or two unitary counties.

Conclusion

Therefore, from these observations of Wychavon, it was revealed that the community was not a significant factor in determining the local cases for reorganisation. This was despite the fact that, before the 'review of the review', community identity had the potential to shape Wychavon's decision as to whether to create a new South Worcestershire. However,

once the 'review of the review' was complete, it became apparent within Wychavon that their plan for South Worcestershire and the three ridings was the most important option. It primarily satisfied the Commission's new criteria because it promoted 3 medium sized, unitary authorities, with populations of between 150,000-250,000 and boundaries that corresponded to other public bodies such as Health Authorities and TEC's. It was, in fact, these factors that became the chief criteria for Wychavon continuing to develop their case for the three ridings, leading them to withdraw from the joint districts case upon reorganisation. This meant, that as far as the community was concerned it had no role nor any significant impact upon determining Wychavon's final submission to the Local Government Commission. This situation and use of the community also appeared to be repeated in the joint district's case for reorganisation - but this did not mean that the community was completely ignored. The Commission had stressed that proposals that took no account of the community and had no community support would in all probability be unsuccessful, therefore, this concept had to be included but it had a new role.

In Wychavon in particular, the community as represented by community opinion, was used to justify and support their proposals for the three ridings. Wychavon achieved this by actively winning over community opinion and key local opinion formers through their publicity campaign, then collecting evidence from their community survey to prove that in terms of community identities and attitudes there was a case for change. It also appeared that the community was being used in this manner by other districts such as Redditch, Worcester City and Bromsgrove. For example, all of these authorities had started 'Save the District Campaigns' and were conducting community surveys to provide community based evidence for their cases for unitary status.

Thus, it appeared that the community had, in the wake of the 'review of the review', developed a new role for itself. The community was to be a supporting concept that justified the local submissions upon reorganisation. However, the question soon arises as to whether the Local Government Commission would accept these local submissions and their interpretations and use of the community. The government's 'review of the local

government review' could also have altered the manner in which the Commission applied this concept to its reviews, thereby altering its significance at both the national level and in particular, in Hereford and Worcester. Therefore, in order to fully understand exactly how these local submissions and their interpretation of the community were used by the Commission, it is necessary to examine the impact of the 'review of the local government review' upon the Local Government Commission.

CHAPTER NINE: IMPACT OF THE REVIEW OF THE REVIEW UPON THE WORK OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

The DoE's decision to halt the local government review and revise its Policy and Procedure Guidance had, as demonstrated by chapter's 7 and 8, a significant effect upon Wychavon District Council, and the emphasis that this authority placed upon the concept of the community. The question therefore arises as to whether the Local Government Commission and the authorities in this thesis sample group (Avon, Humberside, and Cleveland) also altered the manner in which they utilised the concept of the community, in light of these changes.

The Role and Significance of the Community After the Acceleration of the Local Government Review and the Release of new Policy and Procedure Guidance.

Cleveland

The Commission's original recommendation in Cleveland was for the creation of four district based unitary authorities in Cleveland and two unitary authorities in Durham. In Durham it was specifically recommended that one unitary authority would cover the city of Darlington, whilst the other would cover the remainder of the County of Durham. This angered the ADC who called the County of Durham a 'monster sized authority', that was 'too large, remote and artificial' (Lady Anson, Chair of the ADC, Annual Conference June 1993). The ADC even launched a campaign against this proposal, as did the local districts within Durham, who organised a local referendum in which 200,000 people were asked whether they supported the creation of such a large unitary authority. The results of this referendum were that 78% of those sampled, rejected the Commission's proposals (Municipal Journal 16-22 June 1993). The result was given an added significance by John Banham's declaration (at the press conference to accompany the release of these proposals), that it was;

"imperative that the structure of local councils reflects the wishes of local people. They are, in a sense, the jury to whom we are determined to listen" (Local Government Commission: News Release, 10/5/93).

Sir John also declared that the Commission would immediately embark upon two months of local consultation to determine the wishes of local people. The Durham Districts, therefore, began to heighten their campaign against the Commission's proposals, as did Durham County Council and the Districts and County Council within Cleveland. The campaigns became quite vociferous in Durham and soured relations between the County and District Councils. The same situation was repeated in Cleveland where both the County and District Councils embarked upon campaigns to win the loyalties of local people.

Cleveland County Council released adverts which claimed that the creation of four unitary districts would "significantly increase costs and damage local services" (County Leaflets May 1993). The County stated that the districts would not have the 'expertise' to provide education and social services, and would not be able to maintain 'joint book stores' for local libraries (County Leaflets May 1993). The County further argued that joint arrangements for emergency services such as the police and fire brigade would weaken the accountability of these services to local people and 'damage' these services in the long term (County Leaflets May 1993). The District Councils retaliated by asserting that the county was 'running scared' and Districts such as Middlesbrough gained the support of key local papers, such as the Evening Post. Editorials and comments within this paper asserted that a unitary Middlesbrough would benefit local people by giving them a greater chance to 'govern their city' and would consign the 'artificial and unwanted' county of Cleveland to the dustbin (Evening Post May 1993).

It was therefore against this background that the Commission had to consult the local people and make a final recommendation to the Secretary of State. The question arises as to whether these public relations campaigns and surveys of local communities influenced the Commission and their final report.

The Local Government Commission's Final Recommendations for Cleveland

The Commission's method and approach to collecting information upon the opinions of the local people and local communities in both Cleveland and Durham was determined largely by the Procedure Guidance that had been provided by the DoE. The guidance specified that the Commission had to:

- write to all local authorities and a list of national and local public bodies, "as it seems appropriate to consult";
- seek coverage in local newspapers, radio and television, including paid advertisements (where necessary);
- arrange informal public meetings;
- conduct opinion polling (if necessary).

(Procedure Guidance To The Local Government Commission, July 1992).

The Commission therefore appeared to be interested in community opinions rather than community identities. The above procedure was specifically designed to raise awareness and knowledge of the review within local communities, and then to prompt them into articulating their opinions, which would be resampled by the pollsters MORI (who were appointed to conduct further surveys in the areas under review). The surveys represented good examples of the Commission's desire to assess community opinions, rather than community identities. This can be demonstrated by briefly examining the content and aim of the questionnaires used in Cleveland and Durham.

The MORI Questionnaires For Cleveland

The primary aim of the survey in Cleveland was to determine which of the Commission's options for the reorganisation of Cleveland would be preferred by a representative sample of its local residents. MORI achieved this by conducting face to face interviews with selected residents, in which these residents were presented with the Commission's options and then asked to state which one they preferred. A copy of the questionnaire used is provided in Appendix D, a brief review of which revealed that the majority of the questions directly probed respondents preferences for the reorganisation of local government in their area. The questions specifically asked respondents:

- which of the Commission's options they most preferred and why?
- which option would be their second choice?

- which option would be 'least preferred' and why?
- whether the respondent had their own alternative and to briefly state why they favoured this alternative ?

The questions were then repeated, but this time the interviewer supplied further information relating to costs, population and area sizes, and if there were any differences respondents would be briefly asked to explain this change of mind. The questionnaire was finally completed by the interviewer probing respondent's knowledge of their system of local government and the review, along with their attitudes towards the principle of unitary local government and their opinions upon the ideal number of councillors for the new authorities.

It is, however, significant that the main body of questions related to respondents preferences for reorganisation, thereby demonstrating that this questionnaire primarily wanted to establish respondents preferences and opinions. It was definitely not aiming to identify any kind of emotional or behavioural communities, as the original MORI surveys had attempted to do with limited success for the Commission.

It appeared that when the Commission were referring to the 'community' and assessing the 'community', they were referring to and assessing community opinion and not attempting to identify any emotional or behavioural senses of community identity. The results of this survey of community opinion was that in Cleveland there was a preference for four unitary authorities, as demonstrated by Table 27.

Table 27: Preferred Option for Cleveland

OPTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
STATUS QUO	21%
FOUR UNITARY AUTHORITIES	31%
TWO UNITARY AUTHORITIES	8%
THREE UNITARY AUTHORITIES	9%
ONE UNITARY AUTHORITY	16%

Source: MORI; "Cleveland Residents: Research Study for the Local Government Commission"; October 1993, page 2

The MORI survey also found that the least preferred option in Cleveland, was for a unitary county (as demonstrated by Table 28). When respondents were presented with additional information on costs, size of authorities and population sizes, there was a marginal swing towards the status quo as demonstrated by Table 29.

Table 28: Least Preferred Option within Cleveland

OPTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
STATUS QUO	14%
FOUR UNITARY AUTHORITIES	10%
TWO UNITARY AUTHORITIES	3%
THREE UNITARY AUTHORITIES	5%
ONE UNITARY AUTHORITY	34%

Source: MORI, "Cleveland Residents: Research Study for the Local Government Commission, October 1993, page 2.

Table 29: Effect of Information Upon First Preference: Cleveland

OPTIONS	UNINFORMED CHOICE	INFORMED CHOICE
STATUS QUO	21%	25%
4 UNITARY AUTHORITIES	31%	30%
2 UNITARY AUTHORITIES	8%	7%
3 UNITARY AUTHORITIES	9%	9%
1 UNITARY AUTHORITY	16%	17%

Source: MORI, "Cleveland Residents: Research Study for the Local Government Commission", October 1993, page 2.

MORI felt that this marginal drift towards two tiers was caused by "some resistance to transitional costs" (MORI Cleveland; Oct.'93: page 4), but overall these results drew MORI to conclude that the most "resilient options" were either for the status quo or for four unitary authorities (Ibid). MORI also noted that when respondents were directly asked whether they would prefer the status quo or a structure of unitary local government 75% of respondents opted for unitary authorities (MORI Cleveland; Oct.'93; page 4).

Thus, for Cleveland, the MORI survey which sampled 1200 respondents, concluded that community opinion had generated two options. The first was to establish unitary local government in the form of four unitary councils and the second was to maintain the existing two tier system.

The Commission then added the results of their public consultation programme, which found that of those local bodies that had written to them, "most support larger authorities, and many favour no change" , that is, the status quo (LGC; Cleveland & Durham, page 4, Nov.'93). Whereas the County's MP's were noted as favouring unitary district based authorities as promoted by the District Councils. Finally the Commission added the responses of Cleveland's local residents as expressed through letters, local opinion surveys, public meetings and the Commissions leaflet questionnaires. The Commission noted that altogether this public consultation exercise had generated 19,457 responses whose preferred option for reorganisation is demonstrated by Table 30.

Table 30: Residents Views Expressed Direct to the Commission: Cleveland

	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	% OF RESPONSES
4 UNITARY AUTHORITIES	9,475	48.7
2 UNITARY AUTHORITIES	7,708	39.6
1 UNITARY AUTHORITY	954	4.9
3 UNITARY AUTHORITIES	535	2.7
OTHER	785	4.1
TOTAL	19,457	100%

Source: Local Government Commission: Cleveland, page 2, Oct.'93

The above table demonstrates that this entire process of collecting community opinion presented the Commission with three preferences for reorganisation, the four unitary authorities option (which was favoured by both the Commission's consultation programme and the MORI poll) or the status quo (as suggested by MORI's survey) or two unitary authorities (the second preference of the Commission's consultation programme).

The Commission therefore concluded that in terms of the 'community', as the option for four unitary authorities was favoured by both their and MORI's assessment of community opinion - and further that 75% of MORI's respondents wanted unitary local government - they would recommend the creation of four district based, unitary councils (LGC; Cleveland & Durham, page 12, Nov.'93) . Therefore, it appeared that this assessment of community opinion was important to the Commission in determining which option they finally recommended to the Secretary of State. It is also significant that this option for four unitary authorities in Cleveland did not involve significant cost increases.

Whilst the Commission re-iterated the finding from their original review that four unitary authorities would not achieve the greatest level of savings, they still noted that this option

had the potential to save between £6-9 million and that its transitional costs could be paid back within two years (LGC: Durham, page 9, Nov.'93). Furthermore combining these authorities with Darlington (located in Durham), could, to the Commission's satisfaction, ensure the continued provision of all local government services, including the fire and police services. Therefore, in Cleveland the Commission's evidence on community preferences complimented their criteria upon costs and operational efficiency. However, in Cleveland the community appeared to occupy a supporting role within the Commission's work. It was used to justify their recommendations to the Secretary of State, rather than to determine the size, shape and extent of the options for reorganisation. The question therefore arose as to whether the Commission would consider expensive or inefficient options if they had strong support from the local community?

The answer to this question and the results of other reviews were however delayed by the Commission producing an interim progress report, which provided an insight into the factors that they regarded as important when reviewing local authorities.

Progress Report: Renewing Local Government in the English Shires

The report drew upon the Commission's experience in the first tranche and set out their general conclusions, as well as their objectives, their approach to each review and their next steps. It began with the statement from the Commission that the objectives of their review were to:

- " - Strengthen local government
 - Reflect the changes that had taken place since 1974
 - Examine the extent to which dissatisfaction remains with the current two tier structure since its creation in 1974 and to 'take steps' to rectify this situation".
- (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, pages 10-13).

The Commission also stated that in achieving these objectives the principle of unitary local government was a potentially good solution. It was stated in the report that;

"the Commission believes that a well managed and well resourced unitary authority is to be preferred to a well managed two tier system" (Local Government Commission Dec.'93, page 14).

The Commission also recognised that, "a poorly managed unitary authority without adequate staffing or financial resources will represent no worthwhile advance at all" (IBID).

The Commission felt that an important accomplishment to unitary local government, was the transformation of its management systems and accountability (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 15). The Commission were strongly of the opinion that the future effectiveness of local government depended not only upon its structure but also upon having the financial resources to develop and implement new strategies, as well as introduce new skills, management styles, and cultures (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 15). The Commission felt that it was only through introducing such changes that local authorities could adopt more of an enabling role, remain sensitive to the needs of local people and become a strong and viable system of local democracy. The Commission did, however, recognise that managerial and financial reforms were outside of their remit, but they still felt that structural reorganisation and unitary local government had to be accompanied by an important re-engineering of the finance and internal operation of local government.

Another important objective identified by the Commission was to assess the dissatisfaction with the existing system of local government. If considerable dissatisfaction was found then the Commission saw it as their responsibility to remedy this problem by introducing a more effective, efficient and responsive system of local authorities. The Commission acknowledged that this would require them to balance the need for, "effective and convenient local government" against the need to "reflect the identities and interests of local communities" (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 8).

The Commission stated that in dealing with the first criteria of effective and convenient local government they had to examine such issues as the ideal size for a local authority, the impact of joint arrangements upon local service delivery and the overall costs of any

change. It was stated that with regard to the first issue of costs it had taken up 'a disproportionate amount of staff time', because of the "wide disagreement between the county and district councils about the implications and of the same structural alternatives" (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 37).

Therefore, in conjunction with Ernst and Young the Commission developed its own model for assessing costs which found that, "a district based unitary structure would be more costly than the present two tier structure" (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 37). Whilst, "a single unitary authority for the whole of an existing county area would be by far the most cost effective solution" (IBID), with the break even point being a "unitary structure which would replace the existing structure of county plus district councils with about half the number of authorities" (IBID).

This clearly indicated that the Commission did not believe that a district based unitary solution was the cheapest option and that they were carrying this assumption over into their reviews. Further, the Commission acknowledged that whilst they were not required to put forward the cheapest solution, they would not:

"put forward solutions that will cost significantly more than the present arrangements, unless there are exceptional circumstances" (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 37).

This demonstrated that for most reviews the Commission were evaluating all possible options with a definite cost criteria, which was also accompanied by equally definite views on the ideal size for a new unitary authority. Whilst the Commission continued to state that they had no size criteria and that with the advent of the enabling authority there was no real need for authorities to be a specific size, this report clearly stated that any new authorities had to be large enough to:

- develop such services as environmental, social and personal services, housing and education;
- develop a strategic overview and approach to other public bodies such as economic development and transportation;
- work easily with the community policies; Health Authorities, particularly for the governments care economies of scale in the purchasing function;
- achieve potential efficiency with the necessary skills;
- attract and retain staff.

(Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, pages 17-18)

The Commission then advanced the argument that these criteria were generally achieved in authorities with population ranges of between 150,000-250,000. Furthermore, despite the Commission admitting that these factors were indicative rather than prescriptive, they still stated that there had to be exceptional circumstances to justify unitary authorities outside of this range (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 20).

The report also demonstrated that in addition to this size criteria the Commission favoured authorities that minimised joint arrangements. The Commission felt that too many joint arrangements created a complex layer of local arrangements that could not be properly held accountable for police, fire and other public protection services. This therefore undermined unitary local government and the benefits of enhanced accountability and accessibility. The Commission would therefore not look favourably on proposals for unitary authorities that required a large number of joint arrangements. The cumulative effect of this preference and those concerning the optimum size and cost of new unitary authorities indicated that the Commission were guided by definite criteria.

The report also demonstrated that in practically all instances it was these criteria regarding cost, efficiency and size factors that were the Commission's chief considerations. A consequence of this was that the emotional sense of community was a secondary factor, unless an area had an exceptionally strong sense of community, which had only really happened in the Forest of Dean and Hartlepool. It appeared that on the whole, the Commission had found that community identities were usually not large enough to base unitary authorities upon as they were at their strongest at the level of the neighbourhood or village - particularly in rural areas. The Commission also felt that:

"it was not universally the case that local people wish to see a change in their local government" (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 30).

The Commission argued in their 'Progress Report' that the most effective use of the community, would be to sample community opinion to determine, whether there was a

case for change and if so which option, from a range of cost effective and efficient options, would be preferred by local people.

The report, in effect, reinforced a view that had been advanced by Sir John Banham in the October of 1993 (Municipal Journal 22/10/93). Sir John's opinion, at this time, was that local government reorganisation had to be a gradual process determined by the wishes and preferences of the local community. Sir John also emphasised that where change was to be introduced, it should seek to use local communities as building blocks, but should primarily ensure that all new unitary authorities could deliver cost effective, responsive and efficient services to local people. Sir John's comment reinforced the point that unless there were exceptionally strong and definite communities, the creation of new authorities was to be primarily determined by financial and administrative concerns. The role of the community was to indicate areas around which those new authorities could be built and then to test these areas with local residents to initially determine whether there was any support for change and reorganisation. If such support was identified then to demonstrate which option would be most preferred by local people. However, did the Commission apply these assumptions to their review of Avon?

The Local Government Commissions Review of Avon

The Commission's final recommendations for Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset were, like Cleveland, accompanied by considerable speculation and gossip. The Chief Executive of Tewkesbury at a private meeting with Mr du Sautoy, stated the Commission had in fact altered their original proposals.

The Commission's original proposals had entailed abolishing Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset County Councils and creating eight unitary authorities. In the last week before this proposal was confirmed or rejected, the Local Government Chronicle reported that the Commission was to make a 'U-turn on Gloucestershire' and 'recommend the retention of counties and districts' (Local Government Chronicle 17/24-12-93). The report was in fact correct, and when the Commission announced its recommendations for this review on

the 20th of December, they had altered their original proposal for Gloucestershire and Somerset. Therefore questions arise as to what had prompted this decision and was it the concept of the community?

Interviews with the Chief Executive of Tewkesbury, Mr Davis, revealed that the Commission had changed their mind because they could find, 'an easy way out in Gloucestershire and Somerset' (interview December 1993). Mr Davis further commented that because the Commission could find no obvious solution they just 'walked away', rather than stir up a 'hornets nest of inter-district squabbling and debate'. It is worth noting that the districts in Gloucestershire and Somerset wanted unitary status on their existing boundaries, and did not favour the Commission's idea of mergers (interview December 1993). Mr Davis was, however, surprised that the Forest of Dean was not achieving unitary status as they had a strong and discernible community identity. Mr Davis further suggested that the Forest of Dean had been unsuccessful because one of the Commissioners, Ken Ennals, was an 'advocate' of large unitary authorities, and if he could not find such authorities would favour the status quo. A further interview with Mr Stephenson, the Chief Executive of Woodspring District Council, revealed that the Commission had not changed its position on Avon because of overwhelming support for the abolition of the County.

Mr Stephenson highlighted newspaper reports in the Bristol Evening Post, and the Gazette in Weston-super-Mare, which throughout December continued to argue that Avon should be abolished (interview December 1993). The main thrust of these editorials and similar pieces in local newspapers in Bath, such as the Bath Chronicle, was that Avon should never have been created and it was time for historic cities such as Bristol and Bath to have 'independence' (Bristol Evening Post 12/12/94, Bath Chronicle 14/12/94 and the Weston-Super-Mare Gazette 14/12/94).

Mr Stephenson also commented that Avon County Council had accepted 'their fate' and there was little campaigning for the continued survival of the county. Therefore, against this local background, what prompted the Commission to make their final decision.

Final Recommendations On the Future Local Government Of Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset: A Report to the Secretary of State for the Environment

The report, as with its predecessors for Cleveland and Durham, consisted of three sections. The first section began by describing the overall public response to the Commission's proposals, whilst the second summarised the community based evidence and the third presented the Commission's conclusions and final recommendations.

In assessing the role of the community within these recommendations, as with the other two reports by the Commission, it is necessary to firstly describe the community based evidence that the Commission collected.

The evidence which sampled the views of almost 38,500 residents found that in Avon there was support for the Commission's original recommendation, as demonstrated by table 31.

Table 31 : Avon - Residents Views Expressed Direct to the Commission

District Area	Commissions Recommendations	Unitary Districts	Status Quo	Other - Don't Know	Total
Bath	67%	17%	12%	5	528
Bristol	57	28	14	1	2854
Kingswood	49	28	19	6	731
Northavon	60	11	23	6	844
Wansdyke	81	5	11	4	957
Woodspring	77	7	12	4	1998
TOTAL	65	17	14	4	7912

Source: Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 3

The Commission also noted that all of the local MP's within Avon supported their original proposal for three unitary authorities and the abolition of Avon County Council, (Local Government Commission, page 10, Dec.'93). It appeared that this was supported by the latest MORI poll for Avon, which revealed that 72% of those sampled, were in favour of the principle of unitary local government (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 5) and that the preferred solution for Avon appeared to be three unitary authorities as demonstrated by table 32.

Table 32: Avon - MORI's Most Preferred Option

Option	Bristol	Kingswood & Northavon	Bath & Wansdyke	Wood-Spring
Unitary Authority	68%	39%	42%	36%
No Change	22	38	17	11
Two Tiers In Former County	N/A	16	26	37
Don't Know	10	7	16	17

Source: Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 6

Therefore, it appeared that the evidence collected by the Commission and MORI indicated that there was community based support for the Commission's proposal to abolish Avon County Council and create three unitary authorities. However, the Commission did note that some voluntary agencies and local businesses argued for the retention of Avon County Council, but they soon dismissed this argument when they also considered the evidence from the very first MORI poll conducted in the April of 1993. In this survey the Commission observed that MORI;

"had shown a very low level of loyalty and community identity between the people and county, with only 5% of residents saying they belonged very strongly to Avon, the lowest figure of any first tranche county" (Local Government Commission, Dec.'93, page 17).

The district councils, unsurprisingly, supported this statement, which prompted the Commission to recommend that in terms of the identities and interests of the local communities within Avon, the best solution was their original proposal to abolish Avon County Council and replace the two tier system with a system of unitary authorities.

It therefore appeared that even in 'exceptional circumstances' and with the existence of strong community identities, the criteria of costs and efficiency dominated the Commission's decisions, with the community being used to compliment and justify the

most cost effective and operationally efficient options. But, whilst the community could not determine the size and shape of any new authorities, it could still indicate to the Commission which out of a pre-determined range of options, they should choose, as demonstrated by the way the community or rather community preferences overturned the Commission's original recommendations for Somerset and Gloucestershire. This demonstrated that the role of the community in the guise of community opinion was to indicate to the Commission the options that they could propose to the Secretary of State from a range of options determined by the criteria of costs and efficiency.

The Commission's final recommendations for Humberside, North Yorkshire and Lincolnshire re-inforced this particular use and application of the community. In the areas North and South of the Humber the Commission had not changed its original recommendations, these were for:

- unitary Hull;
- unitary North Lincolnshire;
- unitary North East Lincolnshire;
- unitary East, West and North Ridings in Yorkshire;
- an expanded unitary York City; and
- no change in Lincolnshire.

A brief interview with the Chief Executive of York City Council at the ADC headquarters in London, revealed that the Commission had not found any discernible negative sentiment from their consultation and MORI polls, therefore they, 'stuck to their guns' (Mr Cairns, interview 1993). Table 33 below summarises the results of the Commission's local consultation and opinion polling both North and South of the Humber, and demonstrates that local opinion in Humberside favoured larger unitary authorities and merged districts, whilst in Lincolnshire local opinion favoured the status quo. This led the Commission to recommend new unitary local authorities in Humberside and the status quo in Lincolnshire, with the chief justification being that it represented the views and preferences of the local community.

Table 33: Local Opinion for Humberside & Lincolnshire

	% Responses for Unitary Authorities		% Responses for Unitary Districts	% Responses for Status Quo
	large unitaries	merged districts		
Humberside	59	41	9	34
Lincolnshire	22	10	6	62

Source: MORI 1993

The decisions for Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and Lincolnshire did, however, come under scrutiny from the Secretary of State John Gummer, who ordered second reviews in Gloucestershire, Durham and Derbyshire. Furthermore, Derbyshire and Lancashire County Councils decided to challenge the Commission's guidance in the High Court.

It was the opinion of these authorities and their legal counsel, that John Gummer had acted unlawfully when he altered the Commission's Guidance to state that the government expected that unitary authorities would be the norm for this review. The opinion was based upon the premise that the original 1992 Local Government Act from which the Commission's remit was derived, stated that the retention of two tiers and the status quo was an equally valid option for the Commission. The opinion was upheld in the High Court by Mr Justice Jowitt (Municipal Journal 4-10/2/94), who decided that the Environment Secretary had given an extra direction to the Commission which conflicted with their original guidance. Therefore, the DoE removed their additional sentence from paragraph 3 of the Policy Guidance that advised the Commission that unitary status was to be the expected norm. Instead this guidance was left as stating that;

"The Government does not wish to impose a national blueprint for reform, or to require the wholesale abolition of either district or county councils. In some areas the Commission may wish to recommend a continuation of the existing two tier structure" (Revised Policy Guidance, Nov.'93, page 3).

This meant that, if a strong enough case were to be made by the Commission then they could recommend the status quo for some reviews. However, this judgement did not prevent the government proceeding with the new guidance which was now deemed lawful

- nor did it prevent the government re-instructing the Commission to again review Durham, Derbyshire and Gloucestershire - but did this result in the Commission changing the role it had established for the community at the end of the first tranche?

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter and summarising the Commission's use of the community in the first tranche, it can be stated that the community was not the most important factor within the process of reorganisation. The Commission's conclusion from its initial assessment of the community was that it was (other than in exceptional circumstances) too difficult a concept to practically apply to the process of creating unitary authorities. Instead, the Commission in the first year of their work decided that outside of the urban areas or highly exceptional authorities the community, as identified through their MORI surveys, was either too large, too small or too complex to be used in determining the size and shape of new unitary authorities. Therefore the Commission produced options that as demonstrated by this chapter were determined primarily by the criteria of costs and efficiency. However, the community did become a concept that could be used to identify small communities, around which new effective and efficient unitary authorities could be constructed - but, generally the community in the form of community identity did not have a significant role in shaping the Commission's options for reorganisation. However, once these options were established this role changed.

The Commission having produced their proposals then used the community or rather community preferences and opinions to determine which of their options should be recommended to the Secretary of State, or whether in fact there was a case for retaining the status quo. In particular, the Commission used community preferences and opinions, as expressed through their MORI polls and local consultation, to determine which of their cost effective and operationally efficient options would be recommended to the Secretary of State. The Commission also used the strength of that opinion to justify their final proposal, stating that it was one that really reflected the wishes of the local community. This was demonstrated in Avon, Cleveland and Humberside, where all of the

Commission's proposals were demonstrated as having the support of local communities (through the opinions collected by MOR and through local consultation).

Therefore, before the government's 'review of the review', the community was not actually used to determine the size and extent of the new unitary authorities. Instead, it was used under the guise of community preferences and opinions, to choose between cost effective and efficient options and then to justify that choice. When the 'review of the review' was complete the community was re-used to choose between a range of options, with the Commission in Avon, Cleveland and Humberside choosing options that had a degree of community support, but more importantly were cost effective and operationally efficient.

Furthermore, as demonstrated by chapter 6, this was not markedly different to the way in which the community was being used by Wychavon District Council. The council had chosen an option for three unitary authorities that was determined primarily by the considerations of size, cost effectiveness and efficiency, with community opinions being used to justify and support this proposal. The review in Wychavon was not, however, complete. The question therefore arises as to whether the Commission used the community to choose between the submissions produced in Hereford and Worcester, or whether these Commissioners had a different approach to applying the community.

CHAPTER TEN: THE COMMISSION'S FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS IN HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

The Commission entered this phase of their work against a background of controversy and debate. Whilst Chapter 8 demonstrated that the DoE had revised the Commission's guidance to re-emphasise the community and the perceived need for more unitary authorities, chapter 9 demonstrated that this was immediately contested in the High Court by Derbyshire and Lancashire County Councils. Even though these authorities failed to stop the review their complaint against the emphasis upon unitary authorities in the Commission's guidance documents was upheld. Furthermore, other county councils, such as Cleveland and Humberside were mounting judicial challenges to the Secretary of State's decision to abolish their county councils and create unitary authorities.

Opposition to the review had also been identified from within the Conservative party. The Local Government Chronicle (11/2/94) reported that the then Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr Heathcote-Amory, had publicly declared his opposition to the Commission's proposals for Somerset and called for a radical overhaul of the Commission itself. It was also reported that he was supported in both of these stances by three other Conservative MP's in Somerset, Mr Tom King (Bridgwater), David Nicholson (Taunton) and Mark Robinson (Frome), with the Under-secretary to the DoE Mr Robert Jones adding his voice to this opposition (Local Government Chronicle 11/3/94). The Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd also publicly declared that he would not support the creation of unitary authorities in his constituency of Oxford (Municipal Journal 25-31st March 1994), thereby exacerbating rumours that the Cabinet was split over the whole issue of reorganisation. Finally, at the end of March 1994, in the House of Lords debate on reorganisation, their Lordships spoke out against unitary councils and the review, calling for fewer unitary authorities and the continuation of England's traditional shire counties (Local Government Chronicle 30/3/94).

Therefore, working against this background of increasing opposition towards reorganisation and the DoE's apparent bias towards unitary local government, how did the Commission proceed with their work in Hereford and Worcester?

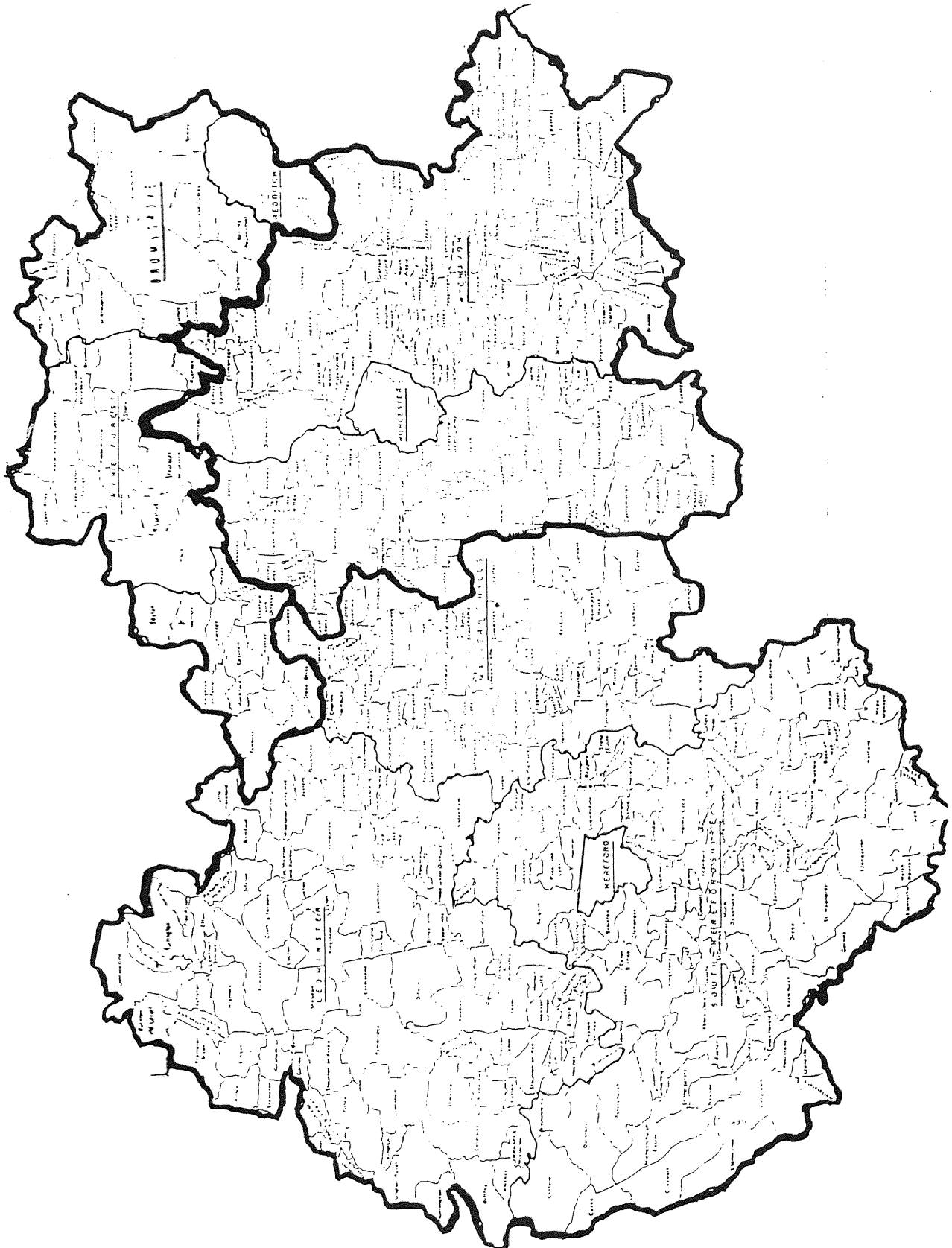
The Commission's Final Decision in Hereford and Worcester

The Commission were faced with three distinct and separate cases in Hereford and Worcester. Wychavon was proposing three new unitary authorities, the remaining district councils wanted six unitary authorities, and Hereford and Worcester County Council wanted either a unitary Herefordshire and a unitary Worcestershire, or a unitary Herefordshire and the status quo in Worcestershire. It is worth briefly examining these submissions as a reminder of how the community was utilised in each of the three different submissions that were produced.

Wychavon's proposal for the three ridings involved abolishing all the County and District Councils within Hereford and Worcester and replacing them with new local councils, as demonstrated by Map 13. In chapter 8 it was noted that this proposal, which was opposed by the County and many of the District councils within Hereford and Worcester, had been determined primarily by the Commission's criteria of cost and efficiency. The criteria, as already noted, determined that the Commission ideally wanted between 2-4 unitary authorities with populations of 150-250,000. It appeared that for the Commission it was only these types of authorities that could achieve financial savings and efficiently contract in and provide all local services.

The Commission reinforced these points to all the local authorities within Hereford and Worcester through written guidance papers and also in the closed meetings that the Commissioners, Brian Hill and Clive Wilkinson, held during their initial consultations. The result was that Wychavon, under the urging of its Chief Executive and Leader, agreed to produce a proposal that reflected these criteria.

Map 13 Three Ridings



Chapter 8 demonstrated that a consequence of this agreement was that the community was not a concept that significantly affected Wychavon's case for reorganisation. However, this did not mean that the community had absolutely no impact upon Wychavon's case for unitary status.

The Commissioners, Brian Hill and Clive Wilkinson, had emphasised that all local submissions and proposals had to prove that they had considered local opinions and identities. Therefore, Wychavon had conducted a community identities survey to prove that there was a sense of local identification with their proposal for South Worcestershire, in addition to a public relations campaign to win over the support of local opinion formers and local residents. The result of these efforts was that Wychavon at the launch of its three ridings submission, managed to gain the active support of such local opinion formers as Peter Luff the local MP, the local Health Authorities in Worcestershire, Hereford and Worcester TEC and over two thirds of local parishes.

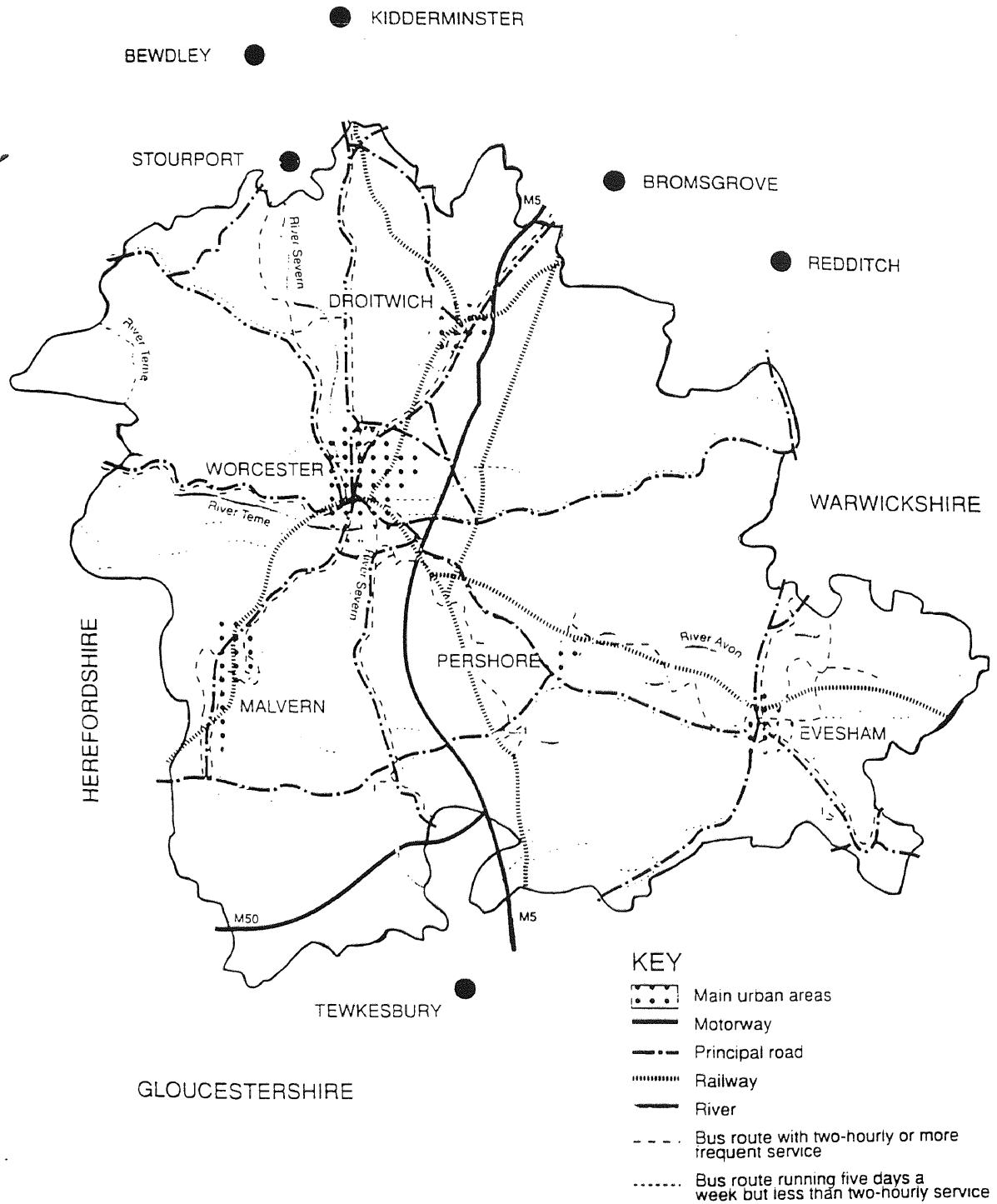
Therefore, in Wychavon, whilst the community did not actually determine their proposals for reorganisation, it was used to collect evidence of loyalties, identities and opinions that supported their case for the three ridings and South Worcestershire. This was further demonstrated by Wychavon's final submission to the Local Government Commission (released 18/4/94). This submission proved that it not only satisfied the Commission's criteria of proposing cost effective and efficient unitary authorities (that minimised joint arrangements - and would be expected to save £11 million per year - Wychavon, pages 7 - 9, April '94) but also reflected local identities and interests. The proposal emphasised, "the overwhelming desire from the people of Herefordshire to see that historic County recreated as a unitary council" (Wychavon, page 1, April '94), whilst also recognising, "the community of interest based firmly upon people's association with Worcestershire" (Wychavon, page 13, April '94). The last assertion by Wychavon was supported by the second section to their submission, which provided an analysis of the interviews with local residents conducted by the market research company Foresight.

The analysis of Foresight's interviews found that 80% of those sampled identified with Worcestershire (Wychavon, Section 2, page 14, April '94) and 46% supported unitary local government, as compared to the 27% who opposed it (Ibid). Wychavon therefore used this evidence to conclude that Herefordshire and Worcestershire should be split and new unitary authorities should be created.

Wychavon then continued by observing that Worcestershire should also be split into North and South to take account of the 'distinctive character' of these different areas. (Wychavon, page 13, April '94). Wychavon emphasised these 'distinctive characters' by referring to the Commission's MORI survey, which demonstrated that whilst South Worcestershire's main towns of Evesham, Pershore, Droitwich, Malvern and Worcester were quite self contained in terms of effective communities, Worcester was still an important centre. It was observed that Worcester City was the "main shopping and employment centre upon which most of the surrounding local economy is based and is a centre for cultural life in the locality" (Wychavon, page 5, April '94). Furthermore, Wychavon noted that for South Worcestershire the lines of communication and transportation centred upon Worcester as demonstrated by Map 14 and topographically this area was surrounded by high land with its low lying vales in the centre, thereby forming a "naturally geographically contained area" (Wychavon, page 3, April '94).

Wychavon then contrasted this self containment with North Worcestershire, which with the exception of Wyre Forest was regarded as looking more towards Birmingham. Wychavon demonstrated this by stating in their submission that the Commission's MORI survey exemplified how in Bromsgrove and Redditch more people worked and shopped in Birmingham than in the local towns (Wychavon, Page 4, April '94).

Map 14 Lines Of Communication



Therefore, in making this distinction between North and South Worcestershire and drawing upon people's activities and effective communities, Wychavon used the community to support and justify their case for three new unitary authorities and South Worcestershire. However, it is also interesting to note that Wychavon also drew on other characteristics such as topography, lines of communication and transportation, the local economy and the local culture. The aim was to further prove that South Worcestershire was also a self contained local area, as well as an area with a number of distinct communities who had an identifiable sense of belonging with South Worcestershire.

Wychavon also used other evidence to support its case for the three ridings, this additional evidence included the fact that the authority had considered 'fresh approaches' to local management and recognised the new opportunity that this reorganisation presented for a greater emphasis upon the local community (Wychavon, pages 3-7, April '94). Proposals were included for local authority shops in each of South Worcestershire's major towns in which local people could conduct business with the local authority or raise queries or complaints. The devolution of aspects of planning to area planning committees was also suggested, as was a parish charter to guarantee consultation with local parishes. Wychavon hoped that these initiatives would address some of the Commission's considerations regarding devolved services, improved management and the need for local authorities to have considered more than one option for reorganisation.

Wychavon therefore presented a case that considered a number of the Commission's criteria, particularly those of costs and efficiency, and had also used the community in terms of identity and opinion to support its proposal. Wychavon was, however, the only authority actively promoting the three ridings, indeed there was a considerable degree of local hostility towards this option from some of the other District Councils and the County Council.

The districts in particular had produced a joint submission that advocated the creation of six unitary authorities - a unitary county of Herefordshire, a unitary merger of Wychavon

with the Worcestershire half of the District of the Malvern Hills and the unitary districts of Worcester City, Redditch, Wyre Forest and Bromsgrove. It must, however, be noted that whilst Malvern Hills and the District of Leominster assisted with the preparation of this document, they had also developed their own submissions. Leominster, for example, supported the three ridings but expressed concern about the position of the small market town of Tenbury, which they either wanted placed in Herefordshire or South Worcestershire - but not to be merged with North Worcestershire or the District of Wyre Forest. Malvern Hills also promoted a variant of the three ridings, but instead of their District being split to allow the recreation of Herefordshire, their submission advocated the inclusion of their entire district within this county.

It is significant that, when it came to promoting these submissions, only three of the districts had used a community survey to demonstrate a consideration of community identity. The districts were Redditch, Worcester City (who both commissioned the pollsters NOP) and Malvern Hills, who with Wychavon jointly commissioned Foresight. It is also significant that these surveys were only conducted after these authorities had determined their cases for reorganisation and, unsurprisingly, all of them produced evidence of community identities and attitudes that supported each of their cases.

For example, in the district's joint submission, Redditch proved that the town and borough had a strong effective sense of community, by reference to their community identity survey (The Local Solution, page 64, April '94). Redditch noted that 65% of their workforce lived in the borough, 75% used the local town for leisure pursuits, 94% for food shopping and 82% for other shopping (Ibid). Whilst Worcester in their addition to the joint submission, "The Local Solution" (April '94), observed that in their survey 66% of respondents identified strongly with the local authority of Worcester City (The Case for a Unitary Worcester, page 3, April '94).

Therefore when the Commission started their work in Hereford and Worcester, they were faced with four district based submissions (from the District of Wychavon, the District of Malvern Hills, the District of Leominster and a joint submission), three of which included

in some community based evidence that supported and justified their particular option. The Commission, in addition to these proposals, also had to evaluate the final submission from Hereford and Worcester County Council.

The County Council's submission proposed the creation of either two large unitary counties, with some local functions devolved to area committees, or a hybrid structure. The hybrid was to consist of a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire, which would retain a smaller Worcestershire County Council and a smaller district of Malvern Hills, (without its western Herefordshire half) Wychavon, Worcester City, Redditch, Wyre Forest and Bromsgrove. At the start of the Commission's work in Hereford and Worcester the Commission had never referred to the possibility of creating a hybrid structure, nor had this come across in local meetings. The County Council nevertheless proposed this option because it retained the historic identities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire - both of which were popular in the Commission's MORI poll. Furthermore, the County also stated that this solution prevented the creation of smaller authorities, meant minimum disruption, few joint arrangements and lower costs than the proposal for six unitary authorities (Hereford and Worcester County Council, page 10, April '94). The County Council also felt that there was no real consensus for change in Worcestershire and that these proposals would ensure a more strategic approach to planning and development (Hereford and Worcester County Council, April '94, page 14). The County therefore addressed several of the Commission's concerns about cost, efficiency and only introducing change where it was wanted. Therefore, what was the Commission's draft recommendation for Hereford and Worcester?

The Commission's recommendations, which were published in the July of 1994, proposed three main options, which were for two unitary counties, a hybrid structure of a unitary county and two tier Worcestershire and Wychavon's three ridings, which was also the Commission's preferred option for reorganisation. The Commissioners, Brian Hill and Clive Wilkinson also made it clear that the joint districts' six unitary authority proposal and Malvern Hills proposals were definitely not viable options. Therefore, it appeared that the Commission had stuck to their official criteria of not promoting the case for unitary

districts and what they perceived as expensive and inefficient authorities. But, what was the Commission's detailed justification of these recommendations?

Local Government Commission: A Report to Local People: Hereford & Worcester

The Commission's key finding within Hereford and Worcester was that MORI had found that, "residents do not identify strongly with the area covered by the existing County of Hereford and Worcester". Instead, the local residents sampled by MORI still identified strongly with the traditional and separate counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 26). The Commission also observed that MORI had found stronger support for the principle of unitary local government in Hereford and Worcester (58%) and that the majority of the written responses that they had received had favoured larger rather than smaller unitary authorities (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 14).

Therefore the Commission recommended that one option for reorganisation should be the creation of two separate and unitary counties, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. However, the Commission also emphasised that this was only one option that would have to be placed out to public consultation, along with a second option for a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire.

The Commission justified this option by repeating their argument for a unitary Herefordshire and then arguing that two tiers of local government in Worcestershire would: permit the combination of a strategic county and local districts;
reduce the need for joint arrangements;
minimise overall disruption; and,
achieve savings of at least £3 million per year.
(Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 22).

The Commission provided further weight to their arguments for this option by observing that in terms of community there was uneven support for either a unitary county or unitary districts in Worcestershire, and some 200 representations had supported the status quo

(Hereford and Worcester, July '94, pages 18-19). Therefore, the Commission felt that they could choose a hybrid structure as their second recommendation for public consultation. The Commission's final and preferred option was, however, Wychavon District Council's proposal for three unitary authorities.

The Commission chose this submission - 'the three ridings' - as their preferred option for reorganisation because in their opinion it, 'performed well against all criteria' (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 30). The Commissioners Brian Hill and Clive Wilkinson in private conversations stated that the three ridings was the only submission that: proposed unitary authorities whose populations all fell within the range of 150-250,000; and, satisfied the Commission's request for an option that proposed between 2-4 unitary authorities.

Therefore, for the Commission, this meant that each one of these authorities would be large enough to ensure that they had the potential for a "high degree of self sufficiency" (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 30) and would require few joint arrangements. Furthermore the Commission also noted that this option would achieve financial savings of £4-7 million per year and that the boundaries of these three authorities were also co-terminous with those of other public bodies such as District Health Authorities, and the Hereford and Worcester Training and Enterprise Council. The Commission observed that these organisations were also keen supporters of the three ridings. (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, pages 29-30).

Therefore, in its criteria of creating cost effective and efficient unitary authorities, the three ridings satisfied the Commission's chief considerations was potentially a, 'strong and effective system of local government' (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 30). This assertion was further re-reinforced for the Commission by their assessment of community identities. The Commission appeared to accept Wychavon's arguments that North and South Worcestershire had two distinct communities. It was observed from MORI's evidence of effective behavioural communities (from the community survey

conducted in the November and December of 1995) that in terms of employment, shopping and leisure patterns, Worcester was a natural focus for South Worcestershire (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 29). The Commission also asserted that in their opinion there was "clearly a special relationship between the communities in South Worcestershire and the city, and this relationship should be built upon to unite the new authority" (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 29).

The Commission recognised that whilst North Worcestershire's districts of Wyre Forest, Redditch and Bromsgrove had distinct identities, they were still united and separated from South Worcestershire by;

"strong urban fringe and overspill issues related to the West Midlands conurbation" (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 29).

The Commission further emphasised this orientation towards Birmingham and away from Worcester, by referring to MORI's assessment of shopping patterns in these areas, with 14% of Bromsgrove's residents, 7% of Redditch's and 14% of Wyre Forests using Worcester (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 28), in contrast to the much higher percentages of local residents that used their local town or the West Midlands and Birmingham in particular (ibid). The Commission also found in this MORI poll that there were very low negative responses towards a North and South divide for Worcestershire (Hereford and Worcester, July '94, page 29). The Commission did not, however, mention how strong the positive responses were, instead effective community identities and behavioural patterns had been identified that supported the Commission's costs and efficiency criteria.

Therefore, in producing their draft recommendations for Hereford and Worcester, it was apparent that the Commissioners, Brian Hill and Clive Wilkinson had used a specific criteria and had developed a specific role for the community. These were:-

(i) to use as a starting point the proposals of local authorities, in this instance relying upon those produced by Wychavon and Hereford and Worcester County Council;

(ii) to aim to create between 2-4 unitary authorities i.e. under half of the total number of authorities in Hereford and Worcester, so as to reduce costs, bureaucracy and minimise the potential for joint arrangements;

(iii) to aim to create larger rather than smaller unitary authorities with populations between 150-250,000, which for the Commission would be largely self sufficient and again minimise the need for joint arrangements;

(iv) to use community identity as measured through MORI's assessment of effective behavioural communities and affective senses of belonging, to establish the communities that their new cost effective and efficient unitary authorities should cover, or failing this to justify the status quo - or even a hybrid system of unitaries and two tiers.

The overall effect of this criteria in Hereford and Worcester was to relegate community identity to a secondary role in the production of draft recommendations, in which the concept supported the Commission's conclusions regarding cost effective and efficient systems of local government.

Therefore, with the Commission not changing its role for community identity in the draft recommendations for Hereford and Worcester, the question arises as to whether the use of this concept remained unchanged after the Commission's public consultation and its final report?

Before answering this question it would be advisable to describe exactly what happened during the Commission's period of public consultation to highlight the local activities and pressures that affected the Commission's assessment of community opinion and their final recommendation to the Secretary of State. The most important of these external pressures, must be the public relations campaigns that were conducted by the local authorities in Hereford and Worcester to win community opinion to the different cases for reorganisation.

The publicity campaigns in other areas had been very aggressive and vociferous - indeed at the national level the ADC had called upon the Audit Commission and the DoE to curb

the 'dirty propaganda campaigns by county councils' (Municipal Journal 19th-25th August 1994). However, the ACC had also responded (on behalf of its members) by accusing the ADC of scaremongering (ibid) and the Municipal Journal noted the district councils were equally guilty of 'dirty propaganda' as the county councils. The whole issue of publicity and accusations of scaremongering during reorganisation contributed towards a public row and a breakdown of communication between the ADC and the ACC. Whilst this was eventually resolved, these national arguments and the whole issue of dirty propaganda was repeated within Hereford and Worcester. In this area the county council in response to the Commission's preferences for the three ridings, launched its own publicity campaign to gain support for its preferred option of a hybrid structure.

The County Council's campaign consisted of a travelling roadshow that visited all local villages to promote the County's case, along with extensive adverts in the local press and on local radio - these are reproduced in appendix E.

The result of these adverts was that Wychavon immediately launched an objection on the grounds that they contravened the government's 'Code of Conduct' for local authority publicity. The code only permitted councils to inform local residents and not to direct them or overly influence them. Wychavon's Chief Executive pointed out to the County's auditors, Price Waterhouse, that the county had contravened this code by directly asking people to vote for their option for local government reorganisation (option 3 on the Commissions publicity leaflets). Wychavon's Council Leader also complained to the local MP's and the Local Government Minister David Curry and eventually, the County withdrew these adverts and apologised - but the districts of Bromsgrove, Redditch, Worcester City and Wyre Forest continued their own local campaigns against the three ridings.

The districts' campaigns consisted of stalls in the local towns urging local people to vote for the status quo in Worcestershire. In Redditch, a large banner over the town hall asked local people to, 'Save the Borough', and was supported by adverts in the local papers. These adverts are also reproduced in appendix E and demonstrate that these authorities

contravened the government's publicity code by asking local people to vote for option 3, the county's option for status in Worcestershire. In the case of Worcester City this campaign was aided by the 'Save the City' campaign by the local newspaper, the Worcester Evening News. It therefore appeared that by the summer of 1994 the district councils in Worcestershire had come to firmly support the County Council because it was the only solution since the district's proposal for six unitary authorities had been rejected that would ensure the continued survival of their boroughs and districts.

Wychavon attempted to counter these campaigns with their own publicity but mainly concentrated upon press releases to counter the public campaigns of other authorities. There was, in fact, little promotional activity by Wychavon and none which directly asked residents to vote for the three ridings. The Local Government Review Committee decided to concentrate mainly upon countering what they saw as negative publicity, and to avoid adverts that directly asked residents to vote for their preferred option and thereby to contravene the government's Code of Conduct for publicity. This decision was made soon after the Commission recommendations and was reinforced at the Committee's meeting in the July of 1994. However, Wychavon did embark upon a publicity campaign that sought to inform those areas that were outside of its existing district but would fall into the proposed area of South Worcestershire. An immediate protest was raised because Wychavon had gone outside of its boundaries but this did not come from other local authorities, instead it was one of Wychavon's own councillors Pat Edwards (Liberal Democrat) who complained to the District Auditor.

Councillor Edwards' protest was based on the grounds that it was a misuse of funds by Wychavon. Councillor Edwards felt that the whole process of local government reorganisation was a waste of time and she was especially opposed to the amount of time and energy that she believed was being wasted by Wychavon District Council. The matter was eventually referred by the Council of Executive in conjunction with the District Auditor without action being taken against Wychavon.

Therefore, against this background of disputes and accusations the Commission continued with their assessment of community opinion. In Hereford and Worcester this consisted of further MORI polls, along with adverts in the local newspapers, on the local television and radio, and displays in public places such as local libraries and supermarkets. The Commission also produced leaflets, which were to be despatched to all households within the county. The leaflets asked residents which of the three options they preferred for the reorganisation of local government in their county. Whilst the Commission were not entirely successful in covering the entire county with this leaflet campaign they still managed, through the Royal Mail, to distribute these to approximately 300,000 households.

However, the two Commissioners for Hereford and Worcester, Brian Hill and Clive Wilkinson, refused to hold open meetings. The reason was that the Commissioners were not guaranteed large audiences. The Commissioners also remained steadfastly committed to this course of action despite repeated requests from Kempsey Parish Council (outside of Worcester City) for the Commissioners to address their public meetings which consistently saw attendances of 200 people or more. Instead, in Hereford and Worcester the Commission preferred to rely upon their leaflets, opinion polls and written responses.

Therefore, what were the results of this exercise and how did they affect the Commission's final recommendations?

Final Report to the Secretary of State: Hereford and Worcester

The report, as with those for the first tranche reviews, relied upon the community in the guise of community opinion to determine which of the Commission's three options would be recommended to the Secretary of State. The Commission identified and assessed this opinion by relying upon its local consultation and its second MORI poll. The local consultation exercise in Hereford and Worcester generated over 51,000 responses from local residents (approximately 7.4% of the county's population). The responses were mainly in the form of written responses and returned copies of the Commission's detachable questionnaire on their leaflet. The main result of these responses was that the Commission's preferred structure of three unitary authorities was not the most popular option. This is demonstrated by table 34, which also exemplifies that the most preferred option was for the County's hybrid structure, with the greatest level of responses and support coming from the districts of Worcester City, Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre

Forest. These were the districts that had actively campaigned against the three ridings and had attempted to direct their residents towards supporting the status quo for Worcestershire. Therefore, this suggests that these campaigns along with the County's own campaign could have been successful in influencing local residents, who in MORI's first community identity poll did not appear to be so strongly in favour of a two tier Worcestershire.

Table 34: Views On Structural Change: District Analysis: Hereford and Worcester

Authority	Three Unitaries	Two Unitaries	Hybrid (*)	Others	Total Number Of Responses
Bromsgrove	3%	14%	77%	4%	10,700
Hereford	42	20	33	5	3,047
Leominster	24	20	43	1	2,674
Malvern Hills	27	20	39	9	6,863
Redditch	5	6	80	8	6,782
South Herefordshire	38	23	33	5	3,677
Worcester City	12	9	75	5	7,153
Wychavon	33	21	41	5	5,272
Wyre Forest	11	20	55	13	4,926
Total	18%	18%	16%	7%	51,094

(*) Unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire

Source: NOP Oct. '94, from the Local Government Commission, Hereford and Worcester, Jan.'95, page 17.

The Commission added that in addition to these results, all of the local authorities in Hereford and Worcester, bar Wychavon and South Herefordshire District Council, had come to support the case for a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire (Hereford and Worcester, Dec.'94, page 21). The Commission further observed that 25 out of the 75 parishes that responded also supported the County Council's option, with the remainder supporting a different option (24 parishes), or the three ridings (19 parishes) or two unitary authorities (4 parishes - Hereford and Worcester, Dec.'94, page 21).

Furthermore two of the three MP's who responded supported the hybrid structure (although one of these saw the three ridings as an 'opportunity missed'), whilst the third

Peter Luff remained committed to three unitary authorities (Hereford and Worcester, Dec.'94, page 22). Mr Luff was also supported by only 5 out of the 29 local businesses that responded to the Commission.

The Commission therefore felt that community opinion favoured the hybrid structure of a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire. However the Commission also stated that from these results it was not possible to;

“draw definitive conclusions about the attitudes of local residentsas respondents may not be representative of the residents as a whole” (Hereford and Worcester, Dec.'94, page 18).

The Commission therefore supplemented these conclusions with the results of the MORI survey.

The survey, which was an exact replica in its questions and structure as those conducted in the first tranche and indeed all other public consultations, revealed that option 3 - the hybrid structure was marginally the most popular option. This is demonstrated by table 35, which also demonstrates that MORI found a strong preference for no change in historic Worcestershire, as compared to historic Herefordshire, where only 10% of the respondents were opposed to change.

Table 35: Second MORI Poll in Hereford and Worcester

Authority	Three Unitaries	Two Unitaries	Hybrid (*)	No Change	Others/ Don't Know
Herefordshire	10%	23%	15%	10%	42%
Worcestershire	9	17	24	24	26

(*) Unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire

Source: MORI, from the Local Government Commission, Hereford and Worcester, Jan.'95, page 18

The above table led the Commission to conclude that as far as Herefordshire was concerned, an historic unitary county elicited the support of 48% of MORI's respondents

and 93% of the responses they received from their consultation programme (Hereford and Worcester, Dec.'94, page 28). The Commission even quoted Malvern Hills District Council as concluding that there was strong local support in the half of the district that was in Herefordshire for an historic, unitary Herefordshire (Hereford and Worcester, Dec.'94, page 28). Therefore, on the basis of these MORI results and the Commission's own public consultation, they concluded that:

"Worcestershire residents have a preference for a two tier system and Herefordshire residents strongly support options that provide for a unitary Herefordshire" (Hereford and Worcester, Dec.'94, page 20).

It was on these grounds that the Commission recommended that the options for two unitary authorities and three unitary authorities be rejected. The Commission decided that these options had a low level of public support in Worcestershire and did not 'command the support of local people', this was despite these options being both cost effective and efficient. Instead the Commission justified its choice of the hybrid structure of a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire, by noting that it was a cost effective and efficient option, that particularly reflected the identities of local communities (as measured by MORI and in their local consultation).

Therefore, it is apparent that, in Hereford and Worcester there was no change in the Commission's interpretation and application of the community. In the first stage of the review it was used in the form of community identity (as measured by MORI and the Commission's initial consultation) to identify localities for the Commission to base new, cost effective and efficient unitary authorities upon. However, if this could not be achieved then a lack of community identity was used to justify the status quo or a hybrid. Once these options were selected the community in the form of community opinion was used to choose the final option that would be recommended to the Secretary of State, with the additional justification that it was the people's choice and hence the best reflection of community identities and interests. Therefore, when this analysis of the community is combined with the analysis of the reviews of Avon, Cleveland and Humberside what role has the community appeared to play and what impact has it had?

Conclusion

The immediate answer is that in the reviews of Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and Hereford and Worcester, when the community is interpreted as, 'a social and spatial area that is measured in terms of individual's feelings of belonging and sentiment, and their day to day activities', it has occupied a secondary role to the considerations of cost and efficiency. This chapter has, however, also demonstrated that if the community is interpreted in terms of individuals' attitudes and expressed preferences then it does have an important and alternative role. The role is to indicate to the Commission which option, out of a range of cost effective and efficient options, (which includes the status quo) should be recommended to the Secretary of State, as this can then be justified on the grounds that a particular option has been chosen by the local community and therefore, properly reflects their identities and interests.

The Commission used this approach and process of decision making in their review of Hereford and Worcester where despite the three ridings being the Commission's favoured option, it was not proposed because it fared poorly in MORIs sampling of community opinion.

Thus, this chapter demonstrates that after the government's review of the local government review, the community in the form of community identity was not as important as the considerations of cost and efficiency. Instead, it was usually the case that the Commission would only use this concept if it threw up a social and spatial area that they considered to be cost effective and efficient. If not, the status quo was introduced or a compromise such as a hybrid authority was recommended.

Therefore, as the review developed, the community acquired two roles, the first was as an indicator of community identity whilst the second was as an indicator of community opinion, which was the more significant in influencing the Commission's recommendations. However, there were exceptions to this rule and some small local authorities such as Rutland were recommended and justified on the grounds of having an

exceptional community identity, even though they were considered to be inefficient and expensive.

Therefore, against this background of conflicting reviews and the community acquiring a dual role, overall, how significant was this concept (and the localities it created) to the review?

CONCLUSION

The reorganisation of local government in England was finally completed when the last new unitary authorities, and new County Councils, were brought into being on the 1st April 1998, almost six years after this review started. The process by which these and many other unitary councils have been created, had been fraught with difficulties. The review has been dogged by criticism and complaints, and has seen almost three sets of guidance papers, two different Chairmen and Chief Executives at the helm of the Local Government Commission and three different Secretaries of State at the DoE.

The aim of this thesis was to test whether the concept of the community had been a significant factor in this review and in the creation of the new unitary authorities. The hypothesis that was to have been tested was that:

the concept of the community was a significant factor within this structural review of English local government, determining whether new unitary authorities should be created and what area and communities these new authorities should cover.

The methodological approach for testing this hypothesis was to compare the results of the local government review in Wychavon District Council and the County of Hereford and Worcester, with the results of the review in a small sample of other local authorities. The authorities within this sample included Avon, Cleveland and Humberside. Therefore, what were the final results and how significant was the vague and nebulous concept of the community?

Chapter 2, which described the method by which the community became introduced to the review found that initially it appeared as though the concept of the community and community identities were to be significant factors within local government reorganisation. For example, when Michael Heseltine first proposed this radical

structuring of local government into unitary authorities he stated that local communities and local people, "should have an important role in determining what structure of local government best reflects their community loyalties (Hansard 21/3/1991, volume 188, columns 401-402).

Furthermore, the Conservative Government's initial, "Consultation Paper On The Structure Of Local Government in England" (April 1991) reinforced the point that change towards unitary local government not only had to be more efficient and accountable, but also had to;

'reflect local peoples own sense of identity with the community in which they live" (Page 6, April 1991).

It was further emphasised that the independent Local Government Commission, who were to conduct the reviews of the English Shires would have to embark upon extensive local consultation to consult with all local communities affected by the review. The 1992 Local Government Act even contained a statutory obligation that all reviews had to demonstrate that any change in the structure of local government reflected, 'the identities and interests of local communities' (section 15, 1992).

Therefore, it initially appeared that this reorganisation of local government would, unlike the reorganisation of 1974, use the concept of the community to influence and shape the creation of new unitary authorities. The Conservative Government even supplied the independent Local Government Commission with tools to identify the community, such as the Community Index. This index instructed the Commission to use a range of factors to identify local communities, these included:

- local history;
- topography;
- personal mobility (i.e. work, travel or leisure patterns);
- local sporting clubs;
- established industries;
- transport;
- demography.

A brief review of some of the most recent and relevant interpretations of community and community texts in chapter 4 revealed that these were particularly useful factors for identifying communities. The basis for this is that a community is identified by its spatial area and by the feeling of commonality, and belonging that is shared by its residents. Factors which can identify these feelings and the community include history, personal mobility, geography, a shared local industry, etc., all of which are encompassed within the Community Index. However, there were two key weaknesses within this index. The first was that it did not prompt the Commission to sample the strength of belonging felt by local residents, and the specific areas to which residents would say they felt they belonged and where they felt part of a community. The second was that it required the Commission to make subjective decisions as to which of the index's factors were the most important and significant and then to draw inferences based their decisions. A difficult task as more often than not the Commissioners were not local residents and knew very little or nothing about the areas they were reviewing.

The Conservative Government did, however, commission the pollsters MORI to assist the Local Government Commission. MORI were to do this by actually sampling the subjective views of local residents and their feelings of community and belonging. This provided the Commission with more objective data for their decision making.

An unforeseen consequence of the appointment of MORI was that the Commission came to solely rely upon the MORI polls for their assessments of community identity. The Community Index was rejected on the grounds that it was; "better to address the question of community identity directly, through opinion research amongst local residents, than to rely on inferences drawn from some community index. These would be open to challenge on three grounds: the scoring of each factor, the relative importance or weighting and the inferences to be drawn" (Report To Local People: North of the Humber, page 20).

The questionnaires that MORI used were actually good tools to assess the community. Chapter 5 and its evaluation of these questionnaires revealed that they examined

respondent's emotional sense of belonging and community, as well as their daily travel and communication patterns, in order to give a fair indication of the area that respondents regarded as their community.

The significant problem with the MORI polls was that they were snapshots of community sentiment from a relatively small sample of local residents. The polls were really only designed to fill in gaps in the Commission's evaluation of community identities and to assist the Commission to address any inconsistencies in their consultation exercise.

The main results of the MORI polls in the counties of Avon, Cleveland and Humberside were that, in the urban towns and cities, it was possible to identify communities that corresponded to the towns or cities boundaries. Therefore, in cities such as Bristol, Derby and Darlington, large and densely populated communities were identified. However, in rural areas, the MORI polls identified small and complex communities that were primarily centred upon local towns and were no larger than villages.

The Commission in Avon, Cleveland and Humberside instantly rejected the small rural communities as significant building blocks for new unitary authorities. Interviews with Commissioners Brian Hill and Wilkinson confirmed that the Local Government Commission had a definite criteria when it came to determining whether local communities and their local areas could be used as unitary authorities.

Clive Wilkinson in a private conversation in January 1994 at Wychavon's Civic Centre confirmed that the Commission did not regard district councils and anything smaller as being able to function effectively as unitary authorities. The Commission wanted unitary authorities to have populations of at least 150-250,000 because in Mr Wilkinson's words this meant 'few joint arrangements, few transitional costs, and were able to could adequately support a police force and fire brigade and work with key local agencies such as Health Authorities'. Mr Wilkinson emphatically stated that small unitary authorities cost too much and didn't stand a 'snowflakes chance in hell'.

Key figures within local government such as Geoffrey Filkin and local authority chief executives including Mr Stephens from Woodspring, Mr Cairns from York, Mr Davis from Tewkesbury and Mr du Sautoy from Wychavon, confirmed that Clive Wilkinson was supporting a view that appeared to be widely (but not universally) shared by the Commission, particularly by John Banham. Therefore, the debate that raged throughout the review over whether small authorities were equally as efficient and cost effective as large authorities seemed very academic in light of these comments and observations, and is a reason why this thesis has not chosen to analyse this debate. These comments also explain why in reviews of rural counties where the MORI poll had identified nothing but a range of small communities and community identities, the Commission rejected these communities and opted either for unitary status for large authorities or the status quo.

For example, in Lincolnshire MORI found small communities centred around local villages and towns, which under the Commission's criteria would not become unitary authorities and did not present obvious areas for unitary councils, therefore the status quo was recommended. The same result was obtained in Derbyshire. In Durham the Commission even recommended a unitary county with an independent and unitary Darlington because the community identities were based on and around small villages. It appeared that this reasoning even led to the Forest of Dean failing to get unitary status, despite having an exceptional sense of community and community identity. Under the Commission's size criteria it was just too small to be cost effective and efficient. However, when the Commission and MORI found large densely populated communities in cities such as Derby, Hull and Bristol unitary status was granted. Smaller cities such as Bath and York were also granted unitary status because of their discernible and larger communities based on their cities, although the Commission did recommend that the boundaries of these cities had to be expanded to swell their population. The Commission also gave unitary status to small authorities such as Langbaugh which had a population of under 100,000 and no real sense of community. However, in this case it appeared that the authority got unitary status because once the Commission had given unitary status to the

other three district councils in Cleveland, it had nothing else to do with Langbaugh, so the only practical solution was to re-name it to try and stimulate some sense of community and give it unitary status anyway.

Therefore, it appeared that the concept of the community, as measured through the MORI polls, (that is a distinct spatial area in which people lived their lives, felt familiar with and felt that they belonged to), was not a significant factor in the Commission's reviews. The Commission in Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and also Hereford and Worcester appeared to place size above community. This was confirmed by Wychavon District Council's case for dividing Hereford and Worcester into three unitary authorities. It was supported because it satisfied the Commission's size criteria and appeared to be a good political solution for the local Conservative party. The ideas of community identity and community sentiment were actually applied as an afterthought to justify this case.

The rejection by this thesis of the concept of the community as a significant factor in shaping this review does, however, create an important problem, as the Commission did recommend unitary status for six small unitary authorities. Table 36 demonstrates that none of these authorities had a population significantly over 100,000. Furthermore the Commission also justified these authorities on the grounds that they had strong and/or exceptional senses of community and community identity.

Table 36: Five Smallest Unitary Authorities in England

Unitary Authority	Population
Slough	107,000
Darlington	98,906
Bracknell Forest	95,949
Hartlepool	90,409
Rutland	31,489

Source: Municipal Yearbook 1998

Therefore why did the Commission recommend these small unitary authorities and yet reject others, such as the Forest of Dean which had exceptional senses of community? There does not appear to be an answer to this question, other than the Commission was inconsistent in its decision making. Whilst Commissioners such as Clive Wilkinson, David Ansbro, Mary Leigh, Ann Levick, Ken Ennals, Brian Hill and Howell Harris Hughes who reviewed the first tranche of authorities did not appear to favour small unitary authorities, other Commissioners in later tranches appeared to have different opinions. Commissioners who fall into this category include Margaret Hodge and Christopher Chope who both claimed to have had disputes with Sir John Banham over the size criteria that some Commissioners, such as Clive Wilkinson and Sir John himself, favoured.

Therefore, when this thesis concludes that the concept of the community was not a significant factor in the local government review, the caveat also has to be added that the review also produced some significant inconsistencies. However, on the whole and for a significant majority (over two thirds) of new unitary authorities the concept of the community did not appear to be a significant factor in their reviews.

However, whilst community identity, was not highly significant it appeared that in the Commission's final deliberations community opinion was important. This reflected John Banham's continued emphasis throughout the review that local people should have a voice

in the reorganisation of their area which was achieved by the Commission placing the options they felt were viable and effective out to further public consultation. The consultation consisted of the Commission analysing the written responses from local residents and further opinion polling by MORI. The additional polling now directly asked residents which option they preferred for the reorganisation of local government in their area. The Commission, after reviewing the results of this exercise, then recommended whichever opinion was chosen by this process regardless of their preference. This was demonstrated in Hereford and Worcester when the public consultation exercise chose the hybrid option of a unitary Herefordshire and two tier Worcestershire and not the Commission's preferred option of the three ridings.

The hybrid was then recommended to the Secretary of State, on the grounds that it was what local people wanted and, on the whole, the Secretary of State accepted the majority of these proposals. However, in July 1995, the Secretary of State refused to accept 22 of these recommendations and ordered the re-examination of the following areas:

'Spelthorne, Basildon, Blackburn, Blackpool, Broxtowe, Dartford, Exeter, Gedling, Gillingham, Gloucester, Gillingham, Gravesham, Halton, Huntingdonshire, Northampton, Norwich, Peterborough, Rochester-upon-Medway, Rushcliffe, Thurrock, Warrington and Wrekin' (Municipal Journal 30 June-6 July 1995).

The authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Medway Towns, Wrekin, Thurrock, Halton and Warrington later achieved unitary status. In the majority of cases these new unitary authorities had a population of over 120,000.

Therefore, this thesis concludes that, taking into account the variations and inconsistencies in the Commission's recommendations, the concept of the community was not a significant factor in the recent review of local government. Whilst the opinion of local communities, as sampled by MORI, determined which option the Commission recommended to the Secretary of State, the final conclusion remains that:

the concept of the community, as a distinct social and spatial area to which people feel a shared sense of belonging, was not a significant factor in the observed work of the Local Government Commission and the process of reorganising the structure of English Shire Councils.

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