



# New electoral arrangements for West Somerset District Council

May 2010

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## Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body which conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. The broad purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements – the number of councillors and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions – for a specific local authority. We are conducting an electoral review of West Somerset to ensure that the new unitary authority has appropriate electoral arrangements that reflect its functions and political management structure.

The review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same. The Boundary Committee for England commenced the review in 2009. However, on 1 April 2010 the Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee and is now conducting the review. It therefore falls to us to complete the work of the Boundary Committee.

This review is being conducted as follows:

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Stage starts</b>	<b>Description</b>
One	27 October 2009	Submission of proposals to the Boundary Committee
Two	19 January 2010	Boundary Committee's analysis and deliberation
Three	25 May 2010	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	20 July 2010	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

## Submissions received

The Boundary Committee received 10 representations during its Stage One consultation period, including district-wide schemes from West Somerset District Council and Councillor Taylor. The Council's scheme was based on a council size of 28 members. A number of other respondents, including Councillor Taylor, argued against this number, favouring the retention of the existing council size of 31 members or a reduction of only one or two councillors. All submissions can be viewed on our website at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk).

## Analysis and draft recommendations

### Electorate figures

West Somerset District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year September 2014, a period five years on from the September 2009 electoral roll which is the basis for this review. Initially it projected electorate growth of 6%. However, the Boundary Committee expressed concerns about whether this level of growth would be realised and requested a more detailed break down of the methodology from the Council. In the process of providing this, the Council revised its forecast growth down to 2.5%. On balance, we are satisfied that the Council's revised electorate figures are the most accurate that can be provided at this time.

## Council size

The Boundary Committee received proposals for council size ranging from 28 to the existing 31. West Somerset District Council proposed a council size of 28 members. It considered the streamlining of its planning and licensing committees and provided some calculations on the implications this would have in terms of the number of members needed. Councillor Taylor argued for retaining a council size as near to the existing 31 members as was possible, on the basis of councillor workload and time spent on council business. He also put forward alternatives for the number of councillors on the various committees and argued that some allowance should be made for non-attendance. While we acknowledge the concerns about any reduction in council size, we also note that the Council had given this full consideration and outlined details of streamlined committee structures. On balance, we consider that the evidence favours reducing the number of councillors to 28, from 31.

## General analysis

Having considered the submissions received during Stage One, we have developed proposals that are based broadly on those of the Council. However, we have made minor modifications to its proposals in Brendon and Old Cleeve wards to provide wards that, in our view, better reflect local communities. We also propose a minor boundary amendment between Minehead Central and Minehead North wards, to unite the whole of Minehead's central shopping street in a single ward. We would particularly welcome comments from local people and groups on our amendments to Brendon, Old Cleeve, Minehead Central and Minehead North wards.

## What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on the draft recommendations on the proposed electoral arrangements for West Somerset District Council contained in the report. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.** We will take into account all submissions received by **19 July 2010**. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We would particularly welcome local views backed up by demonstrable evidence. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

**Review Officer**

**West Somerset Review**

**The Local Government Boundary Commission for England**

**Layden House**

**76–86 Turnmill Street**

**London EC1M 5LG**

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The full report is available to download at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk).

# 1 Introduction

1 In March 2009, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee for England (the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's predecessor) to conduct a review of the electoral arrangements for West Somerset District Council. The review commenced on 27 October 2009. The Boundary Committee wrote to West Somerset as well as to other interested parties, inviting the submission of proposals for new electoral arrangements. The submissions received during these stages of the review have informed the Commission's draft recommendations.

2 On 1 April 2010, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee. The Commission is now conducting a full public consultation on the draft recommendations. Following this period of consultation, we will consider the evidence received and will publish final recommendations for the new electoral arrangements for West Somerset District Council in autumn 2010.

## What is an electoral review?

3 The main aim of an electoral review is to try to ensure 'electoral equality', which means that all councillors in a single authority represent approximately the same number of electors. Our objective is to make recommendations that will improve electoral equality, while also trying to reflect communities in the area and provide for effective and convenient local government.

4 Our three main considerations – equalising the number of electors each councillor represents; reflecting community identity; and providing for effective and convenient local government – are set out in legislation<sup>1</sup> and our task is to strike the best balance between them when making our recommendations.

5 Our powers, as well as the guidance we have provided for electoral reviews and further information on the review process, can be found on our website at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk).

## Why are we conducting a review in West Somerset?

6 In March 2009, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee for England to carry out a review of West Somerset as, based on the December 2008 electorate figures, the existing Alcombe East ward would have 41% fewer electors than the district average. In addition, 50% of the existing wards (nine of the 18 wards) have electoral variances of greater than 10% from the district average.

7 As discussed in paragraphs 1, 2 and 6, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to conduct an electoral review. However, following the Local Government Boundary Commission for England assuming the functions of the Boundary Committee, the Commission is now conducting the review. It therefore falls to us to complete the work of the Boundary Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

## How will the recommendations affect you?

8 The recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the council. They will also decide which ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward and, in some instances, which parish or town council wards you vote in. Your ward name may change, as may the names of parish or town council wards in the area. If you live in a parish, the name or boundaries of that parish will not change.

9 It is therefore important that you let us have your comments and views on the draft recommendations. We encourage comments from everyone in the community, regardless of whether you agree with the draft recommendations or not. The draft recommendations are evidence-based and we would therefore like to stress the importance of providing evidence in any comments on our recommendations, rather than relying on assertion. We will be accepting comments and views until 19 July 2010. After this point, we will be formulating our final recommendations which we are due to publish in autumn 2010. Details on how to submit proposals can be found on page 15 and more information can be found on our website, at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk).

## What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

10 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Members of the Commission are:

Max Caller CBE (Chair)  
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL (Deputy Chair)  
Jane Earl  
Joan Jones CBE  
Professor Colin Mellors

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill  
Director of Reviews: Archie Gall

## 2 Analysis and draft recommendations

11 Before finalising our recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for West Somerset District Council we invite views on these draft recommendations. We welcome comments relating to the proposed ward boundaries, ward names, and parish or town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

12 As described earlier, our prime aim when recommending new electoral arrangements for West Somerset is to achieve a level of electoral fairness – that is, each elector’s vote being worth the same as another’s. In doing so we must have regard to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009,<sup>2</sup> with the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government
- provide for equality of representation
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities, in particular
  - the desirability of arriving at boundaries that easily identifiable
  - the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties

13 Legislation also states that our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on the existing number of electors in an area, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of electors likely to take place over a five-year period. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for the wards we put forward at the end of the review.

14 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral fairness is unlikely to be attainable and there must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach is to keep variances in the number of electors each councillor represents to a minimum. We therefore recommend strongly that, in formulating proposals for us to consider, local authorities and other interested parties should also try to keep variances to a minimum, making adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. As mentioned above, we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral fairness over a five-year period.

15 These recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of West Somerset District Council or the external boundaries or names of parish or town councils, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that the recommendations will have an adverse effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. The proposals do not take account of parliamentary constituency boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

### Submissions received

16 Prior to and during the initial stage of the review, members and officers of the Boundary Committee visited West Somerset District Council and met with members, officers and parish and town councils. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-

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<sup>2</sup> Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

operation and assistance. The Boundary Committee received 10 submissions during its consultation at Stage One, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the Council. All representations received can also be viewed on our website at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk).

## Electorate figures

17 As part of this review, West Somerset District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2014. Initially it projected electorate growth of 6%. The Boundary Committee expressed concerns about whether this level of growth would be realised and wrote to the Council requesting a more detailed break down of its forecast methodology. In the process of providing additional information, the Council revised its forecast growth down to 2.5%, with the electorate growing from 28,063 in September 2009 to 28,763 by September 2014.

18 The Boundary Committee did not receive any additional representations in relation to the electorate forecasts. The Committee considered that the Council's revised methodology was robust and that growth of 2.5% reflects the best forecasts currently available.

19 We acknowledge that electorate projections are not an exact science, but consider that the Council's forecasts are the best presently available and have based our draft recommendations on them.

## Council size

20 The Boundary Committee received 10 submissions during Stage One, two of which made a proposal for or provided evidence in relation to the appropriate number of councillors for West Somerset ('council size'). West Somerset District Council proposed a 28-member council, a reduction of three from the existing size of 31 members, while Councillor Taylor argued for the retention of a council size as near to the existing number as possible. A number of other respondents expressed general concerns about reducing council size and the potential impact on local representation.

21 The Council stated that it was generally agreed by councillors that its current Scrutiny Committee of nine members worked well, although there could be scope for reducing it to seven. It suggested that there was less agreement about the Council's regulatory business, but that there was general agreement that its planning and licensing committees should be more streamlined. It was suggested that these could be reduced from 19 and 15 members to something 'in the region' of 12 and nine members, respectively. The Council explored the implication of such streamlining, using these figures in some calculations on the number of councillors needed. It concluded that it would require between 24 and 30 councillors. It also considered the issue of achieving an appropriate balance of representation (allocation of councillors) across the district.

22 Councillor Taylor argued for retaining as near to the existing 31-member council as possible. He stated that a reduction in the number of councillors could lead to increased workload for councillors, many of whom had to balance council work with other commitments. In addition, in some rural areas councillor workload was higher

given the difficulty that some parish councils have in finding councillors to stand for election. He also stressed the importance of ensuring there were sufficient members to sit on local external bodies. Finally, he argued that there should be sufficient members to allow for some non-attendance by members.

23 The Boundary Committee considered the evidence received and while it noted Councillor Taylor's concerns about non-attendance, it did not consider that this in itself was sufficient reason to retain the existing council size of 31 members. Indeed, it noted that the Council had given some consideration to the effectiveness of a slight reduction in the number of members on its committees and concluded that they could still function effectively. Therefore, on balance, the Committee considered that there was sufficient evidence to justify a reduction of council size from 31 to 28 members.

## Electoral fairness

24 As discussed in the introduction to this report, the prime aim of an electoral review is to achieve electoral fairness within a local authority.

25 Electoral fairness, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. It is expected that our recommendations should provide for electoral fairness whilst ensuring that we reflect communities in the area, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

26 In seeking to achieve electoral fairness, we work out the average number of electors per councillor. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the county (28,063 in September 2009 and 28,763 by September 2014) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 28 under our draft recommendations. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 1,002 in 2009 and 1,027 by 2014.

27 Under the draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in only one of the 16 wards will vary by more than 10% by 2014 from the district average. However, overall, we are satisfied that we have achieved good levels of electoral fairness under our draft recommendations for West Somerset.

## General analysis

28 During Stage One, only West Somerset District Council submitted a district-wide scheme based on a council size of 28. As discussed in the Council size section above, we have decided to base our draft recommendations on a council of 28 members. Therefore we have been unable to fully consider the schemes for 29- and 30-member councils put forward by Councillor Taylor. However, where possible we have sought to reflect the comments that he made in support of his warding proposals

29 The majority of other respondents also put forward general comments, or comments for proposals based on council sizes other than 28. A number of respondents also objected to proposals based on a 28-member council. However, where possible, we have sought to reflect the arguments about community identity links put forward their proposals.

30 West Somerset District Council put forward proposals for six single-member wards, eight two-member wards and two three-member wards. Under its proposals only Quantock Vale would have a variance greater than 10%, with 15% fewer electors than the district average by 2014. The Council did not put forward any strong evidence to explain the community identity considerations underpinning its proposed warding pattern. However, it did forward copies of submissions received from local interests during its own consultation.

31 We note that the Council's proposals generally secure good levels of electoral equality and use strong boundaries. However, we had concerns about the boundaries used in a number of areas and therefore explored a number of alternative options. These are outlined in the Electoral arrangements section, below.

32 Our proposals are for a pattern of six single-member wards, eight two-member wards and two three-member wards. We consider our proposals to provide good electoral equality and, where we have received evidence, a reasonable reflection of community identities and interests.

33 A summary of our proposed electoral arrangements is set out in Table C1 (on pages 24–25) and Map 1.

## Electoral arrangements

34 This section of the report details the submissions that were received, our consideration of them, and our draft recommendations for each area of West Somerset. The following areas are considered in turn:

- Exmoor (pages 8–9)
- Brendon Hills and Lowlands area (pages 9–11)
- Quantocks, Watchet and Williton (pages 11–12)
- Minehead (pages 12–13)

35 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Table C1 on pages 24–25, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

### Exmoor

36 At Stage One, in the Exmoor area, West Somerset District Council put forward proposals for a single-member Greater Exmoor ward comprising Cutcombe, Exford, Exmoor and Withypool & Hawkridge parishes, and a two-member Porlock & District ward comprising Luccombe, Minehead Without, Oare, Porlock, Selworthy and Wootton Courtenay parishes. These wards would have 3% more and 4% more electors than the district average by 2014, respectively.

37 Councillor Nicholson requested the retention of the existing Exmoor ward, arguing that the geography of the area justified it having around 24% fewer electors than the district average. Luccombe Parish Council requested the retention of the existing Porlock ward, but did not provide any evidence in support of its request.

38 The Boundary Committee did not receive any other comments regarding this area. However, we note from the West Somerset District Council's consultation that Cutcombe Parish Council expressed a preference for it being in a ward with the parishes in the Greater Exmoor area rather than those in the Dulverton area.

39 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note that the Council's proposals secure good levels of electoral equality. We also note Councillor Nicholson's request for the retention of the existing Exmoor ward; however, under a 28-member council, the existing Exmoor ward would actually have 31% fewer electors than the district average, rather than the 24% suggested by Councillor Nicholson. We do not consider that Councillor Nicholson has provided sufficient evidence to justify a ward with 24% fewer electors than the district average, and therefore certainly not sufficient to justify a ward with 31% fewer electors.

40 We also note Luccombe Parish Council's request to retain the existing Porlock ward. Under a 28-member council, the existing Porlock ward would have 9% fewer electors than the district average. However, we must also consider the knock-on effect in the surrounding area. Retaining the existing Porlock ward would require Wootton Courtenay parish to be transferred to another ward. The only option that we considered might reflect Wootton Courtenay parish's community links would be to transfer it to the Council's Dunster & Timberscombe ward. However, this would worsen electoral equality in this Dunster & Timberscombe ward from 6% more electors than the district average to 19% more. We do not consider that there is sufficient evidence to support such a poor level of electoral equality. We therefore cannot retain the existing Porlock ward and have decided to adopt the Council's proposals for this area in full as part of our draft recommendations.

41 Table C1 (on pages 24–25) provides details of the electoral variances of the draft recommendations for wards in this area. The draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

## Brendon Hills and Lowlands area

42 At Stage One, in the Brendon Hills and Lowlands area, West Somerset District Council proposed a single-member Brendon ward comprising the parishes of Brompton Ralph, Clatworthy, Huish Champflower, Skilgate and Upton and part of Brompton Regis parish; a single-member Carhampton & Withycombe ward comprising Carhampton and Withycombe parishes; and a single-member Dunster & Timberscombe ward comprising Dunster and Timberscombe parishes. It also proposed a two-member Dulverton & District ward comprising the parishes of Brushford, Dulverton, Exton and Winsford and part of Brompton Regis parish; and a two-member Old Cleeve ward comprising the parishes of Elworthy, Luxborough, Monksilver, Nettlecombe, Old Cleeve and Treborough. These wards would have equal to the average, 3% more, 6% more, 5% more and 7% fewer electors respectively than the district average by 2014.

43 Councillor Turner provided some evidence that Elworthy parish does not have links to the Old Cleeve ward. He proposed that it should be in a ward with the Brendon Hills parishes. He argued that Elworthy has very limited road links into the Old Cleeve ward and is a 'Brendon Hill parish' and has no affinity with the 'distant and lowland population centres [...of] Old Cleeve ward. He also argued that if this

was not accepted, then Elworthy parish should be placed in the Crowcombe & Stogumber ward (discussed further below and in the Quantocks section) to which it is 'reasonably accessible' and has some facilities that are used by local residents. However, he stated that this represented the 'second best' option.

44 Carhampton Parish Council requested the retention of the existing Carhampton & Withycombe ward, while Dunster Parish Council requested to remain in a ward by itself, rejecting any links to Carhampton parish or the Alcombe area.

45 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. Under the Council's proposals for Dulverton & District ward the parish of Brompton Regis is warded to transfer 65 electors into Dulverton & District. The Council has opted to do this to improve electoral equality in the area. However, while we acknowledge the Council's efforts to secure good electoral equality, in this instance we are not persuaded that its proposal reflects local communities. It would also make Brompton Regis the only parish outside the urban Minehead parish warded for district ward reasons.

46 Having visited the area, we are not persuaded by the Council's proposal to transfer the Bury area of Brompton Regis parish into a ward with Dulverton. We note that retaining the whole of Brompton Regis parish in the neighbouring Brendon ward would improve electoral equality in Dulverton & District from 5% more electors than the district average in 2014 to 2% more. However, transferring this area to Brendon ward would worsen electoral equality in Brendon from equal to the average to 6% more.

47 We note Councillor Turner's argument that Elworthy parish should not be included in the Old Cleeve ward. Indeed from our visit to the area, we agree that it only has very limited links into the Old Cleeve ward. However, transferring Elworthy parish from Old Cleeve ward to Brendon ward would worsen electoral equality in both wards. Electoral equality in Old Cleeve would worsen from 7% fewer electors than the district average in 2014 to 10% fewer, while worsening in Brendon from equal to the district average to 12% more (taking into account the amendment to unite Brompton Regis parish in the ward, discussed above).

48 While we consider that Councillor Turner provided some evidence to justify the transfer of Elworthy into Brendon ward, we are concerned by the significant worsening of electoral equality that would result. We also note Councillor Turner's suggestion of an alternative solution to better reflect Elworthy parish's links. While we acknowledge his first preference, our visit to the area indicated that Elworthy parish has good links into Crowcombe & Stogumber ward. Transferring Elworthy parish to Crowcombe & Stogumber ward would have the advantage of improving electoral equality in the ward from 4% fewer electors than the district average in 2014 to 2% more, while also ensuring electoral equality in Brendon remained at a good level.

49 Therefore, on balance, we propose amending the Council's proposals and have decided to retain the whole of Brompton Regis parish in the Brendon ward, and transfer Elworthy parish out of Old Cleeve ward to the Crowcombe & Stogumber ward. However, we acknowledge Councillor Turner's concerns and would welcome any additional evidence of community links between Elworthy parish and the rest of

the proposed Brendon ward, to assist us in striking the appropriate balance between community identity and electoral equality.

50 In the remainder of the area we note that the Council's proposal reflects Carhampton Parish Council's desire to retain the existing Carhampton & Withycombe ward. We note that its proposals combine Dunster parish with Timberscombe ward. Although Dunster Parish Council requested the retention of the existing ward, it only made explicit reference to not being placed in a ward Carhampton parish or the Alcombe area. Unfortunately, we are unable to retain the existing Dunster ward as, under a council size of 28 members, it would have 31% fewer electors than the district average and we do not consider there to be sufficient evidence to justify this variance. We have therefore decided to adopt the Council's Carhampton & Withycombe ward as part of our draft recommendations.

51 Table C1 (on pages 24–25) provides details of the electoral variances of the draft recommendations for wards in this area. The draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

### Quantocks, Watchet and Williton

52 At Stage One, in the Quantocks, Watchet and Williton area, West Somerset District Council proposed a single-member Crowcombe & Stogumber ward comprising Crowcombe and Stogumber parishes; a two-member Quantock Vale ward comprising the parishes of Holford, Kilve, Stogursey and Strington; a three-member Watchet ward comprising Watchet parish; a single-member West Quantock ward comprising the parishes of Bicknoller, East Quantoxhead, Sampford Brett and West Quantoxhead; and a two-member Williton ward comprising Williton parish. These would have 4% fewer, 15% fewer, 1% fewer, 5% fewer and 6% more electors than the district average by 2014, respectively.

53 The Boundary Committee received only limited comments in relation to this area, with Williton Parish Council requesting that it become the basis of a three-member ward with Stanford Brett parish and part of Watchet parish.

54 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received. We note that with the exception of its Quantock Vale ward, the Council's proposals in this area secure good levels of electoral equality. We have examined alternatives to address the fact that its Quantock Vale ward will have 15% fewer electors than the district average by 2014. One option considered was to combine the Quantock Vale and West Quantock wards to create a three-member ward. However, this would only offer a marginal improvement in electoral equality, creating a large rural three-member ward, with 11% fewer electors than the average. Having visited the area, we do not consider that a three-member ward in this area would necessarily better reflect local communities, particularly when it secures only a marginal improvement in electoral equality.

55 Another alternative was to transfer the East Quantoxhead parish to the Quantock Vale ward. However, this would worsen electoral equality in the West Quantock ward from 5% fewer electors than the district average in 2014 to 14% fewer.

56 We have therefore been unable to come up with any viable alternative proposals to those put forward by the Council. In addition, we notice that in its consultation, the Council received some support for its proposals and that they reflect the existing wards in this area. Therefore, although the Council's Quantock Vale ward does not secure good electoral equality, given its location on the edge of the district we do not propose amending the Council's proposals. We have therefore decided to adopt the Council's Quantock Vale and West Quantock wards as part of our draft recommendations.

57 Finally in this area, we note Williton Parish Council's proposal to create a three-member ward taking in Sampford Brett parish and part of Watchet parish. However, having examined the proposal in detail, we note that it would have a significant knock-on effect across the area, leaving West Quantock ward with 30% fewer electors than the district average and requiring the warding of Watchet parish. We cannot consider any area in isolation and consider that Williton Parish Council's proposals do not secure viable electoral arrangements. We have therefore decided to adopt West Somerset District Council's proposals for Watchet and Williton wards as part of our draft recommendations.

58 Table C1 (on pages 24–25) provides details of the electoral variances of the draft recommendations for wards in this area. The draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

## Minehead

59 At Stage One, in the Minehead area West Somerset District Council proposed two-member Alcombe, Minehead North and Minehead South wards and a three-member Minehead Central ward. These wards would have 7% more, 2% fewer, 2% more and 1% more electors than the district average by 2014, respectively. There were few other representations about this area but some included objections to parts of Alcombe being put in a ward with Dunster parish.

60 We have given careful consideration to the limited evidence received. The Council's proposals secure good levels of electoral equality and generally use strong boundaries. However, following our visit to the area, we have some concern about the Council's proposal to divide Minehead's main shopping area around The Avenue and The Parade. Although the Council chose to use a strong boundary, it seems to us that The Avenue and The Parade are focal points for the community and we are not persuaded that it would be sensible to divide them between two wards. In addition, the approach the Council has taken in this area is not consistent with that which it has taken elsewhere in Minehead, where it has generally run boundaries along the back of houses.

61 We have therefore explored the option of taking the boundary along the back of the shops on the The Parade and The Avenue and transferring them into a single ward. We note that transferring the southern side of this area from Minehead Central ward to Minehead North ward marginally improves electoral equality in both wards from 2% more and 4% fewer electors than the district average in 2014, respectively, to 1% fewer and 2% more. Moving the northern area from Minehead North ward to Minehead Central ward would worsen electoral equality in both wards to 6% fewer and 4% more electors than the district average by 2014, respectively.

62 The Council’s Minehead Central ward includes the commercial business on the seafront and parts of the Butlins holiday resort while Minehead North ward is more residential, including the higher town area. Therefore, on balance we believe that it would be more sensible to retain the bulk of Minehead’s commercial area in a single ward, Minehead Central. We are therefore recommending the transfer of the properties to the north of The Parade, The Avenue, Wellington Square and Park Street from the Council’s Minehead North ward to its Minehead Central ward. In the remainder of the area we have decided to adopt the Council’s proposals as part of our draft recommendations.

63 Table C1 (on pages 24–25) provides details of the electoral variances of the draft recommendations for wards in this area. The draft recommendations are shown on Maps 1 and 2 accompanying this report.

**Conclusions**

64 Table 1 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, based on 2009 and 2014 electorate figures.

**Table 1: Summary of electoral arrangements**

	<b>Draft recommendations</b>	
	<b>2009</b>	<b>2014</b>
Number of councillors	28	28
Number of electoral wards	16	16
Average number of electors per councillor	1,002	1,027
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	1	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	0	0

**Draft recommendation**  
 West Somerset District Council should comprise 28 councillors serving 16 wards, as detailed and named in Table C1 and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

**Parish electoral arrangements**

65 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so

that each parish ward lies wholly within a single district ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

66 To meet our obligations under the 2009 Act, we propose consequential parish warding arrangements for the parish of Minehead.

67 We would particularly welcome comments on these proposals from the Town Council and local residents during this consultation stage.

68 The parish of Minehead is currently divided into four parish wards: Alcombe East (returning three members), Alcombe West (returning three members), Minehead North (returning five members) and Minehead South (returning five members).

69 As a result of our proposed district ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Minehead parish.

**Draft recommendations**

Minehead Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Alcombe (returning four members), Minehead Central (returning five members), Minehead North (returning three members) and Minehead South (returning four members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 2.

### 3 What happens next?

70 There will now be a consultation period of eight weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for West Somerset District Council contained in this report. We will take into account fully all submissions received by 19 July 2010. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

71 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for West Somerset and welcome comments from interested parties relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We would welcome alternative proposals backed up by demonstrable evidence during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

72 Express your views by writing directly to:

**Review Officer**  
**West Somerset Review**  
**The Local Government Boundary Commission for England**  
**Layden House**  
**76–86 Turnmill Street**  
**London EC1M 5LG**

[reviews@lgbce.org.uk](mailto:reviews@lgbce.org.uk)

Submissions can also be made by using the ‘current consultations’ section of our website, at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk), or by emailing [reviews@lgbce.org.uk](mailto:reviews@lgbce.org.uk).

73 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, we make available for public inspection full copies of all representations the Commission takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all Stage Three representations will be placed on deposit locally at the offices of West Somerset District Council and at our offices in Layden House (London) and on our website at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk). A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

74 If you are a member of the public and not writing on behalf of a council or organisation we will remove any personal identifiers, such as postal or email addresses, signatures or phone numbers from your submission before it is made public. We will remove signatures from all letters, no matter who they are from.

75 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations and consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, **whether or not** they agree with the draft recommendations. We will then publish our final recommendations.

76 After the publication of our final recommendations, the changes we have proposed must be approved by Parliament. An Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in draft in Parliament. Parliament can either accept or reject our recommendations. If accepted, the new electoral arrangements will come into force at the next elections for West Somerset District Council.

## 4 Mapping

### Draft recommendations for West Somerset

77 The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for West Somerset District Council:

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for West Somerset District Council.
- **Sheet 2, Map 2** illustrates the proposed wards in Minehead.

# Appendix A

## Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England was a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Boundary Committee's functions were assumed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in April 2010
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve on a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever division they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. It regulates party and election finance and sets standards for well-run elections

Electoral fairness	When one elector's vote is worth the same as another's
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. For the purposes of this report, we refer specifically to the electorate for local government elections
Local Government Boundary Commission for England or LGBCE	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee for England in April 2010
Multi-member ward or division	A ward or division represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and can be found at <a href="http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk">www.nationalparks.gov.uk</a>
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents

Parish council	A body elected by electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town Council'
Parish (or Town) Council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by the Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England
Political management arrangements	The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enabled local authorities in England to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from two broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet or a cabinet with a leader
Town Council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at <a href="http://www.nalc.gov.uk">www.nalc.gov.uk</a>
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average

Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council

## Appendix B

### Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (November 2000) ([http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/consult/code/\\_consultation.pdf](http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/consult/code/_consultation.pdf)) requires all government departments and agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

The Code of Practice applies to consultation documents published after 1 January 2001, which should reproduce the criteria, give explanations of any departures, and confirm that the criteria have otherwise been followed.

**Table B1: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England's compliance with Code criteria**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Compliance/departure</b>
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	We comply with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	We comply with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	We comply with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	We comply with this requirement.
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.	We consult at the start of the review and on our draft recommendations. Our consultation stages are a minimum total of 16 weeks.

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Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.

We comply with this requirement.

Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.

We comply with this requirement.

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## Appendix C

**Table C1: Draft recommendations for West Somerset District Council**

	<b>Electoral ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (September 2009)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>	<b>Electorate (September 2014)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
1	Alcombe	2	2134	1,067	6	2,198	1,099	7
2	Brendon	1	1,073	1,073	7	1,093	1,093	6
3	Carhampton & Withycombe	1	1,022	1,022	2	1,056	1,056	3
4	Crowcombe & Stogumber	1	1,035	1,035	3	1,047	1,047	2
5	Dulverton & District	2	2,049	1,025	2	2,092	1,046	2
6	Dunster & Timberscombe	1	1,063	1,063	6	1,088	1,088	6
7	Greater Exmoor	1	1,026	1,026	2	1,062	1,062	3
8	Minehead Central	3	3,058	1,019	2	3,197	1,066	4
9	Minehead North	2	1,916	958	-4	1,936	968	-6
10	Minehead South	2	2,007	1,004	0	2,045	1,023	0
11	Old Cleeve	2	1,810	905	-10	1,844	922	-10

**Table C1 (cont.): Draft recommendations for West Somerset District Council**

	<b>Electoral ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (September 2009)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>	<b>Electorate (September 2014)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
12	Porlock & District	2	2,092	1,046	4	2,139	1,070	4
13	Quantock Vale	2	1,724	862	-14	1,755	878	-15
14	Watchet	3	2,972	991	-1	3,046	1,015	-1
15	West Quantock	1	962	962	-4	980	980	-5
16	Williton	2	2,120	1,060	6	2,185	1,093	6
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28,063</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>28,763</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>1,002</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>1,027</b>	<b>–</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by West Somerset District Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

# Appendix D

## Additional legislation we have considered

### Equal opportunities

In preparing this report we have had regard to the general duty set out in Section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

### National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Broads

We have also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by Section 97, Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.



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The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament in April 2010. It is independent of Government and political parties, and is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. It is responsible for conducting boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government areas.