

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Dorset County Council

January 2004

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to The Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No. 3692). The Order also transferred to The Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE
Robin Gray
Joan Jones CBE
Ann M. Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to the number of councillors elected to the council, division boundaries and division names.

Summary

We began a review of the electoral arrangements for Dorset County Council on 4 February 2003.

- **This report summarises the submissions we received during the first stage of the review, and makes draft recommendations for change.**

We found that the current arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Dorset County Council:

- **In 13 of the 42 divisions, each of which are currently represented by a single councillor, the number of electors varies by more than 10% from the average for the county and four divisions vary by more than 20%.**
- **By 2007 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per Councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 18 divisions and by more than 20% in seven divisions.**

Our main proposals for Dorset County Council's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 58–107) are:

- **Dorset County Council should have 45 councillors, three more than at present, representing 40 divisions.**
- **As the divisions are based on district wards, which have themselves been changed as a result of recent district reviews, the boundaries of all divisions will be subject to change.**

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each county councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- **In 29 of the proposed 40 divisions, the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further with the number of electors per councillor in 31 divisions expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average for the County by 2007.**

This report sets out draft recommendations on which comments are invited.

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 13 January 2004. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, which will then be responsible for implementing change to the local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also decide when any changes will come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 8 March 2004.

**The Team Leader
Dorset County Council Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

Division name. By district council area		Number of councillors	Constituent district wards
Christchurch			
1	Burton Grange	1	Burton & Winkton ward; Grange ward.
2	Christchurch Central	1	Purewell & Stanpit ward; Town Centre ward; part of Portfield ward.
3	Commons	1	Jumpers ward; St Catherine's & Hurn ward; part of Portfield ward.
4	Highcliffe & Walkford	1	North Highcliffe & Walkford ward; West Highcliffe ward.
5	Mudford & Highcliffe	1	Highcliffe ward; Mudford & Friars Cliff ward.
East Dorset			
6	Colehill & Stapehill	1	Colehill East ward; Colehill West ward; Stapehill ward.
7	Corfe Mullen	1	Corfe Mullen North ward; Corfe Mullen South ward; Corfe Mullen Central ward.
8	Cranborne Chase	1	Aldersholt ward; Crane ward; Handley Vale ward; part of Holt ward (the parishes of Chalbury, Hinton Martell, Hinton Parva and Horton).
9	Ferndown	2	Ameysford ward; Ferndown Central ward; Ferndown Links ward; Longham ward; Parley ward.
10	Minster	1	Stour ward; Wimborne Minster ward.
11	St Leonards & St Ives	1	St Leonards & St Ives East ward; St Leonards & St Ives West ward.
12	Verwood & Three Legged Cross	2	Three Cross & Potterne ward; Verwood Dewlands ward; Verwood Newtown ward; Verwood Stephen's Castle ward.
13	West Moors & Holt	1	West Moors ward; part of Holt ward (the parish of Holt).
North Dorset			
14	Blackmore Vale	1	Blackmore ward; Lydden Vale ward; Stour Valley ward.
15	Blandford	1	Blandford Damory Down ward; Blandford Hilltop ward; Blandford Langton St Leonards ward; Blandford Old Town ward; Blandford Station ward.
16	Gillingham	1	Gillingham Town ward; Lodbourne ward; Milton ward; Wyke ward.
17	Hambleton	1	Cranborne Chase ward; Hill Forts ward; The Beacon ward; The Lower Tarrants ward.
18	Stour Vale	1	Bourton & District ward; Marnhull ward; Motcombe and Ham ward; The Stours ward.
19	Shaftesbury	1	Shaftesbury Central ward; Shaftesbury Christy's ward; Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward; Shaftesbury Underhill ward.
20	Winterborne	1	Abbey ward; Bulbarrow ward; Portman ward; Riversdale ward.
Purbeck			
21	Egdon Heath	1	Bere Regis ward; Wool ward; Winfrith ward; part of Lytchett Matravers ward (the parish of Morden).
22	Lytchett	1	Lytchett Minster & Upton East ward; Lytchett Minster & Upton West ward; part of Lytchett Matravers ward (the parish of Lytchett Matravers).
23	Purbeck Hills	1	Castle ward; Creech Barrow ward; Langton ward; West Purbeck ward.
24	Swanage	1	Swanage North ward; Swanage South ward.
25	Wareham	1	Wareham ward; Wareham St Martin ward.

	Division name. By district council area	Number of councillors	Constituent district wards
West Dorset			
26	Beaminster & Maiden Newton	1	Beaminster ward; Broadwindsor ward; Maiden Newton ward; part of Netherbury ward.
27	Bride Valley	1	Burton Bradstock ward; Loders ward; Bradpole ward; part of Bridport North ward (Bradpole Claremont parish ward of Bradpole parish); part of Chesil Bank ward (Litton Cheney parish).
28	Bridport	1	Part of Netherbury ward (Allington parish); part of Bridport North ward (Bridport North parish ward); part of Bridport South & Bothenhampton ward (Bridport South parish ward).
29	Chickerell & Chesil Bank	1	Chickerell ward; part of Chesil Bank ward (the parishes of Long Bredy, Kingston Russell, Littlebredy, Abbotsbury, Portesham, Langton Herring and Fleet); part of Winterborne St Martin ward (the parishes of Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton).
30	Dorchester	2	Dorchester North ward; Dorchester South ward; Dorchester East ward; Dorchester West ward.
31	Linden Lea	1	Broadmayne ward; Owermoigne ward; Puddletown ward; part of Winterborne St Martin ward (the parishes of Winterborne Monkton, Winterborne St Martin, Winterborne Came, Whitcombe, Winterborne Herringston and Bincombe).
32	Marshwood Vale	1	Lyme Regis ward; Charmouth ward; Marshwood Vale ward; Chideock & Symondsburys ward.
33	Sherborne	1	Sherborne East ward; Sherborne West ward.
34	Sherborne Rural	1	Halstock ward; Bradford Abbas ward; Cam Vale ward; Queen Thorne ward; Yetminster ward.
35	Three Valleys	1	Frome Valley ward; Charminster and Cerne Valley ward; Piddle Valley ward.
Weymouth & Portland			
36	Broadway & Lodmoor	2	Littlemoor ward; Preston ward; Radipole ward; Upwey & Broadway ward; Wey Valley ward.
37	Portland Harbour	1	Underhill ward; Wyke Regis ward.
38	Portland Tophill	1	Tophill East ward; Tophill West ward.
39	Rodwell	1	Weymouth East ward; Weymouth West ward.
40	Westham & Weymouth Town	2	Melcombe Regis ward; Westham North ward; Westham East ward; Westham West ward.

Notes

1. *The constituent district wards are those resulting from the electoral reviews of the six Dorset districts which were completed between 1998 and 2002. Where whole district wards do not form the building blocks, constituent parishes and parish wards are listed.*
2. *The large map inserted at the back of the report illustrates the proposed divisions outlined above and the maps in Appendix A illustrate some of the proposed boundaries in more detail.*

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Dorset County Council

Division name (by district council name)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Christchurch							
1 Burton Grange	1	6,786	6,786	-3	6,855	6,855	-8
2 Christchurch Central	1	7,443	7,443	6	8,464	8,464	13
3 Commons	1	8,024	8,024	14	8,275	8,275	11
4 Highcliffe & Walkford	1	7,528	7,528	7	8,133	8,133	9
5 Mudeford & Highcliffe	1	7,494	7,494	7	7,627	7,627	2
East Dorset							
6 Colehill & Stapehill	1	7,733	7,733	10	7,799	7,799	4
7 Corfe Mullen	1	8,090	8,090	15	8,165	8,165	9
8 Cranborne Chase	1	6,688	6,688	-5	6,983	6,983	-7
9 Ferndown	2	15,413	7,706	10	16,161	8,080	8
10 Minster	1	7,576	7,576	8	7,976	7,976	7
11 St Leonards and St Ives	1	5,996	5,996	-15	6,120	6,120	-18
12 Verwood & Three Legged Cross	2	10,985	5,492	-22	11,975	5,987	-20
13 West Moors & Holt	1	7,285	7,285	4	7,740	7,740	-1
North Dorset							
14 Blackmore Vale	1	7,275	7,275	4	7,814	7,814	4
15 Blandford	1	7,004	7,004	0	7,599	7,599	2
16 Gillingham	1	6,985	6,985	0	7,765	7,765	4
17 Hambledon	1	7,773	7,773	11	7,981	7,981	7
18 Stour Vale	1	6,022	6,022	-14	6,712	6,712	-10
19 Shaftesbury	1	5,450	5,450	-22	6,582	6,582	-12
20 Winterborne	1	7,382	7,382	5	7,576	7,576	1

Division name (by district council name)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Purbeck							
21 Egdon Heath	1	6,261	6,261	-11	7,265	7,265	-3
22 Lytchett	1	8,775	8,775	25	9,068	9,068	21
23 Purbeck Hills	1	5,620	5,620	-20	5,797	5,797	-22
24 Swanage	1	8,028	8,028	14	8,551	8,551	14
25 Wareham	1	6,892	6,892	-2	7,069	7,069	-5
West Dorset							
26 Beaminster & Maiden Newton	1	7,281	7,281	4	7,811	7,811	4
27 Bride Valley	1	6,543	6,543	-7	7,001	7,001	-6
28 Bridport	1	6,854	6,854	-2	7,711	7,711	3
29 Chickerell & Chesil Bank	1	6,328	6,328	-10	6,480	6,480	-13
30 Dorchester	2	13,263	6,613	-5	15,623	7,811	4
31 Linden Lea	1	7,286	7,286	4	7,952	7,952	6
32 Marshwood Vale	1	7,555	7,555	8	8,131	8,131	9
33 Sherborne	1	6,846	6,846	-2	7,024	7,024	-4
34 Sherborne Rural	1	7,669	7,669	9	7,898	7,898	6
35 Three Valley	1	6,633	6,633	-5	7,303	7,303	-2
Weymouth and Portland							
36 Broadway & Lodmoor	2	15,311	7,655	9	15,782	7,891	6
37 Portland Harbour	1	6,562	6,562	-6	7,142	7,142	-4
38 Portland Tophill	1	6,596	6,596	-6	6,836	6,836	-9
39 Rodwell	1	6,844	6,844	-2	7,034	7,034	-6
40 Westham & Weymouth Town	2	13,604	6,802	-3	14,853	7,426	-1
Totals	45	315,683	-	-	336,513	-	-
Averages	-	7,015	-	-	7,478	-	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Dorset County Council's submission.

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

Please note that the 2002 figures differ slightly between the County Council's proposed wards and the existing wards. However, this does not have a substantive effect on our proposals. This is due to rounding.

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the county of Dorset, on which we are now consulting. Our review of the county is part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. This programme started in 1996 and is expected to finish in 2004.

2 In carrying out these county reviews, we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.
- 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:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and
 - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

3 Details of the legislation under which we work are set out in The Electoral Commission's *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reports* (published by the EC in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of electoral divisions. In each two-tier county, our approach is first to complete the PERs of all the constituent districts and, when the Orders for the resulting changes in those areas have been made, then to commence a PER of the county council's electoral arrangements. Orders were made for the new electoral arrangements in the districts in Dorset between August and September 2002 with the Purbeck district in September 1998, and we are now embarking on our county review in this area.

5 Prior to the commencement of Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000, each county council division could only return one member. This restraint has now been removed by section 89 of the 2000 Act, and we may now recommend the creation of multi-member county divisions. In areas where we are unable to identify single-member divisions that are coterminous with ward boundaries and provide acceptable levels of electoral equality we will consider recommending two-member divisions if they provide a better balance between these two factors. However, we do not expect to recommend large numbers of multi-member divisions other than, perhaps, in the more urban areas of a county.

6 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 sets out the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements*. These statutory rules state that each division should be wholly contained within a single district and that division boundaries should not split unwarded parishes or parish wards.

7 In the *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been created locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local people are normally in a better position to judge what council size and division configurations are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while also reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.

8 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the local authority as a whole. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any division will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

9 Similarly, we will seek to ensure that each district area within the county is allocated the correct number of county councillors with respect to the district's proportion of the county's electorate.

10 The *Rules* provide that, in considering county council electoral arrangements, we should have regard to the boundaries of district wards. We attach considerable importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of divisions and wards. The term 'coterminosity' is used throughout the report and refers to situations where the boundaries of county electoral divisions and district wards are the same, that is to say where county divisions comprise either one or more whole district wards.

11 We recognise, however, that it is unlikely to be possible to achieve absolute coterminosity throughout a county area while also providing for the optimum level of electoral equality. In this respect, county reviews are different from those of districts. We will seek to achieve the best available balance between electoral equality and coterminosity, taking into account the statutory criteria. While the proportion of electoral divisions that will be coterminous with the boundaries of district wards is likely to vary between counties, we would normally expect coterminosity to be achieved in a significant majority of divisions. The average level of coterminosity secured under our final recommendations for the first eleven counties that we have reviewed (excluding the Isle of Wight) is 70%. We would normally expect to recommend levels of coterminosity of around 60% to 80%.

12 Where coterminosity is not possible in parished areas, and a district ward is to be split between electoral divisions, we would normally expect this to be achieved without dividing (or further dividing) a parish between divisions. There are likely to be exceptions to this, however, particularly where larger parishes are involved.

13 We are not prescriptive on council size. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction or no change, should be supported by evidence and argumentation. Given the stage now reached in the introduction of new political management structures under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, it is important that whatever council size interested parties may propose to us they can demonstrate that their proposals have been fully thought through, and have been developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structure. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

14 A further area of difference between county and district reviews is that we must recognise that it will not be possible to avoid the creation of some county divisions which contain diverse communities, for example, combining rural and urban areas. We have generally sought to avoid this in district reviews in order to reflect the identities and interests of local communities. Some existing county council electoral divisions comprise a number of distinct communities, which is inevitable given the larger number of electors represented by each councillor, and we would expect that similar situations would continue under our recommendations in seeking the best balance between coterminosity and the statutory criteria.

15 As a part of this review we may also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the county. However, we made some recommendations for new parish electoral arrangements as part of our district reviews. We therefore expect to put forward such recommendations during county reviews only on an exceptional basis. In any event, we are *not* able to review administrative boundaries *between* local authorities or parishes, or consider the establishment of new parish areas as part of this review.

The review of Dorset County Council

16 We completed the reviews of the six district council areas in Dorset in April 2002 and Orders for the new electoral arrangements have since been made. This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Dorset County Council. The last such review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in June 1982 (Report No. 427).

17 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to us
Two	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to The Electoral Commission

18 Stage One began on 4 February 2003, when we wrote to Dorset County Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified the six district councils in the county, Dorset Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Dorset Association of Parish Councils, Members of Parliament with constituencies in the county, Members of the European Parliament for the South West Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Dorset County Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of submissions (the end of Stage One) was 2 June 2003.

19 At Stage Two we considered all the submissions received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

20 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 13 January 2004 and will end on 8 March 2004, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **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.**

21 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to modify them, and submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order and decide when any changes come into effect.

Equal opportunities

22 In preparing this report the committee has had regard to the general duty under section 71(1) of the Race Relation Act 1976 to promote racial equality and to the approach set out in BFCE (03) 35, *Race Relations Legislation*, which the Committee considered and agreed at its meeting on 9 April 2003.

2 Current electoral arrangements

23 The County of Dorset comprises the six districts of Christchurch, East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland. Covering an area of 254,181 hectares, the county is bordered to the north by Wiltshire and Somerset, to the east by Hampshire, to the west by Devon and to the south by the English Channel. The coastline is of World Heritage status and Dorset itself is characterised by its beautiful landscapes and designated Areas of Outstanding Beauty. Dorset's economy is based mainly on tourism, agriculture, manufacturing and commerce. Travel is easily accessible through ferry services to the Channel Isles, good road and rail links, as well as an international airport.

24 Dorset County Council was significantly reorganised in 1997 when the districts of Bournemouth and Poole became unitary authorities effectively making the current electorate figure lower than in 1997. The county currently has an electorate of 315,877 (December 2002 figures), which is expected to increase by 6.5% by 2007 to 336,511. The Council currently has 42 members, with one member elected from each division.

25 To compare levels of electoral inequality between divisions, we calculated, in percentage terms, the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each division (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the county average. In the text which follows, this figure may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

26 At present, each councillor represents an average of 7,521 electors, which the County Council forecasts will increase to 8,012 by the year 2007 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration over the last two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 13 of the 42 divisions varies by more than 10% from the district average, four divisions by more than 20% and two divisions by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Verwood division where the councillor represents 61% more electors than the county average.

27 As detailed previously, in considering the County Council's electoral arrangements, we must have regard to the boundaries of district wards. Following the completion of the reviews of district warding arrangements in Dorset, we are therefore faced with a new starting point for considering electoral divisions. Our proposals for county divisions will be based on the new district wards as opposed to those which existed prior to the recent reviews. In view of the effect of these new district wards and changes in the electorate over the past twenty years, which have resulted in electoral imbalances across the county, changes to most if not all of the existing county electoral divisions are inevitable.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements

Division name (by district council area)		Number of councillors	Electorate 2002	Variance from average %	Electorate 2007	Variance from average %
Christchurch						
1	Burton Grange	1	7,763	3	8,119	1
2	Christchurch Central	1	7,689	2	8,683	8
3	Commons	1	6,883	-8	7,036	-12
4	Highcliffe	1	6,794	-10	6,918	-14
5	Mudford & Wingfield	1	8,146	8	8,599	7
East Dorset						
6	Colehill	1	7,443	-1	7,587	-5
7	Corfe Mullen	1	8,090	8	8,165	2
8	Cranborne Chase	1	6,698	-11	6,979	-13
9	Ferndown	1	6,402	-15	6,796	-15
10	Hampreston South	1	7,127	-5	7,470	-7
11	Minster	1	7,625	1	7,945	-1
12	St Leonards and St Ives	1	5,996	-20	6,120	-24
13	Verwood	1	12,085	61	13,091	63
14	West Moors	1	8,300	10	8,466	6
North Dorset						
15	Blackmore	1	7,478	-1	7,972	-1
16	Blandford	1	7,819	4	8,424	5
17	Gillingham	1	9,237	23	10,057	26
18	Hambleton	1	7,224	-4	7,425	-7
19	Shaftesbury	1	8,242	10	9,800	22
20	Winterborne	1	8,091	8	8,351	4

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate 2002	Variance from average %	Electorate 2007	Variance from average %
Purbeck					
21 Egdon Heath	1	6,650	-12	7,663	-4
22 Lytchett	1	8,775	17	9,069	13
23 Purbeck Hills	1	5,231	-30	5,397	-33
24 Swanage	1	8,028	7	8,551	7
25 Wareham	1	6,892	-8	7,069	-12
West Dorset					
26 Beaminster	1	7,249	-4	7,737	-3
27 Bridport	1	7,749	3	8,625	8
28 Cerne	1	7,856	4	8,583	7
29 Chesil	1	8,277	10	8,802	10
30 Dorchester East	1	7,308	-3	7,867	-2
31 Dorchester North	1	7,741	3	9,758	22
32 Dorchester Rural South	1	9,875	31	10,480	31
33 Marshwood Vale	1	6,891	-8	7,474	-7
34 Sherborne	1	6,846	-9	7,204	-10
35 Sherborne Rural	1	6,460	-14	6,582	-18
Weymouth and Portland					
36 Broadwey	1	8,137	8	8,458	6
37 Lodmoor	1	7,174	-5	7,324	-9
38 Portland Harbour	1	6,562	-13	7,142	-11
39 Portland Tophill	1	6,596	-12	6,836	-15
40 Rodwell	1	6,844	-9	7,034	-12
41 Westham	1	6,185	-18	6,551	-18
42 Weymouth Town	1	7,419	-1	8,302	4
Totals	42	315,877	-	336,511	-
Averages	-	7,521	-	8,012	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Dorset County Council.

Note: Each division is represented by a single councillor, and the electorate columns denote the number of electors represented by each councillor. The 'variance from average' column shows how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies from the average for the county. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2002, electors in Purbeck Hills division in Purbeck were relatively over-represented by 30%, while electors in Verwood division in East Dorset were relatively under-represented by 61%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Submissions received

28 At the start of this review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Dorset County Council

29 During this initial stage of the review, officers from The Boundary Committee visited the area and met officers and members of the County Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 14 submissions during Stage One, including a county-wide scheme from Dorset County Council, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the County Council.

Dorset County Council

30 The County Council proposed a council of 45 members, three more than at present, serving 43 divisions, compared to the existing 42 members, representing 42 single-member divisions. Under its proposals the districts of East Dorset, North Dorset and West Dorset would all receive an additional councillor. Under the Council's proposals 14 divisions would initially have an electoral variance of over 10% and three divisions would have an electoral variance of more than 20%. By 2007 12 divisions would vary by more than 10% while two divisions would vary by more than 20%. The County Council's proposals would provide for a level of coterminosity of 70%.

District and borough councils

31 Purbeck District Council proposed 'that East Stoke should be retained in the Egdon Heath Division'. In addition it proposed six, rather than five, county councillors for the Purbeck district as it argued that it was under-represented at present.

Parish and town councils

32 We received responses from ten parish and town councils. Corfe Castle Parish Council stated that it had concerns that the Purbeck Hills division may include several parishes that related to other areas, other than the Isle of Purbeck. The parish council also proposed an extra councillor for the district, increasing the number of councillors for the county to 46.

33 East Stoke Parish Council proposed that its parish be placed within the Egdon Heath division of Purbeck district. It stated that the proposed increase in the size of the divisions would result in a less effective service from the county councillor. Arne Parish Council stated that it was concerned that the increase in the size of the current divisions would have a detrimental effect. Broadwindsor Group Parish Council proposed no change to the existing arrangements. Cerne Valley Parish Council proposed that the existing County division boundaries be maintained. Dorchester Town Council proposed that Dorchester Town be represented by two county councillors.

34 Sherborne Town Council stated that it would like the parish of Sherborne to remain 'intact', and that it was not in favour of multi-member wards. Shaftesbury Town Council stated that it had no initial comments to make. Wimborne Minster Town Council proposed no change to the existing Minster division. Portland Town Council proposed that the Island & Royal Manor area of Portland should be allocated two county council divisions.

Other representations

35 Councillor Legg representing Sherborne Rural put forward proposals for four of the six districts based on a 45-member council, namely East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck and West Dorset. In the districts of North Dorset and Purbeck, Councillor Legg presented three options in each case.

36 Capt Malcolm Shakesby MBE county councillor for the Egdon Heath division proposed that the Egdon Heath and Purbeck divisions be considered as exceptional cases and that the parish of East Stoke be maintained within the Egdon Heath division even though it would worsen electoral equality.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

37 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Dorset County Council and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed division boundaries, number of councillors and division names. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

38 As with our reviews of districts, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Dorset County Council is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being ‘as nearly as may be, the same in every division of the county’.

39 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and maintaining local ties, and to the boundaries of district wards.

40 We have discussed in Chapter One the additional parameters which apply to reviews of county council electoral arrangements and the need to have regard to the boundaries of district wards and in order to achieve coterminosity. In addition, our approach is to ensure that, having reached conclusions on the appropriate number of councillors to be elected to the county council, each district council area is allocated the number of county councillors to which it is entitled.

41 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every division of a county.

42 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, especially when also seeking to achieve coterminosity in order to facilitate convenient and effective local government, so there must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum. Accordingly, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as the boundaries of district wards and community identity. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be taken into account and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

43 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not therefore able to take into account any representations that are based on these issues.

Electorate forecasts

44 Since 1975 there has been a 28% decrease in the electorate of Dorset County Council. However, this is largely due to the fact that the districts of Bournemouth and Poole became unitary authorities in 1997. The County Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2007, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 6.5% from 315,877 to 336,511 over the five-year period from 2002 to 2007. It expects most of the growth to be in the West Dorset District, although a significant amount is also expected in East Dorset and North Dorset districts. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the County Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to division boundaries has been obtained.

45 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered all the evidence received concerning electorate forecasts, we accept that the County Council's figures are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council size

46 As explained earlier, we now require justification for any council size proposed, whether it is an increase, decrease, or retention of the existing council size.

47 Dorset County Council presently has 42 members. The County Council proposed a council of 45 members, an increase of three members. Councillor Legg's proposals for four of the six districts were based on a council size of 45 members. However, he provided an allocation table for the county in the range of 38-53 members. He concluded that from his analysis the council should explore further options for a 41-member and 45-member council.

48 In reaching its decision on council size, the County Council considered a number of factors. The County Council adopted Executive arrangements in October 2001 and its Stage One submission set out the Council's structure under this. The County Council's political management structure now provides for a Cabinet of six members, 'members of the County Council who are not members of the Cabinet have an entitlement to sit on two or three committees'. It stated that there are four overview and policy development committees, three of which have a membership of 14 members and one of 18 members. There is an audit and scrutiny committee of eight members, a standards committee containing four elected members, a staffing committee of five members and five quasi-judicial/regulatory committees comprising five to 10 members. There is also a Health & Social Care Overview Scrutiny Committee which has a membership of six County Councillors and six District Councillors. Members can also serve on policy development panels. Additionally it stated that there are 45 joint committees, partnerships and consultative panels to represent the County Council on approximately 60 outside bodies regionally, countywide and locally.

49 It stated that individual member review and development meetings were introduced in 2002 to enable county councillors to voice their opinions on their personal workloads. It stated that the high volume of parish and town council meetings which members attend, especially in the large rural areas, puts a strain on the time of the councillors. In addition a Member Advisory Panel considered various council sizes between 37 and 55 inclusive. A council size of 45 was considered the 'preferred option' when considering the calculation of projections of the electorate for 2007. It was not only the increase in electorate that concerned the County Council but the 'distribution within the County'. It stated that the additional Councillors would be allocated to the county's expanding towns and would reduce the burden for the representatives of the divisions with 'significantly higher electorates than the current average'. A public consultation was also held whereby only 17 of the 108 respondents disagreed with the proposed increase.

50 The rationale behind the 45 council size was based on the Corporate Performance Assessment of the County Council by the Audit Commission in 2002. The Council stated that they were assessed by the Audit Commission on a Comprehensive Performance Assessment and were judged to be an 'excellent authority'. It stated that this suggested that the current arrangements were providing effective and convenient local government and the proposals for a slight increase in councillors were in order to maintain this high standard. It stated that this facilitates solutions to be found in community and democratic terms for the expanding areas of the County. We note that under the Council's proposals all the districts in the County would receive the correct allocation of councillors.

51 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 45 members.

Electoral arrangements

52 We have given careful consideration to the views received during Stage One, including the county-wide scheme from the County Council and the proposals from Councillor Legg. We noted that Councillor Legg's proposals secured good levels of electoral equality in the districts where he submitted proposals. However, we also noted that the levels of coterminosity were inferior to the proposals submitted by the County Council and that his proposals divided parishes between different county divisions in a number of areas. We also noted that the County Council's proposals also secured reasonable levels of electoral equality and that it also secured an excellent level of coterminosity and, with one exception, did not divide parishes between county divisions. Therefore, given the evidence available to us we propose basing our draft recommendations on the proposals of the County Council.

53 The County Council had not expressed any specific wish to retain a pattern of single-member divisions across the county and proposed two-member divisions in East Dorset. We also note that its proposals secured reasonable levels of electoral equality and good levels of coterminosity while having regard to the statutory criteria. However, in a minority of areas we have examined alternatives to improve coterminosity and community identity further.

54 We are proposing a number of modifications to the County Council's proposals in Christchurch, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland to better reflect the statutory criteria and provide for improved levels of coterminosity.

55 The Council's proposals would improve electoral equality with the number of divisions in which the number of electors would vary by more than 20% from the county average from six to two by 2007.

56 For county division purposes, the six district areas in the county are considered in turn, as follows:

- i. Christchurch (page 26)
- ii. East Dorset (pages 27 & 28)
- iii. North Dorset (pages 28 & 29)
- iv. Purbeck (pages 29, 30 & 31)
- v. West Dorset (pages 31, 32 & 33)
- vi. Weymouth & Portland (pages 33 & 34)

57 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Christchurch borough

58 Under the current arrangements, the borough of Christchurch is represented by five county councillors serving five divisions. The divisions of Commons and Highcliffe currently have 8% and 10% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (12% and 14% fewer by 2007). The divisions of Burton Grange, Christchurch Central and Mundeford & Wingfield currently have 3%, 2% and 8% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (1%, 8% and 7% more by 2007).

59 At Stage One the County Council proposed five single-member divisions, which the borough is entitled to under a council size of 45. Its proposals for this area would achieve 40% coterminosity. Its proposed Highcliffe & Walkford division would comprise the new district wards of North Highcliffe & Walkford and West Highcliffe. Its proposed Mundeford & Highcliffe division would comprise the new district wards of Highcliffe and Mundeford & Friars Cliff. Its proposed Burton Grange & Stanpit division would comprise the new district wards of Burton & Winkton and Grange and would also comprise part of the new Purewell & Stanpit district ward (Purewell & Stanpit polling district B). Its proposed Christchurch Central division would comprise the new Town Centre district ward and part of the new Purewell & Stanpit district ward (Purewell & Stanpit polling district A) and part of the new Portfield district ward (Portfield polling district B). Its proposed Commons division would comprise the new St Catherine's & Hurn and Jumpers district wards and part of the new Portfield district ward (Portfield polling district A). The County Council stated that following its consultation on its proposals it had 'swapped' the polling districts Portfield A and Portfield B between the proposed St Catherine's & Hurn and Christchurch Central divisions. It argued that the Portfield A area had little in common with the Town Centre area while the Portfield B area has 'closer physical and historical ties'.

60 Under the County Council's proposals the division of Christchurch Central would initially have 9% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (2% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Burton Grange & Stanpit, Commons, Highcliffe & Walkford and Mundeford & Highcliffe would initially have 12%, 14%, 7% and 7% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7%, 11%, 9% and 2% more by 2007).

61 We received no further submissions for Christchurch and therefore propose basing our draft recommendations on the County Council's proposals. However, we note that only two of the Council's five proposed divisions are coterminous and therefore propose an amendment between the proposed Burton Grange & Stanpit and Christchurch Central divisions. We propose that Purewell & Stanpit polling district B be transferred to the proposed Christchurch Central division in order to provide for improved level of coterminosity and provide for effective and convenient local government. We note that under our proposals the levels of electoral equality would worsen slightly due to our proposed amendment. However, we are of the view that they would better reflect the statutory criteria as a whole than under the County Council's proposals.

62 Our draft recommendations would achieve a level of coterminosity of 60% between county divisions and district wards boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed division of Burton Grange would have 3% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (8% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Christchurch Central, Commons, Highcliffe & Walkford and Mundeford & Highcliffe would have 6%, 14%, 7% and 7% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (13%, 11%, 9% and 2% more by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

East Dorset district

63 Under the current arrangements, the district of East Dorset is represented by nine county councillors serving nine divisions. The divisions of Colehill, Cranborne Chase, Ferndown, Hampreston South and St Leonards & St Ives currently have 1%, 11%, 15%, 5% and 20% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (5%, 13%, 15%, 7% and 24% fewer by 2007). The divisions of Corfe Mullen, Minster, Verwood and Holt & West Moors currently have 8%, 1%, 61% and 10% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (2% more, 1% fewer, 63% more and 6% more by 2007).

64 At Stage One the County Council proposed eight divisions, six single-member divisions and two two-member divisions which the borough is entitled to under a council size of 45. Its proposals for this area would achieve 75% coterminosity. Its proposed Cranborne Chase division would comprise the new district wards of Crane, Alderholt and Handley Vale and part of Holt ward (the parishes of Chalbury, Hinton Martell, Hinton Parva and Horton). Its proposed Minster division would comprise the new district wards of Stour and Wimborne Minster. Its proposed division of Corfe Mullen would comprise the new district wards of Corfe Mullen Central, Corfe Mullen North and Corfe Mullen South. Its proposed division of Colehill & Stapehill would comprise the new district wards of Colehill West, Colehill East and Stapehill. Its proposed division of Ferndown would comprise the new district wards of Longham, Ferndown Central, Ameysford, Parley and Ferndown Links and would be represented by two councillors. Its proposed division of West Moors & Holt would comprise the new district ward of West Moors and part of the new Holt ward (the parish of Holt). Its proposed division of Verwood & Three Legged Cross would comprise the new district wards of Verwood Dewlands, Verwood Newtown, Verwood Stephens Castle and Three Cross & Potterne and would be represented by two councillors. Its proposed division of St Leonards & St Ives would comprise the new district wards of St Leonards & St Ives East and St Leonards & St Ives West.

65 The County Council noted that the proposed St Leonards & St Ives and Verwood & Three Legged Cross divisions would have variances of 18% and 20% respectively by 2007. It argued that the reason St Leonards & St Ives division would be 18% below the county average was due to geographic constraints, there being only two adjacent wards that are actually within the same district, West Moors and Three Cross & Pottern. It argued that these 'form separate communities' and that to include them in the St Leonards & St Ives division would result in a higher electoral variance than the county average. It stated that, in the proposed Verwood division, the option for a two-member division had been considered most appropriate to maintain community identity in the distinctly different rural areas that surround the town itself.

66 Under the County Council's scheme the proposed divisions of Cranborne Chase, St Leonards & St Ives and Verwood & Three Legged Cross would initially have 5%, 15% and 22% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7%, 18% and 20% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Colehill & Stapehill, Corfe Mullen, Ferndown, West Moors & Holt and Minster would initially have 10%, 15%, 10%, 4% and 8% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4% more, 9% more, 8% more, 1% fewer and 7% more by 2007).

67 Councillor Legg proposed ten single-member divisions for East Dorset. His proposals provided for a level of coterminosity of 30% with three of his proposed divisions varying by more than 10% from the county average by 2007. Councillor Legg stated that 'in formulating my own proposals I have attempted to put electoral equality and issues of appropriate community identity to the fore'.

68 Wimbourne Minster Parish Council stated that they wish to retain the same electoral divisions subject to 'any minor amendments to cater for recent changes to district wards'.

69 We have considered all the representations received at Stage One carefully. We note the proposals of Councillor Legg and the low level of coterminosity secured under his proposals. We do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence or argumentation to persuade us to adopt Councillor Legg's proposals, and have not been persuaded that he has struck the right balance between the statutory criteria and coterminosity. Furthermore we note that Councillor Legg's proposals would divide parishes between two of the divisions, namely West Moors and St Leonards & St Ives. We note that under the County Council's proposals the division of St Leonards & St Ives would have a high variance by 2007; however, we have examined a number of alternative proposals in the area. We considered combining the proposed West Moors and St Leonards & St Ives division to form a two-member division in order to improve electoral equality. However, we consider that this would result in a poorly linked division. We also note the high electoral imbalance of the proposed Verwood division and considered a number of alternatives. However, we would agree with the council that Verwood has a distinctly more urban nature than surrounding parishes and therefore do not believe that combining neighbouring rural parishes with the town in order to provide for an improved level of electoral equality would best reflect the statutory criteria as a whole. Therefore given that we have investigated alternative options in the district to those of the County Council and have not been persuaded they would better reflect the statutory criteria than the County Council's proposals and also given the argumentation received we propose adopting the County Council's proposals in full.

70 Our draft recommendations would achieve a level of coterminosity of 75% between county divisions and district wards boundaries. Under the draft recommendations the divisions of Cranborne Chase, St Leonards & St Ives and Verwood & Three Legged Cross would initially have 5%, 15% and 22% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7%, 18% and 20% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Colehill & Stapehill, Corfe Mullen, Ferndown, West Moors & Holt and Minster would initially have 10%, 15%, 10%, 4% and 8% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4% more, 9% more, 8% more, 1% fewer and 7% more by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

North Dorset district

71 Under the current arrangements, the district of North Dorset is represented by six county councillors serving six divisions. The divisions of Blackmore and Hambledon currently have 1% and 4% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (1% and 7% fewer by 2007). The divisions of Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Winterborne currently have 4%, 23%, 10% and 8% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (5%, 26%, 22% and 4% more by 2007).

72 At Stage One the County Council proposed seven single-member divisions which the borough is entitled to under a council size of 45. Its proposals for this area would achieve 100% coterminosity. Its proposed Winterborne division would comprise the new district wards of Abbey, Riversdale, Portman and Bulbarrow. Its proposed Blandford division would comprise the new district wards of Blandford Damory Down, Blandford Hilltop, Blandford Langton St Leonards, Blandford Old Town and Blandford Station. Its proposed Hambledon division would comprise the new district wards of The Lower Tarrants, Cranborne Chase, The Beacon and Hill Forts. Its proposed Blackmore Vale division would comprise the new district wards of Lydden Vale, Blackmore and Stour Valley. Its proposed Gillingham division would comprise the new district wards of Milton, Gillingham Town, Wyke and Lodbourne. Its proposed Stour Vale division would comprise the new district wards of Bourton & District, Motcombe & Ham, The Stours and Marnhull. Its proposed Shaftesbury division would comprise the new district wards of Shaftesbury Central, Shaftesbury Christy's, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill.

73 The County Council stated that the proposals for Stour Vale included a two-member division including the town of Gillingham and the surrounding rural parishes. However, it stated that this had been unpopular during its consultation exercise. The County Council contended that their proposals were necessary to provide for issues of community identity and that the approach was more in line with proposals in other areas of the county. The County Council noted that its proposed Shaftesbury division would result in the division having 12% fewer electors than the county average by 2007. However, to bring the electoral variance within 10% of the county average it stated that it would be necessary to include rural parishes with the town area.

74 Under the County Council's scheme the proposed divisions of Stour Vale and Shaftesbury would initially have 14% and 22% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (10% and 12% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Blackmore Vale, Blandford, Gillingham, Hambledon and Winterborne would initially have 4%, 0%, 0%, 11% and 5% more electors per councillor than the county average (4%, 2%, 4%, 7% and 1% more by 2007).

75 We received a district wide proposal from Councillor Legg which included three options of seven single-member divisions. Option one provided for a level of coterminosity of 43% with one division varying by more than 10% by 2007. Option two provided for a level of coterminosity of 43% with one division varying by more than 10% by 2007. Option 3 provided for a level of coterminosity of 57% with one division varying by more than 10% by 2007.

76 No further submissions were received for the district.

77 We have carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One. We noted Councillor Legg's proposals for the area secured good levels of electoral equality. However, we note that the proposals of the County Council also secured good levels of electoral equality and secured a level of coterminosity of 100% while those of Councillor Legg did not provide for a comparative level. As stated in our guidance, while we accept that coterminosity will normally be secondary to the achievement of electoral equality we are mindful that where groups of wards are not coterminous with county divisions this can cause confusion for the electorate. Therefore, given the good levels of electoral equality, coterminosity and argumentation provided by the County Council we propose adopting their proposals in full for the North Dorset district.

78 Our draft recommendations would achieve a level of coterminosity of 100% between county division and district ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed divisions of Stour Vale and Shaftesbury would initially have 14% and 22% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (10% and 12% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Blackmore Vale, Blandford, Gillingham, Hambledon and Winterborne would initially have 4%, 0%, 0%, 11% and 5% more electors per councillor than the county average (4%, 2%, 4%, 7% and 1% more by 2007).

Purbeck district

79 Under the current arrangements, the district of Purbeck is represented by five county councillors serving five divisions. The divisions of Egdon Heath, Purbeck Hills and Wareham currently have 12%, 30% and 8% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4%, 33% and 12% fewer by 2007). The divisions of Lytchett and Swanage currently have 17% and 7% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (13% and 7% more by 2007).

80 At Stage One the County Council proposed five single-member divisions which the borough is entitled to under a council size of 45. Its proposals for this area would achieve

60% coterminosity. Its proposed Egdon Heath division would comprise the new district wards of Bere Regis, Wool and Winfrith and part of the new Lytchett Matravers district ward (Morden parish). Its proposed Purbeck Hills division would comprise the new district wards of Langton, Castle, West Purbeck and Creech Barrow. Its proposed Swanage division would comprise the new district wards of Swanage North and Swanage South. Its proposed division of Wareham would comprise the new Wareham and Wareham St Martin district wards. Its proposed Lytchett division would comprise the new Lytchett Minster & Upton East and Lytchett Minster & Upton West wards and part of the new Lytchett Matravers district ward (the parish of Lytchett Matravers.)

81 The County Council noted that the division of Lytchett Minster was subject to a high electoral variance. It argued that to maintain community interest and identity in the area the proposals were necessary. It stated that to achieve better electoral equality the village of Lytchett Matravers would have to be split between Lytchett Minster to the east and Bere Regis to the west.

82 Under the County Council's scheme the proposed divisions of Egdon Heath, Purbeck Hills and Wareham would initially have 11%, 20% and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (3%, 22% and 5% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Lytchett and Swanage would initially have 25% and 14% more electors per councillor than the county average (21% and 14% more by 2007).

83 The County Council's proposed Swanage division would comprise two wards, Swanage North and Swanage South. The proposed Swanage division would be 14% above the county average by 2007. It stated that to achieve better electoral equality it would be necessary to separate these two town wards and create two divisions with a mix of both urban and rural electors. The County Council argued that it would not be beneficial to electors in either area and stated that it would prefer to maintain community identity.

84 The County Council noted that the Purbeck Hills division would have a high electoral variance by 2007 but stated that 'this inequality is due to the extreme rurality of this area'. It stated further that this had been recognised in the district boundary review where West Purbeck ward had been accepted with a 24% electoral variance. The council noted that East Stoke Parish Council had stated that they had stronger links with the parish of Wool within Egdon Heath division. However, the council stated that to move this parish would cause electoral inequality of 27% below the county average and argued that this was not acceptable.

85 We received a district wide proposal from Councillor Legg which included three options for each of the five single-member divisions. Option one provided for a level of coterminosity of 40% with four divisions varying by more than 10% by 2007. Option two provided for a level of coterminosity of 20% with three divisions varying by more than 10% by 2007. Option three provided for a level of coterminosity of 40% with one division varying by more than 10% by 2007.

86 Purbeck District Council proposed that East Stoke parish be retained in Egdon Heath division and argued that there should be an increase of one county councillor. Capt Malcolm Shakesby MBE, County Councillor for the Egdon Heath division, proposed that the parish of East Stoke be maintained within Egdon Heath division for reasons of community identity and to avoid the creation of large geographical divisions. East Stoke Parish Council objected to the County Council's proposals and stated that they would like to be included in the proposed Egdon Heath division, arguing that it has stronger community ties and interests with the area. Additionally, it stated that the increase in the geographical area would significantly reduce the effectiveness of its councillor. Arne Parish Council stated that it is concerned about the increase in size of divisions and argued that it would place a strain on its councillor. Corfe Castle Parish Council stated that it was concerned regarding the

possible size of a new division. It argued that this would cause great strain on its councillor's workload and would lead to 'geographically very large and unrelated divisions and a disproportionate strain on the members for those divisions'. It argued the need for an increase of one county councillor for the district.

87 We have considered the representations received at Stage One carefully. We noted Councillor Legg's proposals for the area, but noted that his proposals, whilst securing good levels of electoral equality, in the case of options one and two did not secure a good level of coterminosity and with options two and three divided parishes between divisions. We note that, although the County Council's proposals did not secure as good a level of electoral equality, they secured a good level of coterminosity and did not divide parishes between divisions. Therefore given the balance of the statutory criteria and the argumentation provided we propose basing our proposals on those of the County Council. We have considered carefully the various submissions received proposing to retain East Stoke parish within the Egdon Heath division. However, we note that the transfer of East Stoke to the proposed Egdon Heath division would result in the proposed Purbeck Hills division varying by more than 22% from the county average by 2007. While we have some sympathy we do not consider that we could accept such a high variance. We have also noted the objections to the creation of large rural divisions particularly with regard to the proposed Purbeck Hills division. However, we note that the proposed division would already vary by 22% from the county average and that a further reduction of parishes would exacerbate this problem. Given the high level of electoral inequality we have considered combining divisions. However, we do not consider that a large rural division would best reflect the statutory criteria. With regard to proposals that Purbeck be allocated an extra councillor we note that the district would only merit five councillors by 2007. Therefore given the options available to us we propose adopting the County Council's proposals in this district.

88 Our draft recommendations would achieve a level of coterminosity of 60% between county divisions and district wards boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed divisions of Egdon Heath, Purbeck Hills and Wareham would initially have 11%, 20% and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (3%, 22% and 5% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Lytchett and Swanage would initially have 25% and 14% more electors per councillor than the county average (21% and 14% more by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

West Dorset district

89 Under the current arrangements, the district of West Dorset is represented by ten county councillors serving ten single-member divisions. The divisions of Beaminster, Dorchester East, Marshwood Vale, Sherborne and Sherborne Rural currently have 4%, 3%, 8%, 9% and 14% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (3%, 2%, 7%, 10% and 18% by 2007). The divisions of Bridport, Cerne, Chesil, Dorchester North and Dorchester Rural South currently have 3%, 4%, 10%, 3% and 31% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (8%, 7%, 10%, 22% and 31% by 2007).

90 At Stage One the County Council proposed 11 single-member divisions which the district is entitled to under a council size of 45. Its proposals for this area would achieve 45% coterminosity. Its proposed Marshwood Vale division would comprise the new Charmouth, Lyme Regis and Marshwood Vale district wards and part of the new Broadwindsor district ward (Pilsden parish) and Chideock and Symondsburry district ward (part of Symondsburry parish). Its proposed Bridport division would comprise part of the new Bridport North district ward (Bridport North parish ward), part of the new Bridport South & Bothenhampton district ward (Bridport South parish ward), part of the new Netherbury district ward (Allington parish) and part of the Chideock & Symondsburry district ward (the West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish). Its proposed Bride Valley division would comprise the new Bradpole district ward, part of the new Bridport North district ward (Bradpole Claremont parish ward), part of

Bridport South & Bothenhampton district ward (Bothenhampton parish), the new Burton Bradstock district ward, the new Lodders district ward and part of the new Chesil Bank district ward (Litton Cheney parish). Its proposed Beaminster & Maiden Newton division would comprise the new Beaminster, Maiden Newton and part Broadwindsor district wards (the parishes of Burstock, Broadwindsor, Seaborough and Stoke Abbott) and part of the Netherbury district ward (Netherbury parish). Its proposed Sherborne division would comprise the new Sherborne East and Sherborne West district wards. Its proposed Sherborne Rural division would comprise the new Halstock, Bradford Abbas, Cam Vale, Queen Thorne and Yetminster district wards. Its proposed Three Valley division would comprise the new Frome Valley, Charminster & Cerne Valley and Piddle Valley district wards. Its proposed Linden Lea division would comprise part of the new Winterborne St Martin district ward (the parishes of Winterborne Monkton, Winterborne St Martin, Winterborne Came, Whitcombe, Winterborne Herringston and Bincombe) and the new Broadmayne, Owermoigne and Puddletown district wards. Its proposed Dorchester South division would comprise the new Dorchester South and Dorchester East district wards. Its proposed Dorchester North Division would comprise the new Dorchester North and Dorchester West district wards. Its proposed Chickerell & Chesil Bank division would comprise the new Chickerell district ward and part Winterborne St Martin (the parishes of Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton) and part of the new Chesil Bank district ward (the parishes of Long Bredy, Kingston Russell, Littlebredy, Abbotsbury, Portesham, Langton Herring and Fleet).

91 In its proposals for Chickerell & Chesil Bank division it argued that Litton Cheney parish has closer links with the Bridport area and considered that the parish was best placed within Bride Valley division. The County Council also proposed that Allington parish be included within the proposed Bridport division arguing that the parish has strong community and geographical links with the area. The County Council also proposed that Pilsden parish be included within Marshwood Vale division arguing that the parish is closer geographically.

92 Under the County Council's scheme the proposed divisions of Bride Valley, Chickerell & Chesil Bank, Dorchester North, Dorchester South, Sherborne and Three Valley would initially have 7%, 10%, 9%, 2%, 2% and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (6% fewer, 13% fewer, 13% more, 4% fewer, 4% fewer and 2% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Beaminster & Maiden Newton, Bridport, Linden Lea, Marshwood Vale and Sherborne Rural would initially have 3%, 1%, 4%, 5% and 9% more electors per councillor than the county average (4%, 7%, 6%, 6% and 6% more by 2007).

93 We received a district wide proposal from Councillor Legg comprising of eleven single-member divisions and a level of coterminosity of 27% with one division varying by more than 10% by 2007. Councillor Legg stated that within this proposal he had 'attempted to focus on issues of community identity and electoral equality rather than attempting to achieve coterminosity'.

94 Broadwindsor Group Parish Council stated that it considered 'no change was needed'. Cerne Valley Parish Council stated that it wished to retain the existing division boundaries. Dorchester Town Council proposed that the town should be represented by two county councillors and that these division boundaries should not extend outside of the town. Sherborne Town Council proposed that the electoral division boundary should keep the parish 'intact'.

95 We have considered the representations received at Stage One carefully. We note that both district-wide proposals secure good levels of electoral equality. However, we note that both proposals secured poor levels of coterminosity. We also noted that under both proposals parishes would be divided between county divisions, the parish of Symondsburry under the County Council's proposals and the parishes of Symondsburry and Netherbury under the proposals of Councillor Legg. Given the argumentation provided, we are of the

view that the County Council's proposals should form the basis of our recommendations in the district as they secure good levels of electoral equality and provide for a superior level of coterminosity and argumentation than the proposals forwarded by Councillor Legg. However, in order to achieve an improved level of coterminosity and to provide for improved levels of electoral equality we propose a number of modifications. We propose that Pilsden parish be transferred from Marshwood Vale division to the proposed Beaminster & Maiden Newton division in order to secure an improved level of coterminosity. We have also carefully considered the County Council's proposal to include the West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish within its proposed Bridport ward. However, we note the lack of argumentation for this proposal and we note that were the West Cliff area to be transferred to the proposed Marshwood Vale division, this, in conjunction with our proposal for Pilsden parish, would improve the level of coterminosity in the area. We therefore propose the West Cliff area be transferred to its proposed Marshwood Vale division. We also note that under the County Council's proposals its proposed Dorchester North division would vary by 13% from the county average by 2007. Therefore, having considered the options available to us, we propose combining the proposed Dorchester North and Dorchester South division to form a two-member Dorchester division which would secure an electoral variance of 5% (4% by 2007) without affecting the level of coterminosity in the district.

96 We note the submissions of Broadwindsor Group Parish and Cerne Valley for no change. However, given the implementation of new district wards in the area this has not been possible. We must also look to securing the best possible electoral arrangements for the district as a whole and therefore cannot view any area in isolation.

97 Our draft recommendations would achieve 60% coterminosity between county divisions and district ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed divisions of Bride Valley, Bridport, Chickerell & Chesil Bank, Dorchester, Sherborne and Three Valley would have 7%, 2%, 10%, 5%, 2% and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (6% fewer, 3% more, 13% fewer, 4% more, 4% fewer and 2% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Beaminster & Maiden Newton, Linden Lea, Marshwood Vale and Sherborne Rural would have 4%, 4%, 8% and 9% more electors per councillor than the county average (4%, 6%, 9% and 6% more by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Weymouth & Portland borough

98 Under the current arrangements, the borough of Weymouth & Portland is represented by seven county councillors serving seven divisions. The divisions of Preston, Portland Harbour, Portland Tophill, Rodwell, Westham and Weymouth Town currently have 5%, 13%, 12%, 9%, 18% and 1% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (9% fewer, 11% fewer, 15% fewer, 12% fewer, 18% fewer and 4% more by 2007). The division of Broadway currently has 8% more electors per councillor than the county average (6% more by 2007).

99 At Stage One the County Council proposed seven single-member divisions. Its proposals for this area would achieve 100% coterminosity. Its proposed Broadway division would comprise the new Upwey & Broadway, Littlemoor and Wey Valley district wards. Its proposed division of Lodmoor would comprise the new Preston and Radipole district wards. Its proposed division of Westham would comprise the new Westham North and Westham South district wards. Its proposed division of Weymouth Town would comprise the new Melcombe Regis and Westham East district wards. Its proposed division of Rodwell would comprise the new Weymouth East and Weymouth West district wards. Its proposed division of Portland Harbour would comprise the new Wyke Regis and Underhill district wards. Its proposed division of Portland Tophill would consist of Tophill East and Tophill West district wards.

100 Under the County Council's scheme the proposed divisions of Portland Harbour, Portland Tophill, Rodwell and Westham would have 6%, 6%, 2% and 12% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4%, 9%, 6% and 12% fewer by 2007). The divisions of Broadway, Lodmoor and Weymouth Town would have 16%, 2% and 6% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (13% more, 2% fewer and 11% more by 2007).

101 Portland Town Council stated that they considered the current electoral arrangements to be 'unsatisfactory in relation to the Island & Royal Manor of Portland'. They argued that the division known as Portland Harbour is divided between the Underhill area of Portland and the Wyke Regis area of Weymouth and is separated by Portland Beach Road. They therefore proposed that the Portland area be allocated two councillors.

102 We have considered the representations received at Stage One carefully. Given the excellent level of coterminosity under the County Council proposals we propose using them as the basis of our proposals in the district. However, in order to provide for improved levels of electoral equality we propose a number of modifications. We propose that the divisions of Broadway and Lodmoor be combined to form a two-member Broadway & Lodmoor division which would secure an electoral variance of 9% (6% by 2007) without affecting the level of coterminosity. We also propose combining the proposed Westham and Weymouth Town divisions to form a two-member Westham & Weymouth Town division which would secure an electoral variance of 3% (1% by 2007) without affecting the level of coterminosity.

103 Our draft recommendations would achieve 100% coterminosity between county divisions and district ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed divisions of Portland Harbour, Portland Tophill, Rodwell and Westham & Weymouth Town would have 6%, 6%, 2% and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4%, 9%, 6% and 1% fewer by 2007). The proposed division of Broadway & Lodmoor would have 9% more electors per councillor than the county average (6% more by 2007). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Conclusions

104 Having considered all the evidence and submissions received during the first stage of the review, we propose:

- There should be an increase in council size from 42 to 45 members.
- The boundaries of all divisions will be subject to change as the divisions are based on district wards which have themselves changed as a result of the district reviews.

105 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the County Council's proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following areas:

- In Christchurch borough we propose adopting the majority of the County Council's proposals. However, we propose one amendment in the proposed Christchurch Central division to improve the level of coterminosity.
- In West Dorset district we propose adopting the majority of the County Council's proposals. However, we propose three amendments in Marshwood Vale and Beaminster & Maiden Newton divisions to improve the level of coterminosity and in Dorchester town to improve the level of electoral equality.
- In Weymouth & Portland borough we propose adopting the majority of the County Council's proposals. However, we propose two amendments to combine the Broadway

and Preston divisions and the Westham and Weymouth Town divisions to improve the levels of electoral equality.

106 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2002 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2007.

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2002 Electorate		2007 Forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft arrangements	Current arrangements	Draft arrangements
Number of councillors	42	45	42	45
Number of divisions	42	40	42	40
Average number of electors per councillor	7,521	7,015	8,012	7,478
Number of divisions with a variance more than 10% from the average	13	11	18	9
Number of divisions with a variance more than 20% from the average	4	3	7	2
Level of coterminosity	76%	73%	-	73%

* Level of coterminosity following the completion of the LGBC Review in 1982

107 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Dorset County Council would result in a reduction in the number of divisions with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 17 to 11. By 2007 only nine divisions are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

Draft recommendation

Dorset County Council should comprise 45 councillors serving 40 divisions, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated in Appendix A, and on the large map inside the back cover.

5 What happens next?

108 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Dorset County Council contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 8 March 2004. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the County Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

109 Express your views by writing directly to us:

**The Team Leader
Dorset County Council Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

110 In the light of responses received, we will review our draft recommendations to 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 our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to The Electoral Commission, which cannot make the Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

Appendix A

Draft recommendations for Dorset County Council: **Detailed mapping**

The following map illustrates our proposed division boundaries for the Dorset County Council area.

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates in outline form the proposed divisions for Dorset County Council, including constituent district wards and parishes.

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/code.htm> requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

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