

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for West Dorset

Report to the Electoral Commission

April 2002

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CONTENTS

	page
WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?	5
SUMMARY	7
1 INTRODUCTION	13
2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS	15
3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS	21
4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION	23
5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS	27
6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?	53
APPENDIX	
A Final Recommendations for West Dorset: Detailed Mapping	55

A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Bridport and Dorchester is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

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 are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)

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 ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of West Dorset.

SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of West Dorset's electoral arrangements on 27 March 2001. It published its draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 9 October 2001, after which it undertook an eight-week period of consultation. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us, the Boundary Committee for England, to complete the work of the LGCE and submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations received by the LGCE during consultation on its draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.**

We found that the existing arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in West Dorset:

- **in 17 of the 38 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and eight wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 19 wards and by more than 20 per cent in nine wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 121–122) are that:

- **West Dorset District Council should have 48 councillors, seven fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 33 wards, instead of 38 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 34 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of five, and four wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 28 of the proposed 33 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward, Yetminster, expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district by 2006.**

Recommendations are also made for changes to parish and town council electoral arrangements which provide for:

- **revised warding arrangements and a redistribution of councillors in Bradpole, Bridport, Dorchester and Sherborne.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 15 May 2002:

**The Secretary
Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Beaminster	2	The parishes of Beaminster, Chedington, Mapperton, Mosterton and South Perrott	Map 2
2 Bradford Abbas	1	The parishes of Beer Hackett, Bradford Abbas, Clifton Maybank and Thornford	Map 2
3 Bradpole	1	Part of Bradpole parish (the proposed Bradpole Village parish ward)	Large map
4 Bridport North	2	Part of Bridport parish (the proposed Bridport North parish ward); part of Bradpole (the proposed Bradpole Claremont parish ward)	Large map
5 Bridport South & Bothenhampton	3	Part of Bridport parish (the proposed Bridport South parish ward); part of Bothenhampton parish (Bothenhampton parish ward)	Large map
6 Broadmayne	1	The parishes of Broadmayne, West Knighton and West Stafford	Map 2
7 Broadwindsor	1	The parishes of Broadwindsor, Burstock, Pilsdon, Seaborough and Stoke Abbott	Map 2
8 Burton Bradstock	1	The parishes of Burton Bradstock, Chilcombe, Puncknowle, Shipton Gorge and Swyre	Map 2
9 Cam Vale	1	The parishes of Folke, Holnest, Holwell, Leigh, Leweston, Lillington, Longburton and North Wootton	Map 2
10 Charminster & Cerne Valley	2	The parishes of Bradford Peverell, Cerne Abbas, Charminster, Godmanstone, Minterne Magna, Nether Cerne, Stinsford and Up Cerne	Map 2
11 Charmouth	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Catherton Leweston, Charmouth and Wootton Fitzpaine	Map 2
12 Chesil Bank	1	The parishes of Abbotsbury, Fleet, Kingston Russell, Langton Herring, Littlebredy, Litton Cheney, Long Bredy and Portesham	Map 2
13 Chickerell	3	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Chickerell	Map 2
14 Chideock & Symondsburly	1	The parishes of Chideock, Stanton St Gabriel and Symondsburly	Map 2
15 Dorchester East	2	Part of Dorchester parish (the proposed Dorchester East parish ward)	Large map
16 Dorchester North	2	Part of Dorchester parish (the proposed Dorchester North parish ward)	Large map
17 Dorchester South	2	Part of Dorchester parish (the proposed Dorchester South parish ward)	Large map
18 Dorchester West	2	Part of Dorchester parish (the proposed Dorchester West parish ward)	Large map
19 Frome Valley	1	The parishes of Cattistock, Chilfrome, Frampton, Frome St Quintin, Stratton and Sydling St Nicholas	Map 2

20	Halstock	1	The parishes of Batcombe, Corscombe, East Chelborough, Evershot, Halstock, Hermitage, Hilfield, Melbury Bubb, Melbury Osmond, Melbury Sampford and West Chelborough	Map 2
21	Loders	1	The parishes of Askerwell, Loders, North Poorton, Powerstock and part of Bothenhampton parish (Walditch parish ward)	Map 2
22	Lyme Regis	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Lyme Regis	Map 2
23	Maiden Newton	1	The parishes of Compton Vallance, Frome Vauchurch, Hooke, Maiden Newton, Rampisham, Toller Fratrum, Toller Porcorum, West Compton, Wraxall and Wynford Eagle	Map 2
24	Marshwood Vale	1	The parishes of Bettiscombe, Marshwood, Thorncombe and Whitchurch Canonicorum	Map 2
25	Netherbury	1	The parishes of Allington and Netherbury	Map 2
26	Owermoigne	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Crossways, Osmington, Owermoigne, Poxwell, Tincleton, Warmwell and Woodsford	Map 2
27	Piddle Valley	1	The parishes of Alton Pancras, Buckland Newton, Melcombe Horsey, Piddlehinton and Piddlethrethide	Map 2
28	Puddletown	1	The parishes of Athelhampton, Burleston, Cheselbourne, Dewlish, Puddletown and Tolpuddle	Map 2
29	Queen Thorne	1	The parishes of Bishop's Caundle, Castleton, Caundle Marsh, Goathill, Haydon, Nether Compton, Osborne, Over Compton, Poyntington, Purse Caundle, Sandford Orcas and Trent	Map 2
30	Sherborne East	2	Part of Sherborne parish (the proposed Sherborne East parish ward)	Map A2
31	Sherborne West	2	Part of Sherborne parish (the proposed Sherborne West parish ward)	Map A2
32	Winterborne St Martin	1	The parishes of Bincombe, Whitcombe, Winterborne Came, Winterborne Herringston, Winterborne Monkton Winterborne St Martin and Winterbourne Abbas, Winterbourne Steepleton	Map 2
33	Yetminster	1	The parishes of Chetnole, Ryme Intrinseca, Stockwood and Yetminster	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

2 Map 2 and Appendix A, including the large map in the back of the report, illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

3 We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Final Recommendations for West Dorset

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Beaminster	2	3,189	1,595	2	3,276	1,638	0
2 Bradford Abbas	1	1,568	1,568	1	1,590	1,590	-3
3 Bradpole	1	1,686	1,686	8	1,764	1,764	7
4 Bridport North	2	3,347	1,674	8	3,527	1,764	7
5 Bridport South & Bothenhampton	3	4,185	1,395	-10	4,602	1,534	-7
6 Broadmayne	1	1,552	1,552	0	1,576	1,576	-4
7 Broadwindsor	1	1,427	1,427	-8	1,495	1,495	-9
8 Burton Bradstock	1	1,606	1,606	3	1,657	1,657	1
9 Cam Vale	1	1,644	1,644	6	1,686	1,686	3
10 Charminster & Cerne Valley	2	3,017	1,509	-3	3,586	1,793	9
11 Charmouth	1	1,468	1,468	-6	1,495	1,495	-9
12 Chesil Bank	1	1,738	1,738	12	1,763	1,763	7
13 Chickerell	3	4,266	1,422	-9	4,417	1,472	-10
14 Chideock & Symondsburry	1	1,488	1,488	-4	1,504	1,504	-9
15 Dorchester East	2	3,369	1,685	8	3,503	1,752	7
16 Dorchester North	2	2,805	1,403	-10	3,389	1,695	3
17 Dorchester South	2	3,366	1,683	8	3,399	1,700	3
18 Dorchester West	2	3,267	1,634	5	3,487	1,744	6
19 Frome Valley	1	1,603	1,603	3	1,744	1,744	6
20 Halstock	1	1,478	1,478	-5	1,537	1,537	-6
21 Lodors	1	1,442	1,442	-7	1,509	1,509	-8
22 Lyme Regis	2	3,138	1,569	1	3,330	1,665	1
23 Maiden Newton	1	1,539	1,539	-1	1,631	1,631	-1
24 Marshwood Vale	1	1,422	1,422	-9	1,521	1,521	-7
25 Netherbury	1	1,504	1,504	-3	1,621	1,621	-1
26 Owermoigne	2	2,753	1,377	-12	2,978	1,489	-9
27 Piddle Valley	1	1,587	1,587	2	1,619	1,619	-2
28 Puddletown	1	1,724	1,724	11	1,799	1,799	9

29 Queen Thorne	1	1,647	1,647	6	1,689	1,689	3
30 Sherborne East	2	3,308	1,654	6	3,558	1,779	8
31 Sherborne West	2	3,503	1,752	13	3,537	1,769	8
32 Winterborne St Martin	1	1,667	1,667	7	1,701	1,701	3
33 Yetminster	1	1,372	1,372	-12	1,414	1,414	-14
Totals	48	74,675	-	-	78,904	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,556	-	-	1,644	-

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

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 district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of West Dorset. The six two-tier districts in Dorset have now been reviewed as part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England started by the LGCE in 1996. We have inherited that programme, which we currently expect to complete in 2004. The review of Purbeck district was completed in March 1997.

2 West Dorset's last review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which reported to the Secretary of State in February 1980 (Report no. 373). The electoral arrangements of Dorset County Council were last reviewed in June 1982 (Report no. 427). We expect to begin reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements towards the end of the year.

3 In making final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have had 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:
 - a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of West Dorset was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fourth edition, published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

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

7 The LGCE was not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as West Dorset is concerned, it started from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but was willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, the LGCE found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and argued that any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, it did 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.

8 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 27 March 2001, when the LGCE wrote to West Dorset District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Dorset County Council, Dorset Police Authority, the local authority associations, Dorset Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South West region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 16 July 2001. At Stage Two the LGCE considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared its draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 9 October 2001 with the publication of the LGCE's report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for West Dorset*, and ended on 3 December 2001. During this period comments were sought from the public and any other interested parties on the preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four the draft recommendations were reconsidered in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

10 The district of West Dorset is bounded in the west and north by the counties of Devon and Somerset, to the east by the districts of North Dorset and Purbeck, and to the south by Weymouth and Portland district and the English Channel. There are a number of small towns, including Dorchester, Bridport and Sherborne, though the district is mainly rural, with its population of 91,330 dispersed across an area of 108,281 hectares. It has a population density of 0.8 people per hectare. The district has many archaeological and historical sites, which, in addition to its coastline, make it an important area for tourism. The district contains 87 civil parishes and is entirely parished.

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

12 The electorate of the district is 74,675 (February 2001). The Council presently has 55 members who are elected from 38 wards. Five of the wards are each represented by three councillors, seven are each represented by two councillors and 26 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

13 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,358 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,435 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration since the last review, the number of electors per councillor in 17 of the 38 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, eight wards by more than 20 per cent and five wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Chickerell ward where each councillor represents 57 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in West Dorset

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Beaminster	2	3,174	1,587	17	3,261	1,631	14
2 Bothenhampton	1	1,829	1,829	35	1,888	1,888	32
3 Bradford Abbas	1	1,486	1,486	9	1,508	1,508	5
4 Bradpole	1	1,855	1,855	37	1,940	1,940	35
5 Bridport North	3	3,379	1,126	-17	3,552	1,184	-17
6 Bridport South	2	2,710	1,355	0	3,110	1,555	8
7 Broadmayne	1	1,567	1,567	15	1,591	1,591	11
8 Broadwindsor	1	1,177	1,177	-13	1,244	1,244	-13
9 Burton Bradstock	1	1,306	1,306	-4	1,332	1,332	-7
10 Caundle Vale	1	1,075	1,075	-21	1,092	1,092	-24
11 Cerne Valley	1	1,287	1,287	-5	1,421	1,421	-1
12 Charminster	1	1,463	1,463	8	1,981	1,981	38
13 Charmouth	1	1,468	1,468	8	1,495	1,495	4
14 Chesil Bank	1	1,458	1,458	7	1,475	1,475	3
15 Chickerell	2	4,266	2,133	57	4,417	2,209	54
16 Dorchester East	2	3,215	1,608	18	3,410	1,705	19
17 Dorchester North	2	2,685	1,343	-1	3,219	1,610	12
18 Dorchester South	3	3,970	1,323	-3	3,995	1,332	-7
19 Dorchester West	3	2,937	979	-28	3,154	1,051	-27
20 Frome Valley	1	1,270	1,270	-6	1,303	1,303	-9
21 Halstock	1	1,335	1,335	-2	1,394	1,394	-3
22 Holnest	1	1,309	1,309	-4	1,342	1,342	-6
23 Loders	1	1,133	1,133	-17	1,174	1,174	-18
24 Lyme Regis	3	3,138	1,046	-23	3,330	1,110	-23
25 Maiden Newton	1	1,252	1,252	-8	1,344	1,344	-6
26 Netherbury	1	1,471	1,471	8	1,513	1,513	5
27 Owermoigne	2	2,753	1,377	1	2,978	1,489	4
28 Piddle Valley	1	1,479	1,479	9	1,503	1,503	5
29 Puddletown	1	1,283	1,283	-6	1,342	1,342	-6
30 Queen Thorne	1	1,187	1,187	-13	1,221	1,221	-15

31	Sherborne East	2	2,906	1,453	7	3,156	1,578	10
32	Sherborne West	3	3,905	1,302	-4	3,939	1,313	-8
33	Symondsbury	1	1,389	1,389	2	1,489	1,489	4
34	Thorncombe	1	1,112	1,112	-18	1,196	1,196	-17
35	Tolpuddle	1	854	854	-37	895	895	-38
36	Whitechurch Canonicorum	1	1,139	1,139	-16	1,163	1,163	-19
37	Winterborne St Martin	1	1,999	1,999	47	2,041	2,041	42
38	Yetminster	1	1,454	1,454	7	1,496	1,496	4
	Totals	55	74,675	-	-	78,904	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,358	-	-	1,435	-

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

Note: 1 The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Tolpuddle ward were relatively over-represented by 37 per cent, while electors in Chickerell ward were relatively under-represented by 57 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 Please note that the existing Whitechurch Canonicorum ward is known locally as Whitchurch Canonicorum ward, after the parish within the ward. The correct name of the ward, as per SI Order, is Whitechurch Canonicorum, and the text in our Final recommendations reflects this.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

14 During Stage One the LGCE received 12 representations, including a district-wide scheme from West Dorset District Council, eight parish and town councils and three local residents. In the light of these representations and evidence available to it, the LGCE reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in its report *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for West Dorset*.

15 The LGCE's draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality. The LGCE noted that the District Council undertook considerable local consultation, and in the light of local support for a reduced council size, and given the reasons put forward by the District Council in favour of a 48-member scheme and the all-party support for the scheme, it considered that the District Council's scheme should be adopted as the basis for its draft recommendations. However, in order to secure a better reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and more identifiable boundaries, the LGCE proposed amendments in three areas: Bridport, Chickerell and Puddletown. It proposed that:

- West Dorset District Council should be served by 48 councillors, compared with the current 55, representing 33 wards, five fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 34 of the existing wards should be modified, while four wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be revised warding arrangements for the parishes of Bradpole, Bridport, Dorchester and Sherborne.

Draft Recommendation

West Dorset District Council should comprise 48 councillors, serving 33 wards. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

16 The LGCE's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 29 of the 33 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one ward, Thorncombe, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average by 2006.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

17 During the consultation on its draft recommendations report, the LGCE received 88 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of West Dorset District Council.

West Dorset District Council

18 The District Council accepted the draft recommendations for all but three areas. The Council reiterated its Stage One proposal to unite Bradpole and Bothenhampton parishes in a district ward, but joined only by a very small area of land, making the ward virtually detached. The Council also proposed an amendment to the Thorncombe and Broadwindsor wards, transferring the parish of Bettiscombe from the latter into the former. Finally, the District Council proposed renaming Holnest ward Cam Vale ward to better reflect the communities within the ward.

Parish Councils

19 We received 18 representations from parish and town councils in the area, one from the Chairman of a parish council, and one from a parish meeting. Bothenhampton & Walditch Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations for the Bothenhampton area and further proposed that Bothenhampton and Walditch be represented by one separate councillor at district level. Bradford Peverell Parish Council stated that it shared close links with the parish of Stratton and therefore wished to be represented by the same district councillor as Stratton. Bradpole Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations for the Bridport area and supported the District Council's proposals to unite Bradpole and Bothenhampton parishes in a district ward. Bridport Town Council opposed the draft recommendations for Bridport, and stated that it preferred no change to the existing electoral arrangements. Broadwindsor Group Parish Council stated that "the cost of it [the PER] could have been better spent elsewhere".

20 Chesil Bank Parish Council opposed the draft recommendation to transfer the parish of Fleet from Chesil Bank ward into Chickerell ward and further queried the District Council's electorate forecasts for the Chickerell area. Chideock Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations to transfer the parish into Symondsbury ward, stating that it associates more with Whitchurch Canonicorum and Charmouth to the west. It also proposed transferring the West Cliff area of Symondsbury into Bridport South ward and renaming Symondsbury ward Chideock & Symondsbury ward, and Thorncombe ward Vale of Marshwood ward.

21 The Comptons, Toller & Wynford Parish Council supported the draft recommendations for Winterborne St Martin ward and stated that to transfer the parish of Compton Valence from Winterborne St Martin ward into Maiden Newton ward "seems sensible". Dorchester Town Council supported the draft recommendations for the warding arrangements in Dorchester, however it requested that the town council's membership be increased to 20 councillors, on the basis of an increased workload devolved from the local authority. Frampton Parish Council supported the draft recommendations. Frome Valley Parish Council supported the draft recommendations for Frome ward. Maiden Newton Parish Council stated that not enough attention had been paid to the concept of 'evening-out' representation. It also stated that it is difficult to represent electors who are "widely scattered" and that "little or no consideration seems to have been given to school catchment areas... or to the geographical position of the largest community in relation to other included areas".

22 Melbury Osmond Parish Council opposed the draft recommendation to transfer the parish from Halstock ward to Yetminster ward. Melcombe Horsey Parish Meeting stated its wish to “remain in the Cheselbourne/Puddletown area” and that the parish has no common links with the Piddle Valley. Minterne Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations to transfer the parish into Halstock ward, and stated its wish to remain in the Cerne Valley ward. Similarly, the Chairman of Minterne Magna Parish Council expressed opposition to the draft recommendation to transfer the parish of Minterne Magna from Cerne Valley ward to Halstock ward and stated that the parish council would “prefer to remain warded with the Cerne Valley”.

23 Osmington Parish Council supported the draft recommendations for Owermoigne ward. Powerstock & North Poorton Parish Council opposed the draft recommendation to include Walditch parish ward of Bothenhampton parish in Loders ward. Winterbourne Abbas & Winterbourne Steepleton Parish Council supported the draft recommendation for Winterborne St Martin ward. Winterborne Farringdon Parish Council also supported the draft recommendations for this ward.

Other Representations

24 A further 67 representations were received in response to the LGCE’s draft recommendations, from local organisations, councillors and residents. Councillor Coatsworth opposed the draft recommendations for the Bradpole/Bridport/Bothenhampton area and proposed adopting the District Council’s Stage One submission, combining Bradpole and Bothenhampton in a district ward. Gore Cross Residents’ Society and a further three residents opposed the draft recommendations for Bridport, preferring the District Council’s scheme. A further 32 representations were received from residents in the Bridport/Bradpole/Bothenhampton area, opposing the draft recommendations but making no further comments. In addition, a petition was received from residents of Coneygar Close in the proposed Bradpole Claremont parish ward stating their desire to be with the remainder of Bradpole parish for district council purposes. Bothenhampton Residents Association opposed being linked with Bridport South ward, stating it had “no wish to be a parasitic appendage to Bridport”. The LGCE received a further eight representations which had been forwarded by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. All eight submissions opposed the draft recommendations for the Bridport/Bradpole/Bothenhampton area but offered no alternative. West Bay Forum proposed transferring the West Cliff Estate from Symondsburry ward into Bridport South ward. Two representations were received in support of the draft recommendations for the Bridport/Bradpole/Bothenhampton area, from Councillor Draper and a local resident. Councillor Draper also proposed including the Cherrytree, Meadfields, Pine View and West Bay West Walks areas in Bridport for district council electoral purposes.

25 Councillor Gardner supported the draft recommendation to transfer the parish of Fleet from Chesil Bank ward to Chickerell ward. However, a local resident opposed this proposal, preferring to retain Fleet in Chickerell ward. Two parish councillors opposed the draft recommendation to transfer Minterne Magna parish from Cerne Valley ward into Halstock ward. Councillor Frost opposed the draft recommendation to transfer Melbury Osmond from Halstock ward into Yetminster ward, preferring the parish to remain in Halstock ward. Ilchester Estates and seven local residents all agreed with Councillor Frost, proposing the retention of Melbury Osmond parish in Halstock ward. A local resident of Whitchurch Canonicorum opposed the draft recommendation to link the parish with Thorncombe. He further stated that, should the two be in the same ward, the ward should be named Marshwood Vale ward. A local resident of Sherborne supported the draft recommendations for the whole district, however he proposed that “all wards

with more than one councillor should elect all councillors at one time and with each elector only having one vote”.

26 One alternative district-wide scheme was received during Stage Three, from District and County Councillor Robin Legg, based on a 44-member council. Councillor Legg stated that, under this council size, his scheme would “show a smaller variation from the councillor:elector ratio than the 48 member proposal” and “allow for growth in... the towns of Dorchester, Bridport and Sherborne”. The LGCE received a further representation from Councillor Howard Thomas in support of Councillor Legg’s alternative scheme, stating that it had “great merit”.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

27 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for West Dorset is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, 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; 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 ward of the district or borough”.

28 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 also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

29 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. 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.

30 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, 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 community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate Forecasts

31 Since 1975 there has been a 28 per cent increase in the electorate of West Dorset district. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5 per cent from 74,675 to 78,904 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects the highest rate of growth to be in the towns of Dorchester and Bridport, and in the Charminster ward. 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. Having accepted that this is an inexact science, and having considered the forecast electorates, the LGCE stated in its draft recommendations report that it was satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

32 The LGCE received one representation regarding Council’s electorate forecasts during Stage Three. As mentioned above, Chesil Bank Parish Council queried the District Council’s forecasts for Chickerell, stating that they were “both unrealistic and inaccurate”. Accordingly, these forecasts were verified with the District Council, who has confirmed its Stage One electorate projections as correct, and we remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates currently available.

Council Size

33 As already explained, the LGCE started its review by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although it was willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

34 West Dorset District Council currently has 55 members. At Stage One, the District Council proposed a council of 48 members representing one three-member ward, 13 two-member wards and 19 single-member wards. The Council originally consulted the parishes on three schemes, one with 55, one with 47 and one with 40 members. The majority of those who responded indicated a preference for a reduction in council size. The Council stated that it had already begun to think about reducing the number of members as a result of “some internal management difficulties” due to the existing number of councillors. It considered that a reduction would assist with the introduction of the new committee structure following the introduction of the Local Government Act 2000. As a consequence, it gave consideration to the two options which would reduce the council size. As it was considered that the 40-member option would necessitate too drastic a reduction, and be unlikely to receive cross-party support, the 47-member option was considered the more viable, and a decision was taken to develop a scheme based on a council size of 46, 47 or 48 members. In considering the options “a council size of 48 was found to work best within the constraints of the review and achieved better electoral equality than the others”, and the District Council therefore proposed a council size of 48.

35 The LGCE received no schemes based on a different council size, although a local resident proposed that each councillor should represent 1,250 electors, giving a council size of around 60, while Thorncombe and Winterborne Farringdon parish councils supported the 40-member option. Given local support for a reduction in council size, and having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, the LGCE concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 48 members.

36 During Stage Three the LGCE received three representations regarding council size. As previously mentioned, a district and county councillor submitted a new scheme based on a 44-member council, contending that this would facilitate better electoral equality and a better balance of representation between the urban and rural areas, and provided ward details to substantiate his argument. Another district councillor supported his revised scheme, commenting on how it better reflected communities. However, a local parish councillor contended that there was no justification for reducing the council size so significantly, contending that “50 or 51 councillors would have kept the electorate per councillor down to a manageable 1,500”. As previously mentioned, the District Council broadly supported the draft recommendations but made no specific comments regarding council size.

37 We note the submission received from Councillor Legg proposing a 44-member council, however we are unable to adopt his proposal. During Stage Three the LGCE is consulting on its draft recommendations, rather than inviting completely new schemes from interested parties. Whilst we also note the support received for Councillor Legg’s submission from a second district councillor, given the general local support for the draft recommendation of a 48-member council from the District Council and a number of other interested parties, we cannot accept Councillor Legg’s submission, particularly as it did not contain any analysis of how a reduction in the council’s size from 55 to 44 would impact on the operation of West Dorset District Council, nor had there been any wider local consultation on a significantly different scheme.

38 Given the broad support for the proposed council size of 48 at Stage Three and having looked at the size, distribution and geography of the district, the Boundary Committee is content to confirm the LGCE's draft recommendation of a 48-member council as final.

Parish Administrative Boundaries

39 During the course of this review, a number of parish boundary anomalies have been identified. We have no power to recommend changes to administrative boundaries as part of this PER. Under the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, district councils may undertake reviews of the parish arrangements in their areas and make recommendations to the Secretary of State. When we have completed our PER of West Dorset, we believe that there would be considerable benefit in West Dorset District Council conducting such a review, particularly in the Bridport area.

Electoral Arrangements

40 The LGCE carefully considered all representations it received during Stage One. It decided to broadly base its draft recommendations on the proposals put forward by West Dorset District Council. The LGCE noted that the District Council undertook considerable local consultation, and in the light of local support for a reduced council size, and given the reasons put forward by the District Council in favour of a 48-member scheme and the all-party support for the scheme, it considered that the District Council's scheme should be adopted as the basis for the draft recommendations. However, in order to secure a better reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and more identifiable boundaries, the LGCE proposed amendments in three areas: Bridport, Chickerell and Puddletown.

41 In response to the draft recommendations report, the LGCE received 88 representations at Stage Three. The District Council supported the majority of the LGCE's draft recommendations, however it opposed the draft recommendations for the Bridport/Bradpole/Bothenhampton area and proposed a minor amendment to Thorncombe and Broadwindsor wards. The Council further proposed renaming one ward to better reflect the communities within the ward.

42 As previously mentioned, the majority of representations were concerned with one specific area. The LGCE received 54 representations from parish councils, residents' associations, councillors and residents in the Bridport/Bradpole/Bothenhampton area, in response to its draft recommendations for the area. The majority came from residents in the older, more established Bradpole and Bothenhampton parishes, who were opposed to being linked with the newer and more urban Bridport. Of these, some 42 stated their opposition to the draft recommendations, either preferring the status quo or offering no alternative. There was some confusion amongst the residents of the three parishes as to the implications of the draft recommendations. Many were concerned that the council tax would increase or that they would be transferred into a new parish.

43 A local resident of Bridport, who supported the draft recommendations, sent the LGCE a copy of a letter from a district councillor, which had been circulated to houses in the proposed Claremont parish ward of Bradpole parish (which would be in a district ward with Bridport North parish ward under the draft recommendations). The letter contained a number of inaccuracies and incorrectly stated that the LGCE was "working towards reducing the number of councillors on District Councils" and that "the average number per councillor is considered to be about 1 councillor for about 1500 people". The author also commented to the effect that residents' council tax would be significantly increased as a consequence of our draft recommendations, and that the "sheer weight of objections is an important consideration" when

the LGCE considers its proposals. Consequentially a large number of representations were received, simply stating opposition to the draft recommendations on the basis of a potential rise in council tax.

44 We have noted all the comments regarding the proposals for the Bridport area, however we have not been persuaded to move away from the draft recommendations in this area. As outlined in the LGCE's *Guidance*, the starting point of any review is the establishment of council size, and from that the elector:councillor ratio is determined. Neither the LGCE nor the Boundary Committee start from an established ratio and then determine council size. Similarly, we are not "working towards reducing the number of councillors on District Councils". As detailed in the *Guidance* (Fourth Edition, December 2000), "We start from the general assumption that the existing number of councillors elected to serve on a council already secures effective and convenient local government. We consider carefully arguments as to why this might not be the case". Our preference, and that of the LGCE previously, is to build on locally derived schemes and the LGCE has put forward proposals not only for decreases, but for increases and the retention of the existing council size.

45 Furthermore, our proposals will not result in increases in council tax. While parts of two different parishes may be contained in the same district ward, the residents of each different parish ward will remain part of their parish and will continue to pay their parish precept to that parish.

46 The draft recommendations have been reviewed in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Charmouth, Lyme Regis, Thorncombe and Whitechurch Canonicorum wards;
- (b) Beaminster, Broadwindsor, Netherbury and Symondsburys wards;
- (c) Bothenhampton, Bradpole, Bridport North and Bridport South wards;
- (d) Burton Bradstock, Halstock, Lodders and Maiden Newton wards;
- (e) Broadmayne, Chesil Bank, Chickerell and Winterborne St Martin wards;
- (f) Dorchester East, Dorchester North, Dorchester South and Dorchester West wards;
- (g) Owermoigne, Piddle Valley, Puddletown and Tolpuddle wards;
- (h) Cerne Valley, Charminster, Frome Valley and Yetminster wards;
- (i) Bradford Abbas, Caundle Vale, Holnest and Queen Thorne wards;
- (j) Sherborne East and Sherborne West wards.

47 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Charmouth, Lyme Regis, Thorncombe and Whitechurch Canonicorum wards

48 These wards are situated on the western edge of the district, with all but Thorncombe ward bordering the English Channel. Lyme Regis is represented by three members, while the others are single-member wards. The number of electors per councillor is 8 per cent above the district average (4 per cent above by 2006) in Charmouth ward, which comprises the parishes of Catherston Leweston, Charmouth and Wootton Fitzpaine; 23 per cent below (unchanged by 2006) in Lyme Regis ward, which comprises the town of Lyme Regis; 18 per cent below (17 per cent below by 2006) in Thorncombe ward, which comprises the parishes of Bettiscombe, Marshwood, Pilsdon, Stoke Abbott and Thorncombe and 16 per cent below (19 per cent below

by 2006) in Whitechurch Canonorum ward, which comprises the parishes of Chideock, Stanton St Gabriel and Whitchurch Canonorum.

49 At Stage One the District Council proposed making no changes to the boundaries of Charmouth and Lyme Regis wards, but proposed a reduction in the number of councillors in Lyme Regis ward from three to two, due to the ward being significantly over-represented. The Council proposed that the parishes of Bettiscombe, Pilsdon and Stoke Abbott should be transferred from Thorncombe ward, which is also significantly over-represented, to Broadwindsor ward, and that the parish of Whitchurch Canonorum should be transferred to Thorncombe ward from Whitechurch Canonorum ward. The parishes of Stanton St Gabriel and Chideock would be transferred into a revised Symondsburry ward, as discussed later. Thus the revised Thorncombe ward would comprise the parishes of Thorncombe, Marshwood and Whitchurch Canonorum, and Whitechurch Canonorum ward would cease to exist. Thorncombe Parish Council expressed its support for the District Council's 40-member consultation scheme, as, in its opinion, it "would provide a more natural boundary with its neighbouring parishes in Broadwindsor, Blackdown and Drimpton".

50 After giving careful consideration to the representations received during Stage One, and noting that the Council's proposals would provide significant improvements to electoral equality while, in its view, providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities, the LGCE was content to adopt the District Council's proposed wards of Charmouth, Lyme Regis and Thorncombe as part of its draft recommendations.

51 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 6 per cent below the district average in Charmouth ward (9 per cent below by 2006), 1 per cent above in Lyme Regis ward (unchanged by 2006) and 12 per cent below in Thorncombe ward (11 per cent below by 2006).

52 At Stage Three, three representations were received in response to the draft recommendations for this area. The District Council proposed a minor amendment, transferring the parish of Bettiscombe from Broadwindsor ward into Thorncombe ward, stating that this would "help reinforce existing links with the parish of parish of Marshwood, and would also meet more closely the Commission's criteria for electoral equality". A local resident of Whitchurch Canonorum opposed the recommendation to link the parish with Thorncombe parish, in the Thorncombe ward. However, the resident further proposed that the Thorncombe ward be renamed Marshwood Vale ward to better reflect local community identity. Similarly, Chideock Parish Council stated that renaming Thorncombe ward Vale of Marshwood ward would "better reflect the identity of the communities in these wards, and their rural dispersed nature".

53 We have carefully considered the representations received during Stage Three. We note the District Council's proposal to transfer the parish of Bettiscombe from Broadwindsor ward into Thorncombe ward, and agree that this would better reflect the communities whilst providing an improved level of electoral equality. Similarly, we note the local support for renaming Thorncombe ward to give a better reflection of the dispersed nature of the rural communities within the ward. We therefore propose renaming Thorncombe ward Marshwood Vale ward, which would comprise the parishes of Bettiscombe, Marshwood, Thorncombe and Whitchurch Canonorum. Given the District Council's agreement with the remainder of the wards in this area, and the absence of any other representations, we are content to confirm the LGCE's draft recommendations as final for Charmouth and Lyme Regis wards.

54 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 6 per cent below the district average in Charmouth ward (9 per cent below by 2006), 1 per cent above in Lyme Regis ward (unchanged by 2006) and 9 per cent below in Marshwood Vale ward (7 per cent below by 2006). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Beaminster, Broadwindsor, Netherbury and Symondsburys wards

55 These wards are situated in the west of the district. Beaminster is represented by two members, while the others are single-member wards. The number of electors per councillor is 17 per cent above the district average (14 per cent above by 2006) in Beaminster ward, which comprises the parishes of Beaminster, Chedington, Mosterton and South Perrott; 13 per cent below (unchanged by 2006) in Broadwindsor ward, which comprises the parishes of Broadwindsor, Burstock and Seaborough; 8 per cent above (5 per cent above by 2006) in Netherbury ward, which comprises the parishes of Hooke, Mapperton, Netherbury, North Poorton and Powerstock, and 2 per cent above (4 per cent above by 2006) in Symondsburys ward, which comprises the parishes of Allington and Symondsburys.

56 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging the under-represented Beaminster ward by including the parish of Mapperton from Netherbury ward. In order to improve electoral equality in Netherbury ward and this part of the district generally, the Council proposed significant changes to Netherbury ward. In addition to transferring the parish of Mapperton to Beaminster ward, the Council proposed transferring the parish of Hooke to Maiden Newton ward and the parishes of North Poorton and Powerstock to Loders ward. Furthermore, it proposed transferring the parish of Allington to Netherbury ward from Symondsburys ward. The Council proposed enlarging the over-represented Broadwindsor ward by transferring to it the parishes of Bettiscombe, Pilsdon and Stoke Abbott from the existing Thorncombe ward, as described earlier. The Council proposed changing the boundaries of Symondsburys ward by transferring the parish of Allington to Netherbury ward, and transferring the parishes of Staunton St Gabriel and Chideock from the existing Whitechurch Canonorum ward to Symondsburys ward. Chideock Parish Council expressed support for the existing arrangements and stated that it had no desire to be included in a district ward with Symondsburys parish.

57 The LGCE gave careful consideration to all representations received for this area. It noted that the Council's proposals would provide significant improvements to electoral equality while providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. The LGCE noted the wishes of Chideock Parish Council, but could not concur with them in the interest of electoral equality in this part of the district. The LGCE therefore adopted the District Council's proposed two-member ward of Beaminster, and the single-member wards of Broadwindsor, Netherbury and Symondsburys as part of the draft recommendations.

58 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average (equal to the average by 2006) in Beaminster ward, which would comprise the parishes of Beaminster, Chedington, Mapperton, Mosterton and South Perrott, 4 per cent below (5 per cent below by 2006) in Broadwindsor ward, which would comprise the parishes of Bettiscombe, Broadwindsor, Burstock, Pilsdon, Seaborough and Stoke Abbott, 3 per cent below (1 per cent below by 2006) in Netherbury ward, which would comprise the parishes of Allington and Netherbury, and 4 per cent below (9 per cent below by 2006) in Symondsburys ward, which would comprise the parishes of Chideock, Staunton St Gabriel and Symondsburys.

59 Two representations were received regarding this area during Stage Three. As previously mentioned, the District Council proposed transferring Bettiscombe parish from Thorncombe ward into Broadwindsor ward, which we are content to adopt as part of our final recommendations. Chideock Parish Council opposed being linked to the parish of Symondsbury, stating that it associated more with the parish of Whitchurch Canonorum to the west. However, the parish council proposed that if it is to remain in Symondsbury ward, that the ward be renamed Chideock & Symondsbury ward, which “suggests a cohesion of identity and interest rather than a domination of one part over another”.

60 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received, and intend adopting the District Council’s proposed Broadwindsor ward, comprising the parishes of Broadwindsor, Burstock, Pilsdon, Seaborough and Stoke Abbott. We note Chideock Parish Council’s opposition to the draft recommendation for Symondsbury ward, however, as previously mentioned, linking the parish with Whitchurch Canonorum parish would lead to an unacceptable level of electoral inequality in both wards of over 25 per cent. However, we accept Chideock Parish Council’s proposals to rename Symondsbury ward Chideock & Symondsbury ward, in order to better reflect the two main communities within the ward, and propose adopting this as part of our final recommendations. Given the District Council’s acceptance of the draft recommendations for the remainder of this area, and the lack of alternative representations received, we are content to confirm the LGCE’s draft recommendations as final for Beaminster and Netherbury wards.

61 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Beaminster, Broadwindsor, Chideock & Symondsbury and Netherbury wards would be 2 per cent above, 8 per cent below, 4 per cent below and 3 per cent below the district average initially (equal to, 9 per cent below, 9 per cent below and 1 per cent below the district average by 2006). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Bothenhampton, Bradpole, Bridport North and Bridport South wards

62 The three-member Bridport North and two-member Bridport South wards are urban wards, while the adjoining single-member wards of Bradpole and Bothenhampton are situated to the north and east of Bridport. The number of electors per councillor is 35 per cent above the district average in Bothenhampton ward (32 per cent above by 2006), 37 per cent above in Bradpole ward (35 per cent above by 2006), 17 per cent below in Bridport North ward (unchanged by 2006) and equal to the average in Bridport South ward (8 per cent above by 2006).

63 At Stage One the District Council proposed significant changes in this part of the district. It proposed moving the boundary between Bridport North and Bridport South wards to include the area of West Allington, currently in Bridport North ward, in Bridport South ward in order to secure improved levels of electoral equality. It argued that this area “is relatively self-contained and that such a transfer would not have any detrimental effect on existing local connections”. It also proposed that the number of councillors representing Bridport North ward should be reduced from three to two. The Council further proposed forming a new two-member ward comprising the parish of Bradpole and the Bothenhampton parish ward of Bothenhampton parish, pointing out that both Bothenhampton and Bradpole wards are currently significantly under-represented and that this situation is likely to worsen under the existing arrangements. It argued that Bradpole parish and Bothenhampton parish ward are similar in that they both contain large areas of overspill development from Bridport, with the majority of the electorate being within urban areas surrounded by sparsely populated rural areas. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average in Bradpole &

Bothenhampton ward (2 per cent below by 2006), 2 per cent above in Bridport North ward (unchanged by 2006) and 6 per cent below in Bridport South ward (1 per cent above by 2006).

64 Having considered the proposals received at Stage One, the LGCE was concerned, in particular, at the proposed Bradpole & Bothenhampton ward. It noted that, whilst there are some similarities between the two constituent parts of the ward, under the District Council's proposal the two areas would be linked only by a very slim piece of land, virtually making the ward a detached ward. In the LGCE's *Guidance* it stated that "the use of detached wards, other than to recognise the particular circumstances of, for example, offshore islands, is undesirable" as the LGCE was of the view that "they lend themselves to the creation of electoral areas which lack community identity". As a consequence the LGCE proposed modifying the District Council's proposals in this area. In the interests of community identity and to secure better boundaries in the area generally, the LGCE proposed retaining the majority of Bradpole ward as a single-member ward and creating a new three-member ward of Bridport South & Bothenhampton, comprising Bridport South ward and Bothenhampton parish ward. It proposed adopting the Council's proposed two-member Bridport North ward, including the boundary change between Bridport North and Bridport South wards. However, it further proposed transferring to Bridport North ward an area of urban overspill from Bradpole ward stretching from Dodham's Lane/Gipsy Lane in the north to Coneygar Road in the south.

65 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent above the district average in Bradpole ward (7 per cent above by 2006), 8 per cent above in Bridport North ward (7 per cent above by 2006) and 10 per cent below in Bridport South & Bothenhampton ward (7 per cent below by 2006).

66 At Stage Three a significant number of representations were received opposing the draft recommendations for these wards, as previously mentioned. The District Council reiterated its Stage One proposal to link Bothenhampton and Bradpole parishes in a district ward, joined only by a slim piece of land, making the ward virtually detached. Forty-two residents opposed the draft recommendations and either offered no alternative or preferred retaining the current warding arrangements. Bridport Town Council opposed the draft recommendations, preferring to retain the current warding arrangements. We received seven further representations for this area which opposed the draft recommendations and supported the District Council's proposals to create a district ward consisting of Bradpole and Bothenhampton parishes, from Bradpole and Bothenhampton & Walditch parish councils, Gore Cross Residents Society, a district councillor and three residents. A district councillor for Bridport North ward supported our draft recommendations for the area but further argued that the small areas of urban overspill in the surrounding Symondsbury, Allington and Netherbury parishes should also be included with Bridport for district warding purposes. West Bay Forum argued that West Cliff Estate shares no links with the village of Symondsbury, and consequentially should be in Bridport South district ward with the remainder of the West Bay resort. Powerstock & North Poorton Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations to include the Walditch parish ward of Bothenhampton parish in the Lodgers ward.

67 We have carefully considered all the representations received during Stage Three. We note the significant opposition to the draft recommendations for the Bridport/Bradpole/Bothenhampton area. However, we also note that much of the opposition is based upon incorrect information distributed by a district councillor, as previously mentioned. We also note that the District Council has reiterated its Stage One proposal for an effectively detached ward and that no other viable alternative was received for the warding arrangements in this area. We recognise that there are areas of overspill to the west of Bridport and Bradpole, in the parishes of

Symondsburry and Allington, which more naturally look to Bridport for their services. However, we are unable to transfer these areas into Bridport for district warding purposes, as this would lead to unacceptable levels of electoral inequality in the western part of the district. Similarly, we note the opposition to placing Walditch parish ward of Bothenhampton parish in Loders district ward. However, retaining the entirety of Bothenhampton parish in one district ward would lead to unacceptable levels of electoral equality in the surrounding wards, of over 20 per cent. Given that we have received no viable alternative proposals for the warding arrangements of Bridport, Bradpole and Bothenhampton parishes and having re-examined the warding arrangements for the area in the light of the Stage Three responses, we propose confirming the LGCE's draft recommendations as final for Bradpole, Bridport North and Bridport South & Bothenhampton wards.

68 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be the same as under the LGCE's draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Burton Bradstock, Halstock, Loders and Maiden Newton wards

69 These single-member rural wards run north-south in the rural areas to the east and north-east of Bridport. The number of electors per councillor is 4 per cent below the district average (7 per cent below by 2006) in Burton Bradstock, which comprises the parishes of Burton Bradstock, Puncknowle and Swyre; 2 per cent below (3 per cent below by 2006) in Halstock ward, which comprises the parishes of Corscombe, East Chelborough, Evershot, Halstock, Melbury Osmond, Melbury Sampford, Rampisham, West Chelborough and Wraxall; 17 per cent below (18 per cent below by 2006) in Loders ward, which comprises the parishes of Askerswell, Chilcombe, Litton Cheney, Loders and Shipton Gorge, and 8 per cent below (6 per cent below by 2006) in Maiden Newton ward, which comprises the parishes of Frome Vauchurch, Maiden Newton, Toller Fratrum, Toller Porcorum, West Compton and Wynford Eagle.

70 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging Burton Bradstock ward by transferring to it the parishes of Chilcombe and Shipton Gorge from Loders ward. It also proposed transferring the parish of Litton Cheney from Loders ward to Chesil Bank ward, and enlarging the resultant Loders ward by including the parishes of North Poorton and Powerstock from Netherbury ward and the parish ward of Walditch from Bothenhampton parish. It further proposed that Halstock ward should gain the parishes of Melbury Bubb, Batcombe, Hilfield and Hermitage from Holnest ward and the parish of Minterne Magna from Cerne Valley ward. In addition it proposed transferring the parishes of Rampisham and Wraxall from Halstock ward to Maiden Newton ward and the parish of Melbury Osmond to Yetminster ward. Finally the Council proposed enlarging Maiden Newton ward by including the parishes of Compton Valence (from Winterborne St Martin ward), Rampisham and Wraxall (from Halstock ward) and Hooke (from Netherbury ward). The Council argued that these changes were necessary in order to improve the levels of electoral equality in this area of the district. The LGCE received one other representation for this area during Stage One, from Shipton Gorge Parish Council. It expressed satisfaction with the existing arrangements.

71 The LGCE gave careful consideration to all the representations received for this area. It noted that the Council's proposals would provide significant improvements to electoral equality while providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. It therefore adopted the proposed wards of Burton Bradstock, Halstock, Loders and Maiden Newton as part of the draft recommendations.

72 Under the draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in these single-member wards would be 3 per cent above the district average (1 per cent above by 2006) in Burton Bradstock ward, which would comprise the parishes of Burton Bradstock, Chilcombe, Puncknowle, Shipton Gorge and Swyre, 3 per cent below (5 per cent below by 2006) in Halstock ward, which would comprise the parishes of Batcombe, Corscombe, East Chelborough, Evershot, Halstock, Hermitage, Hilfield, Melbury Bubb, Melbury Sampford, Minterne Magna and West Chelborough, 7 per cent below (8 per cent below by 2006) in Loders ward, which would comprise the parishes of Askerswell, Loders, North Poorton, Powerstock and the Walditch parish ward of Bothenhampton parish and 1 per cent below (unchanged by 2006) in Maiden Newton ward, which would comprise the parishes of Compton Vallance, Frome Vauchurch, Hooke, Maiden Newton, Rampisham, Toller Fratrum, Toller Porcorum, West Compton, Wraxall and Wynford Eagle.

73 Fourteen representations were received regarding these wards during Stage Three. Ten representations were received regarding the parish of Melbury Osmond, which had been transferred to Yetminster ward from Halstock ward under the draft recommendations. All the representations argued that there are significant and historic links between the parish of Melbury Osmond and its neighbouring parishes of Melbury Sampford, Evershot and Halstock, all of which are in Halstock ward. The submissions included representations from Ilchester Estates, which owns a large part of the area in which the parishes are located, Melbury Osmond Parish Council, the local district councillor and seven local residents. The LGCE also received four submissions regarding the parish of Minterne Magna, including representations from Minterne Parish Council, the Chairman of Minterne Magna Parish Council and two parish councillors. All the representations opposed the draft recommendation to transfer the parish of Minterne Magna from Cerne Valley to a revised Halstock ward. The submissions argued that Minterne Magna shares many historic, geographic and community links with those parishes in Cerne Valley, and shares no such links with the parishes to the west, in Halstock ward.

74 We have carefully considered all representations received during Stage Three. We note the opposition to the draft recommendation to transfer Melbury Osmond from the existing Halstock ward into Yetminster ward. Having carefully examined the arguments, we are content to accept those representations which state that Melbury Osmond has strong historic, geographic and community links with the parishes in Halstock ward, and we propose retaining it in Halstock ward as part of our final recommendations. Similarly, we acknowledge the opposition to the removal of Minterne Magna parish from Cerne Valley ward into Halstock ward. We agree that the Cerne Valley parishes share similar community concerns with Minterne Magna parish and therefore propose retaining the parish in our revised Charminster & Cerne Valley ward, as outlined below.

75 As a consequence of transferring Melbury Osmond from Yetminster ward into Halstock ward, the number of electors per councillor in Yetminster ward deteriorates to 12 per cent below the district average initially (14 per cent below by 2006). We are content to recommend this ward despite its worse level of electoral equality, as the only option which would achieve better electoral equality would involve separating Beer Hackett parish from Thornford parish (its sister parish in the Thornhackett Group and Bradford Abbas ward) and transferring it into Yetminster ward which, in our view, would not best represent the communities in this area. Although the levels of electoral equality deteriorates slightly under our final recommendations, we believe that this is justified by the better reflection of local community identities achieved regarding the parishes of Melbury Osmond and Minterne Magna.

76 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Burton Bradstock, Halstock, Loders and Maiden Newton wards would be 3 per cent above, 5 per cent below, 7 per cent below and 1 per cent below the district average initially (1 per cent above, 6 per cent below, 8 per cent below and 1 per cent below by 2006). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Broadmayne, Chesil Bank, Chickerell and Winterborne St Martin wards

77 These wards are situated in the south of the district, to the west and north of the Borough of Weymouth & Portland. The more urban Chickerell ward is represented by two members, while the others, which are predominantly rural, are single-member wards. The number of electors per councillor is 15 per cent above the district average (11 per cent above by 2006) in Broadmayne ward, which comprises the parishes of Broadmayne, West Knighton, West Stafford and Whitcombe; 7 per cent above (3 per cent above by 2006) in Chesil Bank ward, which comprises the parishes of Abbotsbury, Fleet, Kingston Russell, Langton Herring, Littlebredy, Long Bredy and Portesham; 57 per cent above (54 per cent above by 2006) in Chickerell ward, which comprises the parish of Chickerell, and 47 per cent above (42 per cent above by 2006) in Winterborne St Martin ward, which comprises the parishes of Bincombe, Bradford Peverell, Compton Valence, Winterborne Came, Winterborne Herringston, Winterborne Monkton, Winterborne St Martin, Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton.

78 At Stage One the District Council proposed transferring Litton Cheney parish to Chesil Bank ward from Loders ward. It proposed transferring the parish of Whitcombe from Broadmayne ward to Winterborne St Martin ward and the parishes of Compton Valence and Bincombe from Winterborne St Martin ward to Maiden Newton ward and Chickerell ward respectively. It also proposed further enlarging Chickerell ward by transferring to it the parish of Fleet from Chesil Bank ward. Under these proposals the enlarged Chickerell ward would become a three-member ward, whereas the others would remain single-member wards. Although the Council recognised that adding Bincombe to Chickerell ward would create a detached ward, it was of the opinion that the two parishes “have common factors, not least that they both contain large areas of relatively recent development which is (sic) peripheral to the town of Weymouth and which has (sic) occurred as a result of the expansion of Weymouth”. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the district average in Broadmayne ward (4 per cent below by 2006), 6 per cent above in Chesil Bank ward (2 per cent above by 2006), 2 per cent above in Chickerell ward (equal to the average by 2006) and 1 per cent below in Winterborne St Martin ward (4 per cent below by 2006).

79 Chesil Bank Parish Council opposed the District Council’s proposals on the grounds that “representation of our administrative area will be undertaken by two different district council ward members”. It expressed concern that the needs of Fleet’s rural community would be “seriously disenfranchised” by becoming part of Chickerell, a “Weymouth suburb”. This view was also expressed by a resident who thought that the District Council’s proposals “could be detrimental to the special character of the area and its inhabitants and, therefore, ultimately, would be against the interests of West Dorset as a whole”. Winterborne Farringdon Parish Council felt that Winterborne St Martin district ward should “be made up of all rural areas”.

80 The LGCE gave careful consideration to all representations received for this area. Having considered the Council’s scheme, the LGCE was concerned at the proposal to create a detached ward by transferring Bincombe parish, to the north-east of Weymouth, to Chickerell ward, to the west of Weymouth. As mentioned previously, the LGCE did not believe that such a detached ward would provide for the best reflection of local communities, nor provide for effective and

convenient local government. It did not, therefore, adopt the District Council's proposals for this ward. The LGCE further modified the District Council's proposals in this area. Having visited the area, officers from the LGCE noted that Bincombe is a predominantly rural parish, with a small concentration of urban overspill from Weymouth in its south-west corner. The LGCE proposed that, in terms of community identity, it was more appropriate for the whole parish of Bincombe to remain part of Winterborne St Martin ward, and it therefore proposed this as part of the draft recommendations. Furthermore, in order to secure reasonable electoral equality, the LGCE proposed transferring the parish of Bradford Peverell from Winterborne St Martin ward to the proposed ward of Charminster & Cerne Valley. The LGCE noted the opposition expressed to the District Council's proposal to transfer the parish of Fleet from Chesil Bank ward to Chickerell ward, but was unable to identify an alternative arrangement which would give an equally acceptable level of electoral equality, and therefore adopted the proposal as part of the draft recommendations.

81 Under the draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the district average (4 per cent below by 2006) in Broadmayne ward, which would comprise the parishes of Broadmayne, West Knighton and West Stafford, 6 per cent above (2 per cent above by 2006) in Chesil Bank ward, which would comprise the parishes of Abbotsbury, Kingston Russell, Langton Herring, Littlebredy, Litton Cheney, Long Bredy and Portesham, 7 per cent below (9 per cent below by 2006) in Chickerell ward, which would comprise the parishes of Chickerell and Fleet, and 7 per cent above (3 per cent above by 2006) in Winterborne St Martin ward, which would comprise the parishes of Bincombe, Whitcombe, Winterborne Came, Winterborne Herringston, Winterborne Monkton, Winterborne St Martin, Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton.

82 During Stage Three, six representations were received in response to the draft recommendations for this area. Both Chesil Bank Parish Council and a local resident opposed the draft recommendation to transfer the parish Fleet into Chickerell ward, arguing that the parish of Fleet was more rural in nature and identified more readily with the rural parishes to the west in Chesil Bank ward rather than the more urban Chickerell. However, a district councillor for Chickerell stated that "the inclusion of Fleet in the Chickerell ward makes total sense". Winterbourne Abbas & Winterbourne Steepleton Parish Council, Winterborne Farringdon Parish Council and The Comptons, Toller & Wynford Parish Council all supported the draft recommendations for Winterborne St Martin ward.

83 We note the representations received from Chesil Bank Parish Council and a local resident of Fleet, requesting that the parish of Fleet be placed in Chesil Bank ward rather than Chickerell ward. Although the district councillor for Chickerell supported Fleet's inclusion in the Chickerell ward, in the light of other evidence received we believe that a better reflection of local communities would be achieved by retaining Fleet in the more rural Chesil Bank ward. Although we recognise that the levels of electoral equality deteriorate slightly under our final recommendations, we believe that this is justified by the better reflection of local communities. Chickerell ward would therefore comprise solely the parish of Chickerell and Chesil Bank ward would comprise the parishes of Abbotsbury, Fleet, Kingston Russell, Langton Herring, Littlebredy, Litton Cheney, Long Bredy and Portesham. In view of the support received for the proposed Winterborne St Martin ward, we propose confirming the LGCE's draft recommendations as final for this ward. Similarly, given the District Council's support for Broadmayne ward and the lack of alternative representations, we are content to confirm the LGCE's draft recommendations for this ward as final.

84 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Broadmayne, Chesil Bank, Chickerell and Winterborne St Martin wards would be equal to, 12 per cent above, 9 per cent below and 7 per cent above the district average initially (4 per cent below, 7 per cent above, 10 per cent below and 3 per cent above the district average by 2006). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Dorchester East, Dorchester North, Dorchester South and Dorchester West wards

85 The district and parish ward boundaries of these four urban wards, which together form the town of Dorchester, are coterminous. Dorchester South and West wards are each represented by three members, while Dorchester East and North wards are each represented by two members. The number of electors per councillor is 18 per cent above the district average in Dorchester East ward (19 per cent above by 2006), 1 per cent below in Dorchester North ward (12 per cent above by 2006), 3 per cent below in Dorchester South ward (7 per cent below by 2006) and 28 per cent below in Dorchester West ward (27 per cent below by 2006).

86 At Stage One the District Council proposed modifying the boundaries of all four wards, “so that sufficient electors are transferred from the South ward to the North and East wards and also from the North ward to the West ward to improve electoral equality”. The Council stated that “from the local knowledge available, it was the view that the changes proposed could be implemented without having a significant detrimental effect on any local connections that exist”. In addition it proposed a reduction in the number of councillors representing Dorchester South and West wards from three to two in order to secure the appropriate balance of representation under the reduced council size.

87 Dorchester Town Council submitted a copy of its response to the District Council’s consultation process, in which it expressed support for the Council’s Option Two, which was the option put forward to the LGCE by the Council at Stage One. The Town Council stated that “it would be unfortunate if natural estates had to be split, but they understand the difficulty in achieving equality”.

88 Having given careful consideration to all the representations received for this area, the LGCE noted that the Council’s proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. Therefore, in the light of the support received from Dorchester Town Council, and the absence of evidence of opposition, the LGCE adopted the proposals from the District Council as its draft recommendations for these wards.

89 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent above the district average in Dorchester East ward (7 per cent above by 2006), 10 per cent below in Dorchester North ward (3 per cent above by 2006), 8 per cent above in Dorchester South ward (3 per cent above by 2006) and 5 per cent above in Dorchester West ward (6 per cent above by 2006).

90 During Stage Three Dorchester Town Council stated its support for the draft recommendations and no other representations were received. Given the support expressed by Dorchester Town Council for the draft recommendations for district wards in this area, we are also content to confirm the LGCE’s draft recommendations as final.

91 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Owermoigne, Piddle Valley, Puddletown and Tolpuddle wards

92 These wards are situated on the eastern edge of the district to the north and east of Dorchester. All are single-member wards, apart from Owermoigne ward, which is served by two members. The number of electors per councillor is 1 per cent above the district average (4 per cent above by 2006) in Owermoigne ward, which comprises the parishes of Crossways, Osmington, Owermoigne, Poxwell, Tincton, Warmwell and Woodsford; 9 per cent above (5 per cent above by 2006) in Piddle Valley ward, which comprises the parishes of Alton Pancras, Buckland Newton, Piddlehinton and Piddletrenthide; 6 per cent below (unchanged by 2006) in Puddletown ward, which comprises the parishes of Puddletown, Athelhampton and Stinsford, and 37 per cent below (38 per cent below by 2006) in Tolpuddle ward, which comprises the parishes of Burleston, Cheselbourne, Dewlish, Melcombe Horsey and Tolpuddle.

93 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging Owermoigne ward by including the parish of Tolpuddle from the existing Tolpuddle ward, contending that the constituent parishes within the ward would be linked by a good road network. The Council also proposed enlarging Piddle Valley ward by including the parish of Melcombe Horsey from the existing Tolpuddle ward, stating that, as it is a predominantly rural parish, it “has common links with other parishes in the ward”. The Council further proposed a significant modification to the boundaries of Puddletown ward, citing as its reason the “high level of development in recent years in neighbouring parishes, much of which is likely to continue”. It proposed transferring the parish of Stinsford from the existing Puddletown ward to the new Charminster & Cerne Valley ward, as described below, while enlarging Puddletown ward by including the parishes of Dewlish, Cheselbourne and Burleston from the existing Tolpuddle ward. Owermoigne would remain a two-member ward, and Piddle Valley and Puddletown would be single-member wards. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent below the district average in Owermoigne ward (1 per cent below by 2006), 2 per cent above in Piddle Valley ward (2 per cent below by 2006) and 7 per cent below in Puddletown ward (8 per cent below by 2006).

94 Buckland Newton Parish Council enclosed a copy of its response to the District Council’s consultation process, which stated that there was unanimous agreement on the parish council that Buckland Newton should remain in a district ward with the constituent parishes of the existing Piddle Valley ward.

95 Having given careful consideration to all representations received during Stage One, the LGCE noted that the Council’s proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. However, the LGCE believed that community identity could be better reflected by transferring the parish of Tolpuddle to Puddletown ward, rather than Owermoigne ward. This would secure better road links while also bringing together the constituent parishes of the Puddletown Area Group. The LGCE acknowledged that these proposals would result in slightly worse electoral equality than under the Council’s proposals, but was of the view that this was acceptable given the better reflection of local communities which would result. Subject to the above amendment, the LGCE adopted the District Council’s proposals for these wards.

96 Under the draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 12 per cent below the district average (9 per cent below by 2006) in Owermoigne ward, which would comprise the parishes of Crossways, Osmington, Owermoigne, Poxwell, Tincton, Warmwell and Woodsford, 2 per cent above (2 per cent below by 2006) in Piddle Valley ward, which would comprise the parishes of Alton Pancras, Buckland Newton, Melcombe Horsey, Piddlehinton and Piddletrenthide, and 11 per cent above (9 per cent above by 2006) in Puddletown ward, which would comprise the parishes of Athelhampton, Burleston, Cheselbourne, Dewlish, Puddletown and Tolpuddle.

97 During Stage Three two representations were received regarding these wards. Melcombe Horsey Parish Meeting opposed the draft recommendations and proposed that the parish remain within the Cheselbourne Puddletown area. Osmington Parish Council supported the draft recommendations to transfer Tolpuddle parish from Owermoigne ward to Puddletown ward.

98 Having carefully considered the representations received during Stage Three, we propose making no amendments to the LGCE's draft recommendations. We acknowledge Melcombe Horsey Parish Council's opposition to the draft recommendations, however, for reasons of electoral equality, we cannot transfer the parish from Piddle Valley ward into Puddletown ward. We note the support received for the draft recommendations for Owermoigne and Puddletown wards. We therefore propose confirming the LGCE's draft recommendations for these wards as final.

99 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Owermoigne, Piddle Valley and Puddletown wards would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Cerne Valley, Charminster, Frome Valley and Yetminster wards

100 These single-member rural wards are situated in the north and centre of the district. The number of electors per councillor is 5 per cent below the district average (1 per cent below by 2006) in Cerne Valley ward, which comprises the parishes of Cerne Abbas, Godmanstone, Minterne Magna, Nether Cerne, Stratton and Up Cerne; 8 per cent above the district average (38 per cent above by 2006) in Charminster ward, which comprises the parish of Charminster; 6 per cent below (9 per cent below by 2006) in Frome Valley ward, which comprises the parishes of Cattistock, Chilfrome, Frampton, Frome St Quintin and Sydling St Nicholas, and 7 per cent above (4 per cent above by 2006) in Yetminster ward, which comprises the parishes of Beer Hackett, Chetnole, Ryme Intrinseca, Stockwood and Yetminster.

101 At Stage One the District Council proposed a new two-member ward of Charminster & Cerne Valley as a solution to the projected sharp rise in the electorate of the existing Charminster ward. It proposed transferring the parishes of Stratton and Minterne Magna from the existing Cerne Valley ward to Frome Valley and Halstock wards respectively, and joining the remaining parishes in Cerne Valley ward (Cerne Abbas, Godmanstone, Nether Cerne and Up Cerne) with Charminster ward to form the new ward. It also proposed enlarging the new ward by including the parish of Stinsford from the existing Puddletown ward. The Council stated that, under these proposals, the constituent parishes of the Cerne Valley Group would be kept together, while the similar parishes of Charminster and Stinsford, which both share a boundary with Dorchester, would be in the same ward. It noted that "whilst this may not be ideal, these arrangements would not interfere with the workings of either parish council".

102 The District Council also proposed enlarging Frome Valley ward, in order to secure an improved level of electoral equality, by including the parish of Stratton from the existing Cerne Valley ward, noting that “Stratton Parish Council has, in the past, indicated that the parish had closer links with Bradford Peverell parish or the Frome Valley ward”. It further proposed transferring the parish of Melbury Osmond to Yetminster ward from Halstock ward, and transferring the parish of Beer Hackett from Yetminster ward to Bradford Abbas ward. The latter move would “unite all the constituent parishes of Thornhackett Group within a single ward”. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 18 per cent below the district average in Charminster & Cerne Valley ward (5 per cent below by 2006), 3 per cent above in Frome Valley ward (6 per cent above by 2006) and 3 per cent below in Yetminster ward (5 per cent below by 2006).

103 Having given careful consideration to all the District Council’s proposals for this area, the LGCE noted that the Council’s proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. However, the LGCE made one modification to the District Council’s proposals to include the parish of Bradford Peverell in the proposed Charminster & Cerne Valley ward (as detailed above) in order to secure good electoral equality.

104 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent below the district average (4 per cent above by 2006) in Charminster & Cerne Valley ward, which would comprise the parishes of Bradford Peverell, Cerne Abbas, Charminster, Godmanstone, Nether Cerne, Stinsford and Up Cerne, 3 per cent above (6 per cent above by 2006) in Frome Valley ward, which would comprise the parishes of Cattistock, Chilfrome, Frampton, Frome St Quintin, Stratton and Sydling St Nicholas, and 3 per cent below (5 per cent below by 2006) in Yetminster ward, which would comprise the parishes of Chetnole, Melbury Osmond, Ryme Intrinseca, Stockwood and Yetminster.

105 Three representations were received regarding this area during Stage Three. Bradford Peverell Parish Council requested that it be placed in a district ward with Stratton parish, with which it shares common links. Frampton Parish Council and Frome Valley Parish Council supported the draft recommendations for Frome ward.

106 We have carefully considered the representations received during Stage Three. We note the request from Bradford Peverell Parish Council to be included in a district ward with Stratton parish, namely Frome Valley ward. However, we cannot accept this request as it would create an unacceptable level of electoral equality of 25 per cent from the district average in the Frome Valley ward, and we note that both Frome Valley Parish Council and Frampton Parish Council have expressed support for the draft recommendations for Frome Valley ward. As previously mentioned, we propose modifying the draft recommendations for Halstock and Yetminster wards, retaining Melbury Osmond in Halstock ward in order to better reflect community identity in the area. Yetminster ward would therefore comprise the parishes of Chetnole, Ryme Intrinseca, Stockwood and Yetminster. Similarly, we propose transferring the parish of Minterne Magna from Halstock ward into Charminster & Cerne Valley ward to better reflect community identity, as previously mentioned. Charminster & Cerne Valley ward would therefore comprise the parishes of Bradford Peverell, Cerne Abbas, Charminster, Godmanstone, Minterne Magna, Nether Cerne, Stinsford and Up Cerne. Subject to these two amendments, we are confirming the LGCE’s draft recommendations as final for these wards.

107 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Charminster & Cerne Valley, Frome Valley and Yetminster wards would be 3 per cent below, 3 per cent above

and 12 per cent below the district average initially (9 per cent above, 6 per cent above and 14 per cent below the district average by 2006). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Bradford Abbas, Caundle Vale, Holnest and Queen Thorne wards

108 These single-member rural wards are situated in the north of the district, surrounding the town of Sherborne. The number of electors per councillor is 9 per cent above the district average (5 per cent above by 2006) in Bradford Abbas ward, which comprises the parishes of Bradford Abbas, Clifton Maybank and Thornford; 21 per cent below (24 per cent below by 2006) in Caundle Vale ward, which comprises the parishes of Bishop's Caundle, Caundle Marsh, Folke, Haydon, Holwell, North Wootton and Purse Caundle; 4 per cent below (6 per cent below by 2006) in Holnest ward, which comprises the parishes of Batcombe, Hermitage, Hilfield, Holnest, Leigh, Leweston, Lillington, Longburton and Melbury Bubb, and 13 per cent below (15 per cent below by 2006) in Queen Thorne ward, which comprises the parishes of Castleton, Goathill, Nether Compton, Osborne, Over Compton, Poyntington, Sandford Orcas and Trent.

109 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging Bradford Abbas ward by transferring the parish of Beer Hackett to it from Yetminster ward, thus including the constituent parishes of the Thornhackett Group in a single district ward. It also proposed modifying the boundary of Holnest ward by transferring the parishes of North Wootton, Holwell, and Folke to it from the existing Caundle Vale ward and transferring the parishes of Batcombe, Hilfield, Hermitage and Melbury Bubb from it to Halstock ward. In support of this proposal, the District Council stated that "there are sufficient road links between all the constituent parishes, which currently look to the towns of Sherborne or Yeovil for their local services". The District Council further proposed enlarging Queen Thorne ward by including the parishes of Haydon, Bishops Caundle, Caundle Marsh and Purse Caundle from the existing Caundle Vale ward, citing a good road network and a "mix of similar parishes" in support.

110 Having given careful consideration to the District Council's proposals for this area, the LGCE noted that the Council's proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while providing a reasonable reflection of local community identities. The LGCE acknowledged that, given the rural nature of this area, the configuration of parishes and the constraints of the district boundary, it is particularly difficult to secure revised district wards in this area which provide for good electoral equality, while reflecting local communities. In the absence of evidence of opposition, the LGCE adopted the proposals from the District Council as its draft recommendations for these wards.

111 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average (3 per cent below by 2006) in Bradford Abbas ward, which would comprise the parishes of Beer Hackett, Bradford Abbas, Clifton Maybank and Thornford, 6 per cent above (3 per cent above by 2006) in Holnest ward, which would comprise the parishes of Folke, Holnest, Holwell, Leigh, Leweston, Lillington, Longburton and North Wootton, and 6 per cent above (3 per cent above by 2006) in Queen Thorne ward, which would comprise the parishes of Bishops Caundle, Castleton, Caundle Marsh, Goathill, Haydon, Nether Compton, Osborne, Over Compton, Poyntington, Purse Caundle, Sandford Orcas and Trent.

112 During Stage Three the District Council supported the draft recommendations for these wards, however it further proposed that Holnest ward be renamed Cam Vale ward, which "better reflects the area in general and recognises the Group Parish that forms the largest part of the ward". In the absence of any opposition, we are content to adopt this proposal as part of our final

recommendations, as we agree that it provides a better reflect of the communities in the area. Subject to this one minor amendment, we are content to confirm the LGCE's draft recommendations as final for these wards.

113 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Bradford Abbas, Cam Vale and Queen Thorne wards would be 1 per cent above, 6 per cent above and 6 per cent above the district average initially (3 per cent below, 3 per cent above and 3 per cent above the district average by 2006). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Sherborne East and Sherborne West wards

114 The urban wards of Sherborne East and Sherborne West, which are situated to the north of the district and together form the town of Sherborne, are represented by two and three members respectively. The boundaries of the district and parish wards are coterminous. The number of electors per councillor is 7 per cent above the district average (10 per cent above by 2006) in Sherborne East ward, which comprises the Sherborne East parish ward, and 4 per cent below (8 per cent below by 2006) in Sherborne West ward, which comprises the Sherborne West parish ward.

115 At Stage One the District Council proposed modifying the boundaries of both wards, transferring the Quarr Lane and Priestlands area from the West ward to the East ward in order to improve electoral equality. It further proposed reducing the number of councillors representing Sherborne West ward from three to two to ensure the appropriate balance of representation for the town under the reduced council size.

116 Having given careful consideration to the District Council's proposals for this area, the LGCE noted that the Council's proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. Therefore, in the absence of evidence of opposition, the LGCE adopted the proposals from the District Council as part of its draft recommendations for these wards.

117 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 6 per cent above the district average in Sherborne East ward (8 per cent above 2006) and 13 per cent above in Sherborne West ward (8 per cent above by 2006).

118 During Stage Three, no further representations were received regarding these wards. We therefore confirm the draft recommendations for these wards as final.

119 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Sherborne East and Sherborne West ward would be the same as under the LGCE's draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and Map A2 at the back of the report.

Electoral Cycle

120 By virtue of the amendments made to the Local Government Act 1992 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, we have no powers to make recommendations concerning electoral cycle.

Conclusions

121 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to the LGCE's consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse its draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- we propose that Melbury Osmond parish be transferred from Yetminster ward into Halstock ward in order to better reflect community identity in the area;
- we propose that Minterne Magna parish be transferred from Halstock ward into Charminster & Cerne Valley ward in order to better reflect community identity in the area;
- we propose that Bettiscombe parish be transferred from Broadwindsor ward into Thorncombe ward in order to better reflect the parish's links with Marshwood parish and secure a better level of electoral equality, and furthermore that Thorncombe ward be renamed Marshwood Vale ward in order to better reflect the mixture of communities within the ward;
- we propose renaming Holnest ward Cam Vale ward in order to better reflect the general area and recognise the Group Parish which forms the largest part of the ward;
- we propose renaming Symondsbury ward Chideock & Symondsbury ward in order to reflect the two largest parishes in the ward.

122 We conclude that, in West Dorset:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 55 to 48;
- there should be 33 wards, five fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 34 of the existing wards should be modified.

123 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	55	48	55	48
Number of wards	38	33	38	33
Average number of electors per councillor	1,358	1,556	1,435	1,644
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	17	5	19	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	8	0	9	0

124 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 17 to 5, with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further by 2006, with only one ward, Yetminster, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, at 14 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

West Dorset District Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 33 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A including the large map inside the back cover.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

125 When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it should also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Bradpole, Bridport, Dorchester and Sherborne.

126 The parish of Bradpole is currently served by 10 councillors and is unwarded. In its draft recommendations, the LGCE proposed creating two parish wards, Bradpole Village and Bradpole Claremont, to reflect the proposed district ward boundaries. It further proposed that Bradpole Village parish ward should be represented by nine councillors and Bradpole Claremont parish ward should be represented by a single councillor.

127 At Stage Three, the LGCE received a number of representations regarding the parish of Bradpole, as detailed earlier in this report. The District Council opposed the draft recommendations to create a new Bradpole Claremont parish ward and combine it with Bridport North ward. Similarly, Bradpole Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations, stating that they would be “divisive”. The majority of representations received opposed the district warding arrangements for this parish. However, in the light of the confirmation of the LGCE’s proposed

district wards in the area, we propose confirming the draft recommendations for warding Bradpole parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Bradpole Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Bradpole Village (returning nine councillors) and Bradpole Claremont (one). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

128 The town of Bridport is currently served by 18 councillors representing two wards: Bridport North and Bridport South, each represented by nine councillors. In its draft recommendations report, the LGCE proposed modifying the boundary between the two town wards to reflect the district ward boundary.

129 At Stage Three, the LGCE received a number of representations in opposition to its warding arrangements for the district wards in the area. However, no comments were made specifically referring to the parish ward boundaries. In the light of the confirmation of the LGCE's proposed district wards in the area, we propose confirming the draft recommendations for the revised town ward boundaries in Bridport as final.

Final Recommendation

Bridport Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Bridport North and Bridport South, each returning nine councillors. The boundary between the two town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

130 The town of Dorchester is currently divided into four town wards, Dorchester East, Dorchester North, Dorchester South and Dorchester West, represented by four, three, five and five councillors respectively. In its draft recommendations report, the LGCE proposed modifying the boundaries between the four town wards to reflect the district ward boundaries. Furthermore, as the wards would have a similar number of electors, it proposed that each ward should be represented by four councillors, thus reducing the number of town councillors from 17 to 16.

131 During Stage Three, Dorchester Town Council supported the draft recommendations for the district and town wards in Dorchester, however it proposed increasing its council membership from 17 to 20 councillors, providing details of the increased workload of town councillors as justification.

132 Having considered the evidence received, and in the light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we are content to recommend an increase in town councillors from 17 to 20 and confirm the LGCE's draft recommendations for the town ward boundaries in Dorchester as final.

Final Recommendation

Dorchester Town Council should comprise 20 councillors, representing four wards: Dorchester East, Dorchester North, Dorchester South and Dorchester West, each returning five councillors. The boundaries between the four town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

133 The town of Sherborne is currently divided into two town wards, Sherborne East and Sherborne West, represented by five and seven councillors respectively. In its draft recommendations report, the LGCE proposed modifying the boundary between the two parish wards to reflect the district ward boundary. Furthermore, as the wards would have a similar number of electors, it proposed that each ward should be represented by six councillors.

134 At Stage Three, no comments were received in response to the LGCE's draft recommendations. Therefore, we confirm the draft recommendations for the town ward boundaries in Sherborne as final.

Final Recommendation

Sherborne Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Sherborne East and Sherborne West, each returning six councillors. The boundary between the two town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for West Dorset

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

135 Having completed the review of electoral arrangements in West Dorset and submitted our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692).

136 It is now up to the Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 15 May 2002.

137 All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

The Secretary
Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for West Dorset: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the West Dorset area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries in the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on Map A2 and the large maps at the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Sherborne.

The **large maps** inserted at the back of this report illustrate the proposed warding arrangements for Bridport and Dorchester.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for West Dorset: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed warding arrangements for Sherborne