

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Wyre Forest in Worcestershire

February 2002

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

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations on whether there should be changes to local authorities' electoral arrangements.

Members of the Commission:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)
Peter Brokenshire
Kru Desai
Pamela Gordon
Robin Gray
Robert Hughes CBE

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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, and the number of councillors, ward names and the frequency of elections.

With effect from 1 April 2002, the Electoral Commission will assume the functions of the Local Government Commission for England and take over responsibility for making Orders putting in place the new arrangements resulting from periodic electoral reviews (powers which currently reside with the Secretary of State). As part of this transfer the Electoral Commission will set up a Boundary Committee for England which will take over responsibility for the conduct of PERs from the Local Government Commission for England. The Boundary Committee for England will conduct electoral reviews following the same rules and in the same manner as the Local Government Commission for England. Its final recommendations on future electoral arrangements will then be presented to the Electoral Commission which will be able to accept, modify or reject the Boundary Committee for England's findings. Under these new arrangements there will remain a further opportunity to make representations directly to the Electoral Commission after the publication of the final recommendations, as was previously the case with the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to send comments to the Electoral Commission.

SUMMARY

We began a review of Wyre Forest's electoral arrangements on 31 July 2001.

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

We found that the current arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Wyre Forest:

- **in nine of the 18 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and two 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 nine wards and by more than 20 per cent in four wards.**

Our main proposals for Wyre Forest's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 63 – 64) are that:

- **Wyre Forest District Council should have 42 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 17 wards, instead of 18 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one, and two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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 none of the proposed 17 wards would the number of electors per councillor vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2006.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements for the town of Stourport-on-Severn;**
- **revised warding arrangements and an increase in the number of councillors serving Bewdley Town Council.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 26 February 2002. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission which, with effect from 1 April 2002, will be responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also decide when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 22 April 2002:

**Review Manager
Wyre Forest Review
LGCE
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU**

**Fax: 020 7404 6142
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
Website: www.lgce.gov.uk**

Table 1: Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Aggborough & Spennells*	3	part of Aggborough & Spennells ward.	Large Map
2	Areley Kings	3	Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings East and Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings West parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn parish; the parish of Ribbesford.	Map 2
3	Bewdley & Arley	3	Bewdley East and Bewdley West parish wards of Bewdley parish; the parish of Upper Arley.	Map 2
4	Blakedown & Chaddesley	2	the parishes of Chaddesley Corbett; Churchill & Blakedown; Broome; Stone and Rushock.	Map 2
5	Broadwaters*	3	part of Broadwaters ward; part of Franche ward; part of Greenhill ward.	Large Map
6	Cookley	1	Cookley parish ward of Wolverley & Cookley parish.	Map 2
7	Franche*	3	part of Franche ward.	Large Map
8	Greenhill*	3	part of Aggborough & Spennells ward; part of Greenhill ward; part of Offmore ward.	Large Map
9	Habberley & Blakebrook*	3	part of Habberley & Blakebrook ward; part of Sutton Park ward.	Large Map
10	Lickhill	3	part of Stourport-on-Severn Lickhill and Stourport-on-Severn North parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn parish.	Map 2
11	Mitton	3	part of Stourport-on-Severn Central and Stourport-on-Severn Stour & Wilden parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn parish	Map 2
12	Offmore & Comberton*	3	part of Aggborough & Spennells ward; part of Greenhill ward; part of Offmore ward.	Large Map
13	Oldington & Foley Park*	2	part of Oldington & Foley Park ward.	Large Map
14	Rock	1	the parish of Rock;	Map 2
15	Sutton Park*	3	part of Sutton Park ward; part of Oldington & Foley Park ward.	Large Map
16	Wolverley	1	Wolverley parish ward of Wolverley & Cookley parish.	Map 2
17	Wribbenhall	2	Bewdley Wribbenhall parish ward of Bewdley parish; the parish of Kidderminster Foreign.	Map 2

*Notes: 1 Kidderminster is the only unparished part of the district and comprises the eight wards indicated * above.*

2 The wards in the above table are illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A.

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: Draft Recommendations for Wyre Forest

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 Aggborough & Spennells	3	5,364	1,788	0	5,356	1,785	-2
2 Areley Kings	3	4,957	1,652	-8	4,889	1,630	-10
3 Bewdley & Arley	3	5,090	1,697	-5	5,086	1,695	-7
4 Blakedown & Chaddesley	2	3,360	1,680	-6	3,329	1,665	-8
5 Broadwaters	3	5,546	1,849	3	5,722	1,907	5
6 Cookley	1	1,905	1,905	6	1,884	1,884	4
7 Franche	3	5,578	1,859	4	5,621	1,874	3
8 Greenhill	3	5,489	1,830	2	5,684	1,895	4
9 Habberley & Blakebrook	3	5,176	1,725	-4	5,174	1,725	-5
10 Lickhill	3	5,651	1,884	5	5,570	1,857	2
11 Mitton	3	5,162	1,721	-4	5,648	1,883	4
12 Offmore & Comberton	3	5,675	1,892	5	5,633	1,878	3
13 Oldington & Foley Park	2	3,626	1,813	1	3,607	1,804	-1
14 Rock	1	1,957	1,957	9	2,024	2,024	11
15 Sutton Park	3	5,383	1,794	0	5,518	1,839	1
16 Wolverley	1	1,754	1,754	-2	1,785	1,785	-2
17 Wribbenhall	2	3,655	1,828	2	3,743	1,872	3
Totals	42	75,328	-	-	76,273	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,794	-	-	1,816	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Wyre Forest 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 proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of Wyre Forest in Worcestershire, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the six districts in Worcestershire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Wyre Forest. Wyre Forest's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1977 (Report no. 240). We expect to begin a review Worcestershire County Council's electoral arrangements later this year.

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, i.e. the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Full details of the legislation under which we work are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as 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.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not

accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

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

Table 3: Stages of the Review

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

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper called *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one, half of the district council would be elected, in year two, half of the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral wards in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals were taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, states that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 Stage One began on 31 July 2001, when we wrote to Wyre Forest District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Worcestershire County Council, West Mercia Police Authority, the local authority associations, Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the West Midlands Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Wyre Forest District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of submissions (the end of Stage One) was 22 October 2001.

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

13 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 26 February 2002 and will end on 22 April 2002, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore**

important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

15 Wyre Forest is situated in the north of Worcestershire, to the south west of the Birmingham conurbation. It comprises three main towns, Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley, while the surrounding area is rural in character and is made up predominantly of farming communities, with some rural developments. Comprising 19,571 hectares, the district has a population of 96,500. The district is parished, except for the town of Kidderminster.

16 The electorate of the district is 75,328 (February 2001). The Council presently has 42 members who are elected from 18 wards, 11 of which are relatively urban in Kidderminster and Stourport-on-Severn, with the remainder being mainly rural. Eleven of the wards are each represented by three councillors, two are each represented by two councillors and five are single-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

17 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'.

18 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,794 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,816 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 nine of the 18 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in two wards by more than 20 per cent and in one ward by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Aggborough & Spennells ward where the councillor represents 35 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Wyre Forest

Table 4: 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 Aggborough & Spennells	3	7,246	2,415	35	7,304	2,435	34
2 Areley Kings	3	4,756	1,585	-12	4,688	1,563	-14
3 Bewdley	2	4,530	2,265	26	4,527	2,264	25
4 Blakedown	1	1,577	1,577	-12	1,563	1,563	-14
5 Broadwaters	3	4,839	1,613	-10	4,863	1,621	-11
6 Chaddesley	1	1,783	1,783	-1	1,766	1,766	-3
7 Cookley	1	1,905	1,905	6	1,884	1,884	4
8 Franche	3	5,578	1,859	4	5,783	1,928	6
9 Greenhill	3	5,309	1,770	-1	5,502	1,834	1
10 Habberley & Blakebrook	3	5,071	1,690	-6	4,986	1,662	-8
11 Lickhill	3	5,667	1,889	5	5,588	1,863	3
12 Mitton	3	5,146	1,715	-4	5,630	1,877	3
13 Offmore	3	4,681	1,560	-13	4,647	1,549	-15
14 Oldington & Foley Park	3	4,301	1,434	-20	4,282	1,427	-21
15 Rock & Ribbesford	1	2,158	2,158	20	2,225	2,225	23
16 Sutton Park	3	4,813	1,604	-11	4,948	1,649	-9
17 Wolverley	1	1,754	1,754	-2	1,785	1,785	-2
18 Wribbenhall & Arley	2	4,214	2,107	17	4,302	2,151	18
Totals	42	75,328	-	-	76,273	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,794	-	-	1,816	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Wyre Forest 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. For example, in 2001, electors in Oldington & Foley Park ward were relatively over-represented by 20 per cent, while electors in Aggborough & Spennells ward were relatively under-represented by 35 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

19 At the start of this review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

20 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received eight submissions during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from the District Council and Wyre Forest Conservative Association, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council.

Wyre Forest District Council

21 Following local consultations, Wyre Forest District Council proposed retaining the existing council size of 42, serving 18 wards, as at present. The District Council's proposals would provide a mixed pattern of single-, two- and three-member wards. There would be some realignment of district wards in the town of Kidderminster and between the Lickhill and Mitton wards of Stourport-on-Severn, while Wolverley and Chaddesley wards would remain unchanged. Rock parish would be warded while Wolverley & Cookley parish would be divided into three parish wards, rather than the current two. The remainder of the district wards would include whole parishes. The District Council's proposals would provide good electoral equality throughout the district, with no ward having a variance over 10 per cent in 2001 or 2006.

Wyre Forest Conservative Association

22 Wyre Forest Conservative Association proposed a reduction in council size, from 42 to 39, serving a mixed pattern of 22 single- and two-member wards. Under these proposals there would be some realignment of the district wards in the towns of Kidderminster and Stourport-on-Severn, while the remaining wards would remain unchanged. These proposals would provide for some improvement to electoral equality. However, by 2006 four wards would have a variance of over 10 per cent.

Parish and Town Councils

23 We received responses from six parish and town councils. Bewdley Town Council proposed the provision of an additional councillor each for Bewdley, Wribbenhall & Arley and Rock & Ribbesford wards, to counter what it perceives as Kidderminster's dominant position. In addition, it made proposals for its own parishing arrangements. Chaddesley Corbett Parish Council proposed that elections should be held every two years for half the council. Churchill & Blakedown Parish Council considered that "electoral arrangements should be a reflection of rural communities and [that rural communities should] not be incorporated into urban communities solely to obtain an equal numerical representation across the district". It stated support for the current electoral arrangements. Stourport-on-Severn Town Council recommended minor alterations to Lickhill and Mitton, but no change to Areley Kings ward on the "criterion of 'community identity'". Upper Arley Parish Council

questioned the Commission's objectives in the review, but made no specific comments about electoral arrangements. Wolverley & Cookley Parish Council objected to the District Council's proposals for a new Caunsall parish ward. This was supported by a petition from local residents containing 130 signatures.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

24 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

25 As described earlier, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 of the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

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

27 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.

28 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an 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

29 Since 1975 there has been a 12 per cent increase in the electorate of Wyre Forest district. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 1 per cent from 75,328 to 76,273 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

30 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having looked at the District Council’s figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

31 As explained earlier, we start by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

32 Wyre Forest District Council presently has 42 members. The District Council proposed maintaining the existing council size, stating that “there is no overwhelming evidence to suggest that the existing arrangements are not providing effective and convenient local government”.

33 We have also examined the proposals put forward by Wyre Forest Conservative Association for a 39-member council. Changes in council size, either increases or decreases, can be detrimental to the functioning of local democracy. Too few councillors can mean that the interests of residents are not adequately represented; too many can lead to difficulties in the internal management of the council. It is therefore important that such proposals are supported by sufficient argumentation and evidence of public consultation. The Conservative scheme did not provide any particular argumentation for this alternative council size, nor was it the subject of any local consultation. Accordingly, we have not been persuaded to adopt the Conservative Association’s proposals for a change in council size.

34 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 42 members.

Electoral Arrangements

35 We have given careful consideration to the views that we received during Stage One, including the district-wide schemes received from the District Council and the Wyre Forest Conservative Association. As already explained, we consider that there was insufficient evidence of consultation or detailed argument for us to adopt the Wyre Forest Conservative Association’s proposals for a change in council size.

36 In view of the support given to elements of the District Council’s proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties prior to their submission, we have based our recommendations on the District Council’s scheme. We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. We note that the Council’s scheme produces good electoral equality, with no wards having an electoral variance of more than 5 per cent in 2001, or 7 per cent by 2006. However, it inserted the caveat that while “it has put together an overall scheme which attempts to produce better electoral equality, it believes that at times this is not consistent with retaining existing community boundaries and identities”. We share these concerns, in particular the proposals for further parish warding. We are therefore moving away from the District Council’s proposals in a number of areas.

37 For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Aggborough & Spennells, Broadwaters, Greenhill and Offmore wards;
- (b) Franche, Habberley & Blakebrook, Oldington & Foley Park and Sutton Park wards;
- (c) Blakedown, Chaddesley, Cookley and Wolverley wards;
- (d) Areley Kings, Bewdley, Rock & Ribbesford and Wribbenhall & Arley wards;
- (e) Lickhill and Mitton wards.

Aggborough & Spennells, Broadwaters, Greenhill and Offmore wards

38 These four three-member wards cover the east of the unparished town of Kidderminster. Aggborough & Spennells ward is currently 35 per cent under-represented (34 per cent by 2006). Broadwaters ward is currently 10 per cent over-represented (11 per cent by 2006). Greenhill ward is currently 1 per cent over-represented (1 per cent under-represented by 2006). Offmore ward is currently 13 per cent over-represented (15 per cent by 2006).

39 The District Council proposed transferring a number of areas from the existing Aggborough & Spennells ward to neighbouring wards. Firstly, the area to the north of the Spennells Valley Road and east of Chester Road South would be transferred to its proposed Offmore & Comberton ward. Secondly, the area to the north of Aggborough Crescent and west of Chester Road South would be transferred to Greenhill ward. Finally, the area to the north and west of The Ringway would be transferred to Habberley & Blakebrook ward (discussed below). In addition, it proposed transferring a small area of the existing Greenhill ward, to the north of Comberton Road and east of Chester Road North, to its proposed Offmore & Comberton ward. It also proposed transferring an area of the existing Greenhill ward, to the north of Gilbert Scott Way and Plane Tree Close, and an area of the existing Franche ward (discussed below) to the east of the River Stour, to Broadwaters ward.

40 After careful consideration we have decided to adopt the District Council's scheme for this area, subject to a number of minor amendments to improve ward access and provide clearer boundaries. We propose adopting the District Council's scheme to transfer the area of the existing Aggborough & Spennells ward, to the north of Spennells Valley Road and east of Chester Road South, to the proposed Offmore & Comberton ward. However, we propose additionally including the area to the east of the railway line, and to include the electors in Cormorant Grove, Kingfisher Grove, Little Grebe Road, Mallard Avenue, Merlin Drive and Osprey Park Road. We are adopting the District Council's proposals to transfer the area of the existing Aggborough & Spennells ward, to the north of Aggborough Crescent and west of Chester Road South, to Greenhill ward, but propose additionally including the area to the north and west of The Ringway in Aggborough & Spennells ward. We consider that this would provide better access to the rest of the ward. In addition, we recommend adopting the District Council's proposal to transfer the area of the existing Greenhill ward, to the north of Gilbert Scott Way and Plane Tree Close, to Broadwaters ward. However, we recommend additionally including the electors on Harold Evers Way in Greenhill ward. We also propose transferring the area of the existing Offmore ward to the north of the railway to Greenhill ward, to improve ward access.

41 Under these proposals Aggborough & Spennells ward would initially have a variance of zero per cent, but would be 2 per cent over-represented by 2006. Broadwaters ward would be 3 per cent under-represented (5 per cent by 2006). Greenhill ward would be 2 per cent under-represented (4 per cent by 2006). Offmore & Comberton ward would be 5 per cent under-represented (3 per cent by 2006). We consider that the revised wards would reflect local communities, while providing improved levels of electoral equality. These recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Franche, Habberley & Blakebrook, Oldington & Foley Park and Sutton Park wards

42 These four wards cover the west of the unparished town of Kidderminster. Franche ward is currently 4 per cent under-represented (6 per cent by 2006). Habberley & Blakebrook ward is currently 6 per cent over-represented (8 per cent by 2006). Oldington & Foley Park ward is currently 20 per cent over-represented (21 per cent by 2006). Sutton Park ward is currently 11 per cent over-represented (9 per cent by 2006).

43 The District Council proposed transferring an area of the existing Aggborough & Spennells ward, to the north and west of The Ringway, to Habberley & Blakebrook ward. As described above, it additionally recommended the transfer of an area of the existing Franche ward, to the east of the River Stour, to Broadwaters ward. It also proposed the transfer of an area of the existing Oldington & Foley Park ward, to the north of Sutton Park Road and Northumberland Avenue, to Sutton Park ward.

44 After careful consideration we have decided to adopt the District Council's scheme for this area, subject to a number of minor amendments to improve ward access. As explained above, we recommend that the area to the north and west of The Ringway be transferred to Greenhill ward, rather than Habberley & Blakebrook ward. We also propose a minor amendment to improve ward access for the electors on Bewdley Hill and Rowland Hill Road by transferring them to Habberley & Blakebrook ward.

45 Under these proposals Franche ward would be 4 per cent under-represented (3 per cent by 2006). Habberley & Blakebrook ward would be 4 per cent over-represented (5 per cent by 2006). Oldington & Foley Park ward would be 1 per cent under-represented (1 per cent over-represented by 2006). Sutton Park ward would initially have a level of electoral equality equal to the district average, but would be 1 per cent under-represented by 2006. We consider that these revised wards would reflect local communities, while providing improved levels of electoral equality. These recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Blakedown, Chaddesley, Cookley and Wolverley wards

46 These four single-member wards are situated in the north and east of the district. Blakedown ward comprises the parishes of Broome and Churchill & Blakedown, and is currently 12 per cent over-represented (14 per cent by 2006). Chaddesley ward comprises the parishes of Chaddesley Corbett, Rushock and Stone, and is currently 1 per cent over-represented (3 per cent by 2006). Cookley ward comprises Cookley parish ward of Wolverley & Cookley parish and is currently 6 per cent under-represented (4 per cent by 2006).

Wolverley ward comprises Wolverley parish ward of Wolverley & Cookley parish and is 2 per cent over-represented, both currently and in 2006.

47 Under the District Council's proposals Chaddesley and Wolverley wards would remain unchanged. However, to address the high electoral variances in the existing Blakedown ward the District Council proposed further warding Wolverley & Cookley parish, maintaining the existing Wolverley parish ward, but dividing the existing Cookley parish ward into a modified Cookley parish ward and a new Caunsall parish ward. It then proposed combining the new Caunsall parish ward with the existing Blakedown ward. Under these proposals both the modified Cookley district ward and the modified Blakedown ward would be 3 per cent over-represented (5 per cent by 2006).

48 Churchill & Blakedown Parish Council objected to any change to the existing electoral arrangements stating that the wards "should be a reflection of rural communities". Chaddesley Corbett Parish Council also requested that electoral arrangements remain unchanged. Wolverley & Cookley Parish Council stated that it was "vehemently opposed" to the District Council's proposals and submitted a petition from local residents containing 130 signatures. We note that the District Council also expressed some reservations over its own proposals for the area, commenting "the artificial attachment of the village of Caunsall to Blakedown ward for district council purposes, does not make sense from a community point of view".

49 We concur with the view that further parish warding of Wolverley & Cookley parish would not reflect community identity and have therefore examined alternatives to address the high variance in Blakedown ward. However, the options are limited. After careful consideration we have decided to propose retaining the existing Cookley ward and creating a new two-member Blakedown & Chaddesley ward, combining the existing Blakedown and Chaddesley wards. While we accept that the new Blakedown & Chaddesley ward would cover a large geographical area, there is good road linkage and we consider that the impact on community relations would be less severe than separating the adjoining villages of Caunsall and Cookley. Under these arrangements the new Blakedown & Chaddesley ward would be 6 per cent over-represented (8 per cent by 2006), while Wolverley and Cookley wards would retain their existing electoral variances. We consider that the revised wards would reflect local communities, while providing improved levels of electoral equality. These recommendations are illustrated on Map 2

Areley Kings, Bewdley, Rock & Ribbesford and Wribbenhall & Arley wards

50 These four wards are situated to the east of the district. The three-member Areley Kings ward covers part of Stourport-on-Severn and is separated from the remainder of the town by the River Severn. It comprises the Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings East and Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings West parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn parish, and is currently 12 per cent over-represented (14 per cent by 2006). The two-member Bewdley ward comprises the Bewdley East and Bewdley West parish wards of Bewdley parish, and is currently 26 per cent under-represented (25 per cent by 2006). Rock & Ribbesford ward is represented by a single member and comprises the parishes of Rock and Ribbesford, and is currently 20 per cent under-represented (23 per cent by 2006). The two-member Wribbenhall & Arley ward comprises the Bewdley Wribbenhall parish ward of Bewdley parish and the parishes of

Kidderminster Foreign and Upper Arley, and is currently 17 per cent under-represented (18 per cent by 2006).

51 The District Council proposed creating a new Areley Kings ward, comprising the existing Areley Kings ward, Ribbesford parish and a newly created Heightington parish ward of Rock parish. The remainder of Rock parish would form a new Rock ward. In addition the District Council proposed creating a new Wribbenhall ward, comprising the existing Bewdley Wribbenhall parish ward of Bewdley parish and the parish of Kidderminster Foreign. Upper Arley parish, currently part of Wribbenhall & Arley ward, would then be combined with the existing Bewdley ward to create a new Bewdley & Arley ward. Areley Kings ward would be 4 per cent over-represented (6 per cent by 2006). Bewdley & Arley ward would be 5 per cent over-represented (7 per cent by 2006). Rock ward would be 4 per cent over-represented (1 per cent by 2006). Wribbenhall ward would be 2 per cent under-represented (3 per cent by 2006).

52 The District Council added the caveat in its submission that “in reality, the proposals do not find support from parish or district councillors, as neither Heightington nor Ribbesford have any direct community links with Areley Kings”. Stourport-on-Severn Town Council supported this view, stating it “would apply the criterion of ‘community identity’ to recommend no change to [...] Areley Kings”. Rock Parish Council stated that it was “adamantly against any break up of the Parish by the introduction of warding”. It also commented that it “fails to see that the movement of Ribbesford to the Areley Kings will have any benefit to the electors [...] it would be far more sensible to attach Ribbesford to a Bewdley ward”. Bewdley Town Council commented that “it sees no merit in wholesale change and would prefer to find a solution within the existing framework”. We also received a submission from Upper Arley Parish Council, although this made no specific comments about electoral arrangements.

53 We note and acknowledge these concerns. However, the issue of high electoral variances across the existing wards must still be addressed. In light of the comments received, we consider that the District Council’s proposals do not give sufficient consideration to the statutory criteria and we would concur with its own concerns about its proposals. We have therefore considered a number of alternatives. Firstly, in order to address the high electoral variance in Areley Kings ward we have considered creating a ward straddling the River Severn, taking in areas of Mitton and Lickhill wards (discussed below). The river provides a very distinct barrier in Stourport-on-Severn, with the communities on either side set some distance back from it and with only a single crossing point between them. Indeed, we understood from our initial contact with the District Council officers that there would be very little support for such a proposal. Consequently, such a ward was not put forward or considered during the District Council’s initial scheme generation and subsequent consultation. From the evidence we would concur with this view.

54 We have therefore considered alternatives that combine Areley Kings ward with parishes to the north. We note that the District Council’s scheme combines Areley Kings with Ribbesford parish and a new Heightington parish ward of Rock parish. However, we are concerned that the creation of a Heightington parish ward would not facilitate effective and convenient local government at parish level. It is not possible to combine the whole of Rock parish with any of the neighbouring parishes without creating significant electoral inequality. Given this, we propose creating a district ward comprising solely Rock parish. This would initially be 9 per cent under-represented (11 per cent by 2006). While this variance is

somewhat higher than we would initially aim for, we consider that it is appropriate when balanced against the statutory criteria.

55 As a consequence we would not recommend including Heightington parish ward with Areley Kings ward and Ribbesford parish. A number of respondents stated that Ribbesford parish looks more towards Bewdley than Areley Kings, although we did not receive any submission from Ribbesford Parish Council. While we accept these comments, we cannot consider any area in isolation and must still address the high variance in Areley Kings ward. In our opinion, Ribbesford does not appear to comprise a single settlement, in close proximity to Bewdley, but rather a number of separate dwellings. We therefore propose adopting a modified version of the District Council's proposals and recommend that Areley Kings be combined with Ribbesford parish to create a modified Areley Kings ward. While we accept that this option may not receive support from all local groups, it is our task to seek a balance between good electoral equality and the statutory criteria, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities, and securing effective and convenient local government. However, we would welcome any alternative, locally generated schemes that provide comparable levels of electoral equality, while better reflecting community identities.

56 We have considered options for the Bewdley, Kidderminster Foreign and Upper Arley areas. However, these do not give good electoral equality. Given the above proposals, we have decided to adopt the District Council's proposals for Bewdley & Arley and Wribbenhall wards. These have the support of the District Council and provide good levels of electoral equality. Furthermore, under these proposals, Upper Arley will remain attached to Bewdley parish, albeit with a different parish ward.

57 Under our recommendations the three-member Areley Kings ward would be 8 per cent over-represented (10 per cent by 2006). The three-member Bewdley & Arley ward would be 5 per cent over-represented (7 per cent by 2006). The single-member Rock ward would be 9 per cent under-represented (11 per cent by 2006). The two-member Wribbenhall ward would be 2 per cent under-represented (3 per cent by 2006). We consider that the revised wards would reflect local communities, while providing improved levels of electoral equality. These recommendations are illustrated and named on Map 2.

Lickhill and Mitton wards

58 These two three-member wards comprise the part of Stourport-on-Severn parish that lies to the north east of the River Severn. Lickhill ward comprises the parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn Lickhill and Stourport-on-Severn North of Stourport-on-Severn parish, and is currently 5 per cent under-represented (3 per cent by 2006). Mitton ward comprises the parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn Central and Stourport-on-Severn Stour & Wilden of Stourport-on-Severn parish, and is currently 4 per cent over-represented (3 per cent under-represented by 2006).

59 Given the good levels of electoral equality under the existing arrangements, the District Council proposed only a minor realignment of the ward boundaries between Lickhill and Mitton wards, to improve ward access. Under these proposals Lickhill ward would be 5 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006), and Mitton ward would be 4 per cent over-represented (4 per cent under-represented by 2006). Stourport-on-Severn Town Council supported these proposals.

60 As already stated, we have considered and discounted the option of creating a ward that straddles the River Severn, taking in areas of Lickhill and Mitton wards, to address the high electoral variances in Areley Kings ward. Accordingly, we have decided to adopt the District Council's scheme for the proposed Lickhill and Mitton wards. These recommendations would result in the same levels of electoral equality as under the District Council's proposals. These recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Electoral Cycle

61 We received two responses regarding the District Council's electoral cycle. The District Council itself stated it "sees no reason to change from the present electoral cycle and would wish to continue with elections by thirds". Chaddesley Corbett Parish Council asked that "the District Council be re-elected every two years for half of the Council".

62 We considered carefully all the comments received. At present, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order under the Local Government Act 2000, we continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas. Statutorily, we have no power to recommend a change to biennial elections. We therefore propose no change to the Council's present system of elections by thirds at this time.

Conclusions

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

- a council of 42 members should be retained;
- there should be 17 wards;
- the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one, and two wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

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

- in Kidderminster we propose basing our draft recommendations on the District Council's proposals with our own modifications;
- in Blakedown, Chaddesley and Cookley we propose basing our draft recommendations on our own proposals;
- in Areley Kings and Rock & Ribbesford we propose basing our draft recommendations on our own proposals.

65 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will effect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2001 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2006.

Table 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councilors	42	42	42	42
Number of wards	18	17	18	17
Average number of electors per councilor	1,794	1,794	1,816	1,816
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	9	0	9	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	2	0	4	0

66 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Wyre Forest District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 9 to zero. By 2006 only one ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Draft Recommendation
 Wyre Forest District Council should comprise 42 councillors serving 17 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. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

67 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible 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 must 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 parish of Stourport-on-Severn to reflect the proposed district wards. In addition, Bewdley Parish Council wrote requesting amendments to its parishing arrangements.

68 The parish of Stourport-on-Severn is currently served by 18 councillors representing six wards: Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings East, Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings West, Stourport-on-Severn Central, Stourport-on-Severn Lickhill, Stourport-on-Severn North and Stourport-on-Severn Stour & Wilden. In the light of our proposed district warding

arrangements, we propose modifying the parish ward boundaries to correspond with those of the district wards within the town.

Draft Recommendation

Stourport-on-Severn Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, as at present, representing six wards: Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings East, Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings West, Stourport-on-Severn Central, Stourport-on-Severn Lickhill, Stourport-on-Severn North and Stourport-on-Severn Stour & Wilden, each returning three councillors. The boundary between the parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn North and Stourport-on-Severn Central should be amended to reflect the district ward boundary between Lickhill and Mitton wards, as illustrated on Map A2 in Appendix A.

69 The parish of Bewdley is currently served by 12 councillors representing three wards: Bewdley East, Bewdley West and Bewdley Wribbenhall. Bewdley Parish Council wrote requesting an amendment to the parish ward boundary between Bewdley East and Bewdley West parish wards. In addition it requested an additional councillor for Bewdley Wribbenhall ward. We are adopting these proposals.

Draft Recommendation

Bewdley Town Council should comprise 13 councillors, instead of the current 12, representing three wards: Bewdley East (returning four councillors), Bewdley West (returning four councillors) and Bewdley Wribbenhall (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries between the parish wards of Bewdley East and Bewdley West should be amended as shown in Map A3 in Appendix A.

Map 2: Draft Recommendations for Wyre Forest

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

70 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 22 April 2002. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

71 Express your views by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
Wyre Forest Review
LGCE
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
Website: www.lgce.gov.uk

72 In the light of responses received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Electoral Commission, which cannot make the Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Wyre Forest: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Wyre Forest area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on Maps A2, A3 and the large map at the back of this report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Stourport-on-Severn parish.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Bewdley parish.

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Kidderminster.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Wyre Forest: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Stourport-on-Severn

Map A3: Proposed Warding of Bewdley

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Non-Departmental Public Bodies, such as the Local Government Commission for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table B1: LGCE compliance with Code criteria

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