

Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Dorset County Council

Report to The Electoral Commission

July 2004

Translations and other formats

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to The Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI No. 3962). 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)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE
Robin Gray
Joan Jones CBE
Ann M. Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

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

This report sets out the Committee's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the county of Dorset.

Summary

We began a review of Dorset County Council's electoral arrangements on 4 February 2003. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 13 January 2004, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

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

Our main final recommendations for Dorset county council's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 137-138) are that:

- **Dorset County Council should have 45 councillors, three more than at present, representing 42 divisions.**
- **As the divisions are based on district wards which have themselves changed as a result of the recent district reviews, the boundaries of all divisions will be subject to change.**

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

- **In 29 of the proposed 42 divisions the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in 30 divisions, expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average by 2007.**

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

- **new parish warding arrangements for the West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish.**

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 six weeks after publication of the Final Report. The information in the representations will be available for public access once the Order has been made.

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Table 1: Final recommendations: Summary

Division name (by district council area)	Number of Councillors	Constituent district wards
Christchurch		
1 Burton Grange	1	Burton & Winkton ward; Grange ward.
2 Christchurch Central	1	Purewell & Stanpit ward; Town Centre ward; part of Portfield ward.
3 Commons	1	Jumpers ward; St Catherine's & Hurn ward; part of Portfield ward.
4 Highcliffe & Walkford	1	North Highcliffe & Walkford ward; West Highcliffe ward.
5 Mundeford & Highcliffe	1	Highcliffe ward; Mundeford & Friars Cliff ward.
East Dorset		
6 Colehill & Stapehill	1	Colehill East ward; Colehill West ward; Stapehill ward.
7 Corfe Mullen	1	Corfe Mullen Central ward; Corfe Mullen North ward; Corfe Mullen South ward.
8 Cranborne Chase	1	Alderholt ward; Crane ward; Handley Vale ward; part of Holt ward (the parishes of Chalbury, Hinton Martell, Hinton Parva and Horton).
9 Ferndown	2	Ameysford ward; Ferndown Central ward; Ferndown Links ward; Longham ward; Parley ward.
10 Minster	1	Stour ward; Wimborne Minster ward.
11 St Leonards & St Ives	1	St Leonards & St Ives East ward; St Leonard & St Ives West ward.
12 Verwood & Three Legged Cross	2	Three Cross & Potterne ward; Verwood Dewlands ward; Verwood Newtown ward; Verwood Stephen's Castle ward.
13 West Moors & Holt	1	West Moors ward; part of Holt ward (the parish of Holt).
North Dorset		
14 Blackmore Vale	1	Blackmore ward; Lydden Vale ward; Stour Valley ward.
15 Blandford	1	Blandford Damory Down ward; Blandford Hilltop ward; Blandford Langton St Leonards ward; Blandford Old Town ward; Blandford Station ward.

Division name (by district council area)	Number of Councillors	Constituent district wards
16 Gillingham	1	Gillingham Town ward; Lodbourne ward; Milton ward; Wyke ward.
17 Hambledon	1	Cranborne Chase; Hill Forts ward; The Beacon ward; The Lower Tarrant ward.
18 Shaftesbury	1	Shaftesbury Central ward; Shaftesbury Christy's ward; Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward; Shaftesbury Underhill ward.
19 Stour Vale	1	Bourton & District ward; Marnhull ward; Motcombe and Ham ward; The Stours ward.
20 Winterborne	1	Abbey ward; Bulbarrow ward; Portman ward; Riversdale ward.
Purbeck		
21 Egdon Heath	1	Bere Regis ward; Winfrith ward; Wool ward; part of Lytchett Matravers ward (the parish of Morden).
22 Lytchett	1	Lytchett Minster & Upton East ward; Lytchett Minster & Upton West ward; part of Lytchett Matravers ward (the parish of Lytchett Matravers).
23 Purbeck Hills	1	Castle ward; Creech Barrow ward; Langton ward; West Purbeck ward.
24 Swanage	1	Swanage North ward; Swanage South ward.
25 Wareham	1	Wareham ward; St. Martin ward.
West Dorset		
26 Beaminster	1	Beaminster ward; Broadwindsor ward; part of Maiden Newton ward (the parishes of Compton Valence, Frome Vauchurch, Hooke, Rampisham, Toller Fratrum, Toller Porcorum, West Compton, Wraxall, Wynford Eagle); part of Netherbury ward (the parish of Netherbury).
27 Bride Valley	1	Burton Bradstock ward; Bradpole ward; Loders ward; part of Bridport North ward (Bradpole Claremont parish ward of Bradpole parish); part of Chesil Bank ward (Litton Cheney parish).

Division name (by district council area)	Number of Councillors	Constituent district wards
28 Bridport	1	Part of Bridport North ward (Bridport North parish ward); part of Bridport South & Bothenhampton ward (Bridport South parish ward); Part of Chideock & Symondsburry ward (West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish); Part of Netherbury ward (Allington parish).
29 Chickerell & Chesil Bank	1	Chickerell ward; part of Chesil Bank ward (the parishes of Abbotsbury, Fleet, Kingston Russell, Langton Herring, Littlebredy, Long Bredy and Portesham); part of Winterborne St Martin ward (the parishes of Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton).
30 Dorchester	2	Dorchester North ward; Dorchester South ward; Dorchester East ward; Dorchester West ward.
31 Linden Lea	1	Broadmayne ward; Owermoigne ward; Puddletown ward; part of Winterborne St Martin ward (the parishes of Bincombe, Whitcombe, Winterborne Came, Winterborne Herringston, Winterborne Monkton, Winterborne St Martin,)
32 Marshwood Vale	1	Charmouth ward; Lyme Regis ward; Marshwood Vale ward; part of Chideock & Symondsburry ward (the parishes of Chideock, Stanton St Gabriel and Symondsburry).
33 Sherborne	1	Sherborne East ward; Sherborne West ward.
34 Sherborne Rural	1	Halstock ward; Bradford Abbas ward; Cam Vale ward; Queen Thorne ward; Yetminster ward.
35 Three Valleys	1	Frome Valley ward; Charminster and Cerne Valley ward; part of Maiden Newton ward (Maiden Newton parish); Piddle Valley ward.

Weymouth & Portland

36	Broadwey	1	Littlemoor ward; Upwey & Broadwey ward; Wey Valley ward.
37	Lodmoor	1	Preston ward; Radipole ward.
38	Portland Harbour	1	Underhill ward; Wyke Regis ward.
39	Portland Tophill	1	Tophill East ward; Tophill West ward.
40	Rodwell	1	Weymouth East ward; Weymouth West ward.
41	Westham	1	Westham North ward; Westham West ward.
42	Weymouth Town	1	Melcombe Regis ward; Westham East ward.

Notes:

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

Table 2: Final recommendations for Dorset

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Christchurch				
1 Burton Grange	1	6,786	6,786	-3
2 Christchurch Central	1	7,443	7,443	6
3 Commons	1	8,024	8,024	14
4 Highcliffe & Walkford	1	7,528	7,528	7
5 Mundeford & Highcliffe	1	7,494	7,494	7
East Dorset				
6 Colehill & Stapehill	1	7,733	7,733	10
7 Corfe Mullen	1	8,090	8,090	15
8 Cranbourne Chase	1	6,688	6,688	-5
9 Ferndown	2	15,413	7,707	10
10 Minster	1	7,576	7,576	8
11 St Leonards & St Ives	1	5,996	5,996	-15
12 Verwood & Three Legged Cross	2	10,985	5,493	-22
13 West Moors & Holt	1	7,285	7,285	4
North Dorset				
14 Blackmore Vale	1	7,275	7,275	4
15 Blandford	1	7,004	7,004	0
16 Gillingham	1	7,185	7,185	2
17 Hambledon	1	7,773	7,773	11
18 Shaftesbury	1	5,450	5,450	-22
19 Stour Vale	1	6,022	6,022	-14
20 Winterborne	1	7,382	7,382	5

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Dorset

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Christchurch				
1 Burton Grange	1	6,855	6,855	-8
2 Christchurch Central	1	8,464	8,464	13
3 Commons	1	8,275	8,275	11
4 Highcliffe & Walkford	1	8,133	8,133	9
5 Mundeford & Highcliffe	1	7,627	7,627	2
East Dorset				
6 Colehill & Stapehill	1	7,799	7,799	4
7 Corfe Mullen	1	8,165	8,165	9
8 Cranbourne Chase	1	6,983	6,983	-7
9 Ferndown	2	16,161	8,081	8
10 Minster	1	7,976	7,976	7
11 St Leonards & St Ives	1	6,120	6,120	-18
12 Verwood & Three Legged Cross	2	11,975	5,988	-20
13 West Moors & Holt	1	7,740	7,740	-1
North Dorset				
14 Blackmore Vale	1	7,814	7,814	4
15 Blandford	1	7,599	7,599	2
16 Gillingham	1	7,765	7,765	4
17 Hambledon	1	7,981	7,981	7
18 Shaftesbury	1	6,582	6,582	-12
19 Stour Vale	1	6,712	6,712	-10
20 Winterborne	1	7,576	7,576	1

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Dorset

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Purbeck				
21 Egdon Heath	1	6,261	6,261	-11
22 Lytchett	1	8,775	8,775	25
23 Purbeck Hills	1	5,620	5,620	-20
24 Swanage	1	8,028	8,028	14
25 Wareham	1	6,892	6,892	-2
West Dorset				
26 Beaminster	1	6,489	6,489	-8
27 Bride Valley	1	6,543	6,543	-7
28 Bridport	1	7,110	7,110	1
29 Chickerell & Chesil Bank	1	6,328	6,328	-10
30 Dorchester	2	13,263	6,632	-6
31 Linden Lea	1	7,286	7,286	4
32 Marshwood Vale	1	7,299	7,299	4
33 Sherborne	1	6,846	6,846	-2
34 Sherborne Rural	1	7,669	7,669	9
35 Three Valleys	1	7,425	7,425	6
Weymouth & Portland				
36 Broadwey	1	8,137	8,137	16
37 Lodmoor	1	7,174	7,174	2
38 Portland Harbour	1	6,562	6,562	-7
39 Portland Tophill	1	6,596	6,596	-6
40 Rodwell	1	6,844	6,844	-3

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Dorset

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Purbeck				
21 Egdon Heath	1	7,265	7,265	-3
22 Lytchett	1	9,068	9,068	21
23 Purbeck Hills	1	5,797	5,797	-22
24 Swanage	1	8,551	8,551	14
25 Wareham	1	7,069	7,069	-5
West Dorset				
26 Beaminster	1	6,940	6,940	-7
27 Bride Valley	1	7,001	7,001	-6
28 Bridport	1	7,973	7,973	7
29 Chickerell & Chesil Bank	1	6,480	6,480	-13
30 Dorchester	2	15,623	7,812	4
31 Linden Lea	1	7,952	7,952	6
32 Marshwood Vale	1	7,869	7,869	5
33 Sherborne	1	7,204	7,204	-4
34 Sherborne Rural	1	7,898	7,898	6
35 Three Valleys	1	8,174	8,174	9
Weymouth & Portland				
36 Broadwey	1	8,458	8,458	13
37 Lodmoor	1	7,324	7,324	-2
38 Portland Harbour	1	7,142	7,142	-4
39 Portland Tophill	1	6,836	6,836	-9
40 Rodwell	1	7,034	7,034	-6

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Dorset

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
41 Westham	1	6,185	6,185	-12
42 Weymouth	1	7,419	7,419	6
Totals	45	315,883	-	-
Averages	-	-	7,020	-

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for Dorset

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
41 Westham	1	6,551	6,551	-12
42 Weymouth	1	8,302	8,302	11
Totals	45	336,513	-	-
Averages	-	-	7,478	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Dorset County 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 county. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Please note that the 2002/2007 figures differ slightly between the County Council's proposed wards and the existing wards. However, this does not have a substantive effect on our proposals. This is due to rounding.

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the county of Dorset. Our review of the county is 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 currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 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. 3962), i.e. the need to:
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.
- The general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and
 - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

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

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

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

6 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 sets out the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements*. These statutory *Rules* state that each division

should be wholly contained within a single district and that division boundaries should not split unwarded parishes or parish wards.

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

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

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

10 The **Rules** provide that, in considering county council electoral arrangements, we should have regard to the boundaries of district wards. We attach considerable importance to achieving coterminosity between the boundaries of divisions and wards. The term "coterminosity" is used throughout the report and refers to situations where the boundaries of county electoral divisions and district wards are the same, that is to say, where county divisions comprise one or more whole district wards. Where wards or groups of wards are not coterminous with county divisions, this can cause confusion for the electorate at local elections, lead to increased election costs and, in our view, may not be conducive to effective and convenient local government.

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

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

13 We are not prescriptive on council size. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction or no change, should be supported by evidence and argumentation. Given the stage now reached in the introduction of new political management structures under the provisions of the

Local Government Act 2000, it is important that whatever council size interested parties may propose to us they can demonstrate that their proposals have been fully thought through, and have been developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structure. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

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

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

The review of Dorset County Council

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

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

18 Stage Three began on 13 January 2004 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Dorset County Council*, and ended on 8 March 2004. During this period we sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four

we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

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

2 Current electoral arrangements

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

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

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

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

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

Table 3: Existing electoral arrangements

Division name (by district council area)		Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Variance from average %
Christchurch				
1	Burton Grange	1	7,763	3
2	Christchurch Central	1	7,689	2
3	Commons	1	6,883	-8
4	Highcliffe	1	6,794	-10
5	Mudford & Wingfield	1	8,146	8
East Dorset				
6	Colehill	1	7,443	-1
7	Corfe Mullen	1	8,090	8
8	Cranborne Chase	1	6,698	-11
9	Ferndown	1	6,402	-15
10	Hampreston South	1	7,127	-5
11	Minster	1	7,625	1
12	St Leonards & St Ives	1	5,996	-20
13	Verwood	1	12,085	61
14	West Moors	1	8,300	10
North Dorset				
15	Blackmore	1	7,478	-1
16	Blandford	1	7,819	4
17	Gillingham	1	9,237	23
18	Hambledon	1	7,224	-4
19	Shaftesbury	1	8,242	10
20	Winterborne	1	8,091	8
Purbeck				
21	Egdon Heath	1	6,650	-12
22	Lytchett	1	8,775	17
23	Purbeck Hills	1	5,231	-30
24	Swanage	1	8,028	7

Table 3 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Variance from average %
Christchurch			
1 Burton Grange	1	8,119	1
2 Christchurch Central	1	8,683	8
3 Commons	1	7,036	-12
4 Highcliffe	1	6,918	-14
5 Mundeford & Wingfield	1	8,599	7
East Dorset			
6 Colehill	1	7,587	-5
7 Corfe Mullen	1	8,165	2
8 Cranborne Chase	1	6,979	-13
9 Ferndown	1	6,796	-15
10 Hampreston South	1	7,470	-7
11 Minster	1	7,945	-1
12 St Leonards & St Ives	1	6,120	-24
13 Verwood	1	13,091	-63
14 West Moors	1	8,466	6
North Dorset			
15 Blackmore	1	7,972	-1
16 Blandford	1	8,424	5
17 Gillingham	1	10,057	26
18 Hambledon	1	7,425	-7
19 Shaftesbury	1	9,800	-22
20 Winterborne	1	8,351	4
Purbeck			
21 Egdon Heath	1	7,663	-4
22 Lytchett	1	9,069	13
23 Purbeck Hills	1	5,397	-33
24 Swanage	1	8,551	7

Table 3 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2002)	Variance from average %
25 Wareham	1	6,892	-8
West Dorset			
26 Beaminster	1	7,249	-4
27 Bridport	1	7,749	3
28 Cerne	1	7,856	4
29 Chesil	1	8,277	10
30 Dorchester East	1	7,308	-3
31 Dorchester North	1	7,741	3
32 Dorchester Rural South	1	9,875	31
33 Marshwood Vale	1	6,891	-8
34 Sherborne	1	6,846	-9
35 Sherborne Rural	1	6,460	-14
Weymouth & Portland			
36 Broadwey	1	8,137	8
37 Preston	1	7,174	-5
38 Portland Harbour	1	6,562	-13
39 Portland Tophill	1	6,596	-12
40 Rodwell	1	6,844	-9
41 Westham	1	6,185	-18
42 Weymouth Town	1	7,419	-1
Totals	42	315,877	-
Averages	-	7,521	-

Table 3 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements

Division name (by district council area)	Number of councillors	Electorate (2007)	Variance from average %
25 Wareham	1	7,069	-12
West Dorset			
26 Beaminster	1	7,737	-3
27 Bridport	1	8,625	8
28 Cerne	1	8,583	7
29 Chesil	1	8,802	10
30 Dorchester East	1	7,867	-2
31 Dorchester North	1	9,758	22
32 Dorchester Rural South	1	10,480	31
33 Marshwood Vale	1	7,474	-7
34 Sherborne	1	7,204	-10
35 Sherborne Rural	1	6,582	-18
Weymouth & Portland			
36 Broadwey	1	8,458	6
37 Preston	1	7,324	-9
38 Portland Harbour	1	7,142	-11
39 Portland Tophill	1	6,836	-15
40 Rodwell	1	7,034	-12
41 Westham	1	6,551	-18
42 Weymouth Town	1	8,302	4
Totals	42	336,511	-
Averages	-	8,012	-

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

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

3 Draft recommendations

25 During Stage One we received 14 representations, including a county-wide scheme from Dorset County Council, and representations from ten parish and town councils, one district council and two county councillors. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Dorset County Council*.

26 Our draft recommendations were based on the County Council's proposals, which achieved improvement in electoral equality. However, we moved away from the County Council's scheme in a number of areas, affecting three boroughs/districts. We proposed that:

- Dorset County Council should be served by 45 councillors;
- there should be 40 electoral divisions, involving changes to the boundaries of all of the existing divisions.

Draft recommendation

Dorset Council should comprise 45 councillors, serving 40 divisions.

27 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 29 of the 40 divisions varying by no more than 10% from the county average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only nine divisions varying by more than 10% from the average in 2007.

4 Responses to consultation

28 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 28 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Dorset County Council.

Dorset County Council

29 The County Council supported our proposal to accept their Stage One proposal for a council size of 45. It made no representations regarding the districts of East Dorset, North Dorset or Purbeck and supported our proposed amendment in Christchurch to improve the level of coterminosity. It also supported the creation of a two-member Dorchester division in West Dorset. However, it put forward alternative proposals for two divisions for West Dorset and promoted single-member divisions in Weymouth & Portland to reflect community identities. The council supported our proposed changes of names of electoral divisions throughout the county, subject to our further consideration of the Weymouth & Portland area.

District and borough councils

30 We received a representation from North Dorset District Council who supported our proposals.

Political parties

31 We received one submission from the South Dorset Labour Party who opposed our proposed two-member divisions within the Weymouth & Portland borough.

Parish and town councils

32 We received submissions from 14 parish and town councils. In East Dorset, Holt Parish Council supported our proposed increase in council size but expressed concern at the proposal to link Holt parish with West Moors & Holt division on grounds of community interest. The submission also included alternative proposals for three divisions within East Dorset.

33 In Purbeck we received two representations from members of East Stoke Parish Council who opposed the proposals to include their parish within the proposed Purbeck Hills division.

34 In West Dorset, there were a number of concerns about our proposed Sherborne Rural division. Melbury Osmond Parish Council opposed being linked to it and Corscombe, Halstock & District Parish Council opposed proposals for Halstock ward to be contained within it. Queen Thorpe Parish Council, Cam Vale Parish Council, Chetnole & Stockwood Parish Council and Yeohead & Castleton Parish Council also objected to the proposed division arguing that the Sherborne Rural division was too large to manage effectively and did not community interest. Elsewhere, Maiden Newton Parish Council opposed proposals that it be included within the Beaminster & Maiden Newton division. Bridport Town Council proposed that the West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish be included within the proposed Bridport division. Chesil Bank

Parish Council opposed proposals to combine their area with the town of Chickerell. Thorncombe Parish Council confirmed that they had 'no objections' to the proposals in the area and Bradpole Parish Council supported our draft recommendations in full.

Other representations

35 A further eleven representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from a local organisation, MPs, councillors and residents.

36 Councillor Legg objected to our proposals for the County. Additionally he objected to the proposed Sherborne Rural division due to the lack of local ties and its size.

37 In West Dorset, Councillor Barrett opposed proposals for a two-member Dorchester division. West Bay Forum and Councillor Brown objected to our proposal to include West Cliff within the Marshwood Vale division on community interest grounds. Councillor Frost opposed our proposals to include Halstock ward in Sherborne Rural division and suggested that Halstock has a greater affinity with the proposed Beaminster & Maiden Newton division.

38 In Weymouth & Portland, Councillor Burden, Councillor Thomas, Councillor West and a local resident objected to the proposed two-member divisions within the borough arguing that the areas covered in the new divisions are too diverse to be grouped together.

39 Jim Knight MP opposed our two-member divisions within Weymouth & Portland and objected to our proposal that East Stoke parish be contained within the proposed Purbeck Hills division in Purbeck. Oliver Letwin MP offered support to Cam Vale Parish Council and Melbury Osmond Parish Council in their objection to our proposed Sherborne Rural division.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

40 As with our reviews of districts, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Dorset is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) which defines 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 division of the county'.

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

42 We have discussed in Chapter One the additional parameters which apply to reviews of county council electoral arrangements and the need to have regard to the boundaries of district wards to achieve coterminosity. In addition, our approach is to ensure that, having reached conclusions on the appropriate number of councillors to be elected to the county council, each district council area is allocated the number of county councillors to which it is entitled. It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every division of a county.

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

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

Electorate forecasts

45 Since 1975 there has been a 28% decrease in the electorate of Dorset county. However, this is largely due to the fact that the districts of Bournemouth and Poole became unitary authorities in 1997. At Stage One the County Council submitted

electorate forecasts for the year 2007, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 6.5% from 315,877 to 336,511 over the five-year period from 2002 to 2007. It expects most of the growth to be in West Dorset, although a significant amount is also expected in East Dorset and North Dorset districts. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. We accept that this is an inexact science, and having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

46 We received no comments on the Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates currently available.

Council size

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

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

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

50 The County Council stated that individual member review and development meetings were introduced in 2002 to enable county councillors to voice their opinions on their personal workloads. It said that the high volume of parish and town council meetings which members attend, especially in the large rural areas, put a strain on councillors' time. In addition a Member Advisory Panel considered various council sizes between 37 and 55 inclusive. A council size of 45 was the 'preferred option' when considering the calculation of projections of the electorate for 2007. It was not only the increase in electorate that concerned the County Council but the 'distribution within the

County'. It stated that the additional councillors would be allocated to the county's expanding towns and would reduce the burden for the representatives of the divisions with 'significantly higher electorates than the current average'. A public consultation was also held; of the 108 respondents only 17 disagreed with the proposed increase.

51 The County Council described in detail how the rationale behind the council size of 45 was based on the Corporate Performance Assessment of the County Council by the Audit Commission in 2002. The Council stated that they were assessed by the Audit Commission on a Comprehensive Performance Assessment and were judged to be an 'excellent authority'. It stated that this suggested that the current arrangements were providing effective and convenient local government and the proposals for a slight increase in councillors were in order to maintain this high standard. It stated that this facilitated solutions to be found in community and democratic terms for the expanding areas of the County.

52 We examined the County Council's proposals to increase from a 42 to a 45-member council. We noted that under the Council's proposals all the districts in the County would get the correct allocation of councillors. We therefore proposed adopting the County Council's proposals for a 45-member council. Consequently, having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we concluded that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 45 members.

53 During Stage Three we did not receive any alternative proposals for council size and we noted general support for a council of 45 members. Therefore in the absence of any new proposals or evidence which might have persuaded us to move away from our draft recommendations we have decided to confirm our draft recommendation for a council size of 45 as final.

Electoral arrangements

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

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

56 We adopted the County Council's proposals in full for East Dorset, North Dorset and Purbeck. However, we proposed a number of modifications to the County Council's proposals in Christchurch, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland to better reflect the statutory criteria and provide for improved levels of coterminosity.

57 In Christchurch although we proposed basing our draft recommendations on the County Council's proposals, we noted that only two of the Council's five proposed divisions were coterminous. We therefore proposed an amendment between the proposed Burton Grange & Stanpit and Christchurch Central divisions in order to provide for an improved level of coterminosity and provide for effective and convenient local government. Under our proposals the levels of electoral equality would worsen slightly but we were of the view that they would better reflect the statutory criteria as a whole than under the County Council's proposals.

58 In West Dorset we noted that Councillor Legg's and the County Council's district-wide proposals secured good levels of electoral equality. However, both proposals offered poor levels of coterminosity. We also noted that under both proposals parishes would be divided between county divisions. Given the argumentation provided, we were of the view that the County Council's proposals should form the basis of our recommendations in the district as they secured good levels of electoral equality and provided for a superior level of coterminosity and argumentation than the proposals forwarded by Councillor Legg. However, in order to achieve an improved level of coterminosity and to provide for improved levels of electoral equality we proposed a number of modifications to the Marshwood Vale, Beaminster & Maiden Newton and Bridport divisions. We also noted that under the County Council's proposals its proposed Dorchester North division would vary by 13% from the county average by 2007. Therefore, having considered the options available to us, we proposed combining the proposed Dorchester North and Dorchester South divisions to form a two-member Dorchester division which would improve the electoral variance without affecting the level of coterminosity in the district.

59 In Weymouth & Portland, given the excellent level of coterminosity under the County Council proposals, we proposed using them as the basis of our proposals in the district. However, in order to provide for improved levels of electoral equality we proposed a number of modifications. We proposed that the divisions of Broadway and Lodmoor be combined to form a two-member Broadway & Lodmoor division which would secure a good electoral variance without affecting the level of coterminosity. We also proposed combining the proposed Westham and Weymouth Town divisions to form a two-member Westham & Weymouth Town division which would secure improved levels of electoral equality without affecting the level of coterminosity.

60 At Stage Three, the County Council supported our draft recommendations in Christchurch, East Dorset, North Dorset and Purbeck. It also supported the creation of the two-member Dorchester division to improve electoral equality in West Dorset. However, it proposed amendments to our draft recommendations for Marshwood Vale division and Beaminster & Maiden Newton division. It also objected to the creation of the two-member divisions within the Weymouth & Portland borough and proposed maintaining single-member divisions. The Council further supported our proposed name changes of electoral divisions 'subject to the BCFE's further consideration of their draft recommendations relating to the two two-member divisions in Weymouth'.

61 In response to our draft recommendations report, a number of respondents expressed the view that they were opposed to the creation of two-member divisions. Councillor Legg opposed two-member divisions across the county believing that they would lead to poor representation. Councillor Barrett objected to the two-member Dorchester division. The South Dorset Labour Party opposed the two-member divisions in Weymouth & Portland.

62 In Weymouth & Portland we received general objections to the two two-member divisions proposed in the draft recommendations. Councillor John West and Councillor Thomas from Weymouth & Portland Borough Council objected strongly to the creation of the two two-member divisions as did Councillor Burden, Jim Knight MP and a local resident.

63 As explained earlier in the report, following the commencement of Part IV of the Local Government Act 2000, and in particular section 89, the constraints which previously prevented the creation of multi-member divisions have been removed. As part of our draft recommendations we proposed a number of two-member divisions where we judged that they would provide the best balance between electoral equality and coterminosity while reflecting community identities and interests. However, we acknowledge that local people and organisations are in a much better position to provide us with community identity argumentation, and, indeed, invite them to do so throughout the review process.

64 We note the differing views on the use of multi-member divisions and acknowledge the opposition from a number of sources. However, unless we have received a good level of evidence and argumentation regarding community identity we will place more emphasis on achieving a good balance between electoral equality and coterminosity. In the case of Weymouth & Portland, having looked at all the representations received we do consider that sufficient evidence and argumentation has been provided to persuade us to move away from two multi-member divisions and are therefore amending our draft recommendations accordingly.

65 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage Three, we are also making a number of amendments to our proposed divisions of Beaminster & Maiden Newton, Bridport, Marshwood Vale and Three Valleys in West Dorset and to the divisions of Broadway & Lodmoor and Westham & Weymouth Town in the borough of Weymouth & Portland. These are predominantly to provide a better reflection of community identity, but in Bridport our amendment also reflects geographical links.

66 In Weymouth & Portland we are proposing name changes in light of the move back to single-member divisions.

67 In the West Dorset district our proposals would involve the re-warding of the parish of Symondsburry into two parish wards, namely Symondsburry parish ward and West Cliff parish ward.

68 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- i. Christchurch borough (page 40)
- ii. East Dorset district (page 41)
- iii. North Dorset district (page 43)
- iv. Purbeck district (page 45)
- v. West Dorset district (page 47)
- vi. Weymouth & Portland borough (page 52)

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

Christchurch Borough

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

71 Under a council size of 45 members, Christchurch is entitled to five councillors. During Stage One we received a borough-wide submission from the County Council who proposed five single-member divisions. Its proposals for this area would achieve 40% coterminosity. Its proposed Highcliffe & Walkford division would comprise the new borough wards of North Highcliffe & Walkford and West Highcliffe. Its proposed Mundeford & Highcliffe division would comprise the new borough wards of Highcliffe and Mundeford & Friars Cliff. Its proposed Burton Grange & Stanpit division would comprise the new borough wards of Burton & Winkton and Grange and would also comprise part of the new Purewell & Stanpit borough ward (Purewell & Stanpit polling district B). Its proposed Christchurch Central division would comprise the new Town Centre borough ward and part of the new Purewell & Stanpit borough ward (Purewell & Stanpit polling district A) and part of the new Portfield borough ward (Portfield polling district B). Its proposed Commons division would comprise the new St Catherine's & Hurn and Jumpers borough wards and part of the new Portfield borough ward (Portfield polling district A).

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

73 At Stage One we received no further submissions for Christchurch and therefore proposed basing our draft recommendations on the County Council's proposals, as we considered that they would secure a good level of electoral equality and would provide a good reflection of community identity. However, we noted that only two of the Council's five divisions were coterminous and therefore proposed an amendment between the proposed Burton Grange & Stanpit and Christchurch Central divisions. Consequently we proposed that that Purewell & Stanpit polling district B be transferred to the proposed Christchurch Central division in order to provide for improved levels of coterminosity and provide for effective and convenient local government. We noted that

under our proposed amendment the levels of electoral equality would worsen slightly. However, we judged that this was justified in light of the improved coterminosity that our proposed division pattern achieved.

74 Our draft recommendations achieved a level of coterminosity of 60% between county divisions and borough wards boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed division of Burton Grange would have 3% fewer electors per councillor than the county average (8% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Christchurch Central, Commons, Highcliffe & Walkford and Mudeford & Highcliffe would have 6%, 14%, 7% and 7% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (13%, 11%, 9% and 2% more by 2007).

75 At Stage Three, the County Council supported our draft recommendations in full. North Dorset District Council's submission supported our proposals. We received no further submissions in respect of the borough and consequently we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations as final. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be the same as at draft and coterminosity would remain at 60%. Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

East Dorset District

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

77 Under a council size of 45 members East Dorset is entitled to ten councillors. During Stage One we received three submissions for this area, including district-wide schemes from the County Council and Councillor Legg and comments from Wimbourne Minister Parish Council. The County Council proposed two two-member divisions and six single-member divisions for the district, achieving 75% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions with two divisions varying by more than 10% by 2007.

78 The County Council proposed that Cranborne Chase division comprise the new district wards of Crane, Alderholt and Handley Vale and part of Holt ward (the parishes of Chalbury, Hinton Martell, Hinton Parva and Horton). Its proposed Minster division comprised the new district wards of Stour and Wimborne Minster. Its proposed division of Corfe Mullen comprised the new district wards of Corfe Mullen Central, Corfe Mullen North and Corfe Mullen South. Its proposed division of Colehill & Stapehill comprised the new district wards of Colehill West, Colehill East and Stapehill. Its proposed division of Ferndown comprised the new district wards of Longham, Ferndown Central, Ameysford, Parley and Ferndown Links and would be represented by two councillors. Its proposed division of West Moors & Holt comprised the new district ward of West Moors and part of the new Holt ward (the parish of Holt). Its proposed division of Verwood & Three Legged Cross comprised the new district wards of Verwood Dewlands, Verwood Newtown, Verwood Stephen's Castle and Three Cross & Potterne

and would be represented by two councillors. Its proposed division of St Leonards & St Ives comprised the new district wards of St Leonards & St Ives East and St Leonards & St Ives West.

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

80 At Stage One Councillor Legg proposed ten single-member divisions for East Dorset. His proposals provided for a level of coterminosity of 30% with three of his proposed divisions varying by more than 10% from the county average by 2007. He wished to provide alternative proposals to the County Council's in order to 'pay greater respect to community identity'. Wimbourne Minster Parish Council stated that they wished to retain the same electoral divisions subject to 'any minor amendments to cater for recent changes to district wards'.

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

82 Our draft recommendations achieved a level of coterminosity of 75% between county divisions and district wards boundaries. Under the draft recommendations the divisions of Cranborne Chase, St Leonards & St Ives and Verwood & Three Legged Cross would initially have 5%, 15% and 22% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7%, 18% and 20% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Colehill & Stapehill, Corfe Mullen, Ferndown, West Moors & Holt and Minster would

initially have 10%, 15%, 10%, 4% and 8% more electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4% more, 9% more, 8% more, 1% fewer and 7% more by 2007).

83 At Stage Three the County Council did not comment on the district in their submission. However, we received two submissions in response to our draft recommendations; one from Holt Parish Council and one from Councillor Legg. Holt Parish Council expressed support for the increase in councillors and submitted an alternative proposal for three divisions within East Dorset to reflect community identity. This was argued on the basis that Holt, a rural area, is placed 'with the very urban area of West Moors with whom we have nothing in common'. The parish proposed that West Moors ward become a division on its own, Alderholt ward be linked with Verwood and Holt parish be transferred to Cranbourne Chase division. However, the parish council did not propose alternatives for divisions in the remainder of the district. We examined the options provided and found that the electoral equality would worsen if their proposals were implemented. With their proposals the electoral variance would result in a 5%, 15% and 22% variance, whilst our proposals secured variances of 1%, 7% and 20%. We do not consider that the parish council have provided sufficient evidence to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations and we must also look to securing the best possible electoral arrangements for the district as a whole and therefore cannot view any area in isolation. On balance we consider our proposals better reflect the statutory criteria.

84 Councillor Legg opposed our proposed two-member Verwood division. He argued on the grounds that the division, 'places a considerable burden on the individual representing them' and continued, 'I believe that these proposals will lead to poor representation and eventual voter dissatisfaction'. However, our proposed two-member division improved the level of coterminosity in the district and helped facilitate a scheme in the area. We do not consider that Councillor Legg provided sufficient argumentation or evidence in support of his Stage Three submission and we have not been persuaded to depart from our proposals based on his submission.

85 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received during the consultation period. While we note there is minor opposition we have not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations. We did not consider that the proposals received at Stage Three contained sufficient new evidence or argumentation to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations. Therefore in light of this we are endorsing our draft recommendations as final.

86 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be the same as at draft and coterminosity would remain at 75%. Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

North Dorset District

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

88 Under a council size of 45 members, North Dorset is entitled to seven councillors. During Stage One we received two district-wide schemes for this area, from the County Council and Councillor Legg. At Stage One the County Council proposed seven single-member divisions. Its proposals for this area would achieve 100% coterminosity between district ward boundaries and county divisions, with one division varying by more than 10% by 2007.

89 Its proposed Winterborne division comprised the new district wards of Abbey, Riversdale, Portman and Bulbarrow. Its proposed Blandford division comprised the new district wards of Blandford Damory Down, Blandford Hilltop, Blandford Langton St Leonards, Blandford Old Town and Blandford Station. Its proposed Hambledon division comprised the new district wards of The Lower Tarrants, Cranborne Chase, The Beacon and Hill Forts. Its proposed Blackmore Vale division comprised the new district wards of Lydden Vale, Blackmore and Stour Valley. Its proposed Gillingham division comprised the new district wards of Milton, Gillingham Town, Wyke and Lodbourne. Its proposed Stour Vale division comprised the new district wards of Bourton & District, Motcombe & Ham, The Stours and Marnhull. Its proposed Shaftesbury division comprised the new district wards of Shaftesbury Central, Shaftesbury Christy's, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill.

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

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

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

93 Our draft recommendations achieved a level of coterminosity of 100% between county division and district ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed divisions of Stour Vale and Shaftesbury would initially have 14% and 22%

fewer electors per councillor than the county average (10% and 12% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Blackmore Vale, Blandford, Gillingham, Hambledon and Winterborne would initially have 4%, 0%, 2%, 11% and 5% more electors per councillor than the county average (4%, 2%, 4%, 7% and 1% more by 2007).

94 At Stage Three, the County Council and North Dorset District Council supported our draft recommendations. We received no further submissions for the borough and consequently we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be the same as at draft, coterminosity would remain at 100%. Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Purbeck District

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

96 Under a council size of 45 members, Purbeck is entitled to five councillors. During Stage One we received seven submissions for this area, including district-wide schemes from the County Council and Councillor Legg. The County Council proposed five single-member divisions for the district, achieving 60% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions with three divisions varying by more than 10% by 2007.

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

98 The County Council noted that the division of Lytchett Minster was subject to a high electoral variance. It argued that to maintain community interest and identity in the area the proposals were necessary. The council argued that to achieve better electoral equality the village of Lytchett Matravers would have to be split between Lytchett Minster to the east and Bere Regis to the west. The County Council noted the proposed Swanage division would comprise two wards, Swanage North and Swanage South. It stated that to achieve better electoral equality it would be necessary to separate these two town wards and create two divisions with a mix of both urban and rural electors. The County Council argued that it would not be beneficial to electors in either area and stated that it would prefer to maintain community identity.

99 At Stage One the County Council noted that the Purbeck Hills division would have a high electoral variance by 2007 but stated that 'this inequality is due to the extreme

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

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

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

102 We considered the representations received at Stage One carefully. We considered Councillor Legg's proposals for the area, but noted that his proposals, whilst securing good levels of electoral equality, did not secure a good level of coterminosity in the case of Options one and two. We also noted that his Options two and three divided parishes between divisions. We noted that, although the County Council's proposals did not secure as good a level of electoral equality, they secured a good level of coterminosity and did not divide parishes between divisions. Therefore given the balance of the statutory criteria and the argumentation provided we proposed basing our proposals on those of the County Council. We carefully considered the various submissions received proposing to retain East Stoke parish within the Egdon Heath division. However, we noted that the transfer of East Stoke parish in to the proposed Egdon Heath division from the Purbeck Hill division would result in a high level of electoral inequality of 2% and 27% by 2007 respectively, whilst our proposals secured a 3% and 22% variance. While we had some sympathy we did not consider that we could accept such a high variance. We have also considered the objections to the creation of large rural divisions particularly with regard to the proposed Purbeck Hills division. However, we noted that the electoral variance was already significantly high and that taking out parishes would exacerbate this problem. Therefore given the options available to us we proposed adopting the County Council's proposals in full for this district.

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

104 At Stage Three, we received three submissions including representations from East Stoke Parish Council. The County Council endorsed our draft recommendations for this district. Jim Knight MP opposed the proposal to place East Stoke Parish within our proposed Purbeck Hills division. In his submission he stated that the parish's 'affiliations and interests lie primarily to the West and North of the parish' and considered that East Stoke should be placed within our proposed Egdon Heath division. He stated that our proposal will 'negatively affect local representation and reduce the effectiveness of the county councillor and the quality of the service currently provided'.

105 East Stoke Parish Council was 'disappointed' that their original representation was not accepted by The Boundary Committee at Stage One. They reiterated their initial comments with reference to East Stoke parish being contained within the Purbeck Hills division instead of the Egdon Heath division. We acknowledge the issues raised by Jim Knight MP and East Stoke Parish Council. We have considered their proposals and looked at transferring the parish to the Egdon Heath division. However, as stated in our draft recommendations we could not justify an electoral variance of 27%. We consider that the proposals would not strike the best balance between the statutory criteria and therefore have not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations.

106 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations as final. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be the same as at draft, coterminosity would remain at 60%. Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

West Dorset District

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

108 Under a council size of 45 members West Dorset is entitled to eleven councillors. During Stage One we received six submissions for this area, including a district-wide scheme from the County Council and Councillor Legg. The County Council proposed eleven single-member divisions for the district, achieving 45% coterminosity between district wards and county divisions with two divisions varying by more than 10% by 2007.

109 During Stage One the County Council's proposed Marshwood Vale division comprised the new Charmouth, Lyme Regis and Marshwood Vale district wards, part of the new Broadwindsor district ward (Pilsden parish) and part of Chideock & Symondsbury district ward (the parishes of Chideock, Stanton St Gabriel and part of Symondsbury parish). Its proposed Bridport division comprised part of the new Bridport North district ward (Bridport North parish ward), part of the new Bridport South & Bothenhampton district ward (Bridport South parish ward), part of the new Netherbury district ward (Allington parish) and part of the new Chideock & Symondsbury district ward (the West Cliff area of Symondsbury parish). Its proposed Bride Valley division comprised the new Bradpole district ward, part of the new Bridport North district ward (Bradpole Claremont parish ward), part of Bridport South & Bothenhampton district ward (Bothenhampton parish), the new Burton Bradstock district ward, the new Lodgers district ward and part of the new Chesil Bank district ward (Litton Cheney parish). Its proposed Beaminster & Maiden Newton division comprised the new Beaminster and Maiden Newton district wards, part of Broadwindsor district ward (the parishes of Burstock, Broadwindsor, Seaborough and Stoke Abbott) and part of Netherbury district ward (Netherbury parish). Its proposed Sherborne division comprised the new Sherborne East and Sherborne West district wards. Its proposed Sherborne Rural division comprised the new Halstock, Bradford Abbas, Cam Vale, Queen Thorne and Yetminster district wards. Its proposed Three Valley division comprised the new Frome Valley, Charminster & Cerne Valley and Piddle Valley district wards. Its proposed Linden Lea division comprised part of the new Winterborne St Martin district ward (the parishes of Winterborne Monkton, Winterborne St Martin, Winterborne Came, Whitcombe, Winterborne Herringston and Bincombe) and the new Broadmayne, Owermoigne and Puddletown district wards. Its proposed Dorchester South division comprised the new Dorchester South and Dorchester East district wards. Its proposed Dorchester North division comprised the new Dorchester North and Dorchester West district wards. Its proposed Chickerell & Chesil Bank division comprised the new Chickerell district ward and part of Winterborne St Martin district ward (the parishes of Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton) and part of the new Chesil Bank district ward (the parishes of Long Bredy, Kingston Russell, Littlebredy, Abbotsbury, Portesham, Langton Herring and Fleet).

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

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

112 Broadwindsor Group Parish Council stated that it considered 'no change was needed'. Cerne Valley Parish Council wished to retain the existing division boundaries. Dorchester Town Council proposed that the town should be represented by two county

councillors and that these division boundaries should not extend outside of the town. Sherborne Town Council proposed that the electoral division boundary should keep the parish 'intact'.

113 We considered the representations received at Stage One carefully. We noted that both district-wide proposals secured good levels of electoral equality. However, we noted that both proposals secured poor levels of coterminosity. We also noted that under both proposals parishes would be divided between county divisions, the parish of Symondsbury under the County Council's proposals and the parishes of Symondsbury and Netherbury under the proposals of Councillor Legg. Given the argumentation provided, we were of the view that the County Council's proposals should form the basis of our recommendations in the district as they secured good levels of electoral equality and provided for a superior level of coterminosity and argumentation than the proposals forwarded by Councillor Legg.

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

115 We noted the submissions of Broadwindsor Group Parish Council and Cerne Valley Parish Council for no change. However, given the implementation of new district wards in the area it would not have been possible. We must also look to securing the best possible electoral arrangements for the district as a whole and therefore could not view any area in isolation.

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

117 At Stage Three, we received 18 submissions in relation to our draft recommendations. The County Council supported the creation of a two-member division in Dorchester. However, it did not support the proposal to move Pilsden parish to

Beaminster & Maiden Newton division or the West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish to Marshwood Vale division.

118 West Bay Forum echoed the County Council's objections as did Councillor Brown and Bridport Town Council. Bradpole Parish Council supported the draft proposals in full. Thorncombe Parish Council supported the proposed changes for the Marshwood Vale area and stated that they had no objections to the extended division. Councillor Barrett opposed the creation of a two-member Dorchester division. Maiden Newton Parish Council and Chesil Bank Parish Council opposed proposals for their areas. Melbury Osmond Parish Council, Corscombe, Halstock & District Parish Council, Yeohead & Castleton Parish Council, Chetnole & Stockwood Parish Council, Cam Vale Parish Council, Queen Thorne Parish Council, Councillor Legg, Councillor Frost and Oliver Letwin MP objected to the draft recommendations for the proposed Sherborne Rural division.

119 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. We noted the County Council's proposal that the West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish be transferred to its proposed Bridport division. However, at Stage One the County Council provided no evidence or argumentation as to why we should transfer this part of Symondsburry parish. Therefore, we placed the whole of Symondsburry parish within the proposed Marshwood Vale division to improve coterminosity. However, at Stage Three we have noted the evidence received in response to our draft recommendations which is based on geographical and community links. Access from the West Cliff area to Symondsburry is severely restricted; the accessible roads from the West Bay area travel through the proposed Bridport division before they reach the proposed Marshwood Vale division. We have considered the objections of the County Council, West Bay Forum, Bridport Town Council and Councillor Brown and consider that we have received sufficient evidence to depart from our draft proposals and to warrant the transfer of the West Cliff area to the proposed Bridport division. The transfer will affect coterminosity in the proposed Marshwood Vale and Bridport divisions. However, we feel this is justified in the light of the community identity and geographical argumentation put to us and consider that the proposed amendment would better reflect the statutory criteria than our draft recommendations.

120 At Stage One the County Council, in its submission, noted some minor local support for Stoke Abbot parish and Pilsden parish to be included within the Marshwood Vale division due to community ties. The County Council advisory panel considered this. However, they only proposed moving the parish of Pilsden. We received no evidence in support of this at Stage One and proposed a scheme where Pilsden was included in the Beaminster & Maiden Newton division to improve coterminosity. At Stage Three the County Council objected to the draft recommendations on the basis of geographical and community links. However, we do not consider that they have provided sufficient argumentation in respect of this. We have considered the geographical links and we have not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations as we consider that our proposals provide the best balance of the statutory criteria.

121 We received an objection from Councillor Barrett regarding the two-member Dorchester division. However, we have not been sufficiently persuaded that the proposed division would be 'an unrepresentable enormous conglomerate [division]'. We consider that the two-member division we have proposed as part of our draft recommendations improves electoral equality. We also note that we received support

for our proposed division from the County Council and are consequently confirming our draft recommendations for the two-member Dorchester division as final.

122 We considered Maiden Newton Parish Council's proposal to transfer their parish into the neighbouring Three Valleys division to reflect community identity. They argue that 'application of demographic distributions to this rural area, without consideration of physical geography has produced a result, which completely ignores community links[...] there are no direct public transport links from Maiden Newton [...] most of the services provided for these areas by Dorset County Council come from Bridport'. We consider that we have received enough evidence to justify the proposed transfer. We consider that the slightly worse coterminosity that would result in the area is outweighed by the improvement in the reflection of community identity. We are therefore confirming that Maiden Newton parish be transferred from the proposed Beaminster & Maiden Newton division to the proposed Three Valleys division.

123 Chesil Bank Parish Council opposed the inclusion of their parishes within the Chickerell & Chesil Bank division. We noted that their proposal impacts on Chickerell parish which sits on the edge of the district in isolation. If separated from the Chesil Bank area our only option would be to create a single-member Chickerell division which would have a high level of electoral inequality at 41%, whilst our proposed division secured an electoral variance of 13%. However, the parish has no neighbours except for Chesil Bank ward. We consider that our proposed divisions in the area provide a better allocation of councillors and a significantly better level of electoral equality and we have not been persuaded to move away from them.

124 In relation to the number of responses regarding the proposed Sherborne Rural division, a general objection to the creation of a large rural ward has been raised during Stage Three. Oliver Letwin MP, six parish councils and two councillors expressed concern over the size of the division and requested that parishes in the south west of the division be moved to ensure adequate representation and to reflect community links. We carefully considered the proposals to transfer parishes. However, we noted that this left certain parishes in isolation. It would not be possible to transfer these parishes, without transferring all the parishes in the vicinity. To remedy this we considered the transfer of a whole ward to the Marshwood Vale division but this would not solve the perceived problem of large rural divisions. It would simply transfer it in turn from one area to another. We considered Councillor Legg's Stage One proposal further, in an attempt to address the above issues. However, the same concern was prevalent. While we have some sympathy we do not feel that we have had enough further evidence from the respondents to justify departing from our draft recommendations, especially in light of the fact that we have not had responses from the other parishes concerned. Therefore in this area we are confirming our draft recommendations as final.

125 We are also therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final in this district generally with the exception of the amended Three Valleys division which will become non-coterminous in order to facilitate a better reflection of community identity. We consider that we have received enough community identity evidence to justify the transfer of Maiden Newton Parish Council from the proposed Beaminster & Maiden Newton division to the proposed Three Valleys division. As a consequence, we propose renaming this division as Beaminster. We have also decided to transfer the West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish from our proposed Marshwood Vale division to our proposed Bridport division. We acknowledge that this reduces coterminosity to 30% for

the district. However, on balance, we consider that this low level of coterminosity can be justified by the better reflection of community identity and geographical links that our final recommendations will provide.

126 Under our final recommendations the proposed divisions of Beaminster, Bride Valley, Chickerell & Chesil Bank, Dorchester and Sherborne would have 8%, 7%, 10%, 6% and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (7% fewer, 6% fewer, 13% fewer, 4% more and 4% fewer by 2007). The proposed divisions of Bridport, Linden Lea, Marshwood Vale, Sherborne Rural and Three Valleys would have 1%, 4%, 4%, 9% and 6% more electors per councillor than the county average (7%, 6%, 5%, 6% and 9% more by 2007). Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report, and on detailed Map 1 in Appendix A.

Weymouth & Portland Borough

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

128 Under a council size of 45 members Weymouth & Portland is entitled to seven councillors. During Stage One we received two submissions for this area, including a borough-wide scheme from the County Council. The County Council proposed seven single-member divisions for the borough, achieving 100% coterminosity between borough wards and county divisions with three divisions varying by more than 10% by 2007. Its proposed Broadway division comprised the new Upwey & Broadway, Littlemoor and Wey Valley borough wards. Its proposed division of Lodmoor comprised the new Preston and Radipole borough wards. Its proposed division of Westham comprised the new Westham North and Westham South borough wards. Its proposed division of Weymouth Town comprised the new Melcombe Regis and Westham East borough wards. Its proposed division of Rodwell comprised the new Weymouth East and Weymouth West borough wards. Its proposed division of Portland Harbour comprised the new Wyke Regis and Underhill borough wards. Its proposed division of Portland Tophill comprised of Tophill East and Tophill West borough wards.

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

130 We considered the representations received at Stage One carefully. Given the excellent level of coterminosity under the County Council proposals we proposed using them as the basis of our proposals in the borough. However, in order to provide for improved levels of electoral equality we proposed a number of modifications. We proposed that the divisions of Broadway and Lodmoor be combined to form a two-member Broadway & Lodmoor division which would secure an electoral variance of 9%

(6% by 2007) without affecting the level of coterminosity. We also proposed combining the proposed Westham and Weymouth Town divisions to form a two-member Westham & Weymouth Town division which would secure an electoral variance of 3% (1% by 2007) without affecting the level of coterminosity.

131 Our draft recommendations achieved 100% coterminosity between county divisions and borough ward boundaries. Under our draft recommendations the proposed divisions of Portland Harbour, Portland Tophill, Rodwell and Westham & Weymouth Town would have 7%, 6%, 3% and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4%, 9%, 6% and 1% fewer by 2007). The proposed division of Broadway & Lodmoor would have 9% more electors per councillor than the county average (6% more by 2007).

132 At Stage Three we received seven submissions in response to our draft recommendations including a submission from the County Council. We noted the general opposition to the creation of two two-member divisions within this borough. The County Council strongly opposed our creation of a two-member Broadway & Lodmoor and Westham & Weymouth Town divisions to improve electoral equality. It requested that The Boundary Committee, in respect of Broadway & Lodmoor division, 'review their draft recommendations to take account of community identity and, in particular, the evidence arising [...which] illustrates the very different socio-economic profile of the two proposed divisions.' With regard to the Westham & Weymouth division the council argued against the mix of the town area in Weymouth with the residential area of Westham. It further 'contended that the creation of a mixture of three one-member and two two-member divisions within a single urban area is inconsistent and likely to be confusing for electors'.

133 Borough Councillor West objected to our proposed Broadway & Lodmoor division. He proposed that we should maintain single-member divisions as the 'area covered by the proposed division is very diverse including farms, semi-rural village areas, social housing with deprivation, 1960s and 1970s estates and relatively affluent areas of executive-style housing. This would not form a natural boundary and would further hinder effective representation'. He referred to concern that a two-member division would cause 'a very heavy burden [on councillors] in a mainly urban area' and that the improvement in electoral equality is 'small'. Similarly, the South Dorset Labour party contended that it seems 'highly undesirable to disrupt the four well-established divisions in Weymouth & Portland when they are much closer to the average figure' and wished to maintain the status quo. Councillor Thomas and Councillor Burden expressed objections to our proposed two-member divisions broadly stating the above argumentation. Jim Knight MP objected to the proposed two-member divisions stating that the divisions are too large to manage effectively and would 'make it [...] impossible for a councillor or a new candidate to fulfil their obligations [...] the sheer size of the new area would create enormous practical difficulties in maintaining an effective link with local people, businesses and schools'. A local resident expressed the view that the new proposals 'ignore communities of interest' and 'present enormous communication difficulties for those wishing to represent the division'.

134 We have carefully considered all the representations received during the consultation period. We have considered the responses from Jim Knight MP, local councillors and the local resident that the communities are too diverse and too large to manage effectively. We note the argumentation provided by the County Council who

endorsed their Stage One recommendations and gave further evidence in support of them. We acknowledge that by combining these communities we would be disrupting a well-established structure within the borough and mixing social-economic diverse communities. The council enlarged on the evidence provided in their Stage One submission and provided a workable alternative in maintaining single-member divisions throughout the borough. We received strong argumentation regarding community identity in the area and, in the light of the consensus and the support received, we consider that we have enough evidence to justify endorsing the County Council's Stage One proposals and maintaining single-member divisions throughout the Borough of Weymouth & Portland. By moving away from our draft recommendations we are better able to reflect community identities, this will not affect coterminosity and would not significantly affect electoral equality in the borough. We consider that this would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria.

135 We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final in this borough with the exception of the two amended Broadway & Lodmoor and Westham & Weymouth Town divisions. Given our proposals for these divisions, we consequently propose the revised division names of Broadway, Lodmoor, Westham and Weymouth, to reflect the areas encompassed by the single member divisions. We are now adopting a pattern of single-member divisions throughout the borough. Our final recommendations would provide for 100% coterminosity between borough ward and county divisions.

136 As a consequence of the revised Broadway & Lodmoor and Westham & Weymouth Town divisions, three divisions would have electoral variances of more than 10% by 2007. Under our final recommendations the proposed divisions of Portland Harbour, Portland Tophill, Rodwell and Westham would have 7%, 6%, 3% and 12% fewer electors per councillor than the county average respectively (4%, 9%, 6% and 12% fewer by 2007). The proposed division of Broadway, Lodmoor and Weymouth would have 16%, 2% and 6% more electors per councillor than the county average (13% more, 2% fewer and 11% more by 2007). Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Conclusions

137 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we propose:

- there should be 45 councillors, an increase of three, representing 42 divisions, an increase of two;
- changes should be made to all of the existing 42 divisions.

138 We have decided to move away from our draft recommendations in the following areas:

- In West Dorset district, we propose transferring Maiden Newton parish from Beaminster & Maiden Newton division to Three Valleys division to reflect community identity. We consequently propose to rename this division as Beaminster.

- In West Dorset district, we propose transferring the West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish in Marshwood Vale division to the Bridport division to reflect community identity and geographical links.
- In Weymouth & Portland borough, we propose single-member divisions for the Broadway & Lodmoor and Westham & Weymouth two-member divisions that we proposed in our draft recommendations, in order to reflect community identity.
- In the remaining districts and boroughs of Christchurch, East Dorset, North Dorset and Purbeck we are endorsing our draft recommendations as final.

139 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2002 and 2007 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2002 electorate		2007 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	42	45	42	45
Number of divisions	42	42	42	42
Average number of electors per councillor	7,521	7,020	8,012	7,478
Number of divisions with a variance more than 10% from the average	13	13	18	12
Number of divisions with a variance more than 20% from the average	4	3	7	2

140 As Table 4 shows, our final recommendations would result in the same number of divisions with an electoral variance of more than 10%, with three wards varying by more than 20% from the borough average. By 2007, 12 divisions are forecast to vary by more than 10%. However, in only two divisions would the variances exceed 20%. Our final recommendations are set out in more detail in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps at the back of this report.

Final recommendation

Dorset County Council should comprise 45 councillors serving 42 divisions, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated in Appendix A and on the large map inside the back cover.

Parish council electoral arrangements

141 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 county divisions, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single division of the county.

142 In response to our consultation report, the County Council, West Bay Forum, Bridport Town Council and a local councillor proposed that we transfer the West Cliff area of Symondsburry parish, in order to reflect community identity and geographical links, to the proposed Bridport division. We considered that we received sufficient evidence to depart from our draft proposals and to warrant the transfer of the West Cliff area to the proposed Bridport division. Therefore it has been necessary to ward Symondsburry parish.

143 Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed divisions in the area, we confirm our final recommendation for warding of Symondsburry parish.

Final recommendation

Symondsburry Parish Council should comprise eight councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Symondsburry returning six councillors and West Cliff returning two councillors. The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed county division boundary, as illustrated and named on Map 1 in Appendix A.

6 What happens next?

144 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in 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. 3962).

145 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether or not 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 7 September 2004, and The Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representations made to them by that date.

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

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

Fax: 020 7271 0667

**Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk
(This address should only be used for this purpose.)**

Appendix A

Final Recommendations for Dorset County Council:

Detailed mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed division boundaries for the Dorset County Council area.

Sheet 1 of 2 inserted at the back of this report illustrates in outline form the proposed divisions for Dorset, including constituent district wards and parishes.

Sheet 2 of 2 contains **Map 1** which illustrates the proposed boundary showing the new parish warding arrangements for West Cliff parish and Symondsbury Parish, between the Marshwood Vale and Bridport divisions.

Map 2 overleaf, illustrates the proposed boundary between the proposed Commons and Christchurch Central divisions, in Christchurch borough.

Map 2: Proposed boundary between proposed Commons and Christchurch Central divisions, in Christchurch borough.