

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

Report to The Electoral Commission

July 2002

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

WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE
Kru Desai
Robin Gray
Joan Jones
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 ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Wyre Forest in Worcestershire.

SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of Wyre Forest's electoral arrangements on 31 July 2001. It published its draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 26 February 2002, after which it undertook an eight-week period of consultation. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us, The Boundary Committee for England, to complete the work of the LGCE and submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.

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

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

- **in nine of the 18 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and two wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in nine wards and by more than 20 per cent in four wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 81 – 82) are that:

- **Wyre Forest District Council should have 42 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 17 wards, instead of 18 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one, and three wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In only one of the proposed 17 wards would the number of electors per councillor vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only two wards expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district by 2006.**

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

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

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 10 September 2002:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Constituent areas | Map reference |
|----|-------------------------|------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| 1 | Aggborough & Spennells* | 3 | part of Aggborough & Spennells ward. | Large map |
| 2 | Areley Kings | 3 | <i>Unchanged</i> – Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings East and Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings West parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn parish. | Map 2 |
| 3 | Bewdley & Arley | 3 | Bewdley East and Bewdley West parish wards of Bewdley parish; the parish of Ribbesford, the parish of Upper Arley. | Map 2 and Map A3 |
| 4 | Blakedown & Chaddesley | 2 | the parishes of Chaddesley Corbett, Churchill & Blakedown, Broome, Stone and Rushock. | Map 2 |
| 5 | Broadwaters* | 3 | Broadwaters ward; part of Franche ward; part of Greenhill ward. | Large map |
| 6 | Cookley | 1 | <i>Unchanged</i> – Cookley parish ward of Wolverley & Cookley parish. | Map 2 |
| 7 | Franche* | 3 | part of Franche ward. | Large map |
| 8 | Greenhill* | 3 | part of Aggborough & Spennells ward; part of Greenhill ward; part of Offmore ward. | Large map |
| 9 | Habberley & Blakebrook* | 3 | part of Habberley & Blakebrook ward; part of Sutton Park ward. | Large map |
| 10 | Lickhill | 3 | part of Stourport-on-Severn Lickhill and Stourport-on-Severn North parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn parish. | Map 2 and Map A2 |
| 11 | Mitton | 3 | part of Stourport-on-Severn Central and Stourport-on-Severn Stour & Wilden parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn parish | Map 2 and Map A2 |
| 12 | Offmore & Comberton* | 3 | part of Aggborough & Spennells ward; part of Greenhill ward; part of Offmore ward. | Large map |
| 13 | Oldington & Foley Park* | 2 | part of Oldington & Foley Park ward. | Large map |
| 14 | Rock | 1 | the parish of Rock. | Map 2 |
| 15 | Sutton Park* | 3 | part of Sutton Park ward; part of Oldington & Foley Park ward. | Large map |
| 16 | Wolverley | 1 | <i>Unchanged</i> – Wolverley parish ward of Wolverley & Cookley parish. | Map 2 |
| 17 | Wribbenhall | 2 | Bewdley Wribbenhall parish ward of Bewdley parish; the parish of Kidderminster Foreign. | Map 2 |

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

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

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

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Wyre Forest

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2001) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2006) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Aggborough & Spennells | 3 | 5,364 | 1,788 | 0 | 5,356 | 1,785 | -2 |
| 2 | Areley Kings | 3 | 4,755 | 1,585 | -12 | 4,687 | 1,562 | -14 |
| 3 | Bewdley & Arley | 3 | 5,292 | 1,764 | -2 | 5,288 | 1,763 | -3 |
| 4 | Blakedown & Chaddesley | 2 | 3,360 | 1,680 | -6 | 3,329 | 1,665 | -8 |
| 5 | Broadwaters | 3 | 5,546 | 1,849 | 3 | 5,722 | 1,907 | 5 |
| 6 | Cookley | 1 | 1,905 | 1,905 | 6 | 1,884 | 1,884 | 4 |
| 7 | Franche | 3 | 5,578 | 1,859 | 4 | 5,621 | 1,874 | 3 |
| 8 | Greenhill | 3 | 5,489 | 1,830 | 2 | 5,684 | 1,895 | 4 |
| 9 | Habberley & Blakebrook | 3 | 5,176 | 1,725 | -4 | 5,174 | 1,725 | -5 |
| 10 | Lickhill | 3 | 5,651 | 1,884 | 5 | 5,570 | 1,857 | 2 |
| 11 | Mitton | 3 | 5,162 | 1,721 | -4 | 5,648 | 1,883 | 4 |
| 12 | Offmore & Comberton | 3 | 5,675 | 1,892 | 5 | 5,633 | 1,878 | 3 |
| 13 | Oldington & Foley Park | 2 | 3,626 | 1,813 | 1 | 3,607 | 1,804 | -1 |
| 14 | Rock | 1 | 1,957 | 1,957 | 9 | 2,024 | 2,024 | 11 |
| 15 | Sutton Park | 3 | 5,383 | 1,794 | 0 | 5,518 | 1,839 | 1 |
| 16 | Wolverley | 1 | 1,754 | 1,754 | -2 | 1,785 | 1,785 | -2 |
| 17 | Wribbenhall | 2 | 3,655 | 1,828 | 2 | 3,743 | 1,872 | 3 |
| | Totals | 42 | 75,328 | - | - | 76,273 | - | - |
| | Averages | - | - | 1,794 | - | - | 1,816 | - |

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Wyre Forest District Council.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Wyre Forest in Worcestershire. The six districts in Worcestershire have now been reviewed as part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England started by the LGCE in 1996. We have inherited that programme, which we currently expect to complete in 2004.

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

3 In making final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 no. 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

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

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

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

7 The LGCE was not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as Wyre Forest is concerned, it started from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but was willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, the LGCE found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and stated that any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, it did not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 31 July 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Wyre Forest District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Worcestershire County Council, West Mercia Police Authority, the Local Government Associations, Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the West Midlands Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end

of Stage One, was 22 October 2001. At Stage Two it considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared its draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 26 February 2002 with the publication of the LGCE's report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest in Worcestershire*, and ended on 22 April 2002. During this period comments were sought from the public and any other interested parties on the preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four, the draft recommendations were reconsidered in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

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

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

13 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,794 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,816 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in nine of the 18 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in two wards by more than 20 per cent and in one ward by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Aggborough & Spennells ward, where each councillor represents 35 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Wyre Forest

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2001) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2006) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Aggborough & Spennells | 3 | 7,246 | 2,415 | 35 | 7,304 | 2,435 | 34 |
| 2 | Areley Kings | 3 | 4,756 | 1,585 | -12 | 4,688 | 1,563 | -14 |
| 3 | Bewdley | 2 | 4,530 | 2,265 | 26 | 4,527 | 2,264 | 25 |
| 4 | Blakedown | 1 | 1,577 | 1,577 | -12 | 1,563 | 1,563 | -14 |
| 5 | Broadwaters | 3 | 4,839 | 1,613 | -10 | 4,863 | 1,621 | -11 |
| 6 | Chaddesley | 1 | 1,783 | 1,783 | -1 | 1,766 | 1,766 | -3 |
| 7 | Cookley | 1 | 1,905 | 1,905 | 6 | 1,884 | 1,884 | 4 |
| 8 | Franche | 3 | 5,578 | 1,859 | 4 | 5,783 | 1,928 | 6 |
| 9 | Greenhill | 3 | 5,309 | 1,770 | -1 | 5,502 | 1,834 | 1 |
| 10 | Habberley & Blakebrook | 3 | 5,071 | 1,690 | -6 | 4,986 | 1,662 | -8 |
| 11 | Lickhill | 3 | 5,667 | 1,889 | 5 | 5,588 | 1,863 | 3 |
| 12 | Mitton | 3 | 5,146 | 1,715 | -4 | 5,630 | 1,877 | 3 |
| 13 | Offmore | 3 | 4,681 | 1,560 | -13 | 4,647 | 1,549 | -15 |
| 14 | Oldington & Foley Park | 3 | 4,301 | 1,434 | -20 | 4,282 | 1,427 | -21 |
| 15 | Rock & Ribbesford | 1 | 2,158 | 2,158 | 20 | 2,225 | 2,225 | 23 |
| 16 | Sutton Park | 3 | 4,813 | 1,604 | -11 | 4,948 | 1,649 | -9 |
| 17 | Wolverley | 1 | 1,754 | 1,754 | -2 | 1,785 | 1,785 | -2 |
| 18 | Wribbenhall & Arley | 2 | 4,214 | 2,107 | 17 | 4,302 | 2,151 | 18 |
| | Totals | 42 | 75,328 | - | - | 76,273 | - | - |
| | Averages | - | - | 1,794 | - | - | 1,816 | - |

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Wyre Forest District Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Oldington & Foley Park ward were relatively over-represented by 20 per cent, while electors in Aggborough & Spennells ward were relatively under-represented by 35 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

14 During Stage One the LGCE received eight representations, including district-wide schemes from Wyre Forest District Council and Wyre Forest Conservative Association, and representations from six parish and town councils. In the light of these representations and evidence available to it, the LGCE reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in its report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest in Worcestershire*.

15 The LGCE based its draft recommendations on the District Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a mixed pattern of single-, two- and three-member wards. However, it moved away from the District Council's scheme in a number of areas. It proposed that:

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

Draft Recommendation

Wyre Forest District Council should comprise 42 councillors serving 17 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

16 The LGCE's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in none of the 17 wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to continue, with only Rock ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2006.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

17 During the consultation on its draft recommendations report, the LGCE received 12 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Wyre Forest District Council.

Wyre Forest District Council

18 Wyre Forest District Council supported the draft recommendations.

Wyre Forest Conservative Association

19 Wyre Forest Conservative Association, while disappointed that its Stage One submission was rejected, expressed support for the majority of the draft recommendations. However, it did put forward alternative proposals for the eastern part of Kidderminster, including the creation of two two-member wards. These proposals would provide some improvement in electoral equality, but worsen it in other areas.

Wyre Forest Liberal & Radical Association

20 Wyre Forest Liberal & Radical Association broadly supported the draft recommendations. However, it expressed concern about the proposals for the eastern part of Kidderminster and made a number of boundary amendments to the proposals for this area. These proposals would provide some improvement in electoral equality.

Parish and Town Councils

21 Bewdley Town Council stated that “Ribbesford Parish should be included with Bewdley rather than Areley Kings”. Upper Arley and Wolverley & Cookley parish councils both supported the draft recommendations.

Other Representations

22 Councillor Williams expressed broad support for the proposals for a new Blakedown & Chaddesley ward, but with some concerns about the workload this would create. County Councillor Edington expressed support for the Wyre Forest Conservative Association’s proposals to create two two-member wards in the east of Kidderminster. The Wyre Forest Conservative Association’s proposal was also supported by County Councillor Clee.

23 In addition, we had three submissions from local residents, all expressing concern about the inclusion of Ribbesford parish in the new Areley Kings ward.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

24 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) – the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

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

26 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum.

27 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate Forecasts

28 Since 1975 there has been a 12 per cent increase in the electorate of Wyre Forest district. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 1 per cent from 75,328 to 76,273 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained. Having accepted that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, the LGCE stated in its draft recommendations report that it was satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

29 At Stage Three, Wyre Forest Conservative Association put forward alternative electorate figures for two wards in the Kidderminster area. In Aggborough & Spennells ward it stated “we have taken into account the new development of 296 houses for which planning permission has been granted by the District Council on both the college and cattle market sites and which your draft proposals have not taken into account”. With regard to Broadwaters ward, they stated that the boundary would remain the same, but “with the addition of 243 dwellings known as Springfield Park which have not been accounted for in your proposals”. We have sought clarification from the District Council. It stated that the figures for the college site had been included in its electoral projections and that the cattle market site has still not been granted planning permission and was therefore excluded from the figures. With regard to the

developments in the proposed Broadwaters ward, the District Council stated that these too were already included in its electoral projections.

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

Council Size

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

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

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

34 Following consideration of all the representations received at Stage One and having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, the LGCE concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 42 members.

35 At Stage Three, all representations supported the retention of a 42-member council. Therefore, having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 42 members.

Electoral Arrangements

36 At Stage One the LGCE gave careful consideration to the views received, including the district-wide schemes received from the District Council and the Wyre Forest Conservative Association. As already explained, the LGCE considered that there was insufficient evidence of consultation or detailed argument for them to adopt the Wyre Forest Conservative Association's proposals for a change in council size.

37 In view of the support given to elements of the District Council's proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties prior to their submission, the LGCE based its recommendations on the District Council's scheme. It considered that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. It noted that the Council's scheme produced good electoral equality, with no wards having an electoral variance of more than 5 per cent in 2001, or 7 per cent by 2006. However, it also noted that the District Council inserted the caveat that while "it has put together an overall scheme which attempts to produce better electoral equality, it believes that at times this is not consistent with retaining existing community boundaries and identities". The LGCE shared these concerns, in particular the

proposals for further parish warding. It therefore moved away from the District Council's proposals in a number of areas.

38 At Stage Three, the District Council supported the proposals. Wyre Forest Conservative Association did not pursue its Stage One submission and while accepting the majority of the draft recommendations, it expressed concerns about the proposals for the east of Kidderminster. It proposed dividing this area to create three two-member wards and two three-member wards, instead of the proposed four three-member wards. This was supported by 50 signed copies of a leaflet expressing support for its proposals; all the signatories were from the north east of the existing Aggborough & Spennells ward.

39 We note these proposals and the evidence of some limited consultation. However, as explained earlier, the Wyre Forest Conservative Association's electorate forecasts are incorrect, which affects the electoral equality of their proposals. In addition, some of the calculations in its submission were also incorrect; we calculate that the actual variance for Offmore & Comberton, using the Wyre Forest Conservative Association's figures, is 12 per cent. We have therefore found it necessary to modify the figures in the Wyre Forest Conservative Association's proposal for a number of wards. As a consequence, electoral equality has been significantly worsened in a number of its proposed wards. Therefore, we have not been persuaded to adopt these proposals.

40 The draft recommendations have been reviewed in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. We are generally of the view that the draft recommendations secure good levels of electoral equality, while having regard to local community identities and interests. However, we propose moving away from the draft recommendations in Areley Kings and Bewdley wards. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

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

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

Aggborough & Spennells, Broadwaters, Greenhill and Offmore wards

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

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

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

45 Under these proposals Aggborough & Spennells ward would initially have a variance of zero per cent, but would be 2 per cent over-represented by 2006. Broadwaters ward would be 3 per cent under-represented (5 per cent by 2006). Greenhill ward would be 2 per cent under-represented (4 per cent by 2006). Offmore & Comberton ward would be 5 per cent under-represented (3 per cent by 2006).

46 At Stage Three, the District Council supported the draft recommendations. Wyre Forest Conservative Association put forward alternative proposals for these wards. Its proposals were supported by submissions from two county councillors and a district councillor. However, as explained earlier, the Wyre Forest Conservative Association's electorate forecasts are incorrect, which affects the electoral equality of its proposals. In addition, some of the calculations in its submission were also incorrect. For example, we calculate, using the Wyre Forest Conservative Association's figures that the actual variance for Offmore & Comberton ward is 12 per cent under-represented, rather than its stated 6.6 per cent. In the light of this, and the availability of other warding arrangements that provide better electoral equality, we have not been persuaded to adopt these proposals.

47 Wyre Forest Liberal & Radical Association submitted alternative proposals for these wards. Firstly, it objected to the proposal to transfer part of the existing Offmore ward to the proposed Greenhill ward, stating "far from improving voter access this splits a community. In this part of Kidderminster the Birmingham Road A456 is a dual carriageway trunk road and, apart from children using crossing patrols to access transport to and from the Hagley RC Secondary School there is almost no pedestrian traffic across it", it added, "Furthermore to propose moving numbers 25 - 55 Hunsum Way from Offmore to Greenhill is ridiculous. Hunsum way is the entry to the Offmore estate and is an integral part of that estate". As a consequence, it proposed retaining the existing boundary. It also proposed reverting to the District Council's Stage One submission boundary between Offmore & Comberton and Greenhill wards, transferring the electors to the west of Chester Road South to Greenhill ward, rather than the proposed Offmore & Comberton ward. It proposed leaving Cobham Road, Gamson Close and the 10 properties on Worcester Road between Cobham Road and The Ringway in Aggborough & Spennells ward, stating "To separate them from the rest of Worcester Road is illogical. They are separated from the rest of the proposed Greenhill ward by an extremely steep escarpment and have nothing in common with that ward". It added, "As our proposal moves the historic Aggborough area [...] into Greenhill ward we suggest the new ward might be better know as Greenhill & Aggborough ward with the [...] proposed Aggborough & Spennells ward being renamed Spennells & Hoobrook, a name which more accurately reflects the area it comprises". Finally, to improve electoral equality it proposed retaining the electors on Cormorant Grove, Kingfisher Grove, Little

Grebe Road, Mallard Avenue, Merlin Drive and Osprey Park Road in the proposed Aggborough & Spennells ward.

48 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received at Stage Three. As stated earlier, we have examined the Wyre Forest Conservative Association proposals, but given the poor levels of electoral equality that would result we have not been persuaded to adopt them.

49 We have examined the Wyre Forest Liberal & Radical Association proposals and note its concerns with regard to the proposal to transfer the electors in the north of the existing Offmore ward to the proposed Greenhill ward and the electors to the west of Chester Road South to the proposed Offmore & Comberton ward. However, while we share some concerns about access across the A546, it is important to remember that we cannot consider any area in isolation and must have consideration for the area as whole. We must also consider the access of the electors along Chester Road South. We maintain that the draft recommendations provide better ward access and clearer boundaries than the Wyre Forest Liberal & Radical Association's proposals. With regard to its proposals for the boundary between the proposed Aggborough & Spennells and Greenhill wards, we have not been persuaded that the proposals reflect the statutory criteria any better than the draft recommendations. In addition, we do not consider that there is sufficient evidence of consultation or public support for these proposals. Finally, it should be noted that the District Council supported our draft recommendations for these wards.

50 We have therefore decided to confirm the draft recommendations for these wards as final. The levels of electoral equality would therefore be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

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

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

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

53 After careful consideration the LGCE decided to adopt the District Council's scheme for this area, subject to a number of minor amendments to improve ward access. As explained earlier, the LGCE recommended that the area to the north and west of The Ringway be transferred to Greenhill ward, rather than Habberley & Blakebrook ward. It also proposed a minor amendment to improve ward access for the electors on Bewdley Hill and Rowland Hill Avenue by transferring them to Habberley & Blakebrook ward.

54 Under these proposals Franche ward would be 4 per cent under-represented (3 per cent by 2006). Habberley & Blakebrook ward would be 4 per cent over-represented (5 per cent by 2006). Oldington & Foley Park ward would be 1 per cent under-represented (1 per cent over-represented by 2006). Sutton Park ward would initially have a level of electoral equality equal to the district average, but would be 1 per cent under-represented by 2006.

55 At Stage Three, the District Council supported the draft recommendations. A number of other respondents also broadly accepted the proposals, although they did not make specific comments about these wards. We received no other comments regarding these wards.

56 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received and remain satisfied that the draft recommendations provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We have therefore decided to confirm the draft recommendations for these wards as final. The levels of electoral equality would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Blakedown, Chaddesley, Cookley and Wolverley wards

57 These four single-member wards are situated in the north and east of the district. Blakedown ward comprises the parishes of Broome and Churchill & Blakedown, and is currently 12 per cent over-represented (14 per cent by 2006). Chaddesley ward comprises the parishes of Chaddesley Corbett, Rushock and Stone, and is currently 1 per cent over-represented (3 per cent by 2006). Cookley ward comprises Cookley parish ward of Wolverley & Cookley parish and is currently 6 per cent under-represented (4 per cent by 2006). Wolverley ward comprises Wolverley parish ward of Wolverley & Cookley parish and is 2 per cent over-represented, both currently and in 2006.

58 At Stage One, the District Council proposed leaving Chaddesley and Wolverley wards unchanged. However, to address the high electoral variances in the existing Blakedown ward it proposed further warding Wolverley & Cookley parish, maintaining the existing Wolverley parish ward, but dividing the existing Cookley parish ward into a modified Cookley parish ward and a new Caunsall parish ward. It then proposed combining the new Caunsall parish ward with the existing Blakedown ward.

59 Churchill & Blakedown and Chaddesley parish councils objected to any change to the existing electoral arrangements. Wolverley & Cookley Parish Council also objected to the proposed changes and submitted a petition from local residents containing 130 signatures. The LGCE noted that the District Council also expressed some reservations over its own proposals for the area, commenting “the artificial attachment of the village of Caunsall to Blakedown ward for district council purposes, does not make sense from a community point of view”.

60 The LGCE concurred with the view that further parish warding of Wolverley & Cookley parish would not reflect community identity and therefore examined alternatives to address the high variance in Blakedown ward. After careful consideration it decided to propose retaining the existing Cookley and Wolverley wards and creating a new two-member Blakedown & Chaddesley ward, combining the existing Blakedown and Chaddesley wards. While the LGCE accepted that the new Blakedown & Chaddesley ward would cover a large geographical area, it noted that there is good road linkage and it considered that the impact on community relations would be less severe than separating the adjoining villages of Caunsall and Cookley. Under these arrangements the new Blakedown & Chaddesley ward would be 6 per cent over-represented (8 per cent by 2006), while Wolverley and Cookley wards would retain their existing electoral variances.

61 At Stage Three, the District Council supported the draft recommendations. Wyre Forest Conservative Association and Wyre Forest Liberal & Radical Association both expressed broad support for the draft recommendations. Wolverley & Cookley Parish Council expressed support for the draft recommendations, stating “Councillors were pleased to note that our representations have met with consideration and that it is proposed that Caunsall shall remain as at present with [this parish]”. Councillor Williams stated “I can broadly support your proposals as I feel that the two wards do have an affinity”. However, he did express concerns about the size of the ward and the effect of this on the cost of parish elections.

62 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received. While we note the concerns of Councillor Williams it is important to remember that we cannot consider any area in isolation and must have consideration for the area as whole. As explained in the draft recommendations, the options for this area are limited. Therefore, given the broad support, we remain convinced that the proposals offer the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

63 We have therefore decided to confirm the draft recommendations for these wards as final. The levels of electoral equality would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2.

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

64 These four wards are situated to the west of the district. The three-member Areley Kings ward covers part of Stourport-on-Severn and is separated from the remainder of the town by the River Severn. It comprises the Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings East and Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings West parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn parish, and is currently 12 per cent over-represented (14 per cent by 2006). The two-member Bewdley ward comprises the Bewdley East and Bewdley West parish wards of Bewdley parish, and is currently 26 per cent under-represented (25 per cent by 2006). Rock & Ribbesford ward is represented by a single member and comprises the parishes of Rock and Ribbesford, and is currently 20 per cent under-represented (23 per cent by 2006). The two-member Wribbenhall & Arley ward comprises the Bewdley Wribbenhall parish ward of Bewdley parish and the parishes of Kidderminster Foreign and Upper Arley, and is currently 17 per cent under-represented (18 per cent by 2006).

65 At Stage One, the District Council proposed creating a new Areley Kings ward, comprising the existing Areley Kings ward, Ribbesford parish and a newly created Heightington parish ward of Rock parish. The remainder of Rock parish would form a new Rock ward. In addition, the District Council proposed creating a new Wribbenhall ward, comprising the existing Bewdley Wribbenhall parish ward of Bewdley parish and the parish of Kidderminster Foreign. Upper Arley parish, currently part of Wribbenhall & Arley ward, would then be combined with the existing Bewdley ward to create a new Bewdley & Arley ward. However, the District Council added the caveat that "in reality, the proposals do not find support from parish or district councillors, as neither Heightington nor Ribbesford have any direct community links with Areley Kings". Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley town council objected to the District Council's proposals. Rock Parish Council stated that it was against the break-up of the parish. The LGCE also received a submission from Upper Arley Parish Council, although this made no specific comments about electoral arrangements.

66 The LGCE acknowledged these concerns. However, it considered that the issue of high electoral variances across the existing wards must still be addressed. In light of the comments received, the LGCE considered that the District Council's proposals did not give sufficient consideration to the statutory criteria and concurred with the District Council's concerns about its own proposals. The LGCE therefore considered a number of alternatives, including a scheme to create a ward in Stourport-on-Severn straddling the river. However, from its initial contact with District Council officers, the LGCE understood that such a scheme had been considered but not put forward as it had been concluded that it would not reflect community identity or receive local support. From the evidence the LGCE concurred with this view.

67 The LGCE therefore considered alternatives that combined Areley Kings ward with parishes to the north. It noted that the District Council's scheme combined Areley Kings with Ribbesford parish and a new Heightington parish ward of Rock parish. However, it was concerned that the creation of a Heightington parish ward would not facilitate effective and convenient local government at parish level. It is not possible to combine the whole of Rock parish with any of the neighbouring parishes without creating significant electoral inequality. Given this, the LGCE

proposed creating a district ward comprising solely of Rock parish. This would initially be 9 per cent under-represented (11 per cent by 2006). While this variance is somewhat higher than usually recommend, the LGCE considered that it was appropriate when balanced against the statutory criteria.

68 As a consequence the LGCE did not recommend including Heightington parish ward with Areley Kings ward and Ribbesford parish. A number of respondents stated that Ribbesford parish looks more towards Bewdley than Areley Kings. While the LGCE accepted these comments, it stated that it cannot consider any area in isolation and must still address the high variance in Areley Kings ward. It was of the opinion that Ribbesford does not appear to comprise a single settlement, in close proximity to Bewdley, but rather a number of separate dwellings. It therefore proposed adopting a modified version of the District Council's proposals and recommended that Areley Kings be combined with Ribbesford parish to create a modified Areley Kings ward. It accepted that this option may not receive support from all local groups, but it considered this achieved the best balance between good electoral equality and the statutory criteria, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities, and securing effective and convenient local government. However, the LGCE invited respondents to submit alternative, locally generated schemes that provide comparable levels of electoral equality, while better reflecting community identities.

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

70 Under the draft recommendations, the three-member Areley Kings ward would be 8 per cent over-represented (10 per cent by 2006). The three-member Bewdley & Arley ward would be 5 per cent over-represented (7 per cent by 2006). The single-member Rock ward would be 9 per cent under-represented (11 per cent by 2006). The two-member Wribbenhall ward would be 2 per cent under-represented (3 per cent by 2006).

71 At Stage Three, the District Council supported the draft recommendations. Bewdley Town Council stated "The Town Council feels that the parish of Ribbesford should be included with Bewdley rather than Areley Kings. Historically Ribbesford has always been associated with the town of Bewdley, whereas Areley Kings is very much linked to Stourport". Three local residents supported this view, but also highlighted the issue of access to Areley Kings. One resident stated "There is no link between Ribbesford and Areley Kings on foot. There is a road but it has no footway and would be extremely dangerous to pedestrians, even if it were a walkable distance", while another added that the road is prone to flooding. In addition, one resident suggested "that to join Areley Kings with Stourport would be a more sensible solution". Upper Arley Parish Council expressed support for the proposal to link it with Bewdley rather than Wribbenhall.

72 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received. We note the concerns of Bewdley Town Council and local residents. As already explained, while the LGCE were aware of the issues with Ribbesford and Bewdley parishes, it was also necessary for the draft recommendations to consider the wider area as a whole and in particular the issue of high electoral variances in Areley Kings. However, in light of the new evidence and the District Council's comments at Stage One that proposals to transfer Ribbesford parish to Areley Kings ward were not "in reality" supported by parish or district councillors, we propose moving away from our draft recommendations. We consider that community identity would be reflected better if Ribbesford parish is transferred to the proposed Bewdley & Arley ward. Indeed, we understand from the LGCE's initial contact with the District Council officers that such a proposal was favoured, but rejected on grounds of seeking improved electoral equality. Consequently,

such a ward was not put forward for consideration during the District Council's initial scheme generation and subsequent consultation.

73 As a consequence of these proposals, the electoral equality for Areley Kings ward is actually worsened and while this is somewhat higher than we would initially aim for, we consider that it is appropriate when balanced against the statutory criteria. In addition, the electoral equality for Bewdley & Arley ward is improved. We are recommending no changes to Rock or Wribbenhall wards.

74 Under our final recommendations three-member Areley Kings ward would comprise Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings East and Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings West parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn parish. It would initially be 12 per cent over-represented (14 per cent by 2006). The proposed three-member Bewdley & Arley ward would comprise Bewdley East and Bewdley West parish wards of Bewdley parish and the parishes of Ribbesford and Upper Arley. It would be 2 per cent over-represented (3 per cent by 2006). The levels of electoral equality for Rock and Wribbenhall wards would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2.

Lickhill and Mitton wards

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

76 At Stage One, given the good levels of electoral equality under the existing arrangements, the District Council proposed only a minor realignment of the ward boundaries between Lickhill and Mitton wards, to improve ward access. Under these proposals Lickhill ward would be 5 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006), and Mitton ward would be 4 per cent over-represented (4 per cent under-represented by 2006). Stourport-on-Severn Town Council supported these proposals. The LGCE did not receive any other submissions concerning these wards.

77 As already stated, the LGCE considered and discounted the option of creating a ward that straddles the River Severn, taking in areas of Lickhill and Mitton wards, to address the high electoral variances in Areley Kings ward. Accordingly, it decided to adopt the District Council's scheme for the proposed Lickhill and Mitton wards.

78 At Stage Three, the District Council supported the draft recommendations. Wyre Forest Conservative Association and Wyre Forest Liberal & Radical Association both expressed broad support for the draft recommendations. One resident, commenting on the proposals for Ribbesford parish, suggested "that to join Areley Kings with Stourport would be a more sensible solution". We received no other comments concerning these wards.

79 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received. However, as explained earlier, the LGCE examined and rejected the option of a ward straddling the river, as it did not consider that this would reflect community identity. We remain satisfied that the draft recommendations provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and have therefore decided to confirm them as final for these wards. The levels of electoral equality would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2.

Electoral Cycle

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

Conclusions

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

- in Areley Kings and Bewdley & Arley we propose basing our draft recommendations on our own proposals.

82 We conclude that, in Wyre Forest:

- a council of 42 members should be retained;
- there should be 17 wards, one fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified.

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

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

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

84 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from nine to one, with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This improved level of electoral equality is expected to continue with only two wards, Areley Kings and Rock, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2006. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Wyre Forest District Council should comprise 42 councillors serving 17 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A including the large map inside the back cover.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

85 When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it should also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. In the LGCE's draft recommendations report it proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Stourport-on-Severn parish to reflect the proposed district wards.

86 The parish of Stourport-on-Severn is currently served by 18 councillors representing six wards: Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings East, Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings West, Stourport-on-Severn Central, Stourport-on-Severn Lickhill, Stourport-on-Severn North and Stourport-on-Severn Stour & Wilden. In the light of the proposed district warding arrangements, the LGCE proposed modifying the parish ward boundaries to correspond with those of the district wards within the town.

87 The LGCE proposed that Stourport-on-Severn Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, as at present, representing six wards: Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings East, Stourport-on-Severn Areley Kings West, Stourport-on-Severn Central, Stourport-on-Severn Lickhill, Stourport-on-Severn North and Stourport-on-Severn Stour & Wilden, each returning three councillors. It also proposed that the boundary between the parish wards of Stourport-on-Severn North and Stourport-on-Severn Central should be amended to reflect the district ward boundary between Lickhill and Mitton wards.

88 At Stage Three, no further comments were received regarding Stourport-on-Severn Town Council.

89 Having considered all the evidence received, and in the light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendation for warding Stourport-on-Severn parish as final.

Final Recommendation

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

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

91 The LGCE proposed that Bewdley Town Council should comprise 13 councillors, instead of the current 12, representing three wards: Bewdley East (returning four councillors), Bewdley West (returning four councillors) and Bewdley Wribbenhall (returning five councillors). It also proposed that the parish ward boundaries between the parish wards of Bewdley East and Bewdley West should be amended.

92 At Stage Three, Bewdley Town Council supported the draft recommendations. No further comments were received.

93 Having considered the evidence received, and in the light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendation for warding Bewdley parish as final.

Final Recommendation

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

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Wyre Forest

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

95 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 10 September 2002.

96 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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Wyre Forest: Detailed Mapping

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

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

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

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Bewdley parish.

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

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Wyre Forest: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed warding of Stourport-on-Severn parish

Map A3: Proposed warding of Bewdley parish