

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
EXETER
IN DEVON

*Report to the Secretary of State for the
Environment, Transport and the Regions*

January 1999

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Exeter in Devon.

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Local Government Commission for England

12 January 1999

Dear Secretary of State

On 13 January 1998 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Exeter under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in June 1998 and undertook a ten-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 58) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Exeter.

We recommend that Exeter City Council should be served by 40 councillors representing 18 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that elections should continue to be held by thirds.

We note that you have now set out in the White Paper *Modern Local Government - In Touch with the People* (Cm 4014, HMSO), legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as that new legislation is in place we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

I would like to thank members and officers of the City Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Exeter on 13 January 1998. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 30 June 1998, after which we undertook a ten-week period of consultation.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during consultation on our draft recommendations, and offers our final recommendations to the Secretary of State.**

We found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Exeter because:

- **in ten of the 18 wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the city, and five wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2003 electoral equality is expected to deteriorate, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 13 wards, and by more than 20 per cent in five wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figure 1 and paragraphs 58 and 59) are that:

- **Exeter City Council should be served by 40 councillors, four more than at present;**
- **there should be 18 wards, the same as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 17 of the existing wards should be modified, while one ward should retain its existing boundary;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

These recommendations seek to ensure that the number of electors represented by each city councillor is as nearly as possible the same, having regard to local circumstances.

- **In 16 of the 18 wards, the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the city average**
- **This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve, with the number of electors per councillor in all 18 wards forecast to vary by no more than ten per cent from the city average by 2003.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 23 February 1999:

**The Secretary of State
Department of the Environment,
Transport and the Regions
Local Government Review
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU**

*Figure 1:
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1 Alphington	3	Alphington ward (part)
2 Cowick	2	Cowick ward; Alphington ward (part)
3 Duryard	2	St David's ward (part)
4 Exwick	3	<i>Unchanged</i>
5 Heavitree	2	Heavitree ward (part); St Loyes ward (part); Barton ward (part)
6 Mincinglake	2	Stoke Hill ward (part); Whipton ward (part)
7 Newtown	2	Polsloe ward (part); Rougemont ward (part); St Leonard's ward (part)
8 Pennsylvania	2	Pennsylvania ward (part); Stoke Hill ward (part)
9 Pinhoe	2	Pinhoe ward; Whipton ward (part)
10 Polsloe	2	Polsloe ward (part); Heavitree ward (part); Whipton ward (part); Stoke Hill ward (part); Pennsylvania ward (part)
11 Priory	3	Wonford ward; Countess Wear ward (part); St Loyes ward (part); Topsham ward (part)
12 St David's	2	St David's ward (part); Rougemont ward (part); St Leonard's ward (part)
13 St James	2	Pennsylvania ward (part); St David's ward (part); Rougemont ward (part)
14 St Leonard's	2	St Leonard's ward (part); Countess Wear ward (part)
15 St Loyes	2	St Loyes ward (part); Topsham ward (part)
16 St Thomas	2	St Thomas ward; Alphington ward (part)
17 Topsham	2	Topsham ward (part); Countess Wear ward (part)
18 Whipton & Barton	3	Whipton ward (part); Barton ward (part)

Notes: 1 The city is entirely unparished.

2 The large map at the back of the report illustrates the proposed wards outlined above.

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the city of Exeter in Devon. We have now reviewed all the districts in Devon as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews of all principal local authority areas in England.

2 In undertaking these reviews, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

3 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (published in March 1996, supplemented in September 1996 and updated in March 1998), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 13 January 1998, when we wrote to Exeter City Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. Our letter was copied to Devon County Council, Devon & Cornwall Police Authority, the local authority associations, the Member of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the city, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following publication of our draft recommendations, we published notices in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Council to publicise the review more widely. The closing date for receipt of representations was 20 April 1998. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

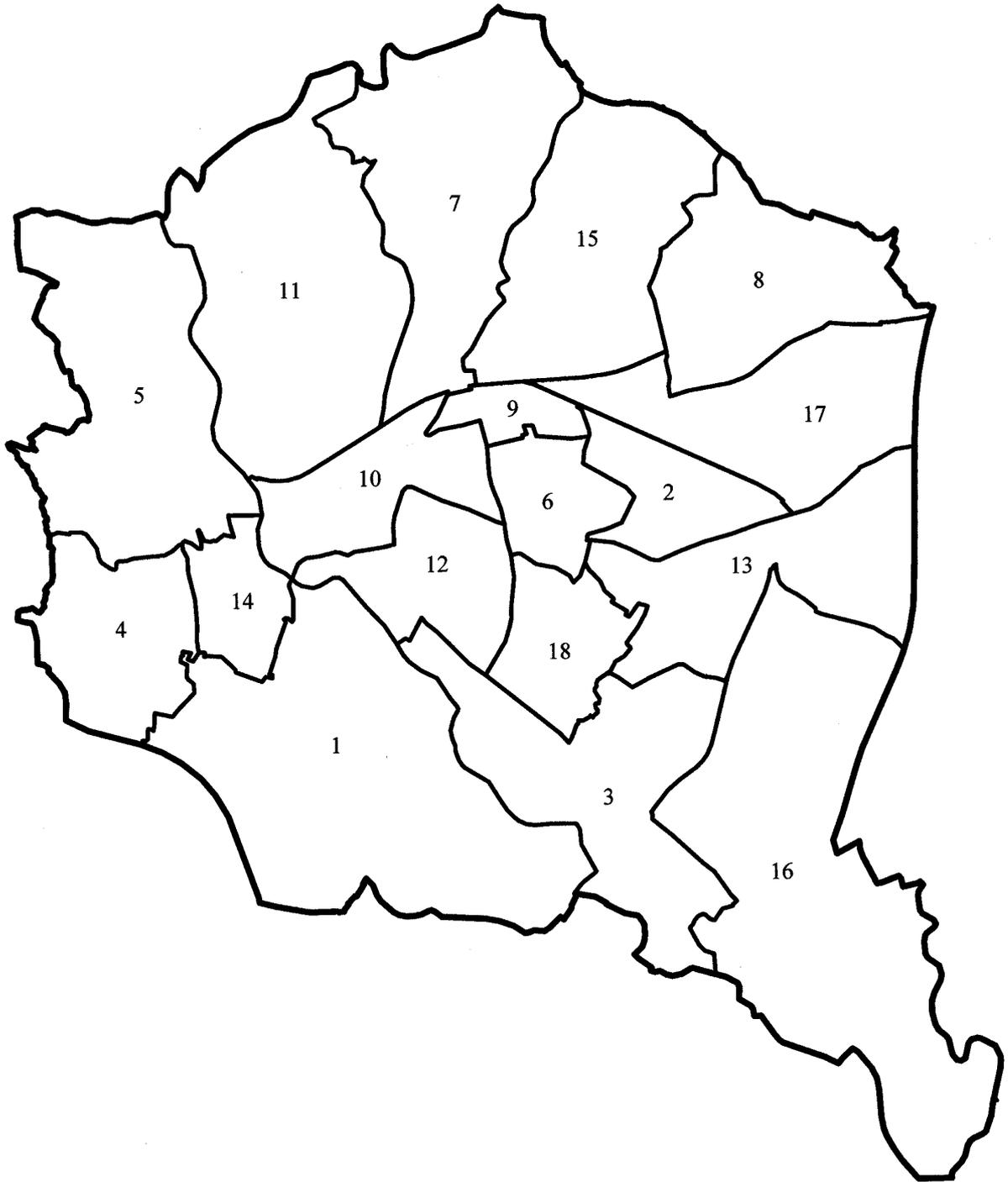
5 Stage Three began on 30 June 1998 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Exeter in Devon*, and ended on 7 September 1998. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

⁶ Exeter is the county town of Devon and acts as a focal centre within the west country. It comprises the city of Exeter and its immediate surrounding area. It covers a total of 4,719 hectares, of which over half lies outside the built-up area, and has a population of some 107,700. The City Council area is divided by the river Exe and is bounded by the M5 motorway to the east and the A30 to the south west. It has a large student population of around 18,000 within the city.

⁷ To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:s3 the ciruar cy Council.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Exeter



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Key to Wards

- | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1 Alphington | 6 Heavitree | 11 St David's | 16 Topsham |
| 2 Barton | 7 Pennsylvania | 12 St Leonard's | 17 Whipton |
| 3 Countess Wear | 8 Pinhoe | 13 St Loyes | 18 Wonford |
| 4 Cowick | 9 Polsloe | 14 St Thomas | |
| 5 Exwick | 10 Rougemont | 15 Stoke Hill | |

Figure 2:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Alphington	2	6,254	3,127	38	6,653	3,327	45
2 Barton	2	3,971	1,986	-13	3,836	1,918	-17
3 Countess Wear	2	3,610	1,805	-21	3,447	1,724	-25
4 Cowick	2	4,330	2,165	-5	4,087	2,044	-11
5 Exwick	2	6,162	3,081	36	6,180	3,090	34
6 Heavitree	2	4,178	2,089	-8	4,226	2,113	-8
7 Pennsylvania	2	4,954	2,477	9	4,826	2,413	5
8 Pinhoe	2	4,053	2,026	-11	3,934	1,967	-14
9 Polsloe	2	4,033	2,017	-11	3,888	1,944	-15
10 Rougement	2	4,733	2,367	4	5,325	2,663	16
11 St David's	2	6,792	3,396	50	7,146	3,573	55
12 St Leonard's	2	4,754	2,377	5	4,798	2,399	4
13 St Loyes	2	4,129	2,065	-9	4,044	2,022	-12
14 St Thomas	2	4,279	2,140	-6	4,071	2,036	-12
15 Stoke Hill	2	4,389	2,194	-3	4,506	2,253	-2
16 Topsham	2	3,830	1,915	-16	4,666	2,333	1
17 Whipton	2	3,784	1,892	-17	3,698	1,849	-20
18 Wonford	2	3,527	1,764	-22	3,469	1,735	-25
Totals	36	81,762	—	—	82,800	—	—
Averages	—	—	2,271	—	—	2,300	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Exeter City Council's submission.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the city. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, electors in Countess Wear ward are relatively over-represented by 21 per cent, while electors in St David's ward are relatively under-represented by 50 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

10 During Stage One we received representations from Exeter City Council, Exeter Conservative Association and a local resident. 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 Exeter in Devon*.

11 Our draft recommendations were largely based on the City Council's scheme, which we considered achieved a good balance between securing reasonable electoral equality and reflecting the interests and identities of local communities in the city. However, we proposed to depart from that scheme in two areas. First, we proposed minor boundary modifications between Alphington and Cowick wards and Alphington and St Thomas wards in order to achieve a better level of electoral equality. Second, in relation to the existing wards of Countess Wear, Topsham and Wonford, we were not persuaded that the City Council's proposals offered the most appropriate warding arrangements for the area. We concluded that the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria would be achieved by combining Countess Wear with Topsham in a three-member ward, with a revised Wonford ward, incorporating Northbrook Park, to be represented by two councillors. We proposed that:

- (a) Exeter City Council should be served by 40 councillors representing 18 wards;
- (b) the boundaries of 17 of the existing wards should be modified, while one ward should retain its existing boundary;
- (c) elections of the council should continue to be held by thirds.

Draft Recommendation

Exeter City Council should comprise 40 councillors, serving 18 wards. Elections of the council should continue to be held by thirds.

12 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 16 of the 18 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the city average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve by 2003 with the number of electors per councillor in all wards projected to vary by less than ten per cent.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

¹³ During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 51 representations were received. In addition we received petitions containing 124 signatures, opposing our draft recommendation to combine Countess Wear and Topsham wards. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Exeter City Council and the Commission.

Exeter City Council

¹⁴ Exeter City Council broadly welcomed our draft recommendations, and was “gratified” that the Commission had adopted its scheme as the basis for our draft recommendations. However it expressed “grave concerns” about our draft recommendations in the Countess Wear, Topsham and Wonford area. The Council argued that its original proposal for a new Priory ward secured a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and that this was reflected by the fact that only three out of 36 councillors had expressed reservations over the proposed warding arrangements. It maintained that there were major differences in community identity between Countess Wear and Topsham, and stressed the importance of Priory High School as a focal point for the proposed Priory ward. It requested that its initial proposals be given “serious and detailed consideration.”

Ben Bradshaw MP

¹⁵ Ben Bradshaw MP commented that he was in full agreement with our draft recommendations with the exception of the proposals regarding Countess Wear, Topsham and Wonford. He argued that while Countess Wear and Wonford did have separate identities, the interests of electors in Countess Wear were closer to those of Wonford than Topsham. He considered that in a new three member ward comprising Topsham and Countess Wear wards, the interests of the Countess Wear estate would become subsumed, and that the separate geographical identities of Wonford and Countess Wear would be better represented as part of the proposed Priory ward. He also expressed

concern that our draft recommendation for this area might cause difficulties in reconciling parliamentary constituency boundaries with the new city wards in a future review of the parliamentary boundaries.

Exeter Conservative Association

¹⁶ Exeter Conservative Association commented that its first preference remained for single-member wards, and that it opposed three-member wards which, it argued, caused confusion to the electorate and resulted in diminished accountability. It questioned the City Council’s projections for population growth in Exwick, and continued to argue that both Exwick and Alphington were distinct communities which would be better served by single-member wards. It also indicated that some of its members were concerned that our draft recommendations for Countess Wear failed to satisfactorily reflect the interests and identities of the different communities. It also proposed a number of boundary modifications in relation to Pennsylvania, Pinhoe and Polsloe wards.

Exeter Labour Party

¹⁷ Exeter Labour Party argued that the City Council’s scheme provided a better warding arrangement than our draft recommendations. In particular, it argued that Countess Wear and Topsham had “very different problems and concerns”, and would therefore benefit from separate representation.

Exeter Liberal Democrats

¹⁸ Exeter Liberal Democrats argued that there had been a lack of meaningful consultation with the public and expressed disappointment that the City Council had not conducted its own public meetings. It proposed the creation of a single-member ward to cover the university halls of residence, resulting in the retention of the existing St David’s ward, except for the area between Prince of Wales Road and Argyll Road, which would form

part of Pennsylvania ward. The Liberal Democrats disagreed with our draft recommendations in relation to the Topsham and Countess Wear areas and proposed that Topsham warranted separate representation. It also argued that, subject to minor adjustments, Countess Wear should continue to be represented by two members in its own right.

Exeter Liberal Party

¹⁹ Exeter Liberal Party supported our draft recommendations. In particular, it supported our proposals for Countess Wear, Topsham and Wonford wards which, it argued, “best reflected community interests in the area”.

Other Representations

²⁰ We received a further 45 submissions from local groups, local councillors and residents. Devon County Council Labour Group, Topsham Ward Labour Party and Countess Wear Ward Labour Party supported the City Council’s original proposals for Topsham and Countess Wear. In addition, we received petitions with 124 signatures expressing the same view, while 18 local residents expressed opposition to the proposal to combine Topsham and Countess Wear in a new ward. Wonford Locality Planning Team, the county councillor for the area and four local residents supported our draft recommendations for Wonford and Countess Wear.

²¹ We received 16 representations opposing the proposed boundary change between Heavitree and Polsloe wards, with a number of alternative warding arrangements being put forward for consideration. One local resident proposed alternative ward names for the proposed St David’s, Mincinglake, St James and Newtown, wards and suggested a number of ward boundary changes in the city centre. We also received two representations proposing boundary modifications between the proposed Whipton and Pinhoe wards.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

22 As indicated previously, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Exeter is to achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the ratio of electors to councillors being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

23 However, our function is not merely arithmetical. First, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. Second, we must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries, and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken. Third, we must consider the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

24 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which provides for 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.

25 Our *Guidance* states that, while we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates. We will require particular justification for schemes which result in,

or retain, an imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent and over should arise only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

Electorate Forecasts

26 At Stage One, Exeter City Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2003, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 1 per cent from 81,762 to 82,800 over the five-year period from 1998 to 2003. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

27 During Stage Three, Exeter Conservative Association queried the City Council’s electorate forecasts for Exwick ward on the basis that there were already a number of new housing developments within the present ward boundaries. We have carefully noted the Conservative Association’s concerns, and have queried them with the City Council. However, the City Council has confirmed that it remains content with its projected electorate figures and we are satisfied that its forecasts represent the best estimates presently available.

Council Size

28 Our *Guidance* indicates that we would normally expect the number of councillors serving a city or district council to be in the range of 30 to 60.

29 Exeter City Council is at present served by 36 councillors. At Stage One, the City Council proposed an increase in council size to 40. It

argued that this increase was necessary in order to achieve good electoral equality without significant changes to existing ward boundaries, improve community representation, and to retain the River Exe as a ward boundary. The Conservatives proposed that there should be a reduction in the number of councillors to 34 in order to facilitate predominantly single-member wards throughout the city. Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by a council size of 40.

30 At Stage Three, we received no representations regarding council size. We have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendation for a council size of 40 as final.

Electoral Arrangements

31 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three we have further considered our draft recommendations. While we are proposing to substantially endorse our draft recommendations, we propose to make changes in relation to the existing wards of Heavitree, Polsloe, Countess Wear, Topsham and Wonford in order to reflect views put to us at Stage Three

32 The following sections outline the Commission's analysis and final recommendations for the future electoral arrangements for Exeter, which are summarised in Figures 1 and 4 and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report. The following wards are considered in turn:

West of the River

(a) Alphington, Cowick, Exwick and St Thomas;

East of the River

(b) Pennsylvania, Pinhoe, St David's and Stoke Hill;

(c) Barton, Heavitree, Polsloe and Whipton;

(d) Rougemont and St Leonard's;

(e) Countess Wear, St Loyes, Topsham and Wonford.

West of the River

Alphington, Cowick, Exwick and St Thomas wards

33 The existing wards of Alphington, Cowick, Exwick and St Thomas all lie to the west of the River Exe. At present, while Cowick and St Thomas wards enjoy reasonable electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the city average by 5 per cent and 6 per cent, the number of electors per councillor in Alphington and Exwick wards is 38 and 36 per cent above the city average. This level of electoral inequality is not projected to improve over the next five years.

34 In our draft recommendations report, we adopted the City Council's proposals as the basis for our draft recommendations in this area. We considered that its proposals would secure the best level of electoral equality in the area, cause the least disruption by retaining current ward boundaries and would appear to better reflect the interests and identities of communities in the area. However, we proposed a minor boundary modification between Alphington and Cowick wards and Alphington and St Thomas wards in order to improve electoral equality in those wards and to rationalise the existing boundaries. Our proposals resulted in much improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 7 per cent in all four wards. This level of electoral equality was projected to improve with the number of electors per councillor expected to vary by no more than 5 per cent in all four wards by 2003.

35 At Stage Three, the City Council accepted our draft recommendations. Our draft recommendations were also supported by Ben Bradshaw MP and Exeter Liberal Party. Exeter Conservative Association proposed that there should be six single-member wards to represent the distinct communities within the existing Exwick and Alpington wards.

36 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we remain persuaded that our draft recommendations would represent the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We have reconsidered the Conservatives proposal for single-member wards, but have not been persuaded that they would offer a more appropriate warding arrangement. In

particular we note that two of the Conservatives' proposed wards would have electoral variances greater than 10 per cent. Accordingly, we confirm our draft recommendations for these wards as final.

East of the River

Pennsylvania, Pinhoe, St David's and Stoke Hill wards

³⁷ Under current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Pennsylvania, Pinhoe and Stoke Hill wards varies from the city average by 9 per cent, 11 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively. However, due largely to the presence of the university, there are 50 per cent more electors per councillor than the average in St David's ward.

³⁸ In our draft recommendations report, we adopted the City Council's proposals for these wards. First we proposed that the eastern ward boundary of Pennsylvania be modified to include the Stoke Hill estate (currently in Stoke Hill ward). Second, we proposed that Stoke Hill ward be renamed Mincinglake ward, and that its southern boundary be modified to incorporate the Whipton village area south of the railway line, with Pinhoe Road forming the new ward boundary. Third, we proposed that Pinhoe ward's southern boundary be modified to include the new private estate development at Monkerton within Pinhoe ward. Fourth, we proposed that St David's ward be reduced in size, with Prince Charles Road forming the southern boundary and as a result of this ward boundary change, we proposed that the ward be renamed Duryard.

³⁹ At Stage Three, the City Council, Ben Bradshaw MP and Exeter Liberal Party welcomed our draft recommendations for these wards. Exeter Conservative Association suggested that Mincinglake Road and Wynford Road should be in the new Mincinglake ward, and that Exhibition Way should form the boundary between Whipton and Pinhoe wards. Exeter Liberal Democrats proposed that the existing St David's ward should be retained as a two-member ward, less the university halls of residence which would be combined with other halls in a single-member University ward. It argued that this would produce a "community of interest approach" rather than a "geographical approach". It also argued that residents of the Stoke Hill estate should be separately represented from electors in Pennsylvania ward. One local resident supported

the Conservatives proposed boundary change between Whipton and Pinhoe wards, while another welcomed the proposal to move Monkerton into Pinhoe ward, and suggested the restoration of an old parish boundary at Warwick Way as the boundary between Whipton and Pinhoe wards.

⁴⁰ Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three we remain of the view that our draft recommendations represent the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and we confirm them as final. We have considered the Liberal Democrats' proposals but are not persuaded that they would represent a better balance between the need for electoral equality and the statutory criteria. In particular, we consider that their proposal to combine the university halls of residence in a single member ward would not satisfactorily reflect the common links that exist between the university halls and their geographical community. We also note that the Conservatives' proposals would result in poor electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying by more than 20 per cent in Pinhoe ward.

Barton, Heavitree, Polsloe and Whipton wards

⁴¹ Under current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Barton, Heavitree, Polsloe and Whipton wards varies from the city average by 13 per cent, 8 per cent, 11 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate over the next five years.

⁴² At Stage One, the City Council proposed combining Whipton and Barton wards on modified boundaries. The Council also proposed a number of boundary changes to Heavitree and Polsloe wards in order to provide a stronger community focus for the two wards. Its proposals resulted in improved electoral equality in all three wards, with the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Heavitree and Polsloe wards varying by 8 per cent and 3 per cent, while the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Whipton & Barton ward would be equal to the average. In our draft recommendations report we endorsed these proposals, which we considered would represent a better balance of the statutory criteria and the need to ensure electoral equality than the current arrangements.

43 At Stage Three, the City Council, Ben Bradshaw MP and Exeter Liberal Party accepted our draft recommendations. Exeter Conservative Association suggested that the Elmside area should be retained within the proposed Polsloe ward which, under our draft recommendations, would form part of Newtown ward. It argued that this area has always been regarded as the “core” of the ward and, as a consequence, it proposed that the triangle of streets comprising Mansfield Road, Tresillian Gardens and part of Mount Pleasant Road should form part of St James ward. We also received 16 representations from local residents objecting to our draft recommendation to transfer part of Heavitree ward into Polsloe ward. Concern was expressed over the effect that our draft recommendations would have on postal addresses and insurance premiums in this area.

44 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we are content to endorse our draft recommendation for Whipton and Barton wards. However, we note that our proposals in relation to Heavitree and Polsloe wards have incurred a degree of local opposition, with particular concern being expressed in relation to the potential adverse effects on postal addresses and insurance premiums. While we have sympathy with the views expressed at Stage Three, we are unable to have regard to any possible impact on postal addresses and insurance premiums which do not fall within our statutory remit and, in any event, are not determined by local government electoral areas. Furthermore we consider that the level of electoral inequality in the existing Polsloe ward should be addressed, and note that any significant changes to the proposed boundaries of Heavitree ward would adversely affect the level of electoral equality in adjoining wards. We also note that while the Conservatives’ proposals would provide reasonable electoral equality in the proposed Polsloe and St James wards, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Newtown ward would vary from the city average by 11 per cent. Accordingly, on balance, we remain of the view that our draft recommendations for these wards would offer the most appropriate warding arrangements. However, in the light of views put to us at Stage Three, we are proposing to make a minor boundary modification between Heavitree and Polsloe wards in order to ensure that the whole of Homefield Road and Bicton Place is contained within Heavitree ward.

Rougemont and St Leonard’s wards

45 The present Rougemont and St Leonard’s wards enjoy good electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying by 4 per cent and 5 per cent from the city average, respectively. However, while this level of electoral equality is projected to remain constant in St Leonard’s ward over the next five years, as a result of a number of major housing developments in the city centre, there are expected to be 16 per cent more electors per councillor than the average by 2003 in Rougemont ward.

46 In our draft recommendations report we endorsed the City Council’s proposals for the area. This involved transferring two city fringe areas out of Rougemont ward to form part of the proposed St James and Newtown wards, with the remainder of Rougemont ward being combined with parts of the current St Leonard’s and St David’s wards, to be renamed St David’s ward in reference to the historic ecclesiastical parish of St David’s. We also proposed that the new St Leonard’s ward be based on the existing ward, but that parts should be transferred to the proposed Newtown and St David’s wards, and that a cluster of properties from the existing Countess Wear ward be included in St Leonard’s ward. Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Newtown, St James and St Leonard’s wards would vary by no more than 7 per cent from the city average. While the number of electors per councillor in the proposed St David’s ward would initially vary by 13 per cent from the city average, it is expected that there will be only 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the average by 2003.

47 At Stage Three, the City Council, Ben Bradshaw MP and Exeter Liberal Party supported our draft recommendations. We received one other representation from a local resident, who proposed a number of boundary changes and suggested alternative names for the city centre wards.

48 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we have not been persuaded that the alternative warding arrangements put forward would represent a satisfactory balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We have also not been persuaded that the proposed alternative ward names would command the support of the communities in the affected

wards. Accordingly, we consider that our draft recommendations represent the best balance between electoral equality and reflecting the interests and identities of communities in the area and we confirm them as final.

Countess Wear, St Loyes, Topsham and Wonford wards

49 At present, the four wards that cover the southern part of the city have a high level of electoral imbalance, with the number of electors per councillor in Countess Wear, St Loyes, Topsham and Wonford wards varying from the city average by 21 per cent, 9 per cent, 16 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively. While this level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Topsham ward over the next five years, as a result of ongoing development in the Digby area, electoral equality is expected to deteriorate further in Countess Wear, St Loyes and Wonford wards.

50 At Stage One, the City Council proposed that Countess Wear and Wonford wards be combined on modified boundaries, to be represented by three councillors. It proposed that this new ward be renamed Priory ward. While the City Council recognised that the Countess Wear and Wonford areas were two “distinct communities” with “little shared identity”, it considered that this proposal offered the “best fit and most comfortable solution” for this area. In respect of the proposed Topsham ward it proposed that the Tollards Road/Southbrook Road area, currently within Countess Wear ward, would offer the best combination with Topsham. It argued that this area is a discreet stand alone community, and has few identifiable community links with the remainder of Countess Wear. It also argued that the Topsham road is a major radial road into the city from the motorway, and would therefore offer a firm and fixed boundary.

51 The City Council also proposed adjustments to ward boundaries in the St Loyes area. It proposed that in order to rationalise existing boundaries, the Digby area, currently the largest development area in the city, be transferred from Topsham ward to St Loyes ward. It also proposed transferring part of St Loyes ward to the proposed Priory ward in order to better reflect community identities between those two wards. Its proposals provided for good electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying by 5 per cent from the city

average in the proposed Priory ward and being equal to the average in the proposed Topsham ward. While there would initially be 18 per cent more electors per councillor than the average in the proposed St Loyes ward, the development of the Digby area would result in there being only 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the average by 2003.

52 In our draft recommendations report, we endorsed the City Council’s proposals for St Loyes ward. However, we were not persuaded that the City Council’s proposals for Countess Wear, Topsham and Wonford offered the most appropriate warding arrangements for the area. While we accepted that the proposal would provide good electoral equality, we were concerned that the proposed Priory ward would extend a considerable distance from the city centre and would combine areas which appeared to have little shared identity. We concluded that the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria would be achieved by combining Countess Wear with Topsham in a three-member ward. This would result in a revised Wonford ward incorporating Northbrook Park with the boundary following the line of Northbrook Park.

53 At Stage Three our draft recommendations were opposed by Exeter City Council, Ben Bradshaw MP, Exeter Liberal Democrats, Exeter Labour Party and 21 local groups and residents. It was argued that the City Council’s proposals represented a better combination of communities in the area than our draft recommendations which, it was claimed, would dilute Topsham’s historic identity. The Liberal Democrats argued that Topsham should be represented by a single councillor, with Countess Wear remaining a two-member ward. Exeter Conservative Association expressed concern that the draft recommendations for Countess Wear did not reflect the interests and identities of local communities, while the majority of other respondents supported the Council’s original proposals or favoured the retention of the status quo. In addition we received petitions containing 124 signatures opposing our proposals and supporting the City Council’s original scheme. Exeter Liberal Party, Wonford Locality Planning Team and four respondents supported our draft recommendations for the area, highlighting the absence of common links between Countess Wear and Wonford and the historic identity of Wonford ward.

54 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we note that our draft recommendations have received limited support at Stage Three, with the balance of evidence opposing our draft recommendations. We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of this further evidence. We have not been persuaded that the retention of the existing arrangements would represent a satisfactory balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, with the number of electors per councillor in Countess Wear and Wonford wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the city average. Similarly we have not been persuaded that the Topsham area could be separately represented as this would result in poor electoral equality in the proposed ward; there would be 40 per cent more electors per councillor in a single-member Topsham ward and 30 per cent fewer electors per councillor in a two-member Topsham ward (using the motorway as a boundary).

55 Accordingly, in our judgement, the only viable alternative to our draft recommendation is the proposal put forward by the City Council. We accept the Council's view that there is "no readily identifiable combination of communities in the area" and note that neither option is likely to produce a solution that satisfies the interests and identities of the different communities. However in the light of the representations received at Stage Three, we have been persuaded that the City Council's original proposals would represent a better balance of electoral equality and the statutory criteria than our draft recommendations. We note that the evidence received would indicate that residents of Countess Wear have more in common with the urban area of Exeter than with Topsham, in relation to local amenities, shopping and health facilities. Priory High School, for which the Countess Wear area is a major feeder, would act as a significant focus for the proposed Priory ward. Furthermore, we note that increases in owner occupation of former council housing over recent years has led to changes to the character of estates in Countess Wear and Wonford, resulting in greater commonality of interest between them.

56 We have also been mindful of the representations received at Stage Three regarding the strength of community identity in Topsham, and the absence of ties with the existing Countess Wear ward. We note the widespread opposition in

Topsham to a combination with Countess Wear and we agree that Topsham's identity would be better preserved by a merger with the Tollards Road/Southbrook Road area, currently separated from the rest of the existing Countess Wear ward by the main Countess Wear Road. Accordingly, while we confirm our draft recommendation for St Loyes ward, we endorse the City Council's original proposals for Wonford, Countess Wear and Topsham for our final recommendations.

Electoral Cycle

57 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that the present system of elections by thirds in Exeter be retained. At Stage Three no comments were received to the contrary, and we have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

58 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- (a) the existing wards of Countess Wear and Wonford should be combined in a new Priory ward to be represented by three members, while Topsham ward should be combined with the Tollards Road/Southbrook Road area to be represented by two members;
- (b) the boundary between the proposed Heavitree and Polsloe wards should be modified to ensure that Homefield Road and Bicton Place are wholly contained within Heavitree ward.

59 We have concluded that, in Exeter:

- (a) there should be an increase in council size from 36 to 40;
- (b) there should be 18 wards, the same as at present;
- (c) the boundaries of 17 of the existing wards should be modified;
- (d) elections of the council should continue to be held by thirds.

Figure 3:
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1998 electorate		2003 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	36	40	36	40
Number of wards	18	18	18	18
Average number of electors per councillor	2,271	2,044	2,300	2,070
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	10	2	13	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	5	0	5	0

⁶⁰ Figure 3 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1998 and 2003 electorate figures.

⁶¹ As Figure 3 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from ten to two, with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the city average. This level of electoral equality would improve further by 2003, with no wards varying by more than 8 per cent from the city average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Exeter City Council should comprise 40 councillors serving 18 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 4, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report. Elections should continue to take place by thirds.

*Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Exeter*

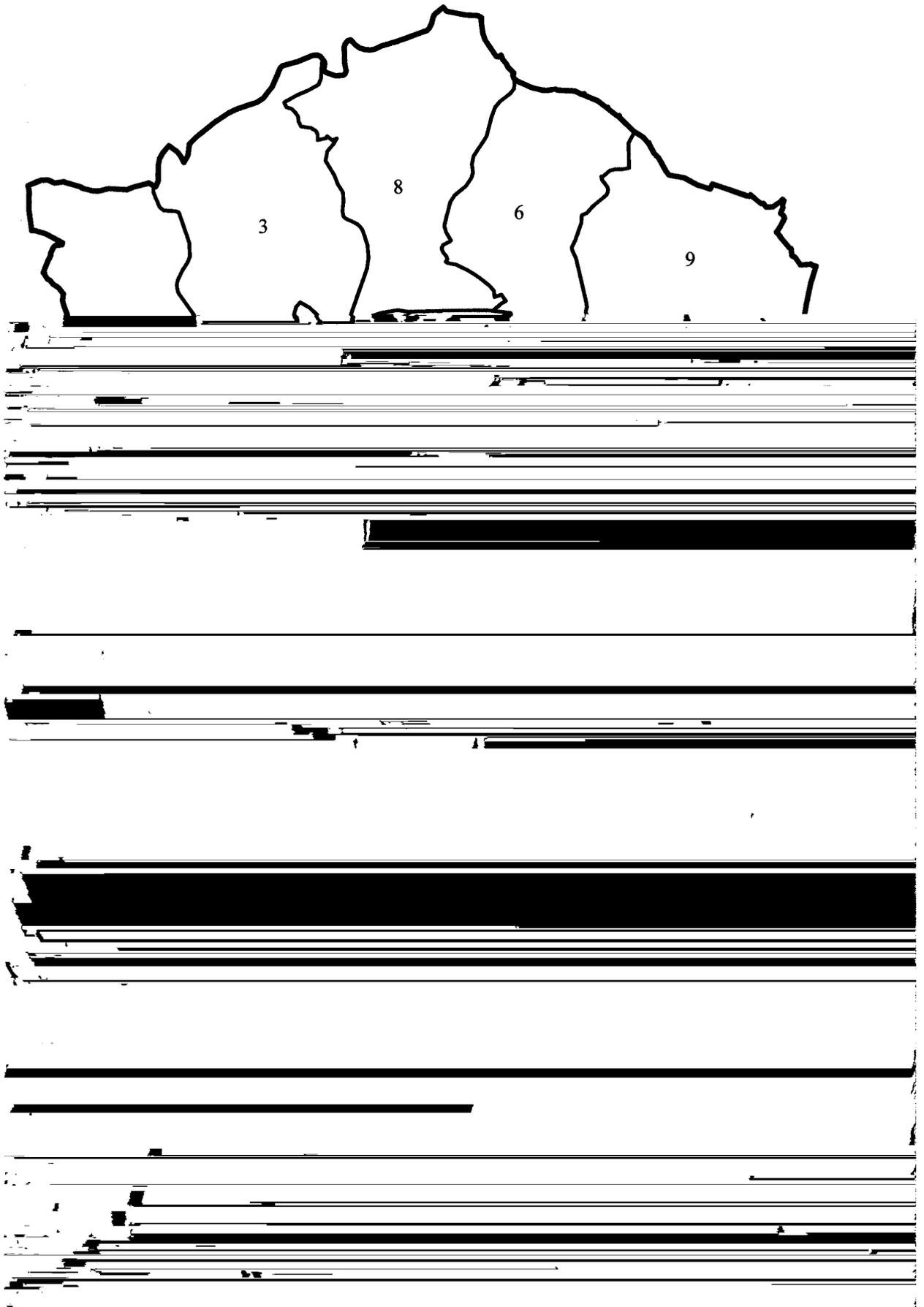


Figure 4:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Exeter

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Alphington	3	6,088	2,029	-1	6,487	2,162	4
2 Cowick	2	4,394	2,197	7	4,145	2,073	0
3 Duryard	2	4,517	2,259	10	4,402	2,201	6
4 Exwick	3	6,162	2,054	0	6,180	2,060	0
5 Heavitree	2	4,446	2,223	9	4,482	2,241	8
6 Mincinglake	2	3,926	1,963	-4	4,051	2,026	-2
7 Newtown	2	3,852	1,926	-6	3,853	1,927	-7
8 Pennsylvania	2	4,363	2,182	7	4,268	2,134	3
9 Pinhoe	2	4,328	2,164	6	4,221	2,111	2
10 Polsloe	2	4,171	2,086	2	4,098	2,049	-1
11 Priory	3	6,416	2,139	5	6,208	2,069	0
12 St David's	2	3,571	1,786	-13	4,209	2,105	2
13 St James	2	3,798	1,899	-7	4,007	2,004	-3
14 St Leonard's	2	3,813	1,907	-7	3,813	1,907	-8
15 St Loyes	2	3,346	1,673	-18	4,299	2,150	4
16 St Thomas	2	4,381	2,191	7	4,173	2,087	1
17 Topsham	2	4,075	2,038	0	3,959	1,980	-4
18 Whipton & Barton	3	6,115	2,038	0	5,945	1,982	-4
Totals	40	81,762	—	—	82,800	—	—
Averages	—	—	2,044	—	—	2,070	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Exeter City Council's submission.

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

6. NEXT STEPS

62 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Exeter and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

63 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made earlier than six weeks from the date that our recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

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

The Secretary of State
Department of the Environment,
Transport and the Regions
Local Government Review
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Exeter: Detailed Mapping

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the Commission's proposed warding arrangements for the city of Exeter.

APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for Exeter:

Figure B1:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Alphington	3	Alphington ward (part)
2	Countess Wear & Topsham	3	Countess Wear ward (part); Topsham ward (part)
3	Cowick	2	Cowick ward; Alphington ward (part)
4	Duryard	2	St David's ward (part)
5	Exwick	3	<i>Unchanged</i>
6	Heavitree	2	Heavitree ward (part); St Loyes ward (part); Barton ward (part)
7	Mincinglake	2	Stoke Hill ward (part); Whipton ward (part)
8	Newtown	2	Polsloe ward (part); Rougemont ward (part); St Leonard's ward (part)
9	Pennsylvania	2	Pennsylvania ward (part); Stoke Hill ward (part)
10	Pinhoe	2	Pinhoe ward; Whipton ward (part)
11	Polsloe	2	Polsloe ward (part); Heavitree ward (part); Whipton ward (part); Stoke Hill ward (part); Pennsylvania ward (part)
12	St David's	2	St David's ward (part); Rougemont ward (part); St Leonard's ward (part)
13	St James	2	Pennsylvania ward (part); St David's ward (part); Rougemont ward (part)
14	St Leonard's	2	St Leonard's ward (part); Countess Wear ward (part)
15	St Loyes	2	St Loyes ward (part); Topsham ward (part)
16	St Thomas	2	St Thomas ward; Alphington ward (part)
17	Whipton & Barton	3	Whipton ward (part); Barton ward (part)
18	Wonford	2	Wonford ward; Countess Wear ward (part); St Loyes ward (part)

Figure B2:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Alphington	3	6,088	2,029	-1	6,487	2,162	4
2 Cowick	2	4,394	2,197	7	4,145	2,073	0
3 Duryard	2	4,517	2,259	10	4,402	2,201	6
4 Exwick	3	6,162	2,054	0	6,180	2,060	0
5 Heavitree	2	4,412	2,206	8	4,448	2,224	7
6 Mincinglake	2	3,926	1,963	-4	4,051	2,026	-2
7 Newtown	2	3,852	1,926	-6	3,853	1,927	-7
8 Pennsylvania	2	4,363	2,182	7	4,268	2,134	3
9 Pinhoe	2	4,328	2,164	6	4,221	2,111	2
10 Polsloe	2	4,205	2,103	3	4,132	2,066	0
11 Countess Wear and Topsham	3	6,193	2,064	1	5,944	1,981	-4
12 St David's	2	3,571	1,786	-13	4,209	2,105	2
13 St James	2	3,798	1,899	-7	4,007	2,004	-3
14 St Leonard's	2	3,813	1,907	-7	3,813	1,907	-8
15 St Loyes	2	3,346	1,673	-18	4,299	2,150	4
16 St Thomas	2	4,381	2,191	7	4,173	2,087	1
17 Wonford	2	4,298	2,149	5	4,223	2,112	2
18 Whipton & Barton	3	6,115	2,038	0	5,945	1,982	-4
Totals	40	81,762	—	—	82,800	—	—
Averages	—	—	2,044	—	—	2,070	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Exeter City Council's submission.

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