

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
North Dorset

October 2001

© Crown Copyright 2001

Applications for reproduction should be made to: Her Majesty's Stationery Office Copyright Unit.

The mapping in this report is reproduced from OS mapping by the Local Government Commission for England with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright.

Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.
Licence Number: GD 03114G.

This report is printed on recycled paper.

CONTENTS

	page
WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?	<i>v</i>
SUMMARY	<i>vii</i>
1 INTRODUCTION	<i>1</i>
2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS	<i>5</i>
3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED	<i>9</i>
4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>11</i>
5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?	<i>29</i>
APPENDICES	
A Draft Recommendations for North Dorset: Detailed Mapping	<i>31</i>
B Code of Practice on Written Consultation	<i>33</i>

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

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

SUMMARY

We began a review of North Dorset's electoral arrangements on 27 March 2001.

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

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

- **in 17 of the 27 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and six 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 16 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 11 wards.**

Our main proposals for North Dorset's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 89-90) are that:

- **North Dorset District Council should have 33 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 27 wards, also the same as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, and five wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 22 of the proposed 27 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further with the number of electors per councillor in 25 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2006.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements for the towns of Gillingham and Shaftesbury.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 9 October 2001. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is**

therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.

- After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission which, subject to Parliamentary approval, with effect from 1 April 2002 will be responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.
- The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also decide when any changes come into effect.

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 3 December 2001:

**Review Manager
North Dorset Review
LGCE
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU**

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

Table 1: Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Abbey	1	The parishes of Hilton, Milton Abbas, Winterborne Houghton and Winterborne Stickland	Map 2
2	Blackmore	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Lydlinch, Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle	Map 2
3	Blandford East	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – part of Blandford Forum parish (the proposed Blandford East parish ward)	Map 2
4	Blandford West	3	<i>Unchanged</i> – part of Blandford Forum parish (the proposed Blandford West parish ward)	Map 2
5	Bourton & District	1	the parishes of Bourton, Buckhorn Weston, Kington Magna and Silton and part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Gillingham Rural parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
6	Bulbarrow	1	the parishes of Bryanston, Durweston, Ibberton, Stoke Wake, Stourpaine, Turnworth and Woolland	Map 2
7	Cranborne Chase	1	the parishes of Ashmore, Iwerne Minster, Pimperne and Tarrant Gunville	Map 2
8	Gillingham Town	1	part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Gillingham Town parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
9	Hill Forts	1	the parishes of Child Okeford, Hammoon, Hanford, Iwerne Courtney, Iwerne Stepleton and Manston	Map 2
10	Lodbourne	1	part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Lodbourne parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
11	Lydden Vale	1	the parishes of Fifehead Neville, Glanvilles Wootton, Hazelbury Bryan, Mappowder and Pulham	Map 2
12	Marnhull	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Marnhull	Map 2
13	Milborne St Andrew	1	the parishes of Milborne St Andrew, Winterborne Clenston and Winterborne Whitechurch	Map 2
14	Milton	1	part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Milton parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
15	Motcombe & Ham	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Motcombe and part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Ham parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
16	Portman	1	the parishes of Blandford St Mary, Langton Long Blandford, Tarrant Keyneston and Tarrant Rawston	Map 2
17	Riversdale	1	the parishes of Anderson, Charlton Marshall, Winterborne Kingston and Winterborne Zelston	Map 2
18	Shaftesbury Central	1	part of Shaftesbury parish (the proposed Shaftesbury Central parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
19	Shaftesbury Christy's	1	part of Shaftesbury parish (the proposed Shaftesbury Christy's parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
20	Shaftesbury Grosvenor	1	part of Shaftesbury parish (the proposed Shaftesbury Grosvenor parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
21	Shaftesbury Underhill	1	part of Shaftesbury parish (the proposed Shaftesbury Underhill parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
22	Shillingstone	1	the parishes of Okeford Fitzpaine and Shillingstone	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
23	Stour Valley	2	the parishes of Hinton St Mary and Sturminster Newton	Map 2
24	The Beacon	1	the parishes of Cann, Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna, Melbury Abbas and Sutton Waldron	Map 2
25	The Lower Tarrants	1	the parishes of Chettle, Farnham, Spetisbury, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Hinton, Tarrant Launceston, Tarrant Monkton and Tarrant Rushton	Map 2
26	The Stours	1	the parishes of East Orchard, East Stour, Fifehead Magdalen, Margaret Marsh, Stour Provost, Todber, West Orchard and West Stour	Map 2
27	Wyke	2	part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Wyke parish ward)	Map 2 and large map

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

2 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Table 2: Draft Recommendations for North Dorset

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Abbey	1	1,527	1,527	7	1,589	1,589	5
2	Blackmore	2	2,754	1,377	-3	2,920	1,460	-3
3	Blandford East	2	2,946	1,473	3	3,060	1,530	2
4	Blandford West	3	3,949	1,316	-8	4,150	1,383	-8
5	Bourton & District	1	1,538	1,538	8	1,548	1,548	3
6	Bulbarrow	1	1,499	1,499	5	1,526	1,526	1
7	Cranborne Chase	1	1,672	1,672	17	1,655	1,655	10
8	Gillingham Town	1	1,414	1,414	-1	1,570	1,570	4
9	Hill Forts	1	1,461	1,461	3	1,535	1,535	2
10	Lodbourne	1	1,512	1,512	6	1,509	1,509	0
11	Lydden Vale	1	1,284	1,284	-10	1,398	1,398	-7
12	Marnhull	1	1,653	1,653	16	1,480	1,480	-2
13	Milborne St Andrew	1	1,425	1,425	0	1,495	1,495	-1
14	Milton	1	1,238	1,238	-13	1,426	1,426	-5
15	Motcombe & Ham	1	1,349	1,349	-5	1,650	1,650	9
16	Portman	1	1,301	1,301	-9	1,595	1,595	6
17	Riversdale	1	1,568	1,568	10	1,673	1,673	11
18	Shaftesbury Central	1	1,518	1,518	7	1,526	1,526	1
19	Shaftesbury Christy's	1	1,262	1,262	-11	1,446	1,446	-4
20	Shaftesbury Grosvenor	1	1,302	1,302	-9	1,447	1,447	-4
21	Shaftesbury Underhill	1	1,348	1,348	-5	1,381	1,381	-8
22	Shillingstone	1	1,521	1,521	7	1,537	1,537	2
23	Stour Valley	2	2,734	1,367	-4	3,010	1,505	0
24	The Beacon	1	1,550	1,550	9	1,563	1,563	4

	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 %
25	The Lower Tarrants	1	1,625	1,625	14	1,776	1,776	18
26	The Stours	1	1,419	1,419	0	1,478	1,478	-2
27	Wyke	2	2,642	1,321	-7	2,787	1,394	-8
	Totals	33	47,011	-	-	49,730	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,425	-	-	1,507	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of North Dorset, on which we are now consulting. We are currently reviewing five of the six two-tier districts in Dorset as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is expected to finish in 2004. We completed the review of Purbeck district in March 1997.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of North Dorset. North Dorset's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1980 (Report no. 392). The electoral arrangements of Dorset County Council were last reviewed in June 1982 (Report no. 427). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary

to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

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

Table 3: Stages of the Review

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

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

11 Stage One began on 27 March 2001, when we wrote to North Dorset District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Dorset County Council, Dorset Police, the local authority associations, Dorset Association of Parish and Town 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 South West Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited North Dorset District Council to publicise the review further. The Commission's Stage One consultation period was put into abeyance from 10 May 2001 until 7 June 2001 as a consequence of the General Election; the closing date for receipt of submissions at the end of Stage One was 16 July 2001.

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

13 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 9 October 2001 and will end on 3 December 2001, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

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

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 The district of North Dorset is located in the north and centre of the county. The district covers an area of around 60,871 hectares and has a population of 58,230. There are five towns in the district, Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Shaftesbury, Stalbridge and Sturminster Newton, together with an extensive rural hinterland. Agriculture and tourism both occupy important positions within the economy of the district.

17 The district contains 59 civil parishes, and is entirely parished. Blandford Forum comprises around 15 per cent of the district's total electorate.

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

19 The electorate of the district is 47,011 (February 2001). The Council presently has 33 members who are elected from 27 wards. Six of the wards are each represented by two councillors, and 21 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,425 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,507 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration since the last review, the number of electors per councillor in 17 of the 27 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in six wards by more than 20 per cent and in three wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Wyke ward where the councillor represents 92 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in North Dorset

Table 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Abbey	2	2,431	1,216	-15	2,530	1,265	-16
2	Blackmore	2	2,754	1,377	-3	2,920	1,460	-3
3	Blandford East	2	2,946	1,473	3	3,060	1,530	2
4	Blandford West	2	3,949	1,975	39	4,150	2,075	38
5	Bourton & District	1	1,350	1,350	-5	1,350	1,350	-10
6	Bulbarrow	1	1,045	1,045	-27	1,010	1,010	-33
7	Cranborne Chase	1	1,445	1,445	1	1,430	1,430	-5
8	Gillingham Town	1	1,450	1,450	2	1,620	1,620	8
9	Hill Forts	2	2,556	1,278	-10	2,680	1,340	-11
10	Hills & Vale	1	1,363	1,363	-4	1,350	1,350	-10
11	Lodbourne	1	1,185	1,185	-17	1,120	1,120	-26
12	Lower Winterborne	1	1,219	1,219	-14	1,290	1,290	-14
13	Lydden Vale	1	1,151	1,151	-19	1,270	1,270	-16
14	Marnhull	1	1,653	1,653	16	1,480	1,480	-2
15	Milton	1	1,623	1,623	14	1,870	1,870	24
16	Motcombe	1	1,349	1,349	-5	1,650	1,650	9
17	Portman	1	1,677	1,677	18	1,880	1,880	25
18	Riversdale	1	1,359	1,359	-5	1,460	1,460	-3
19	Shaftesbury Central	1	1,137	1,137	-20	1,060	1,060	-30
20	Shaftesbury Christy's	1	1,753	1,753	23	2,010	2,010	33
21	Shaftesbury Grosvenor	1	1,656	1,656	16	1,840	1,840	22
22	Shaftesbury Underhill	1	884	884	-38	890	890	-41
23	Stour Valley	2	2,912	1,456	2	3,200	1,600	6

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 %
24 The Beacon	1	1,015	1,015	-29	1,040	1,040	-31
25 The Lower Tarrant	1	1,188	1,188	-17	1,410	1,410	-6
26 The Stours	1	1,225	1,225	-14	1,280	1,280	-15
27 Wyke	1	2,736	2,736	92	2,880	2,880	91
Totals	33	47,011	-	-	49,730	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,425	-	-	1,507	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Shaftesbury Underhill ward were relatively over-represented by 38 per cent, while electors in Wyke ward were relatively under-represented by 92 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

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

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 11 submissions during Stage One, including a district-wide scheme from the District Council, a local councillor and Blandford Forum Town Council, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council.

North Dorset District Council

23 The District Council proposed retaining a council size of 33 members, representing a uniform pattern of single-member wards. The District Council proposed amendments to the majority of ward boundaries to provide improvements to electoral equality while, it considered, reflecting local community identities and interests. It did not provide detailed proposals for warding in the urban areas of the district.

24 Under the District Council's proposals two wards would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average in 2006.

Parish and Town Councils

25 We received responses from seven parish and town councils. Blandford Forum Town Council put forward proposals for a council size of 36, an increase of three, representing a uniform pattern of single-member wards. It did not provide detailed proposals for the warding of Gillingham, Shaftesbury, Stalbridge or Sturminster Newton parishes. Under the Town Council's proposals one ward would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average in 2006.

26 Gillingham Town Council proposed that the existing Wyke and Motcombe wards should each be divided into two new wards. Shaftesbury Town Council proposed modification to ward boundaries in Shaftesbury which it considered would better reflect the areas concerned. Stourpaine Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposed Bulbarrow ward, arguing that it would not reflect local community identities and interests. It considered that the new ward would not possess strong communication links, and supported Councillor Spencer's 31-member scheme, described below. Tarrant Gunville Parish Council initially supported the retention of the status quo in its area. It subsequently made a further submission in support of Councillor Spencer's 31-member scheme. Winterborne Houghton Parish Council considered that the status quo worked well in its area.

27 Buckhorn Weston & Kington Magna Parish Council stated that it had no representations with regard to the review.

Other Submissions

28 We received a further three submissions during Stage One. Councillor Frank Spencer, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on North Dorset District Council, and Chairman of the North Dorset Area of the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, put forward proposals for a council size of 31, a reduction of two, serving a mixed pattern of 29 single-member wards and one two-member ward. He considered that his proposals would secure improvements to electoral equality while having regard to local community identities and interests. He did not provide detailed proposals for the warding of Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Shaftesbury, Stalbridge or Sturminster Newton parishes. Under his proposals one ward would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average in 2006.

29 Gillingham Civic Society considered that, in view of the projected growth in electorate, Wyke and Motcombe wards should each be divided into two new wards. The Shaftesbury & District Branch of the Liberal Democrats put forward revisions to the four district wards in Shaftesbury.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

33 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.

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

Electorate Forecasts

35 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of 6 per cent from 47,011 to 49,730 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects this growth to be relatively evenly distributed across the district, although a significant amount of growth is expected in Motcombe, The Lower Tarrants, Milton and Shaftesbury Christy’s wards. 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.

36 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

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

38 North Dorset District Council presently has 33 members. At Stage One the District Council proposed retaining a council size of 33, which it stated would permit the general achievement of a good scheme for the district as a whole while having regard to local community identities and interests. Councillor Spencer proposed a reduction of two to a council size of 31, arguing that this would provide the best reflection of local community identities and interests. Blandford Forum Town Council proposed a council size of 36, an increase of three.

39 We considered all three district-wide proposals submitted, but did not consider that either Blandford Forum Town Council or Councillor Spencer had submitted substantive evidence as to why the current council size does not facilitate convenient and effective local government, or why their proposed council sizes were preferable.

40 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 conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 33 members.

Electoral Arrangements

41 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received during Stage One and in particular to the three different sets of district-wide proposals which we have received. We note that each is based on a different council size and each is incomplete, as none offers detailed proposals in relation to all of the urban areas. We also note that there is little consensus between the three sets of proposals with regard to the appropriate configuration of wards within the district. Consequently, we have looked for the proposals which we judge would provide the best balance between the need to secure substantial improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We considered all three district-wide proposals but, in the case of Blandford Forum Town Council's scheme and Councillor Spencer's scheme, we were concerned that the more urban Blandford Forum would be combined with parts of adjoining rural parishes. This proposal would involve a significant degree of parish warding, and we did not consider that it would be a good reflection of the interests and identities of local communities.

42 We judge that the District Council's proposals best meet the aims of this review and we are therefore adopting the District Council's proposals as the basis for our draft recommendations in the rural parts of the district, subject to a small number of amendments where we consider that improvements can be made. We have put forward our own proposals for a number of the urban areas of the district as we do not judge that the proposals which we have received so far in such areas have provided sufficient detail or evidence.

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

- (a) Blandford Forum (two wards);
- (b) Cranborne Chase, Hills & Vale, The Beacon and The Lower Tarrants wards;
- (c) Abbey, Lower Winterborne, Portman and Riversdale wards;
- (d) Blackmore, Bulbarrow, Hill Forts and Lydden Vale wards;
- (e) Marnhull, Stour Valley and The Stours wards;
- (f) Shaftesbury (four wards);
- (g) Bourton & District, Gillingham Town, Lodbourne, Milton, Motcombe and Wyke wards.

44 Details of our draft 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.

Blandford Forum (two wards)

45 The town (and parish) of Blandford Forum is situated in the south-east of the district and is currently served by two two-member wards: Blandford East and Blandford West. The area as a whole is under-represented. The number of electors per councillor is 3 per cent above the district average in Blandford East ward (2 per cent above in 2006) and 39 per cent above in Blandford West ward (38 per cent above in 2006).

46 At Stage One the District Council proposed that Blandford Forum parish should comprise five single-member district wards. It did not provide detailed proposals for its scheme in this area. Councillor Spencer proposed that an area comprising Blandford Forum parish, an area in the north of Langton Long Blandford parish and areas in the west of Tarrant Launceston and Tarrant Monkton parishes should together be covered by five councillors. He did not provide detailed proposals for district warding within this area.

47 Blandford Forum Town Council proposed that an area comprising Blandford Forum parish together with part of Blandford St Mary and Langton Long Blandford parishes together be covered by six single-member wards. In particular it argued that those electors in parts of Blandford St Mary and Langton Long Blandford parishes, which it proposed combining with Blandford Forum parish, shared strong community identities with the town. It also proposed that the Letton area of Pimperne parish could be included in this area for district warding purposes.

48 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received during Stage One. We note that we have received three differing sets of proposals for the area concerned. We note that Blandford Forum Town Council proposed that the parish, together with parts of neighbouring parishes, should be represented by six councillors. Similarly we note that Councillor Spencer proposed that Blandford Forum parish should be combined with areas to the east and should be represented by five councillors. We are not persuaded that the achievement of a good solution for the wider district area necessitates looking beyond Blandford Forum Town Council for alternative warding arrangements. Moreover, we note that, under a council size of 33, the area comprising Blandford East and Blandford West wards merits five councillors, both now and in 2006. Consequently we are not proposing to adopt the proposals of Blandford Forum Town Council or Councillor Spencer in this area. We

also note that, although the District Council proposed a pattern of five single-member wards for the town, it did not provide detailed proposals in support of its scheme. Consequently we have provided our own proposals for this area, based on an overall representation of five and on the existing wards. In view of the substantial under-representation in Blandford West ward we are proposing to increase the number of councillors representing the ward from two to three. We are also proposing that the existing boundary between Blandford East and Blandford West wards should be retained, subject to making minor modifications in the centre of the town to provide a more clearly recognisable boundary, which would not affect any electors.

49 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Blandford East ward (2 per cent above in 2006) and 8 per cent below in Blandford West ward both now and in 2006. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome local views on whether a pattern of single-member wards in Blandford Forum would be preferred, together with detailed warding proposals, at Stage Three.

Cranborne Chase, Hills & Vale, The Beacon and The Lower Tarrant wards

50 These four wards are situated in the east of the district and each is represented by a single councillor. Cranborne Chase ward comprises the parishes of Chettle, Farnham, Pimperne, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton; Hills & Vale ward comprises the parishes of Ashmore, Fontmell Magna, Iwerne Minster and Sutton Waldron; The Beacon ward comprises the parishes of Cann, Compton Abbas, East Orchard, Margaret Marsh, Melbury Abbas and West Orchard; and The Lower Tarrants ward comprises the parishes of Langton Long Blandford, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Keyneston, Tarrant Launceston, Tarrant Monkton, Tarrant Rawston and Tarrant Rushton. The number of electors per councillor is 1 per cent above the district average in Cranborne Chase ward (5 per cent below in 2006), 4 per cent below in Hills & Vale ward (10 per cent below in 2006), 29 per cent below in The Beacon ward (31 per cent below in 2006) and 17 per cent below in The Lower Tarrants ward (6 per cent below in 2006).

51 At Stage One the District Council proposed a pattern of three single-member wards in this area. It proposed that a modified The Beacon ward should comprise the parishes of Cann, Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna, Melbury Abbas and Sutton Waldron. It proposed that a modified Cranborne Chase ward should comprise the parishes of Ashmore, Iwerne Minster, Pimperne and Tarrant Gunville. The District Council proposed that a modified The Lower Tarrants ward should comprise the parishes of Chettle, Farnham, Spetisbury, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Hinton, Tarrant Launceston, Tarrant Monkton, Tarrant Rawston and Tarrant Rushton. The District Council considered that its proposals would generally provide a satisfactory reflection of the statutory criteria. However, it noted that under its proposals some electoral inequality would remain in the modified The Lower Tarrants ward, which it considered could be addressed by an alternative proposal including electors from the 'Blandford Camp' area of Tarrant Launceston and Tarrant Monkton parishes in the Blandford Forum wards via "a corridor through Langford Long". The District Council did not provide proposed names for the revised wards in this area. Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent above the district average in the modified The Beacon ward (4 per cent above in 2006), 17 per cent above in the modified

Cranborne Chase ward (10 per cent above in 2006) and 18 per cent above in The Lower Tarrants ward (21 per cent above in 2006).

52 Councillor Spencer proposed a pattern of four single-member wards to cover the majority of this area. He proposed that a new Gardiner ward should comprise the parishes of Ashmore, Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna, Iwerne Minster and Sutton Waldron, although he noted that part of Fontmell Magna parish could also be included in a ward to the west (described later). He proposed that a modified Cranborne Chase ward should comprise the parishes of Chettle, Farnham, Pimperne, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton together with parts of Tarrant Launceston and Tarrant Monkton wards to the east of the Blandford Camp area. He further proposed that a single-member Woodhouse ward should comprise the parishes of Blandford St Mary, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Keyneston, Tarrant Rawston and Tarrant Rushton together with a southern part of Langton Long Blandford parish. The remainder of Langton Long Blandford parish would be transferred to form part of a ward with Blandford Forum parish. He also proposed a single-member Beacon ward comprising the parishes of Cann and Melbury Abbas from the existing ward of the same name and the parishes of East Stour, Stour Provost and Todber, currently in The Stours ward.

53 Under Councillor Spencer's proposals for a 31-member council the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average in Gardiner ward (5 per cent below in 2006), 7 per cent above in Cranborne Chase ward (equal to the average in 2006), 16 per cent below in Woodhouse ward (2 per cent below in 2006) and 8 per cent above in Beacon ward (6 per cent above in 2006).

54 Blandford Forum Town Council proposed a revised pattern of four single-member wards to cover much of this area. It proposed that a revised The Beacon ward should comprise the parishes of Cann, Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna and Melbury Abbas. The Town Council proposed that a revised Hills & Vale ward should comprise the parishes of Ashmore, East Orchard, Hanford, Iwerne Courtney, Iwerne Minster, Iwerne Stepleton, Margaret Marsh, Sutton Waldron and West Orchard. It proposed that a new Tarrants ward should comprise the parishes of Chettle, Farnham, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Gunville, Tarrant Hinton, Tarrant Keyneston, Tarrant Rawston and Tarrant Rushton together with parts of the parishes of Tarrant Launceston, Tarrant Monkton and Langton Long Blandford. It also proposed that a new Pimperne & Camp ward should comprise Pimperne parish together with the remaining parts of Tarrant Launceston and Tarrant Monkton parishes in the Blandford Camp area. Under the Town Council's proposals for a 36-member council, the number of electors per councillor would be 6 per cent above the district average in The Beacon ward (2 per cent above in 2006), five per cent above in Hills & Vale ward (1 per cent below in 2006), equal to the average in Tarrants ward (5 per cent below in 2006), and 2 per cent above in Pimperne & Camp ward (4 per cent above in 2006).

55 We received one further submission in relation to this area. Tarrant Gunville Parish Council initially supported the retention of the status quo in its area. It subsequently made a further submission in support of Councillor Spencer's 31-member scheme, stating that his proposals reflected community identity and interests.

56 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received in this area. We note in particular that under the District Council's proposals there would be substantial electoral inequality in The Lower Tarrants ward, which it considered could be addressed by

transferring the Blandford Camp area to form part of Blandford ward, as proposed by Councillor Spencer. However, as noted above, we are not persuaded that such an arrangement would provide a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. We are also not persuaded that the proposed warding configuration put forward by Blandford Forum Town Council would provide a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. Consequently, we have investigated modifying the schemes which we have received to provide improvements to electoral equality across the area as a whole, while having regard to the statutory criteria. We note that the configuration of parishes in this area does not lend itself easily to the achievement of electoral equality without the use of parish warding, which in the areas concerned is unlikely, we judge, to provide a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. Consequently we are adopting the District Council's proposed scheme for this area, although modified to transfer Tarrant Rawston parish to a modified Portman ward, which would secure a small improvement in electoral equality. We are proposing to retain the existing ward names for this area.

57 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 17 per cent above the district average in Cranborne Chase ward (10 per cent above in 2006), 9 per cent above in The Beacon ward (4 per cent above in 2006) and 14 per cent above in The Lower Tarrants ward (18 per cent above in 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2.

Abbey, Lower Winterborne, Portman and Riversdale wards

58 These four wards are situated in the south of the district. Abbey ward is represented by two members and the remaining three wards are each represented by a single member. Abbey ward comprises the parishes of Hilton, Milborne St Andrew, Milton Abbas, Turnworth, Winterborne Clenston, Winterborne Houghton and Winterborne Stickland; Lower Winterborne ward comprises the parishes of Anderson, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Whitechurch and Winterborne Zelston; Portman ward comprises the parishes of Blandford St Mary, Bryanston and Durweston; and Riversdale ward comprises the parishes of Charlton Marshall and Spetisbury. The number of electors per councillor is 15 per cent below the district average in Abbey ward (16 per cent below in 2006), 14 per cent below in Lower Winterborne ward both now and in 2006, 18 per cent above in Portman ward (25 per cent above in 2006) and 5 per cent below in Riversdale ward (3 per cent below in 2006).

59 At Stage One the District Council proposed a pattern of four single-member wards in this area. It proposed that a modified Portman ward should comprise the parishes of Blandford St Mary, Langton Long Blandford and Tarrant Keyneston. The District Council also proposed that a modified Riversdale ward should comprise the parishes of Anderson, Charlton Marshall, Winterborne Kingston and Winterborne Zelston. The District Council did not include proposals for new ward names in this area. Under the District Council's proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be 12 per cent below the district average in the modified Portman ward (3 per cent above in 2006) and 10 per cent above in the modified Riversdale ward (11 per cent above in 2006).

60 The District Council also proposed that an area comprising Abbey ward, together with a number of neighbouring parishes, should form two new wards. It proposed that the southern ward should comprise the parishes of Milborne St Andrew, Winterborne Clenston and Winterborne Whitechurch, while the northern ward should comprise the parishes of Hilton,

Milton Abbas, Winterborne Houghton and Winterborne Stickland. The District Council did not include proposals for new ward names in this area. It considered that its proposals would generally provide a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. Under its proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the district average in the southern ward (1 per cent below in 2006) and 7 per cent above in the northern ward (5 per cent above in 2006).

61 In addition to a new Woodhouse ward, detailed above, Councillor Spencer proposed a further four single-member wards in this area. He proposed that a single-member Riversdale ward should comprise the parishes of Anderson, Charlton Marshall, Spetisbury and Winterborne Zelston. He proposed that a new Winterborne ward could comprise the parishes of Winterborne Clenston, Winterborne Houghton, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Stickland and Winterborne Whitechurch, while a modified Abbey ward could comprise the parishes of Hilton, Milton Abbas and Milborne St Andrew. However he noted that this represented only a possible division between Abbey and Winterborne wards. He also proposed a modified single-member Portman ward comprising the parishes of Bryanston, Durweston, Iwerne Courtney, Iwerne Stepleton, Stourpaine and Turnworth. Under a council size of 31, the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in Riversdale ward (3 per cent above in 2006), 11 per cent above in Winterborne ward (10 per cent above in 2006), 15 per cent above in Abbey ward (13 per cent above in 2006), and 9 per cent above in Portman ward (6 per cent above in 2006).

62 Blandford Forum Town Council proposed that a single-member Riversdale ward should be retained on its existing boundaries. It proposed that a modified single-member Lower Winterborne ward should comprise the parishes of Anderson, Winterborne Clenston, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Whitechurch and Winterborne Zelston together with the remainder of Blandford St Mary parish. The Town Council proposed that a modified single-member Abbey ward should comprise the parishes of Milton Abbas and Milborne St Andrew alone. It proposed that a further new single-member ward, for which it did not include a name, should comprise the parishes of Bryanston, Durweston, Winterborne Houghton and Winterborne Stickland. The Town Council considered that the new wards which it had proposed would achieve improvements to electoral equality while providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. Under a council size of 36, the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above the district average in Riversdale ward (6 per cent above in 2006), 64 per cent above in Lower Winterborne ward (60 per cent above in 2006), 3 per cent above in Abbey ward (1 per cent above in 2006), and 7 per cent above in the unnamed ward detailed above (4 per cent above in 2006).

63 We received one further submission in relation to this area. Winterborne Houghton Parish Council supported the retention of the existing Abbey ward, considering that the status quo worked well in its area.

64 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received in this area. While we note that all three schemes would achieve substantial improvements to electoral equality in the areas concerned we consider that the proposals put forward by the District Council provide the best balance of the need to secure improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria, both in this area and in view of our proposals for neighbouring areas. Consequently we are adopting the District Council's proposals as part of our draft recommendations. However, as previously stated we propose transferring the parish of Tarrant Rawston from the proposed Lower Tarrants ward to the proposed Portman ward to

secure a small improvement in electoral equality. We are proposing that the existing ward names should be retained for each ward, except in the case of the ward formed from the southern part of Abbey ward and the western part of Lower Winterborne ward, which we are proposing should be called Milborne St Andrew. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent above the district average in Abbey ward (5 per cent above in 2006), equal to the average in Milborne St Andrew ward (1 per cent below in 2006), 9 per cent below in Portman ward (6 per cent above in 2006) and 10 per cent above in Riversdale ward (11 per cent above in 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2.

Blackmore, Bulbarrow, Hill Forts and Lydden Vale wards

65 The four wards of Blackmore, Bulbarrow, Hill Forts and Lydden Vale are situated in the centre and west of the district. Blackmore and Hill Forts wards are each represented by two councillors while Bulbarrow and Lydden Vale wards are each represented by a single councillor. Blackmore ward comprises the parishes of Lydlinch, Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle; Bulbarrow ward comprises the parishes of Ibberton, Mappowder, Okeford Fitzpaine, Stoke Wake and Woolland; Hill Forts ward comprises the parishes of Child Okeford, Hanford, Iwerne Courtney, Iwerne Stepleton, Shillingstone and Stourpaine; and Lydden Vale ward comprises Fifehead Neville, Glanvilles Wootton, Hazelbury Bryan and Pulham parishes. The number of electors per councillor is 3 per cent below the district average in Blackmore ward both now and in 2006, 27 per cent below in Bulbarrow ward (33 per cent below in 2006), 10 per cent below in Hill Forts ward (11 per cent below in 2006) and 19 per cent below in Lydden Vale ward (16 per cent below in 2006).

66 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the boundaries for the wards in this area should be modified. The District Council proposed that a modified single-member Bulbarrow ward should comprise the parishes of Bryanston, Durweston, Ibberton, Stoke Wake, Stourpaine, Turnworth and Wooland, omitting the parish of Okeford Fitzpaine, which would form a single-member ward with Shillingstone parish. It proposed that a modified single-member Lydden Vale ward should comprise the parishes of Fifehead Neville, Glanvilles Wootton, Hazelbury Bryan and Pulham from the existing ward, as well as the parish of Mappowder from Bulbarrow ward. The District Council also proposed that a modified single-member Hill Forts ward should comprise the parishes of Child Okeford, Hammoon, Hanford, Iwerne Courtney, Iwerne Stepleton and Manston. It proposed that two members should represent the area covered by the existing Blackmore ward, although it considered that it should be divided into two single-member Blackmore North and Blackmore South wards. Similarly the District Council proposed that two members should represent the area covered by the parishes of Hinton St Mary and Sturminster Newton, although considered that it should be divided into two new wards. Although it provided details of the proposed division of Blackmore ward, it did not propose detailed ward boundaries for the division of Sturminster Newton parish. The District Council generally considered that its proposals would provide a satisfactory balance between the need to secure improvements to electoral equality while reflecting local community identities and interests. It did not put forward confirmed names for the wards in this area, except for Blackmore North, Blackmore South and Lydden Vale wards.

67 Under the District Council's proposals, the number of electors per councillor in the first modified Bulbarrow ward (comprising the parishes of Bryanston, Durweston etc.) would be 5

per cent above the district average (1 per cent above in 2006), 7 per cent above in the second modified Bulbarrow ward comprising Okeford Fitzpaine and Shillingstone parishes (2 per cent above in 2006), 10 per cent below in Lydden Vale ward (7 per cent below in 2006), and 3 per cent above in the modified Hill Forts ward (2 per cent above in 2006).

68 In addition to the proposals detailed above, Councillor Spencer proposed that a single-member Lydden Vale ward should comprise the parishes of Fifehead Neville, Glanvilles Wooton, Hazelbury Bryan, Mappowder, Pulham, Stoke Wake and Woolland. He also proposed that a two-member Hill Forts or Hayward ward should comprise the parishes of Child Okeford, East Orchard, Hammoon, Hanford, Ibberton, Manston, Margaret Marsh, Okeford Fitzpaine, Shillingstone and West Orchard and also observed that it could include an area in the west of Fontmell Magna parish, with the option of then transferring Ibberton parish to the proposed Lydden Vale ward. He made similar proposals to those put forward by the District Council in the Stalbridge and Sturminster Newton areas, although he proposed that the parishes of Fifehead Magdalen and West Stour should be combined with parishes in the Blackmore area. Under a council size of 31, the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent below the district average in Lydden Vale ward (7 per cent below in 2006) and 4 per cent below in Hill Forts or Haywards ward (7 per cent below in 2006).

69 Blandford Forum Town Council proposed an alternative warding arrangement in this area. It proposed that a modified single-member Bulbarrow ward should comprise the parishes of Hilton, Ibberton, Okeford Fitzpaine, Stoke Wake, Turnworth and Woolland, while a modified single-member Hill Forts ward should comprise the parishes of Shillingstone and Stourpaine. It put forward the same proposal for a modified Lydden Vale ward as contained in the District Council's submission. The Town Council also proposed that Blackmore ward should be divided into single-member wards, while it proposed that Sturminster Newton parish should return two-members "with the boundary agreed locally". It proposed that a new single-member ward, for which it did not include a name, should comprise the parishes of Child Okeford, Hammoon, Hinton St Mary and Manston. Under a council size of 36, the number of electors per councillor would be four per cent above the district average in Bulbarrow ward (3 per cent below in 2006), 3 per cent below in Hill Forts ward both now and in 2006, 2 per cent below in Lydden Vale ward (1 per cent above in 2006), and 2 per cent below in the unnamed ward detailed above (3 per cent below in 2006).

70 We received one further submission in relation to this area. Stourpaine Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposed Bulbarrow ward, arguing that it would not reflect local community identities and interests or possess strong communication links. It supported Councillor Spencer's 31-member scheme and the inclusion of the parish in his proposed Portman ward, which it described as "homogenous and reasonably compact".

71 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received during Stage One. While we note that we have received a number of similar proposals, we note that there is no consensus on the warding arrangements in this area. In the south and east of this area we judge that the District Council's proposals best meet the aims of the review. Consequently we are including its proposals for modified Lydden Vale, Bulbarrow and Hill Forts wards as part of our draft recommendations and we are including these names as the proposed names for the wards in question. We are also adopting the District Council's proposals for a ward comprising Okeford Fitzpaine and Shillingstone, which we are proposing to call Shillingstone ward. In the remaining area, comprising Blackmore ward and much of Stour Valley ward, we note that we have received proposals generally preferring two single-member wards in each of

these areas. However we note that these areas are each presently covered by two-member wards, and we are not persuaded that we have received adequate evidence in support of the divisions of these wards which have been proposed. Consequently, in view of the good electoral equality which would be retained, we are proposing that a two-member Blackmore ward should be retained on its existing boundaries while a modified two-member Stour Valley ward should comprise the parishes of Hinton St Mary and Sturminster Newton. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent below the district average in Blackmore ward both now and in 2006, 5 per cent above in Bulbarrow ward (1 per cent above in 2006), 3 per cent above in Hill Forts ward (2 per cent above in 2006), 10 per cent below in Lydden Vale ward (7 per cent below in 2006), 7 per cent above in Shillingstone ward (2 per cent above in 2006) and 4 per cent below in Stour Valley ward (equal to the average in 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2.

Marnhull, Stour Valley and The Stours wards

72 These three wards are broadly situated in the north-west of the district. Stour Valley is represented by two councillors, while the other two are each represented by a single councillor. Marnhull ward comprises the parish of the same name; Stour Valley ward comprises the parishes of Hammoon, Hinton St Mary, Manston and Sturminster Newton; and The Stours ward comprises the parishes of East Stour, Fifehead Magdalen, Stour Provost, Todber and West Stour. The number of electors per councillor is 16 per cent above the district average in Marnhull ward (2 per cent below in 2006), 2 per cent above in Stour Valley ward (6 per cent above in 2006) and 14 per cent below in The Stours ward (15 per cent below in 2006).

73 At Stage One, in addition to the proposals outlined above affecting Stour Valley ward, the District Council proposed further modifications to wards in this area. It proposed that, while Marnhull ward should be retained on its existing boundaries, a modified single-member The Stours ward should comprise the parishes of East Orchard, East Stour, Fifehead Magdalen, Margaret Marsh, Stour Provost, Todber, West Orchard and West Stour. The District Council considered that its proposals would provide improvements to electoral equality while reflecting local community identities in the wards concerned. Under the District Council's proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be 16 per cent above the district average in Marnhull ward (2 per cent below in 2006) and equal to the average in the modified The Stours ward (2 per cent below in 2006).

74 Councillor Spencer proposed that Marnhull ward should be retained on its existing boundaries, although he noted that it could also include Todber parish. In addition to the proposals outlined above affecting Stour Valley ward, he also proposed that the parishes of Fifehead Magdalen and West Stour be combined with parishes in the Blackmore area, and the parishes of East Stour, Stour Provost and Todber be combined with parishes in the Beacon area (see previous sections for details). Under a council size of 31, the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent above the district average in Marnhull ward (8 per cent below in 2006).

75 Blandford Forum Town Council also proposed that Marnhull ward should be retained on its present boundaries. In addition to the proposals outlined above affecting Stour Valley ward, it also proposed that a new, unnamed, single-member ward should comprise the

parishes of Buckhorn Weston, Fifehead Magdalen, Kington Magna, Stour Provost, Todber and West Stour. Under a council size of 36, in 2006 the number of electors per councillor would be 27 per cent above the district average in Marnhull ward (7 per cent above in 2006), and 5 per cent above in the unnamed single-member ward detailed above (1 per cent above in 2006).

76 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received in this area. We note in particular that there is some consensus in favour of retaining the existing Marnhull ward and, in view of the good electoral equality which would result by 2006, we are adopting this ward as part of our draft recommendations. In the remaining area we are adopting the District Council's proposed The Stours ward as we judge that it would provide the best balance of the need to secure improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 16 per cent above the district average in Marnhull ward (2 per cent below in 2006) and equal to the average in The Stours ward (2 per cent below in 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2.

Shaftesbury (four wards)

77 The town (and parish) of Shaftesbury is situated in the north-east of the district and is currently served by four single-member wards: Shaftesbury Central, Shaftesbury Christy's, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill. The number of electors per councillor is 20 per cent below the district average in Shaftesbury Central ward (30 per cent below in 2006), 23 per cent above in Shaftesbury Christy's ward (33 per cent above in 2006), 16 per cent above in Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward (22 per cent above in 2006) and 38 per cent below in Shaftesbury Underhill ward (41 per cent below in 2006).

78 At Stage One the District Council, Councillor Spencer and Blandford Forum Town Council each proposed that Shaftesbury town should comprise four single-member district wards, as at present, although Councillor Spencer proposed that Motcombe parish should be warded with the town. However, they did not provide detailed proposals for the re-warding of the town area.

79 Shaftesbury Town Council proposed modifications to ward boundaries in Shaftesbury which, it considered, would better reflect the areas concerned. The Shaftesbury & District Branch of the Liberal Democrats also put forward revisions to the four district wards in Shaftesbury.

80 We have carefully considered the views which we have received during Stage One. We note in particular that we have not received detailed proposals relating to the urban area from the District Council, Councillor Spencer and Blandford Forum Town Council. We are also not persuaded that we have received adequate evidence in support of the schemes proposed by Shaftesbury Town Council or Shaftesbury & District Liberal Democrats, which indicate how they would reflect the identity and interests of the communities of the town. Consequently it has been necessary for us to put forward our own proposals in relation to Shaftesbury. We note that, under a council size of 33, Shaftesbury parish merits four district councillors, and we do not consider that combining neighbouring parishes with parts of Shaftesbury parish would offer a good reflection of local community identities. We have instead based our proposals on modifications to the existing arrangements, taking into account the need to

secure improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. In view of the high level of under-representation in Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward we are proposing to transfer an area around Crookhays from Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward to Shaftesbury Central ward. We are proposing to modify further Shaftesbury Central ward by adding an area of Shaftesbury Christy's ward in the Old Boundary Road area. Noting the over-representation in Shaftesbury Underhill ward, we are proposing to transfer an area generally to the west of Salisbury Road and the A350 from Shaftesbury Christy's ward to Shaftesbury Underhill ward. Finally, we are proposing to further modify the boundaries of Shaftesbury Underhill ward by including an area around Yeatmans Close, currently in Shaftesbury Central ward. We would welcome views on our proposals for Shaftesbury during Stage Three.

81 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent above the district average in Shaftesbury Central ward (1 per cent above in 2006), 11 per cent below in Shaftesbury Christy's ward (4 per cent below in 2006), 9 per cent below in Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward (4 per cent below in 2006) and 5 per cent below in Shaftesbury Underhill ward (8 per cent below in 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Bourton & District, Gillingham Town, Lodbourne, Milton, Motcombe and Wyke wards

82 These six wards are situated in the north of the district and each is represented by a single councillor. Bourton & District ward, which is formed of two geographically separate areas, comprises the parishes of Bourton, Buckhorn Weston, Kington Magna and Silton. Each of the wards of Gillingham Town, Lodbourne, Milton and Wyke comprises parts of Gillingham parish, while Motcombe ward comprises the parish of that name and part of Gillingham parish. The number of electors per councillor is 5 per cent below the district average in Bourton & District ward (10 per cent below in 2006), 2 per cent above in Gillingham Town ward (8 per cent above in 2006), 17 per cent below in Lodbourne ward (26 per cent below in 2006), 14 per cent above in Milton ward (24 per cent above in 2006), 5 per cent below in Motcombe ward (9 per cent above in 2006) and 92 per cent above the district average in Wyke ward (91 per cent above in 2006).

83 At Stage One the District Council proposed that Motcombe ward should be retained on its existing boundaries, but renamed Motcombe & Ham ward. It further proposed that Bourton & District ward should be combined with a rural part of Gillingham parish to connect the two separate parts of Bourton & District ward. It proposed that this new single-member ward should be called Bourton Rural. The District Council proposed that, in the remaining area, comprising the wards of Gillingham Town, Lodbourne and Milton, together with the majority of the existing Wyke ward, there should be five single-member wards, although it did not provide detailed proposals for these areas. Under its proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent below the district average in Motcombe & Ham ward (9 per cent above in 2006), and 2 per cent above in Bourton Rural (4 per cent below in 2006).

84 In addition to proposing that Motcombe parish should form part of Shaftesbury ward, outlined above, Councillor Spencer also proposed that Bourton & District ward should be expanded to include part of Gillingham parish, and form a single-member Gillingham Rural ward. He proposed that the remainder of Gillingham should comprise five single-member

wards, although he did not provide detailed proposals for this area. Under a council size of 31, the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in Gillingham Rural ward (3 per cent below in 2006).

85 Blandford Forum Town Council proposed that eight councillors should represent the area covered by the parishes of Gillingham, East Stour, Silton, Bourton and Motcombe. It stated: "It is felt that the parishes making up this northern area of the district are better able to recommend exact ward boundaries." Gillingham Town Council and Gillingham Civic Society both proposed that the existing Wyke and Motcombe wards should each be divided into two new wards.

86 We have given careful consideration to the views received during Stage One. We note in particular that we have not received detailed proposals relating to the warding of Gillingham town. We also note that there is no consensus for warding in the remaining area outside Gillingham town. We have therefore found it necessary to put forward our own proposals in this area. In particular, in view of the satisfactory level of electoral equality and the absence of strong evidence in favour of alternative proposals, we are proposing to retain Motcombe ward on its existing boundaries with the revised name of Motcombe & Ham ward. We are also proposing to adopt the District Council's proposal combining the existing part of Bourton & District ward with a rural part of Gillingham parish, as shown on the large map at the back of the report. We are, however, proposing to retain the name Bourton & District for this ward as we judge that it continues to provide a satisfactory reflection of the area in question. In the remaining area we note that we have not received viable proposals meeting the aims of the review, and we are therefore putting forward our own proposals. We propose transferring an area around Wessex Way and Lammas Close from Milton ward to Lodbourne ward. We propose transferring Lodbourne Green from Lodbourne ward to Gillingham Town ward. We propose further modifying Gillingham Town ward by transferring an area to the west of Orchard Road from this ward to Wyke ward. Noting the severe under-representation which exists in Wyke ward, we are proposing to increase the representation of this ward to two councillors. We judge that our proposals, which seek to utilise the existing warding pattern as the basis for the draft recommendations, would provide substantial improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria.

87 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors would be 8 per cent above the district average in Bourton & District ward (3 per cent above in 2006), 1 per cent below the district average in Gillingham Town ward (4 per cent above in 2006), 6 per cent above in Lodbourne ward (equal to the district average in 2006), 13 per cent below in Milton ward (5 per cent below in 2006), 5 per cent below in Motcombe & Ham ward (9 per cent above in 2006) and 7 per cent below the district average in Wyke ward (8 per cent below in 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Electoral Cycle

88 At Stage One we did not receive any comments proposing change to the electoral cycle of the district. We therefore make no recommendation for change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years.

Conclusions

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

- a council of 33 members should be retained;
- there should be 27 wards;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, and five wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

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

- in Gillingham we have put forward our own warding arrangements affecting the wards of Gillingham Town, Lodbourne, Milton and Wyke;
- in Shaftesbury we have put forward our own warding arrangements affecting the wards of Shaftesbury Central, Shaftesbury Christy's, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill;
- we propose transferring Tarrant Rawston parish from The Lower Tarrants ward to Portman ward;
- we propose retaining two-member Blackmore and Stour Valley wards (although with some modification to the composition of the latter).

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

Table 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	33	33	33	33
Number of wards	27	27	27	27
Average number of electors per councillor	1,425	1,425	1,507	1,507
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	17	5	16	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	6	0	11	0

92 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for North Dorset District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 17 to five. By 2006 only two wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Draft Recommendation

North Dorset District Council should comprise 33 councillors serving 27 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 whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

93 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose modifications to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Gillingham and Shaftesbury to reflect the proposed district wards. We are also proposing to make two minor modifications to the boundaries between Blandford East and Blandford West parish wards to reflect recognisable ground features, which would not affect any electors.

94 The parish of Gillingham is currently served by 15 councillors who represent five wards, Gillingham Town, Ham, Lodbourne, Milton and Wyke. Wyke ward is represented by four councillors, Ham ward is represented by two councillors, and the remaining three wards are each represented by three councillors. In the light of our draft recommendations in this area, we are proposing to create a new Gillingham Rural parish ward and to modify the parish ward boundaries to reflect the district ward boundaries, as shown on the large map at the back of the report. We are also proposing to modify the level of representation of the wards to reflect

the new configuration, thereby increasing the number of parish councillors serving the town from 15 to 17. We propose that Wyke ward should return six councillors, Gillingham Town, Lodbourne and Milton wards should each return three councillors and Gillingham Rural and Ham wards should each return a single councillor. We would welcome views on our proposals for Gillingham parish at Stage Three.

Draft Recommendation

Gillingham Town Council should comprise 17 councillors, two more than at present, representing six wards: Gillingham Town (returning three councillors), Gillingham Rural (one), Ham (one), Lodbourne (three), Milton (three) and Wyke (six). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

95 The parish of Shaftesbury is currently served by 12 councillors representing four three-member wards: Shaftesbury Central, Shaftesbury Christy's, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill. In the light of our draft recommendations for district warding in Shaftesbury we are proposing to modify the boundaries between the parish wards to reflect the new district warding. We are not proposing to modify the level of representation of any of the wards concerned.

Draft Recommendation

Shaftesbury Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Shaftesbury Central, Shaftesbury Christy's, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill, each returning three councillors. The boundary between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

96 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district.

Draft Recommendation

Parish and town council elections should continue to take place every four years, at the same time as elections for the district ward of which they are part.

Map 2: Draft Recommendations for North Dorset

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

97 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for North Dorset contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 3 December 2001. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

98 Express your views by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
North Dorset Review
Local Government Commission for England
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142

E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk

www.lgce.gov.uk

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for North Dorset: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the North Dorset 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 the large map at the back of this report.

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

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for North Dorset: Key Map

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

Table B1: LGCE compliance with Code criteria

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