

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Mendip in Somerset

Further electoral review

January 2006

Translations and other formats

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by The Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)

Robin Gray

Joan Jones CBE

Ann M. Kelly

Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

When conducting reviews our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

Executive summary

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A further electoral review (FER) of Mendip is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. This review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. As a result of the poor levels of electoral inequality that existed in 2004, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to undertake an electoral review of Mendip on 12 May 2005.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing arrangements, 12 wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average. As part of the previous review of Mendip, the District Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 5% between 1996 and 2001. Between 1996 and the start of this review the electorate has increased by 6%. This is predominantly due to growth in the towns of Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells.

Every review is conducted in four stages:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	21 June 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 September 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	17 January 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	11 April 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Submissions received

We received nine representations during Stage One. Mendip District Council proposed to retain the current council size of 46 members, but did not submit a district-wide scheme. The Frome Branch of the Liberal Democrats submitted proposals to amend the five district wards in Frome. We received representations from six parish, town and city councils, five of whom commented on their respective areas and one commented on the issue of council size. One local district councillor commented on his area and on the issue of council size.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2009, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% from 80,400 to 85,805. It expects most of the growth to be in the town areas of Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells. However, we noted that the 2004 electorate totals submitted by the District Council did not match the electorate totals defined by the December 2004 electoral roll. In order to provide for accurate electorate figures we have replaced the

2004 figures provided by the District Council with the figures defined by the December 2004 electoral roll.

Council size

We received proposals to either retain the present council size of 46 or to reduce the number of councillors. We concluded that the best approach would be to consider the issue of council size on the basis of retaining the current council size as the balance of evidence and argument indicates that this ensures effective and convenient local government for Mendip. However, we found that the current council size would require uniting town and rural areas around Frome. We found that an increase of one councillor allows for a separation between town and rural areas, and therefore we recommend a council of 47 members.

General analysis

In light of the lack of proposals we have received for new electoral arrangements we have put forward our own recommendations, which secure a good level of electoral equality for the district.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on our draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Mendip contained in the report. We welcome views from all parts of the community and believe that the more feedback we receive, based on clear evidence, the better informed we will be in forming our final recommendations. We will take into account all submissions received by 10 April 2006. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Mendip and welcome comments from interested parties. We would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

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The full report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Ashwick, Chilcompton & Stratton	2	The parishes of Ashwick, Binegar, Chilcompton and Stratton on the Fosse
2	Beckington & Selwood	1	The parishes Beckington, Berkley and Selwood
3	Butleigh & Baltonsborough	1	The parishes of Baltonsborough, Butleigh and Lydford-on-Fosse
4	Chewton Mendip & Ston Easton	1	The parishes of Chewton Mendip, Emborough, Litton, Priddy and Ston Easton
5	Coleford & Holcombe	2	The parishes of Coleford, Holcombe, Leigh-on-Mendip and Stoke St Michael
6	Cranmore, Doultling & Nunney	1	The parishes of Cranmore, Downhead, Doultling, Nunney and Whatley
7	Creech	1	The parish of Evercreech
8	Croscombe & Pilton	1	The parishes of Croscombe, North Wootton, Pilton and the proposed St Cuthbert Out South parish ward of St Cuthbert Out parish
9	Frome Berkley Down	2	The proposed Frome Berkley Down parish ward of Frome parish
10	Frome Fromefield	2	The proposed Frome Fromefield parish ward of Frome parish
11	Frome Keyford	2	The proposed Frome Keyford parish ward of Frome parish
12	Frome Park	2	The proposed Frome Park parish ward of Frome parish
13	Frome Welshmill	2	The proposed Frome Welshmill parish ward of Frome parish
14	Frome West	1	The proposed Frome West parish ward of Frome parish
15	Glastonbury St Benedict's	1	The proposed Glastonbury St Benedict's parish ward of Glastonbury parish
16	Glastonbury St Edmund's	1	The proposed Glastonbury St Edmund's parish ward of Glastonbury parish
17	Glastonbury St John's	1	The proposed Glastonbury St John's parish ward of Glastonbury parish
18	Glastonbury St Mary's	1	The proposed Glastonbury St Mary's parish ward of Glastonbury parish

Table 1 (cont.): Draft recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
19	Hemington & Kilmersdon	1	The parishes of Buckland Dinham, Great Elm, Hemington, Kilmersdon and Mells
20	Moor	1	The parishes of Meare, Sharpham and Walton
21	Postlebury & Trudoxhill	1	The parishes of Batcombe, Lamyat, Milton Clevedon, Trudoxhill, Upton Noble, Wanstrow and Witham Friary
22	Rode & Norton St Philip	1	The parishes of Lullington, Norton St Philip, Rode and Tellisford
23	Rodney & Westbury	1	The parishes of Westbury and Rodney Stoke
24	Shepton East	2	(Unchanged) Shepton East parish ward of Shepton Mallet parish
25	Shepton West	2	(Unchanged) Shepton West parish ward of Shepton Mallet parish
26	Street North	2	The proposed Street North parish ward of Street parish
27	Street South	2	The proposed Street South parish ward of Street parish
28	Street West	1	(Unchanged) Street West parish ward of Street parish
29	St Cuthbert Out North	1	The proposed St Cuthbert Out East and St Cuthbert Out North parish wards of St Cuthbert Out parish
30	The Pennards & Ditcheat	1	The parishes of Ditcheat, East Pennard, Pylle, West Bradley and West Pennard
31	Wells Central	1	The proposed Wells Central parish ward of Wells parish
32	Wells St Cuthbert's	2	The proposed Wells St Cuthbert's parish ward of Wells parish
33	Wells St Thomas'	2	The proposed Wells St Thomas' parish ward of Wells parish
34	Wookey & St Cuthbert Out West	1	The parishes of Godney and Wookey and the proposed St Cuthbert Out West parish ward of St Cuthbert Out parish

Notes:

1. The whole district is parished.
2. The maps accompanying this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.
3. We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Mendip

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Ashwick, Chilcompton & Stratton	2	3,499	1,750	3	3,588	1,794	-1
2	Beckington & Selwood	1	1,681	1,681	-1	1,711	1,711	-6
3	Butleigh & Baltonsborough	1	1,831	1,831	7	1,875	1,875	3
4	Chewton Mendip & Ston Easton	1	1,676	1,676	-2	1,707	1,707	-6
5	Coleford & Holcombe	2	3,590	1,795	5	3,748	1,874	3
6	Cranmore, Doultling & Nunney	1	1,809	1,809	6	1,858	1,858	2
7	Creech	1	1,722	1,722	1	1,761	1,761	-3
8	Croscombe & Pilton	1	1,892	1,892	11	1,945	1,945	7
9	Frome Berkley Down	2	3,393	1,697	-1	3,639	1,820	0
10	Frome Fromefield	2	3,523	1,762	3	3,669	1,835	1
11	Frome Keyford	2	3,114	1,557	-9	3,727	1,863	2
12	Frome Park	2	3,580	1,790	5	3,758	1,879	3
13	Frome Welshmill	2	3,492	1,746	2	3,770	1,885	4

Table 2 (cont.): Draft recommendations for Mendip

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
14	Frome West	1	1,657	1,657	-3	1,801	1,801	-1
15	Glastonbury St Benedict's	1	1,701	1,701	0	1,795	1,795	-1
16	Glastonbury St Edmund's	1	1,686	1,686	-1	1,805	1,805	-1
17	Glastonbury St John's	1	1,354	1,354	-21	1,841	1,841	1
18	Glastonbury St Mary's	1	1,712	1,712	0	1,780	1,780	-2
19	Hemington & Kilmersdon	1	1,855	1,855	9	1,906	1,906	5
20	Moor	1	1,926	1,926	13	2,000	2,000	10
21	Postlebury & Trudoxhill	1	1,606	1,606	-6	1,653	1,653	-9
22	Rode & Norton St Philip	1	1,657	1,657	-3	1,729	1,729	-5
23	Rodney & Westbury	1	1,736	1,736	2	1,789	1,789	-2
24	Shepton East	2	3,062	1,531	-10	3,527	1,763	-3
25	Shepton West	2	3,494	1,747	2	3,708	1,854	2
26	Street North	2	2,660	1,330	-22	3,443	1,721	-5

Table 2 (cont.): Draft recommendations for Mendip

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
27	Street South	2	3,697	1,849	8	3,817	1,908	5
28	Street West	1	1,741	1,741	2	1,881	1,881	3
29	St Cuthbert Out North	1	1,808	1,808	6	1,851	1,851	2
30	The Pennards & Ditchat	1	1,862	1,862	9	1,901	1,901	4
31	Wells Central	1	1,617	1,617	-5	1,742	1,742	-4
32	Wells St Cuthbert's	2	3,294	1,647	-3	3,439	1,720	-6
33	Wells St Thomas'	2	3,332	1,666	-2	3,463	1,732	-5
34	Wookey & St Cuthbert Out West	1	1,918	1,918	12	1,957	1,957	7
	Totals	47	80,177	-	-	85,582	-	-
	Averages		-	1,706	-	-	1,821	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each ward 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 draft proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of Mendip, on which we are now consulting.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 The Electoral Commission agreed that The Boundary Committee should make on going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a Periodic Electoral Review (PER) has elapsed. More specifically, it was agreed that there should be a closer scrutiny where either:

- 30% of wards in an authority had electoral variances of over 10% from the average; or
- any single ward had a variance of more than 30% from the average.

3 The intention of such scrutiny was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances, to consider likely future trends, and to assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Mendip. Mendip's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in November 1997. An electoral change Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 5 October 1998 and the first elections on the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out our work, The Boundary Committee has to work within a statutory framework.¹ This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
- secure effective and convenient local government; and
- achieve equality of representation.

In addition we are required to work within Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of Mendip is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (published by The Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review and will be helpful both in understanding the approach taken by The Boundary Committee for England and in informing comments that interested groups and individuals may wish to make about our recommendations.

7 Our task is to make recommendations to The Electoral Commission 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 any parish and town councils in the district. We do not in these reviews consider changes to the external boundaries of areas.

¹ As set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962).

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole, i.e. to ensure that all councillors in the local authority represent similar numbers of electors. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

9 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a 'vote of equal weight' when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as nearly as possible, the same across a district. In practice, each councillor cannot represent exactly the same number of electors given geographic and other constraints, including the make-up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identities and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive about council size and acknowledge that there are valid reasons for variations between local authorities. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. Indeed, we believe that consideration of the appropriate council size should be the starting point for our reviews and that whatever size of council is proposed to us should be developed and argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure.

11 As indicated in its *Guidance*, The Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just address any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's optimum political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government and that there is evidence for this.

12 In addition, we do not accept that an increase or decrease in the electorate of the authority should automatically result in a consequent increase or decrease in the number of councillors. Similarly, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of neighbouring or similarly sized authorities; the circumstances of one authority may be very different from those of another. We will seek to ensure that our recommended council size recognises all the factors and achieves a good allocation of councillors across the district.

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an

unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	21 June 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 September 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	17 January 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	11 April 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

15 Stage One began on 21 June 2005, when we wrote to Mendip District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Somerset Police Authority, Somerset Local Councils' Association, parish and town councils in the district, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, 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 Mendip District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 12 September 2005.

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

17 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 17 January 2006 and will end on 10 April 2006, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation about 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.**

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

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report The Boundary Committee has had regard to:

- the general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and

– promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Broads

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

- section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park;
- section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB; and
- section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by section 97 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

2 Current electoral arrangements

21 The district of Mendip comprises both rural and urban areas. It has five principal towns, Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells, and encompasses parts of the Mendip Hills and Somerset Levels. The district is well served by local train services, but the two closest mainline stations, Castle Carey and Westbury, are outside the district.

22 We identified Mendip as an authority where more than 30% of its wards had electoral variances of more than 10%. This prompted further research, which indicated that this level of electoral inequality would not improve. As a result of further research, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to undertake a review of the electoral arrangements of Mendip District Council on 12 May 2005.

23 The electorate of the district is 80,177 (December 2004). The District Council currently has 46 members who are elected from 35 wards. There are 24 single-member wards and 11 two-member wards.

24 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,743 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,860 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to the fact that there has been sustained development since the previous review was undertaken, the number of electors per councillor in 12 of the 35 wards varies by more than 10% from the district average and in two wards by more than 20%. The worst imbalance is in Glastonbury St Mary's ward, where the councillor represents 27% fewer electors than the district average.

25 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the district average in percentage terms. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district, 80,177, by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, currently 46. Therefore the average number of electors per councillor is currently 1,743. In Frome Welshmill ward, currently represented by two councillors, there are currently 4,036 electors, therefore each councillor represents, on average, 2,018 electors, 16% more than the current district average.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in Mendip

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Ashwick & Ston Easton	1	1,860	1,860	7	1,906	1,906	2
2	Avalon	1	2,017	2,017	16	2,071	2,071	11
3	Beacon	1	2,009	2,009	15	2,105	2,105	13
4	Beckington & Rode	1	1,876	1,876	8	1,939	1,939	4
5	Chilcompton	1	1,581	1,581	-9	1,626	1,626	-13
6	Coleford	1	1,735	1,735	0	1,826	1,826	-2
7	Creech	1	1,783	1,783	2	1,822	1,822	-2
8	Frome Berkley Down	2	3,922	1,961	13	4,198	2,099	13
9	Frome Fromefield	2	3,129	1,565	-10	3,255	1,628	-13
10	Frome Keyford	2	3,842	1,921	10	4,581	2,290	23
11	Frome Park	2	3,830	1,915	10	4,019	2,010	8
12	Frome Welshmill	2	4,036	2,018	16	4,313	2,156	16
13	Glastonbury St Benedict's	1	1,993	1,993	14	2,049	2,049	10
14	Glastonbury St Edmund's	1	1,686	1,686	-3	1,805	1,805	-3
15	Glastonbury St John's	1	1,494	1,494	-14	2,031	2,031	9

Table 4 (cont.): Existing electoral arrangements in Mendip

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
16	Glastonbury St Mary's	1	1,280	1,280	-27	1,336	1,336	-28
17	Knowle	1	1,729	1,729	-1	1,771	1,771	-5
18	Mells	1	1,811	1,811	4	1,853	1,853	0
19	Moor	1	2,107	2,107	21	2,189	2,189	18
20	Nedge	1	1,664	1,664	-5	1,698	1,698	-9
21	Nordinton	1	1,627	1,627	-7	1,678	1,678	-10
22	Postlebury	1	1,778	1,778	2	1,806	1,806	-3
23	Pylcombe	1	1,822	1,822	5	1,866	1,866	0
24	Rodney & Priddy	1	1,529	1,529	-12	1,569	1,569	-16
25	Shepton East	2	3,062	1,531	-12	3,527	1,763	-5
26	Shepton West	2	3,494	1,747	0	3,708	1,854	0
27	St Cuthbert (Out) North & West	1	1,698	1,698	-3	1,740	1,740	-6
28	Stratton	1	1,810	1,810	4	1,843	1,843	-1
29	Street North	2	3,381	1,691	-3	4,185	2,093	12
30	Street South	2	2,976	1,488	-15	3,074	1,537	-17
31	Street West	1	1,741	1,741	0	1,881	1,881	1
32	Vale	1	1,632	1,632	-6	1,670	1,670	-10

Table 4 (cont.): Existing electoral arrangements in Mendip

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
33 Wells Central	1	1,420	1,420	-19	1,541	1,541	-17
34 Wells St Cuthbert's	2	3,614	1,807	4	3,773	1,887	1
35 Wells St Thomas'	2	3,209	1,605	-8	3,330	1,665	-11
Totals	46	80,177	-	-	85,582	-	-
Averages		-	1,743	-	-	1,860	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Mendip 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 2004, electors in Wells Central ward were relatively over-represented by 19%, while electors in Moor ward were significantly under-represented by 21%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Submissions received

26 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Mendip District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

27 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Committee visited the area and met with officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their cooperation and assistance. We received nine representations during Stage One, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the District Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Mendip District Council

28 The District Council proposed a council of 46 members, the same as at present. It did not submit a district-wide scheme.

Political groups

29 The Frome Branch of the Liberal Democrats (henceforth the Liberal Democrats) submitted proposals to amend the five district wards in Frome.

Parish and town councils

30 Representations were received from six parish and town councils. Frome Town Council put forward an approach to the development of new electoral arrangements for Mendip. Buckland Dinham Parish Council, Trudoxhill Parish Council and Wells City Council commented on their respective areas. Street Parish Council requested that the existing arrangements be retained for its area. Batcombe Parish Council commented on the issue of council size.

Other representations

31 Councillor Mackenzie (Wells St Thomas' ward) commented on his area and on the issue of council size.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

32 Before finalising our recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Mendip we invite views on our initial thoughts as expressed in these draft recommendations. We welcome comments from all those interested relating to the number of councillors, proposed ward boundaries, 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.

33 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Mendip is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended), which defines the need:

- to secure effective and convenient local government;
- to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- to secure the matters in respect of equality of representation referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

34 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'. 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 clearly identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

35 In reality, absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep variances to a minimum.

36 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 make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identities and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate should also be taken into account, and we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

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

Electorate figures

38 As part of the previous review of Mendip, the District Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 5% between 1996 and 2001. Between 1996 and the start of this review the electorate increased by 6%. There has been growth in the towns of

Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2009, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% from 80,400 to 85,805. It expects most of the growth to be in the town areas of Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells.

39 However, we noted that the 2004 electorate totals submitted by the District Council did not match the electorate totals defined by the December 2004 electoral roll. In order to provide for accurate electorate figures we have replaced the 2004 figures provided by the District Council with the figures defined by the December 2004 electorate roll. On this basis the district is forecast an increase of 7% from 80,177 to 85,582 between 2004 and 2009.

Council size

40 Mendip District Council presently has 46 members. The District Council considered three different council sizes of 46, 39 and 26 members. It concluded 'that the current arrangement of 46 councillors was working fairly well and should be maintained'. It explained its view that 'the decision making structures required for the good governance of council business ... could be carried out with fewer than 46 members', but, in terms of 'the representational and community role of councillors', as 'some district wards have four or five parishes and the logistics of maintaining [a] relationship with them can be time consuming ... any increase to this workload could be detrimental in other community roles'.

41 The Liberal Democrats considered 'that changes at Mendip should be minimal ... [because] even larger rural wards will cause rural councillors much more work'. Councillor Mackenzie expressed the opinion that the District Council 'could work with a reduction of up to ... 7 [but] if this were to happen then there should be positive discrimination in favour of rural wards and their councillors' workloads'.

42 Batcombe Parish Council argued that a reduction in council size would hinder councillors' ability to effectively exercise their representational role as they would be required to represent more parishes than at present. Frome Town Council suggested that the current allocation of 10 councillors for Frome be retained, but 'the remainder of Mendip should have a reduced number of councillors to retain equity of the electorate'.

43 We considered the representations we had received and concluded that there was insufficient evidence upon which to reach an informed decision regarding council size. Therefore we requested the respondents provide further evidence in respect of their proposals.

44 The District Council highlighted that 'a significant part of [councillors'] representational role is that of liaison with the 62 parish, city and town councils that cover the entire council area ... in addition to this there are a number of strategic and operational outside bodies that the councillors belong to', and therefore 'an increase or a decrease in members will affect the overall capacity and increase or reduce the number of outside bodies that [members] can work with'.

45 The Liberal Democrats argued that 'in rural areas increasing the number of electors in each ward ... would make rural wards very large, would give each rural councillor considerably more work, especially in terms of attending parish council meetings and long-term [would] discourage people from standing as councillors'.

46 Councillor Mackenzie considered that there is spare capacity within the District Council's political management structure. He suggested that the burden on the Licensing Board and sub-committees 'will tail off soon' and explained that nine councillors are 'not on any decision-making board apart from the Council', while the Planning Board, which is allocated 21 councillors, has an 'average attendance of 15.5 [councillors]'

47 Batcombe Parish Council explained that 'the interests of [its] parishioners are currently well looked after by [their] district councillor' who is able to 'attend the vast majority of [the Parish Council's] monthly meetings ... and effectively address the issues that affect the lives of [its] parishioners'. It argued that a reduction in council size would mean that district councillors could not exercise an effective representational role or maintain close contact with parishes because of the additional workload.

48 We note that the key concern for those respondents who proposed to retain the current council size concerns the impact a reduction would have on members' workload. They considered it would hinder their ability to undertake their local representational roles, particularly within the rural areas of the district, and diminish the capacity for councillors to take part in the strategic and service-delivery partnerships and bodies outside the District Council's decision and scrutiny structure. We note Councillor Mackenzie's proposal to reduce the number of councillors on the basis of the political management structure's ability to function with fewer councillors, but we are concerned that he has not considered the impact on members' representational and leadership roles outside this structure in as much detail.

49 We are of the view that, on the one hand, respondents have not provided detailed and compelling evidence demonstrating that the current council size ensures that councillors are best able to exercise their representational and leadership roles, yet, on the other hand, there is no evidence to suggest that local governance in Mendip would be enhanced by a reduction in the number of councillors, and we have concluded that the best approach would be to consider this issue on the basis of retaining the current council size. However, we found that, under the current council size, due to the size of the electorate in Frome, allocating ten councillors to the town would require combining town and rural areas to achieve electoral equality. Given the nature of the area we do not consider that this would provide a good reflection of community identities and interests.

50 We considered alternative council sizes that would avoid combining parts of Frome with the surrounding rural area and would not require a significant change in the number of councillors. We found that an increase of one councillor best achieves these objectives and recommend an increase in council size of one to 47.

Electoral equality

51 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. The Electoral Commission expects The Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. Therefore when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where inadequate justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality,

seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as is possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and securing effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria.

General analysis

52 We did not receive a district-wide scheme during Stage One or any evidence regarding the communities within Mendip. Therefore, we have had to develop our own recommendations to ensure an improvement in electoral equality in the district.

53 We note that in the rural areas the existing arrangements are based on a pattern of single-member wards and we saw no reason to move away from this pattern if it reflected the statutory criteria. Therefore for our draft recommendations we have attempted, as far as possible, to unite whole parishes which share good transport links and similar geography within single-member wards which secure a good level of electoral equality. However, there are two areas where we have had to move away from this approach. In the western area, the parish of St Cuthbert Out is geographically large and surrounds Wells. This limits the opportunity for developing a single-member ward pattern based on whole parishes in this area. Therefore, in order to assist the development of a single-member ward pattern, we propose to divide the parish between three single-member district wards. In the northern area, the distribution and number of electors, particularly within the parishes of Ashwick, Chilcompton and Coleford, constrains the opportunity to identify single-member wards based on whole parishes which secure good levels of electoral equality. Therefore we have proposed two two-member wards.

54 In the towns of Glastonbury, Street and Wells, where we have not received specific proposals, we have put forward a number of amendments to the existing wards which reallocate sufficient numbers of electors to address the levels of electoral inequality in the existing wards and to tie boundaries to ground detail.

55 Currently the town of Frome comprises five two-member wards, but it is entitled to 11 councillors. The Liberal Democrats submitted a scheme based on an allocation of 10 councillors, which consequently does not achieve a good level of electoral equality, and therefore we are unable to adopt this scheme entirely. We have broadly retained the current east/west division of the town, which combines areas either side of the river and railway line. However, we do propose to broadly adopt the Liberal Democrats' approach of combining the town centre wholly within a ward. We propose a pattern of one single-member and five two-member wards, but due to the need to include an additional councillor and in the interests of securing good levels of electoral equality within the town it has been necessary to propose significant amendments to the existing arrangements, particularly to the existing Frome Keyford, Frome Park and Frome Welshmill wards.

Warding arrangements

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

- a Frome Berkley Down, Frome Fromefield, Frome Keyford, Frome Park and Frome Welshmill wards (page 29)
- b Beacon, Beckington & Rode, Coleford, Creech, Mells, Nordinton, Postlebury and Stratton wards (page 31)
- c Shepton East and Shepton West wards (page 33)
- d Ashwick & Ston Easton, Avalon, Chilcompton, Knowle, Moor, Nedge, Pylcombe, Rodney & Priddy, St Cuthbert (Out) North & West and Vale wards (page 33)
- e Wells Central, Wells St Cuthbert's and Wells St Thomas' wards (page 35)
- f Glastonbury St Benedict's, Glastonbury St Edmund's, Glastonbury St John's and Glastonbury St Mary's wards (page 36)
- g Street North, Street South and Street West wards (page 37)

57 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively), and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Frome Berkley Down, Frome Fromefield, Frome Keyford, Frome Park and Frome Welshmill wards

58 Under the existing arrangements, the district wards of Frome Berkley Down, Frome Fromefield, Frome Keyford and Frome Welshmill comprise the parish wards of the same names of the parish of Frome. Frome Park ward comprises the parish wards of Frome Park East and Frome Park West of the parish of Frome. Table 4 (on page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

59 We received two submissions regarding Frome. Frome Town Council recommended that the current pattern of five two-member wards be retained, but that 'ward boundaries be adjusted to create greater parity of representation of the electorate'.

60 The Liberal Democrats proposed to retain the current pattern of five two-member wards 'but on revised boundaries'. Their proposals are underpinned by two objectives: to 'split the town into east and west' using the railway and river, and to incorporate the town centre within a single ward.

61 In the eastern area, they proposed that the areas east of the railway, within the existing Frome Welshmill ward, combine with the existing Frome Fromefield ward to comprise a new Frome College ward. They proposed to amend the existing Frome Berkley Down ward's western boundary in order for it to follow the railway and river.

62 In the western area, they proposed that the areas south of the railway line, within the existing Frome Berkley Down ward, the areas west of and including Garston Farm and Rivers Reach and broadly north of Christchurch Street East, within the existing Frome Keyford ward, and the areas broadly north of Christchurch Street West, within the existing Frome Park ward, combine with the remaining part of Frome

Welshmill ward to comprise a new Frome Market ward. They explained that this would ensure that the town centre would be contained wholly within a single ward.

63 They proposed to amend the boundary between the existing Frome Park and Frome Keyford wards. They proposed to transfer the areas west and north of Keyford and Rossiter's Hill roads and Rossiter's Road, within the existing Frome Keyford ward, to a modified Frome Park ward.

64 We have considered the submissions we have received regarding Frome and their approach of retaining the current allocation of 10 councillors to the town. As noted above, the parish of Frome is entitled to 11 district councillors under a council of 46 members and we will not recommend a ward pattern where Frome does not receive the level of representation to which it is entitled. A 10 member ward pattern cannot respect the parish of Frome's external boundary as sufficient numbers of electors within Frome would have to be united with the surrounding more rural areas to secure a good level of electoral equality. We examined this option, such as transferring the area around Easthill, but concluded that this would not provide a good reflection of community identities and interests, and we therefore propose to allocate an additional councillor to Frome.

65 Allocating an additional councillor to Frome does require substantial change to the existing arrangements. We saw no reason to move away from the existing pattern of two-member wards and, therefore, we considered it appropriate to recommend five two-member wards and one single-member ward. We considered whether it was possible to adopt the Liberal Democrats's approach of dividing Frome using the railway and the river within an 11-member ward pattern. However, we found that a scheme based on such a division would not result in good levels of electoral equality. Indeed the Liberal Democrats's proposed Frome College and Frome Berkley Down wards would both have more than 15% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2009. In order to ensure a good level of electoral equality we propose to broadly retain the current east/west division of Frome.

66 To establish a new single-member ward we propose to combine the area broadly west of Vallis Way, Vallis Road and Vernal Lane, within the existing Frome Welshmill ward, with an area broadly west of Weymouth Road and north of Somerset Road and Oakfield Road, within Frome Park ward. We propose to name this new single-member ward Frome West. To compensate for the transfer of electors from Frome Welshmill ward to the new Frome West ward, we propose to adopt the Liberal Democrats's approach of incorporating the town centre within a modified Frome Welshmill ward. We propose that the areas broadly south of Stoneleigh Rise and Stoneleigh House, within the existing Frome Fromefield ward, the areas broadly west of Windsor Crescent, within the existing Frome Berkley Down ward, the areas broadly west of Garsdale and north of Christchurch Street East, within the existing Frome Keyford ward, and the areas broadly north of Christchurch Street West, within the existing Frome Park ward, combine with the remaining part of Frome Welshmill ward to comprise a new two-member Frome Welshmill ward. In addition we propose a minor amendment to the boundary between the proposed Frome Welshmill ward and the existing Frome Fromefield ward in order for it to follow the backs of the properties on the south of Leys Lane.

67 With these modifications we propose to broadly retain the existing Frome Keyford and Frome Park wards subject to a further amendment to ensure a good level of

electoral equality. We propose to amend the existing boundary between these wards in order to transfer those properties broadly on and west of Newington Close, on and north of Rossiter’s Road, and on The Butts from Frome Keyford ward to Frome Park ward.

68 We also propose to broadly retain the existing Frome Fromefield and Frome Berkley Down wards subject to a further amendment to ensure a good level of electoral equality. We propose to transfer the areas broadly west and north of Collett Way, Wainwright Drive and Compton Gardens from Frome Berkley Down ward to Frome Fromefield ward.

69 Our recommendations require consequential amendments to Frome parish’s electoral arrangements and are discussed in more detail in the Parish, town and city council electoral arrangements section on pages 38–41.

70 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Frome Berkley Down, Frome Fromefield, Frome Keyford, Frome Park, Frome Welshmill and Frome West wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 5 accompanying this report.

Beacon, Beckington & Rode, Coleford, Creech, Mells, Nordinton, Postlebury and Stratton wards

71 Under the existing arrangements Beacon, Beckington & Rode, Coleford, Creech, Mells, Nordinton, Postlebury and Stratton wards are parished. Table 5, below, shows the constituent areas of these wards. Table 4 (on page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 5: Existing arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
Beacon	1	The parishes of Cranmore, Doultling, Downhead, Leigh-on-Mendip and Stoke St Michael
Beckington & Rode	1	The parishes of Beckington, Berkley, Rode and Tellisford
Creech	1	The parishes of Evercreech and Milton Clevedon
Coleford	1	The parish of Coleford
Mells	1	The parishes of Great Elm, Mells, Selwood, Trudoxhill and Whatley
Nordinton	1	The parishes of Buckland Dinham, Hemington, Lullington and Norton St Philip

Table 5 (cont.): Existing arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
Postlebury	1	The parishes of Batcombe, Nunney, Upton Noble, Wanstrow and Witham Friary
Stratton	1	The parishes of Holcombe, Kilmersdon and Stratton on the Fosse

72 The District Council expressed its view ‘that Trudoxhill parish has more in common with Witham Friary and Wanstrow, rather than its current collocation with Selwood [parish]’. Trudoxhill Parish Council considered ‘it would be of more benefit if [the parish] was linked with a village such as Nunney, Witham Friary or Wanstrow all of which are closer than Mells’. Buckland Dinham Parish Council explained that ‘working on the community of interest principle [the parish is] perhaps closer to Great Elm and Mells’, but it was keen to highlight that it is ‘not against remaining linked to Hardington/Faulkand and Norton St Philip’ within the existing Nordinton ward. Batcombe Parish Council explained that it does not ‘have strong feelings over which ward [it] should be in’.

73 Due to the lack of specific proposals or evidence regarding this area, our objective in developing our recommendations was to address the level of electoral inequality secured by the existing Beacon ward, which, under a council size of 47, would have 16% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2009. However, in order to address this we have had to move away from the existing arrangements and propose six new single-member wards and a new two-member ward, combining whole parishes which share good transport links and similar geography.

74 In the northern part of this area we propose a new two-member Coleford & Holcombe ward comprising the parishes of Coleford, Holcombe, Leigh-on-Mendip and Stoke St Michael; a new single-member Hemington & Kilmersdon ward comprising the parishes of Buckland Dinham, Great Elm, Hemington, Kilmersdon and Mells; and a new single-member Rode & Norton St Philip ward comprising the parishes of Lullington, Norton St Philip, Rode and Tellisford. In the eastern part of this area we propose a new single-member Beckington & Selwood ward comprising the parishes of Beckington, Berkley and Selwood. In the central and southern part of this area we propose a modified Creech ward comprising the parish of Evercreech; a new single-member Cranmore, Doultling & Nunney ward comprising the parishes of Cranmore, Doultling, Downhead, Nunney and Whatley; and a new single-member Postlebury & Trudoxhill ward comprising the parishes of Batcombe, Lamyat, Milton Clevedon, Trudoxhill, Upton Noble, Wanstrow and Witham Friary.

75 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Beckington & Selwood, Coleford & Holcombe, Cranmore, Doultling & Nunney, Creech, Hemington & Kilmersdon, Postlebury & Trudoxhill and Rode & Norton St Philip wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Shepton East and Shepton West wards

76 Under the existing arrangements, Shepton East and Shepton West wards comprise the parish wards of the same names of the parish of Shepton Mallet. Table 4 (on page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

77 We did not receive any representations regarding these two wards. In light of the good levels of electoral equality secured by the existing arrangements we propose to retain the existing Shepton East and Shepton West wards.

78 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Shepton East and Shepton West wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

Ashwick & Ston Easton, Avalon, Chilcompton, Knowle, Moor, Nedge, Pylcombe, Rodney & Priddy, St Cuthbert (Out) North & West and Vale wards

79 Under the existing arrangements Ashwick & Ston Easton, Avalon, Chilcompton, Knowle, Moor, Nedge, Pylcombe, Rodney & Priddy, St Cuthbert (Out) North & West and Vale wards are parished. Table 6, below, shows the constituent areas of these wards. Table 4 (on page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 6: Existing arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
Ashwick & Ston Easton	1	The parishes of Ashwick, Binegar, Emborough and Ston Easton
Avalon	1	The parishes of Baltonsborough, Butleigh and West Pennard
Chilcompton	1	The parish of Chilcompton
Knowle	1	The parishes of Westbury and Wookey
Moor	1	The parishes of Godney, Meare, Sharpham and Walton
Nedge	1	The parishes of Chewton Mendip and Litton, and the parish wards of St Cuthbert Out East and St Cuthbert Out South of the parish of St Cuthbert Out
Pylcombe	1	The parishes of Croscombe, North Wootton, Pilton and Pylle

Table 6 (cont.): Existing arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
Rodney & Priddy	1	The parishes of Priddy and Rodney Stoke
St Cuthbert (Out) North & West	1	The parish wards of St Cuthbert Out North and St Cuthbert Out West of the parish of St Cuthbert Out
Vale	1	The parishes of Ditchheat, East Pennard, Lamyat, Lydford-on-Fosse and West Bradley

80 The District Council proposed 'to move the parish of Godney out of the Moor ward and into the Knowle ward'.

81 Due to the limited number of proposals and lack of evidence regarding this area, our objective in developing our recommendations was to address the levels of electoral inequality secured by the existing wards of Avalon, Moor, Chilcompton and Rodney & Priddy, which, under a council size of 47, would have 14% and 20% more, and 11% and 14% fewer, electors per councillor than the district average by 2009 respectively.

82 We considered the District Council's proposal to transfer Godney parish and note that, although this does not result in a significant improvement in electoral equality, the existing Moor ward is effectively sandwiched between the district boundary and the towns of Street and Glastonbury, which limits the options to achieve a better level of electoral equality. Therefore we propose to adopt the District Council's proposed Moor ward.

83 Currently the parish of St Cuthbert Out is divided between two wards and comprises four parish wards. The size of the parish in terms of both geography and numbers of electors constrains the opportunity for the parish to be contained wholly within a single-member ward pattern. Therefore we propose to divide the parish between three new single-member wards. Unfortunately we have been unable to locate a map illustrating two of the existing parish ward boundaries: the boundary between St Cuthbert Out North and St Cuthbert Out West parish wards; and the boundary between St Cuthbert Out East and St Cuthbert Out South parish wards. Our recommendations require consequential amendments to St Cuthbert Out parish's electoral arrangements and are discussed in more detail in the parish arrangements section on pages 38–41.

84 We propose to divide the existing St Cuthbert (Out) North & West ward in order to combine the areas broadly south of Elm Close with the parishes of Wookey and Godney to comprise a new single-member Wookey & St Cuthbert Out West ward. In addition we propose to amend the existing ward boundary south of Wells between the existing wards of Nedge and St Cuthbert (Out) North & West to reflect ground detail, which does not affect any electors. Our proposed Wookey & St Cuthbert Out West ward provides the opportunity for Rodney and Westbury parishes to be combined in a new single-member Rodney & Westbury ward and for Priddy parish to be combined with the parishes of Chewton Mendip, Litton, Emborough and Ston Easton to form a new single-member Chewton Mendip & Ston Easton ward, thereby

addressing the high level of electoral inequality secured by the existing Rodney & Priddy ward.

85 We propose a new district ward boundary which follows ground detail to the north of the villages of Dulcote and Dinder and further divides the parish of St Cuthbert Out. We propose that the areas within St Cuthbert Out parish south of this boundary combine with the parishes of Croscombe, North Wootton and Pilton to comprise a new single-member Croscombe & Pilton ward. We propose that the areas within St Cuthbert Out parish to the north of this proposed boundary combine with the remaining areas of St Cuthbert Out parish within the existing St Cuthbert (Out) North & West ward, north of Elm Close, to comprise a new single-member St Cuthbert Out North ward.

86 To address the high level of electoral inequality secured by the existing Avalon ward, we propose to combine the parishes of Baltonsborough and Butleigh with the parish of Lydford-on-Fosse to comprise a new single-member Butleigh & Baltonsborough ward, and to combine the parishes of Ditcheat, East Pennard, Pylle, West Pennard and West Bradley in a new single-member The Pennards & Ditcheat ward.

87 As noted above, in the 'General analysis' section (page 28), we found that the distribution and numbers of councillors within the parishes of Ashwick and Chilcompton constrained the opportunity to identify single-member wards based on whole parishes. Therefore, to address the level of electoral inequality secured by the existing Chilcompton ward, we propose a new two-member Ashwick, Chilcompton & Stratton ward comprising the parishes of Ashwick, Binegar, Chilcompton and Stratton on the Fosse.

88 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Ashwick, Chilcompton & Stratton, Butleigh & Baltonsborough, Chewton Mendip & Ston Easton, Croscombe & Pilton, Moor, Rodney & Westbury, St Cuthbert Out North, The Pennards & Ditcheat and Wookey & St Cuthbert Out West wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1, Map 3 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

Wells Central, Wells St Cuthbert's and Wells St Thomas' wards

89 Under the existing arrangements the district wards of Wells Central, Wells St Cuthbert's and Wells St Thomas' comprise the city wards of the same names of the parish of Wells. Table 4 (on page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

90 Wells City Council expressed its view that the transfer of the residential area surrounding St Cuthbert Avenue and Ash Lane, which had previously comprised part of Wells Central ward, to Wells St Thomas' ward – a consequence of the last review conducted by the LGCE – 'took no account of local allegiances [or] communities within Wells'. It requested that this 'great inequity was corrected', but explained that 'it has neither the expertise nor the detailed numerical information to suggest how this might be done in detail'. Councillor Mackenzie endorsed this view and suggested that 'it was illogical to add on St Cuthbert's Avenue, St Cuthbert Way and Western Retreat' to Wells St Thomas' ward.

91 We note Wells City Council and Councillor Mackenzie's comments regarding the existing arrangements. We agree that it is not ideal that there is no road access from St Cuthbert Avenue and Western Retreat to the rest of the existing Wells St Thomas' ward. However, it would require substantial change to the existing ward pattern to realise Wells City Council's request for those residential areas within Wells St Thomas' ward to be returned to Wells Central ward. In view of the lack of evidence regarding the communities in Wells or an indication of how they might be reflected by a warding pattern we are reluctant to recommend changes to the existing wards beyond the need to secure a good level of electoral equality.

92 Therefore, in order to secure improved levels of electoral equality, we propose to transfer the areas broadly north of East Somerset Way, east of Priory Road and Princes Road, and Portway Avenue from the existing Wells St Cuthbert's ward to comprise part of Wells Central ward. In addition we propose to transfer the properties on Goodymoor Avenue and Mary Road from the existing Wells Central ward to Wells St Thomas' ward. In addition we propose a further five amendments so that the boundaries reflect ground detail, which do not affect any electors. Our recommendations require consequential amendments to Wells parish's electoral arrangements and are discussed in more detail in the 'Parish, town and city council electoral arrangements' section on pages 38–41.

93 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Wells Central, Wells St Cuthbert's and Wells St Thomas' wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 3 accompanying this report.

Glastonbury St Benedict's, Glastonbury St Edmund's, Glastonbury St John's and Glastonbury St Mary's wards

94 Under the existing arrangements the wards of Glastonbury St Benedict's, Glastonbury St Edmund's, Glastonbury St John's and Glastonbury St Mary's comprise the parish wards of the same names of Glastonbury parish. Table 4 (on page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

95 In view of the levels of electoral inequality in Glastonbury, the District Council proposed to 're-examine the Glastonbury wards to increase [Glastonbury] St Mary's ward and to decrease [Glastonbury] St Benedict's ward'. However, it did not suggest how this might be best achieved.

96 Given the lack of community identity arguments received at Stage One, we have sought to provide for excellent levels of electoral equality in the town. We propose to retain the existing Glastonbury St Edmund's ward, subject to a minor amendment to the existing boundary to reflect ground detail, as it secures a good level of electoral equality. Broadly, we propose that the residential areas surrounding Boundary Way and Stagway, and the properties on Street Road and Magdalene Close, should comprise part of Glastonbury St Mary's ward. In consequence we propose to transfer the properties broadly south of St Edmund's Road, within the existing Glastonbury St John's ward, to comprise part of Glastonbury St Benedict's ward. In addition we propose a further amendment to the boundary between Glastonbury St Benedict's and Glastonbury St John's wards to reflect ground detail, which does not affect any

electors. Our recommendations require consequential amendments to Glastonbury parish's electoral arrangements and are discussed in more detail in the 'Parish, town and city council electoral arrangements' section on pages 38–41.

97 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Glastonbury St Benedict's, Glastonbury St Edmund's, Glastonbury St John's and Glastonbury St Mary's wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Street North, Street South and Street West wards

98 Under the existing arrangements the wards of Street North, Street South and Street West comprise the parish wards of the same names of the parish of Street. Table 4 (on page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

99 Street Parish Council argued that the 'present situation with five district councillors for Street worked and therefore should not be changed'.

100 Given the lack of community identity arguments received at Stage One we have sought to provide for excellent levels of electoral equality in the town. We propose to retain the existing Street West ward as it secures a good level of electoral equality. Broadly we propose that the residential areas east of Downside and south of Strode Road should comprise part of Street South ward. In addition we propose a number of amendments to the boundary between Street North and Street South wards to reflect ground detail, which does not affect any electors. Our recommendations require consequential amendments to Street parish's electoral arrangements and are discussed in more detail in the Parish, town and city council electoral arrangements section on pages 38–41.

101 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Street North, Street South and Street West wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

102 Table 7 (page 38) shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2004 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2009.

Table 7: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Draft recommendations	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
Number of councillors	46	46	47	47
Number of wards	35	35	34	34
Average number of electors per councillor	1,743	1,860	1,706	1,821
Number of wards with a variance of more than 10% from the average	12	14	5	0
Number of wards with a variance of more than 20% from the average	2	2	2	0

103 As shown in Table 7, our draft recommendations for Mendip District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 12 to five. By 2009 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%. We propose to increase the council size and are recommending a council size of 47 members.

Draft recommendation

Mendip District Council should comprise 47 councillors serving 34 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish, town and city council electoral arrangements

104 As part of an FER the Committee can make recommendations for new electoral arrangements for parishes. Where there is no impact on the District Council's electoral arrangements, the Committee will generally be content to put forward for consideration proposals from parish and town councils for changes to parish electoral arrangements in FERs. However, the Committee will usually wish to see a degree of consensus between the district council and the parish council concerned. Proposals should be supported by evidence, illustrating why changes to parish electoral arrangements are required.

105 Responsibility for reviewing and implementing changes to the electoral arrangements of existing parishes, outside of an electoral review conducted by the Committee, lies with district councils. If a district council wishes to make an Order amending the electoral arrangements of a parish that has been subject to an electoral changes Order made by either the Secretary of State or The Electoral Commission within the past five years, the consent of the Commission is required.

106 The District Council explained that ‘historic accidents and long lost logic have combined to produce an ancient set of parish boundaries which do not reflect many of modern life’s idiosyncrasies’ and requested that the Committee review ‘those parishes that have unusual geographic shapes’. Wells City Council highlighted its concern that ‘employment land to the west of Wells adjacent to the south of Wookey Hole Road ... forming the Underwood Business Park lie outside the boundary of Wells’, as this would mean that it ‘would have no right to comment on any future land use or planning issues which might arise in respect of this locality’.

107 The Boundary Committee cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an FER. In fact the Secretary of State is responsible for implementing changes to parish boundaries following a review conducted by a local authority under Section 9 of the Local Government and Ratings Act (1997). Therefore we do not have the authority to act in response to the District Council’s and Wells City Council’s request to review parish boundaries in Mendip.

108 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Local Government Act. The Schedule provides 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 district ward. Accordingly, we propose consequential electoral arrangements for the parishes of St Cuthbert Out, Frome, Glastonbury, Street and Wells to reflect the proposed district wards.

109 The parish of St Cuthbert Out is currently served by 17 councillors representing four wards: St Cuthbert Out North and St Cuthbert Out West parish wards return five councillors; St Cuthbert Out South parish ward returns three councillors; and St Cuthbert Out East returns four parish councillors.

110 We propose to retain the current number and distribution of councillors, but we recommend that the parish wards’ boundaries be amended to reflect our proposed district wards of St Cuthbert Out North, Wookey & St Cuthbert Out West and Croscombe & Pilton.

Draft recommendation

St Cuthbert Out Parish Council should comprise 17 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: St Cuthbert Out North (returning five councillors); St Cuthbert Out East (returning four councillors); St Cuthbert Out South (returning three councillors); and St Cuthbert Out West (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 3 and Map 4.

111 The parish of Frome is currently served by 20 councillors representing six town wards: Frome Berkley Down, Frome Fromefield, Frome Keyford and Frome Welshmill town wards all return four councillors, while Frome Park East and Frome Park West town wards return two councillors each.

112 The Liberal Democrats stated ‘that there should not be significant reduction in the numbers of [town] councillors’ and expressed the view that ‘the decision to split Frome Park [town ward] in 1999 into the unequal town council wards of Park East and Park West was ill advised and should be re-considered, particularly for electoral

equality reasons'. However, they did not put forward specific recommendations for new electoral arrangements for Frome Town Council.

113 We propose new electoral arrangements for Frome Town Council to reflect our proposed district ward pattern. We propose new Frome Berkley Down, Frome Fromefield, Frome Keyford, Frome Park, Frome Welshmill and Frome West town wards which should comprise the areas covered by the proposed district wards of the same names.

Draft recommendation

Frome Town Council should comprise 20 councillors, as at present, representing six town wards: Frome Berkley Down (returning four councillors); Frome Fromefield (returning four councillors); Frome Keyford (returning four councillors); Frome Park (returning two councillors); Frome Welshmill (returning four councillors); and Frome West (returning two councillors). The town ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 5.

114 The parish of Glastonbury is currently served by 16 councillors representing four parish wards: Glastonbury St. Benedict's, Glastonbury St. Edmund's, Glastonbury St. John's, and Glastonbury St. Mary's, all of which return four councillors.

115 We propose to retain the current number and distribution of councillors, but we recommend that the parish ward boundaries be amended to reflect our proposed amendments to the district wards of Glastonbury St Benedict's, Glastonbury St John's, Glastonbury St Edmund's and Glastonbury St Mary's.

Draft recommendation

Glastonbury Town Council should comprise 16 parish councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Glastonbury St Benedict's (returning four councillors); Glastonbury St Edmund's (returning four councillors); Glastonbury St John's (returning four councillors); and Glastonbury St Mary's (returning four councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 2.

116 The parish of Street is currently served by 16 councillors representing three wards: Street North, Street South and Street West, which return seven, six and three councillors respectively.

117 We propose to retain the current number and distribution of councillors, but we recommend that the parish ward boundaries be amended to reflect our proposed amendments to the district wards of Street North and Street South.

Draft recommendation

Street Parish Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Street North (returning seven councillors); Street South (returning six councillors); and Street West (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 2.

118 The parish of Wells is currently served by 16 councillors representing three city wards: Wells St. Cuthbert's and Wells St. Thomas', which both return six councillors, and Wells Central, which returns four councillors.

119 We propose to retain the current number and distribution of councillors, but we recommend that the city ward boundaries be amended to reflect our proposed amendments to the district wards of Wells Central, Wells St Cuthbert's and Wells St Thomas'.

Draft recommendation

Wells City Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing three city wards: Wells Central (returning four councillors); Wells St Cuthbert's (returning six councillors); and Wells St Thomas' (returning six councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 3.

5 What happens next?

120 There will now be a consultation period of 12 weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Mendip contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 10 April 2006. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

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

122 Express your views by writing directly to:

**Review Manager
Mendip Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

reviews@boundarycommittee.org.uk

Submissions can also be made online at
www.boundarycommittee.org.uk/our-work/ferfeedback.cfm

123 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, the Committee now makes available for public inspection full copies of all representations it takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all Stage Three representations will be placed on deposit locally at the offices of Mendip District Council, at the Committee's offices in Trevelyan House and on its website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

124 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations and 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 Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Commission, which cannot make the electoral change Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

6 Mapping

Draft recommendations for Mendip

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Mendip.

Sheet 1, Map 1 illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Mendip, including constituent parishes.

Sheet 2, Map 2 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Street and Glastonbury.

Sheet 3, Map 3 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Wells and St Cuthbert Out.

Sheet 4, Map 4 illustrates the proposed boundaries in St Cuthbert Out and Shepton Mallet.

Sheet 5, Map 5 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Frome.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
The Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Consultation	An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Order (or electoral change Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
The Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process
Electoral equality	A measure of ensuring that every person's vote is of equal worth
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the district
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections

FER (or Further Electoral Review)	A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last Periodic Electoral Review conducted between 1996 and 2004
Multi-member ward	A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	<p>The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and will soon be joined by the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is:</p> <p>'an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation's benefit and by appropriate national decision and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; - access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; - wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; - established farming use is effectively maintained'
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single district enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents

Parish council	A body elected by residents of the parish who are on the electoral register, which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries
Parish electoral arrangements	The total number of parish councillors; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
PER (or Periodic Electoral Review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by The Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England
Political management arrangements	The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision-making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories: a directly elected mayor and cabinet; a cabinet with a leader; or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the district average

Ward

A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (available at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm), requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee 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: The Boundary Committee for England's 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 comply with this requirement.
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.

