

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
West 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? *v*

SUMMARY *vii*

1 INTRODUCTION *1*

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS *5*

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED *11*

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS *13*

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? *33*

APPENDICES

A Draft Recommendations for West Dorset:
Detailed Mapping *35*

B Code of Practice on Written Consultation *39*

A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for Bridport and Dorchester 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 to the Government 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 West 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 West Dorset:

- **in 17 of the 38 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and eight 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 19 wards and by more than 20 per cent in nine wards.**

Our main proposals for West Dorset's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 84–85) are that:

- **West Dorset District Council should have 48 councillors, seven fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 33 wards, instead of 38 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 35 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of five, and three 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 29 of the proposed 33 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 32 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 and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Bradpole, Bridport, Dorchester and Sherborne.**

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
West 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	Beaminster	2	The parishes of Beaminster, Chedington, Mapperton, Mosterton and South Perrott	Map 2
2	Bradford Abbas	1	The parishes of Beer Hackett, Bradford Abbas, Clifton Maybank and Thornford	Map 2
3	Bradpole	1	Part of Bradpole parish (the proposed Bradpole Village parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map
4	Bridport North	2	Part of Bridport parish (the proposed Bridport North parish ward); part of Bradpole parish (the proposed Bradpole Claremont parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map
5	Bridport South & Bothenhampton	3	Part of Bridport parish (the proposed Bridport South parish ward); part of Bothenhampton parish ward (Bothenhampton parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map
6	Broadmayne	1	The parishes of Broadmayne, West Knighton and West Stafford	Map 2
7	Broadwindsor	1	The parishes of Bettiscombe, Broadwindsor, Burstock, Pilsdon, Seaborough and Stoke Abbott	Map 2
8	Burton Bradstock	1	The parishes of Burton Bradstock, Chilcombe, Puncknowle, Shipton Gorge and Swyre	Map 2
9	Charminster & Cerne Valley	2	The parishes of Bradford Peverell, Cerne Abbas, Charminster, Godmanstone, Nether Cerne, Stinsford and Up Cerne	Map 2
10	Charmouth	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Catherton, Charmouth, Leweston and Wootton Fitzpaine	Map 2
11	Chesil Bank	1	The parishes of Abbotsbury, Kingston Russell, Langton Herring, Littlebredy, Litton Cheney, Long Bredy and Portesham	Map 2
12	Chickerell	3	The parishes of Chickerell and Fleet	Map 2
13	Dorchester East	2	Part of Dorchester parish (the proposed Dorchester East parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map
14	Dorchester North	2	Part of Dorchester parish (the proposed Dorchester North parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map
15	Dorchester South	2	Part of Dorchester parish (the proposed Dorchester South parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map
16	Dorchester West	2	Part of Dorchester parish (the proposed Dorchester West parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map
17	Frome Valley	1	The parishes of Cattistock, Chilfrome, Frampton, Frome St Quinton, Stratton and Sydling St Nicholas	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
18	Halstock	1	The parishes of Batcombe, Corscombe, East Chelborough, Evershot, Halstock, Hermitage, Hilfield, Melbury Bubb, Melbury Sampford, Minterne Magna and West Chelborough	Map 2
19	Holnest	1	The parishes of Folke, Holnest, Holwell, Leigh, Leweston, Lillington, Longburton and North Wootton	Map 2
20	Loders	1	The parishes of Loders, Askerwell, North Poorton and Powerstock, and part of Bothenhampton parish (Walditch parish ward)	Map 2
21	Lyme Regis	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Lyme Regis	Map 2
22	Maiden Newton	1	The parishes of Compton Valence, Frome Vauchurch, Hooke, Maiden Newton, Rampisham, Toller Fratrum, Toller Porcorum, West Compton, Wraxall and Wynford Eagle	Map 2
23	Netherbury	1	The parishes of Allington and Netherbury	Map 2
24	Owermoigne	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Crossways, Osmington, Owermoigne, Poxwell, Tincleton, Warmwell and Woodsford	Map 2
25	Piddle Valley	1	The parishes of Alton Pancras, Buckland Newton, Melcombe Horsey, Piddlehinton and Piddletrenthide	Map 2
26	Puddletown	1	The parishes of Athelhampton, Burleston, Cheselbourne, Dewlish, Puddletown and Tolpuddle	Map 2
27	Queen Thorne	1	The parishes of Bishops Caundle, Castleton, Caundle Marsh, Goathill, Haydon, Nether Compton, Osborne, Over Compton, Poyntington, Purse Caundle, Sandford Orcas and Trent	Map 2
28	Sherborne East	2	Part of Sherborne parish (the proposed Sherborne East parish ward)	Map 2 and Map A2
29	Sherborne West	2	Part of Sherborne parish (the proposed Sherborne West parish ward)	Map 2 and Map A2
30	Symondsburry	1	The parishes of, Chideock, Stanton St Gabriel and Symondsburry	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
31	Thorncombe	1	The parishes of Marshwood, Thorncombe and Whitchurch Canonicorum	Map 2
32	Winterborne St Martin	1	The parishes of Bincombe, Winterborne St Martin, Whitcombe, Winterborne Abbas, Winterborne Came, Winterborne Herringston, Winterborne Monkton and Winterborne Steepleton	Map 2
33	Yetminster	1	The parishes of Chetnole, Melbury Osmond, Ryme Intrinseca, Stockwood and Yetminster	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

2 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2, Maps A1 - A2 in Appendix A and the large map at the back of the report.

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 West 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 Beaminster	2	3,189	1,595	2	3,276	1,638	0
2 Bradford Abbas	1	1,568	1,568	1	1,590	1,590	-3
3 Bradpole	1	1,686	1,686	8	1,764	1,764	7
4 Bridport North	2	3,347	1,674	8	3,527	1,764	7
5 Bridport South & Bothenhampton	3	4,185	1,395	-10	4,602	1,534	-7
6 Broadmayne	1	1,552	1,552	0	1,576	1,576	-4
7 Broadwindsor	1	1,487	1,487	-4	1,555	1,555	-5
8 Burton Bradstock	1	1,606	1,606	3	1,657	1,657	1
9 Charminster & Cerne Valley	2	2,846	1,423	-9	3,414	1,707	4
10 Charmouth	1	1,468	1,468	-6	1,495	1,495	-9
11 Chesil Bank	1	1,653	1,653	6	1,678	1,678	2
12 Chickerell	3	4,351	1,450	-7	4,502	1,501	-9
13 Dorchester East	2	3,369	1,685	8	3,503	1,752	7
14 Dorchester North	2	2,805	1,403	-10	3,389	1,695	3
15 Dorchester South	2	3,366	1,683	8	3,399	1,700	3
16 Dorchester West	2	3,267	1,634	5	3,487	1,744	6
17 Frome Valley	1	1,603	1,603	3	1,744	1,744	6
18 Halstock	1	1,505	1,505	-3	1,564	1,564	-5
19 Holnest	1	1,644	1,644	6	1,686	1,686	3
20 Loders	1	1,442	1,442	-7	1,509	1,509	-8
21 Lyme Regis	2	3,138	1,569	1	3,330	1,665	1
22 Maiden Newton	1	1,539	1,539	-1	1,631	1,631	-1

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 %
23 Netherbury	1	1,504	1,504	-3	1,621	1,621	-1
24 Owermoigne	2	2,753	1,377	-12	2,978	1,489	-9
25 Piddle Valley	1	1,587	1,587	2	1,619	1,619	-2
26 Puddletown	1	1,724	1,724	11	1,799	1,799	9
27 Queen Thorne	1	1,647	1,647	6	1,689	1,689	3
28 Sherborne East	2	3,308	1,654	6	3,558	1,779	8
29 Sherborne West	2	3,503	1,752	13	3,537	1,769	8
30 Symondsburly	1	1,488	1,488	-4	1,504	1,504	-9
31 Thorncombe	1	1,362	1,362	-12	1,461	1,461	-11
32 Winterborne St Martin	1	1,667	1,667	7	1,701	1,701	3
33 Yetminster	1	1,516	1,516	-3	1,559	1,559	-5
Totals	48	74,675	-	-	78,904	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,556	-	-	1,644	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by West 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 West 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. We completed the review of Purbeck District in March 1997.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of West Dorset. West Dorset's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in February 1980 (Report no. 373). 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 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 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 West Dorset District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Dorset County Council, Dorset Police Authority, the local authority associations, Dorset Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests 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 West 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 Electoral Commission. It will then be for it to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order. The Electoral Commission 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 for England which will take over responsibility for the conduct of PERs from the Local Government Commission for England. The Boundary Committee for England will conduct electoral reviews following the same rules and in the same manner as the Local Government Commission for England. The Boundary Committee for England'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 for England'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 West Dorset is bounded in the west and north by the counties of Devon and Somerset, to the east by the districts of North Dorset and Purbeck, and to the south by Weymouth and Portland district and the English Channel. There are a number of small towns, including Dorchester, Bridport and Sherborne, though the district is mainly rural, with its population of 91,060 dispersed across an area of 108,281 hectares. It has a population density of 1.2 people per hectare. The district has many archaeological and historical sites, which, in addition to its coastline, make it an important area for tourism. The district contains 87 civil parishes and is entirely parished.

17 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'.

18 The electorate of the district is 74,675 (February 2001). The Council presently has 55 members who are elected from 38 wards. Five of the wards are each represented by three councillors, seven are each represented by two councillors and 26 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

19 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,358 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,435 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 38 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, eight wards by more than 20 per cent and five wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Chickerell ward where each councillor represents 57 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in West 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 Beaminster	2	3,174	1,587	17	3,261	1,631	14
2 Bothenhampton	1	1,829	1,829	35	1,888	1,888	32
3 Bradford Abbas	1	1,486	1,486	9	1,508	1,508	5
4 Bradpole	1	1,855	1,855	37	1,940	1,940	35
5 Bridport North	3	3,379	1,126	-17	3,552	1,184	-17
6 Bridport South	2	2,710	1,355	0	3,110	1,555	8
7 Broadmayne	1	1,567	1,567	15	1,591	1,591	11
8 Broadwindsor	1	1,177	1,177	-13	1,244	1,244	-13
9 Burton Bradstock	1	1,306	1,306	-4	1,332	1,332	-7
10 Caundle Valley	1	1,075	1,075	-21	1,092	1,092	-24
11 Cerne Valley	1	1,287	1,287	-5	1,421	1,421	-1
12 Charminster	1	1,463	1,463	8	1,981	1,981	38
13 Charmouth	1	1,468	1,468	8	1,495	1,495	4
14 Chesil Bank	1	1,458	1,458	7	1,475	1,475	3
15 Chickerell	2	4,266	2,133	57	4,417	2,209	54
16 Dorchester East	2	3,215	1,608	18	3,410	1,705	19
17 Dorchester North	2	2,685	1,343	-1	3,219	1,610	12
18 Dorchester South	3	3,970	1,323	-3	3,995	1,332	-7
19 Dorchester West	3	2,937	979	-28	3,154	1,051	-27
20 Frome Valley	1	1,270	1,270	-6	1,303	1,303	-9
21 Halstock	1	1,335	1,335	-2	1,394	1,394	-3
22 Holnest	1	1,309	1,309	-4	1,342	1,342	-6
23 Loders	1	1,133	1,133	-17	1,174	1,174	-18
24 Lyme Regis	3	3,138	1,046	-23	3,330	1,110	-23
25 Maiden Newton	1	1,252	1,252	-8	1,344	1,344	-6
26 Netherbury	1	1,471	1,471	8	1,513	1,513	5
27 Owermoigne	2	2,753	1,377	1	2,978	1,489	4
28 Piddle Valley	1	1,479	1,479	9	1,503	1,503	5
29 Puddletown	1	1,283	1,283	-6	1,342	1,342	-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 %
30 Queen Thorne	1	1,187	1,187	-13	1,221	1,221	-15
31 Sherborne East	2	2,906	1,453	7	3,156	1,578	10
32 Sherborne West	3	3,905	1,302	-4	3,939	1,313	-8
33 Symondsburry	1	1,389	1,389	2	1,489	1,489	4
34 Thorncombe	1	1,112	1,112	-18	1,196	1,196	-17
35 Tolpuddle	1	854	854	-37	895	895	-38
36 Whitchurch Canonorum	1	1,139	1,139	-16	1,163	1,163	-19
37 Winterbourne St Martin	1	1,999	1,999	47	2,041	2,041	42
38 Yetminster	1	1,454	1,454	7	1,496	1,496	4
Totals	55	74,675	-	-	78,904	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,358	-	-	1,435	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by West 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 Tolpuddle ward are relatively over-represented by 37 per cent, while electors in Chickerell ward are relatively under-represented by 57 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

20 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 West Dorset District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

21 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 12 submissions during Stage One, including a district-wide scheme from the District Council, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council.

West Dorset District Council

22 The District Council proposed a council of 48 members, seven fewer than at present, serving 33 wards, compared with the existing 38. The Council stated that its consultation with town and parish councils showed that the existing electoral arrangements worked well and were generally supported. However, the significant electoral inequality in the district meant that changes needed to be made. It also stated that “where it has been necessary to make substantial changes, local connections have been taken into account to ensure that these are disrupted as little as possible.” Under the Council’s proposals, the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average in three wards. By 2006, only one ward was forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average.

Parish and Town Councils

23 We received submissions from eight parish and town councils. Dorchester Town Council enclosed copies of letters to West Dorset District Council, expressing its support for the second of the two options consulted on by the District Council with regard to the Dorchester district wards. Buckland Newton Parish Council was of the view that Buckland Newton should remain in the same ward as Alton Pancras, Piddletrenthide and Piddlehinton as “these villages are similar in character and form a cohesive unit”. Chideock and Shipton Gorge parish councils preferred the existing arrangements to continue. Thorncombe and Winterborne Farringdon parish councils expressed support for a 40-member council, the former as it would “provide a more natural boundary with its neighbouring parishes”, while the latter forwarded comments concerning Bincombe parish having more in common with Weymouth than with the rural Winterborne St Martin ward. Chesil Bank Parish Council was opposed to Fleet parish becoming part of Chickerell ward, expressing concern that Fleet’s representation would be undermined by the larger, more urban Chickerell. This view was also expressed by a local resident. Bradford Peverell Parish Council was opposed to any reduction in the number of parish councillors for the parish.

Other Submissions

24 We received a further two submissions from local residents. One suggested that wards should comprise “at least 2,500” electors and be represented by two councillors, which would facilitate a form of proportional representation, while the other argued that the review should take account of “the wide differences in population density between urban and rural wards”.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

25 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for West 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.

26 As described earlier, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for West 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”.

27 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.

28 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.

29 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

30 Since 1975 there has been a 28 per cent increase in the electorate of West Dorset district. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5 per cent from 74,675 to 78,904 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects the highest rate of growth to be in the towns of Dorchester and Bridport, and in the Cerne Valley ward. 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.

31 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

32 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.

33 West Dorset District Council currently has 55 members. The District Council proposed a council of 48 members representing one three-member ward, 13 two-member wards and 19 single-member wards. The Council originally consulted the parishes on three schemes, one with 55, one with 47 and one with 40 members. The majority of those who responded indicated a preference for a reduction in council size. The Council stated that it had already begun to think about reducing the number of members as a result of “some internal management difficulties” due to the existing number of councillors. It considered that a reduction would assist with the introduction of the new committee structure following the introduction of the Local Government Act 2000.

34 As a consequence, it gave consideration to the two options which would reduce the council size. As it was considered that the 40-member option would necessitate too drastic a reduction, and be unlikely to receive cross-party support, the 47-member option was considered the more viable, and a decision was taken to develop a scheme based on a council size of 46, 47 or 48 members. In considering the options “a council size of 48 was found to work best within the constraints of the review and achieved better electoral equality than the others”. We received no other schemes for West Dorset, although a local resident proposed that each councillor should represent 1,250 electors, giving a council size of around 60, while Thorncombe and Winterbourne Farringdon parish councils supported the 40-member option.

35 Therefore, in the light of local support for a reduction in council size, and 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 48 members.

Parish Administrative Boundaries

36 During the course of this review, a number of parish boundary anomalies have been identified. We have no power to recommend changes to administrative boundaries as part of this PER. Under the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, district councils may undertake reviews of the parish arrangements in their areas and make recommendations to the Secretary of State. When we have completed our PER of West Dorset District Council, we believe that there would be considerable benefit in West Dorset District Council conducting such a review.

Electoral Arrangements

37 We have given careful consideration to the views we have received during Stage One. In particular, we note that the District Council consulted the parishes both on possible council sizes and the differing ward configurations that the different sizes would have entailed. We note also the cross-party support which has been given to the District Council’s proposals.

38 We have noted the comments expressed by a local resident requesting that the wide differences in population density between urban and rural wards be taken into account. However, we are unable to

take into account rural sparsity; as our *Guidance* makes clear there is “no provision in legislation for us to apply such a weighting in reaching our recommendations”.

39 In view of the support given to large elements of the Council’s proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we have based our recommendations on the District Council’s scheme. We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. However, bearing in mind local community identities and interests, we are moving away from the District Council’s proposals in three areas where we judge that its scheme can be further improved upon. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Charmouth, Lyme Regis, Thorncombe and Whitchurch Canonicorum wards
- (b) Beaminster, Broadwindsor, Netherbury and Symondsbury wards
- (c) Bothenhampton, Bradpole, Bridport North and Bridport South wards
- (d) Burton Bradstock, Halstock, Loders and Maiden Newton wards
- (e) Broadmayne, Chesil Bank, Chickerell and Winterborne St Martin wards
- (f) Dorchester East, Dorchester North, Dorchester South and Dorchester West wards
- (g) Owermoigne, Piddle Valley, Puddletown and Tolpuddle wards
- (h) Cerne Valley, Charminster, Frome Valley and Yetminster wards
- (i) Bradford Abbas, Caundle Vale, Holnest and Queen Thorne wards
- (j) Sherborne East and Sherborne West wards

40 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.

Charmouth, Lyme Regis, Thorncombe and Whitchurch Canonicorum wards

41 These wards are situated on the western edge of the district, with all but Thorncombe ward bordering the English Channel. Lyme Regis is represented by three members, while the others are single-member wards. The number of electors per councillor is 8 per cent above the district average (4 per cent above in 2006) in Charmouth ward, which comprises the parishes of Charmouth, Catherston Leweston and Wootton Fitzpaine; 23 per cent below (unchanged in 2006) in Lyme Regis ward, which comprises the town of Lyme Regis; 18 per cent below (17 per cent below in 2006) in Thorncombe ward, which comprises the parishes of Thorncombe, Bettiscombe, Marshwood, Pilsdon and Stoke Abbott, and 16 per cent below (19 per cent below in 2006) in Whitchurch Canonicorum ward, which comprises the parishes of Whitchurch Canonicorum, Chideock and Stanton St Gabriel.

42 At Stage One the District Council proposed making no changes to the boundaries of Charmouth and Lyme Regis wards, but proposed a reduction in the number of councillors in Lyme Regis ward from three to two due to the ward being significantly over-represented. The Council proposed that the parishes of Bettiscombe, Pilsdon and Stoke Abbott should be transferred from Thorncombe ward, which is also significantly over-represented, to Broadwindsor ward, and that the parish of Whitchurch Canonicorum should be transferred to Thorncombe ward from Whitchurch Canonicorum ward. The parishes of Stanton St Gabriel and Chideock would be transferred into a revised Symondsbury ward, as discussed later. Thus the revised Thorncombe ward would comprise the parishes of Thorncombe, Marshwood and Whitchurch Canonicorum, and Whitchurch Canonicorum ward would cease to exist. The Council recognised that constituent parishes of the Marshwood Vale group of parishes would be placed in separate wards, but felt this was unlikely to adversely affect any existing ties. The Council

stated that in its opinion these proposals would not be “significantly detrimental to any existing local connections that exist” and that, while electoral equality was being only slightly improved in the ward, the proposals would “help to address the issue [of inequality] in the wider surrounding area”. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 6 per cent below the district average in Charmouth ward (9 per cent below in 2006), 1 per cent above in Lyme Regis ward (unchanged in 2006) and 12 per cent below in Thorncombe ward (11 per cent below in 2006).

43 Thorncombe Parish Council expressed its support for the District Council’s 40-member consultation scheme as, in its opinion, it “would provide a more natural boundary with its neighbouring parishes in Broadwindsor, Blackdown and Drimpton”.

44 We have given careful consideration to all the representations received for this area. We note that the Council’s proposals would provide significant improvements to electoral equality while, we judge, providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. Therefore, we are adopting the proposed wards of Charmouth, Lyme Regis and Thorncombe as part of our draft recommendations. Our draft proposals for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from all interested parties on these proposals at Stage Three.

Beaminster, Broadwindsor, Netherbury and Symondsburys wards

45 These wards are situated in the west of the district. Beaminster is represented by two members, while the others are single-member wards. The number of electors per councillor is 17 per cent above the district average (14 per cent above in 2006) in Beaminster ward, which comprises the parishes of Beaminster, Chedington, Mosterton, and South Perrott; 13 per cent below (unchanged in 2006) in Broadwindsor ward, which comprises the parishes of Broadwindsor, Burstock and Seaborough; 8 per cent above (5 per cent above in 2006) in Netherbury ward, which comprises the parishes of Netherbury, Hooke, Mapperton, North Poorton and Powerstock, and 2 per cent above (4 per cent above in 2006) in Symondsburys ward, which comprises the parishes of Symondsburys and Allington.

46 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging the under-represented Beaminster ward by including the parish of Mapperton from Netherbury ward. In order to improve electoral equality in Netherbury ward and this part of the district generally, the Council proposed significant changes to Netherbury ward. In addition to transferring the parish of Mapperton to Beaminster ward, the Council proposed transferring the parish of Hooke to Maiden Newton ward and the parishes of North Poorton and Powerstock to Lodders ward. In addition, it proposed transferring the parish of Allington to Netherbury ward from Symondsburys ward. The Council proposed enlarging the over-represented Broadwindsor ward by transferring to it the parishes of Bettiscombe, Pilsdon and Stoke Abbott from the existing Thorncombe ward, as has already been described.

47 The Council proposed changing the boundaries of Symondsburys ward by transferring the parish of Allington to Netherbury ward, and transferring the parishes of Staunton St Gabriel and Chideock from the existing Whitchurch Canonicorum ward to Symondsburys ward. The Council argued that, although electoral equality in the existing Symondsburys ward is good, “it has been necessary to suggest a significant change in order to address the inequality issue in the west of the district”. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average (equal to the average in 2006) in Beaminster ward, which would comprise the parishes of Beaminster, Chedington, Mapperton, Mosterton and South Perrott, 4 per cent below (5 per cent below in 2006) in Broadwindsor ward, which would comprise the parishes of Broadwindsor, Bettiscombe,

Burstock, Pilsdon, Seaborough and Stoke Abbott), 3 per cent below (1 per cent below in 2006) in Netherbury ward, which would comprise the parishes of Netherbury and Allington, and 4 per cent below (9 per cent below in 2006) in Symondsbury ward, which would comprise the parishes of Symondsbury, Chideock and Staunton St Gabriel.

48 Chideock Parish Council expressed support for the existing arrangements and stated that it had no desire to be included in a district ward with Symondsbury parish.

49 We have given careful consideration to all representations received for this area. We note that the Council's proposals would provide significant improvements to electoral equality while, we judge, providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. We note the wishes of Chideock Parish Council, but cannot concur with them in the interest of electoral equality in this part of the district. Therefore, in the absence of other evidence of opposition to these proposals, we are adopting the proposed two-member ward of Beaminster, and the single-member wards of Broadwindsor, Netherbury and Symondsbury as part of our draft recommendations. Our draft proposals for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from the parish councils and local residents on these proposals at Stage Three.

Bothenhampton, Bradpole, Bridport North and Bridport South wards

50 The three-member Bridport North and two-member Bridport South wards are urban wards, while the adjoining single-member wards of Bradpole and Bothenhampton are situated to the north and east of Bridport. The number of electors per councillor is 35 per cent above the district average in Bothenhampton ward (32 per cent above in 2006), 37 per cent above in Bradpole ward (35 per cent above in 2006), 17 per cent below in Bridport North ward (unchanged in 2006) and equal to the average in Bridport South ward (8 per cent above in 2006).

51 At Stage One the District Council proposed significant changes in this part of the district. It proposed moving the boundary between Bridport North and Bridport South wards to include the area of West Allington, currently in Bridport North ward, in Bridport South ward in order to secure improved levels of electoral equality. It argued that this area "is relatively self-contained and that such a transfer would not have any detrimental effect on existing local connections". It also proposed that the number of councillors representing Bridport North ward should be reduced from three to two. The Council further proposed forming a new two-member ward comprising the parish of Bradpole and the Bothenhampton parish ward of Bothenhampton parish, pointing out that both Bothenhampton and Bradpole wards are currently significantly under-represented and that this situation is likely to worsen under the existing arrangements. It argued that Bradpole parish and Bothenhampton parish ward are similar in that they both contain large areas of overspill development from Bridport, with the majority of the electorate being within urban areas surrounded by sparsely populated rural areas. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average in Bradpole & Bothenhampton ward (2 per cent below in 2006), 2 per cent above in Bridport North ward (unchanged in 2006) and 6 per cent below in Bridport South ward (1 per cent above in 2006).

52 We have given careful consideration to all the proposals which we have received in relation to this area. In particular we are concerned at the proposed Bradpole & Bothenhampton ward. While we note that there are some similarities between the two constituent parts of the ward, we have noted that, under this proposal, the two areas would be linked only by a very slim piece of land, virtually making the ward a detached ward. In our *Guidance* we state that "the use of detached wards, other than to recognise the

particular circumstances of, for example, offshore islands, is undesirable” as we are of the view that “they lend themselves to the creation of electoral areas which lack community identity”. As a consequence we propose modifying the District Council’s proposals in this area. In the interests of community identity and to secure better boundaries in the area generally, we propose retaining the majority of Bradpole ward as a single-member ward and creating a new three-member ward of Bridport South & Bothenhampton, comprising Bridport South ward and Bothenhampton parish ward. We propose adopting the Council’s proposed two-member Bridport North ward, including the boundary change between Bridport North and Bridport South wards. However, we further propose transferring to Bridport North ward an area of urban overspill from Bradpole ward stretching from Dodham’s Lane/Gipsy Lane in the north to Coneygar Road in the south.

53 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent above the district average in Bradpole ward (7 per cent above in 2006), 8 per cent above in Bridport North ward (7 per cent above in 2006) and 10 per cent below in Bridport South & Bothenhampton ward (7 per cent below in 2006). While we acknowledge that these proposals would result in slightly worse levels of electoral equality than under the Council’s scheme, we are of the view that they would secure a better reflection of local communities and more identifiable boundaries.

54 Our draft proposals for these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report. We would welcome comments from all interested parties on these proposals at Stage Three.

Burton Bradstock, Halstock, Loders and Maiden Newton wards

55 These single-member rural wards run north-south in the rural areas to the east and north-east of Bridport. The number of electors per councillor is 4 per cent below the district average (7 per cent below in 2006) in Burton Bradstock, which comprises the parishes of Burton Bradstock, Puncknowle and Swyre; 2 per cent below (3 per cent below in 2006) in Halstock ward, which comprises the parishes of Halstock, Corscombe, East Chelborough, West Chelborough, Evershot, Melbury Osmond, Melbury Sampford, Rampisham and Wraxall; 17 per cent below (18 per cent below in 2006) in Loders ward, which comprises the parishes of Loders, Askerswell, Chilcombe, Litton Cheney and Shipton Gorge, and 8 per cent below (6 per cent below in 2006) in Maiden Newton ward, which comprises the parishes of Maiden Newton, Frome Vauchurch, Toller Fratrum, Toller Porcorum, West Compton and Wynford Eagle.

56 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging Burton Bradstock ward by transferring to it the parishes of Chilcombe and Shipton Gorge from Loders ward. It also proposed transferring the parish of Litton Cheney from Loders ward to Chesil Bank ward, and enlarging the resultant Loders ward by including the parishes of Powerstock and North Poorton from Netherbury ward and the parish ward of Walditch from Bothenhampton parish. It further proposed that Halstock ward should gain the parishes of Melbury Bubb, Batcombe, Hilfield and Hermitage from Holnest ward and the parish of Minterne Magna from Cerne Valley ward. In addition it proposed transferring from Halstock ward the parishes of Rampisham and Wraxall to Maiden Newton ward and the parish of Melbury Osmond to Yetminster ward. Finally the Council proposed enlarging Maiden Newton ward by including the parishes of Compton Valence (from Winterborne St Martin ward), Rampisham and Wraxall (from Halstock ward) and Hooke (from Netherbury ward). The Council argued that these changes were necessary in order to improve the levels of electoral equality in this area of the district.

57 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in these single-member wards would be 3 per cent above the district average (1 per cent above in 2006) in Burton Bradstock ward, which would comprise the parishes of Burton Bradstock, Chilcombe, Puncknowle, Shipton Gorge and Swyre, 3 per cent below (5 per cent below in 2006) in Halstock ward, which would comprise the parishes of Halstock, Batcombe, Corscombe, East Chelborough, Evershot, Hermitage, Hilfield, Melbury Bubb, Melbourn Sampford, Minterne Magna and West Chelborough, 7 per cent below (8 per cent below in 2006) in Loders ward, which would comprise the parishes of Loders, Askerswell, North Poorton, Powerstock and the Walditch parish ward of Bothenhampton parish and 1 per cent below (unchanged in 2006) in Maiden Newton ward, which would comprise the parishes of Maiden Newton, Compton Vallance, Frome Vauchurch, Hooke, Rampisham, Toller Fratrum, Toller Porcorum, West Compton, Wraxall and Wynford Eagle.

58 Shipton Gorge Parish Council expressed satisfaction with the existing arrangements.

59 We have given careful consideration to all the representations received for this area. We note that the Council's proposals would provide significant improvements to electoral equality while, we judge, providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. Therefore, we are adopting the proposed wards of Burton Bradstock, Halstock, Loders and Maiden Newton as part of our draft recommendations. Our draft proposals for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from all interested parties on these proposals at Stage Three.

Broadmayne, Chesil Bank, Chickerell and Winterborne St Martin wards

60 These wards are situated in the south of the district, to the west and north of the Borough of Weymouth & Portland. The more urban Chickerell ward is represented by two members, while the others, which are predominantly rural, are single-member wards. The number of electors per councillor is 15 per cent above the district average (11 per cent above in 2006) in Broadmayne ward, which comprises the parishes of Broadmayne, West Knighton, West Stafford and Whitcombe; 7 per cent above (3 per cent above in 2006) in Chesil Bank ward, which comprises the parishes of Abbotsbury, Fleet, Kingston Russell, Langton Herring, Littlebredy, Long Bredy and Portesham; 57 per cent above (54 per cent above in 2006) in Chickerell ward, which comprises the parish of Chickerell, and 47 per cent above (42 per cent above in 2006) in Winterborne St Martin ward, which comprises the parishes of Winterborne St Martin, Bincombe, Bradford Peverell, Compton Valence, Winterborne Came, Winterborne Herrington, Winterborne Monkton, Winterborne Abbas and Winterborne Steepleton.

61 At Stage One the District Council proposed transferring Litton Cheney parish to Chesil Bank ward from Loders ward. It proposed transferring the parish of Whitcombe from Broadmayne ward to Winterborne St Martin ward. It also proposed transferring the parishes of Compton Valence and Bincombe from Winterborne St Martin ward to Maiden Newton ward and Chickerell ward respectively. It also proposed further enlarging Chickerell ward by transferring to it the parish of Fleet from Chesil Bank ward. Under these proposals the enlarged Chickerell ward would become a three-member ward, whereas the others would remain single-member wards. Although the Council recognised that adding Bincombe to Chickerell ward would create a detached ward, it was of the opinion that the two parishes "have common factors, not least that they both contain large areas of relatively recent development which is (sic) peripheral to the town of Weymouth and which has (sic) occurred as a result of the expansion of Weymouth". Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the district average in Broadmayne ward (4 per cent below in 2006), 6 per cent above

in Chesil Bank ward (2 per cent above in 2006), 2 per cent above in Chickerell ward (equal to the average in 2006) and 1 per cent below in Winterborne St Martin ward (4 per cent below in 2006).

62 Chesil Bank Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposals on the grounds that "representation of our administrative area will be undertaken by two different district council ward members". It expressed concern that the needs of Fleet's rural community would be "seriously disenfranchised" by becoming part of Chickerell, a "Weymouth suburb". This view was also expressed by a resident who thought that the District Council's proposals "could be detrimental to the special character of the area and its inhabitants and, therefore, ultimately, would be against the interests of West Dorset as a whole". Winterborne Farringdon Parish Council felt that Winterborne St Martin district ward should comprise rural parishes and that Bincombe should be linked with Weymouth as "urban Bincombe was felt to have more in common with Weymouth".

63 We have given careful consideration to all representations received for this area. Having considered the Council's scheme, we are concerned at its proposal to create a detached ward by transferring Bincombe parish, to the north-east of Weymouth, to Chickerell ward, to the west of Weymouth. As outlined earlier, we do not believe that such a detached ward would provide for the best reflection of local communities, nor provide for effective and convenient local government and, therefore, we do not propose adopting it. We are unable to consider the views of Winterborne Farringdon Parish Council concerning Bincombe parish, as this would entail modifying external district boundaries, which does not fall within the scope of this review. However, we are modifying the District Council's proposals in this area. Having visited the area, we note that Bincombe is a predominantly rural parish, with a small concentration of urban overspill from Weymouth in its south-west corner. It is our opinion that, in terms of community identity, it is appropriate for the whole parish of Bincombe to remain part of Winterborne St Martin ward, and we propose making this part of our draft recommendations. Furthermore, in order to secure reasonable electoral equality, we propose transferring the parish of Bradford Peverell from Winterborne St Martin ward to the proposed ward of Charminster and Cerne Valley. We note the opposition expressed to the District Council's proposal to transfer the parish of Fleet from Chesil Bank ward to Chickerell ward. However, we are not minded to modify this part of the Council's proposals, as we have been unable to identify an alternative arrangement which would give acceptable electoral equality.

64 Subject to this one amendment, we are adopting the District Council's proposals for these wards. Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the district average (4 per cent below in 2006) in Broadmayne ward, which would comprise the parishes of Broadmayne, West Knighton and West Stafford, 6 per cent above (2 per cent above in 2006) in Chesil Bank ward, which would comprise the parishes of Abbotsbury, Kingston Russell, Langton Herring, Littlebredy, Litton Cheney, Long Bredy and Portesham, 7 per cent below (9 per cent in 2006) in Chickerell ward, which would comprise the parishes of Chickerell and Fleet, and 7 per cent above (3 per cent above in 2006) in Winterborne St Martin ward, which would comprise the parishes of Winterborne St Martin, Bincombe, Whitcombe, Winterborne Abbas, Winterborne Came, Winterborne Herrington, Winterborne Monkton and Winterborne Steepleton. Our draft proposals for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from all interested parties on these proposals at Stage Three.

Dorchester East, Dorchester North, Dorchester South and Dorchester West wards

65 The district and parish boundaries of these four urban wards, which together form the town of Dorchester, are coterminous. Dorchester South and West wards are each represented by three members, while Dorchester East and North wards are each represented by two members. One ward is under-represented and three are over-represented. The number of electors per councillor is 18 per cent above the district average in Dorchester East ward (19 per cent above in 2006), 1 per cent below in Dorchester North ward (12 per cent above in 2006), 3 per cent below in Dorchester South ward (7 per cent below in 2006) and 28 per cent below in Dorchester West ward (27 per cent below in 2006).

66 At Stage One the District Council proposed modifying the boundaries of all four wards, “so that sufficient electors are transferred from the South ward to the North and East wards and also from the North ward to the West ward to improve electoral equality”. The Council stated that “from the local knowledge available, it was the view that the changes proposed could be implemented without having a significant detrimental effect on any local connections that exist”. In addition it proposed a reduction in the number of councillors representing Dorchester South and West wards from three to two in order to secure the appropriate balance of representation under the reduced council size. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent above the district average in Dorchester East ward (7 per cent above in 2006), 10 per cent below in Dorchester North ward (3 per cent above in 2006), 8 per cent above in Dorchester South ward (3 per cent above in 2006) and 5 per cent above in Dorchester West ward (6 per cent above in 2006).

67 Dorchester Town Council submitted a copy of its response to the District Council’s consultation process, in which it expressed support for the Council’s option two, which was the option put forward to the Commission by the Council at Stage One. The Town Council stated that “it would be unfortunate if natural estates had to be split, but they understand the difficulty in achieving equality”.

68 We have given careful consideration to all the representations received for this area. We note that the Council’s proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while, we judge, providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. Therefore, in the light of the support received from Dorchester Town Council, and the absence of evidence of opposition, we are adopting the proposals from the District Council as our draft recommendations for these wards. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Owermoigne, Piddle Valley, Puddletown and Tolpuddle wards

69 These wards are situated on the eastern edge of the district to the north and east of Dorchester. All are single-member wards, apart from Owermoigne which is served by two members. The number of electors per councillor is 1 per cent above the district average (4 per cent above in 2006) in Owermoigne ward, which comprises the parishes of Owermoigne, Crossways, Osmington, Poxwell, Tingleton, Warmwell and Woodsford; 9 per cent above (5 per cent above in 2006) in Piddle Valley ward, which comprises the parishes of Piddletrenthide, Piddlehinton, Alton Pancras and Buckland Newton; 6 per cent below (unchanged in 2006) in Puddletown ward, which comprises the parishes of Puddletown, Athelhampton and Stinsford, and 37 per cent below (38 per cent below in 2006) in Tolpuddle ward, which comprises the parishes of Tolpuddle, Burleston, Cheselbourne, Dewlish and Melcombe Horsey.

70 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging Owermoigne ward by including the parish of Tolpuddle from the existing Tolpuddle ward, contending that the constituent parishes within the ward would be linked by a good road network. The Council also proposed enlarging Piddle Valley ward by including the parish of Melcombe Horsey from the existing Tolpuddle ward, stating that, as it is a predominantly rural parish, it “has common links with other parishes in the ward”. The Council further proposed a significant modification to the boundaries of Puddletown ward, citing as its reason the “high level of development in recent years in neighbouring parishes, much of which is likely to continue”. It proposed transferring the parish of Stinsford from the existing Puddletown ward to the new Charminster & Cerne Valley ward, as described below, while enlarging Puddletown ward by including the parishes of Dewlish, Cheselbourne and Burleston from the existing Tolpuddle ward. Owermoigne would remain a two-member ward, and Piddle Valley and Puddletown would be single-member wards. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent below the district average in Owermoigne ward (1 per cent below in 2006), 2 per cent above in Piddle Valley ward (2 per cent below in 2006) and 7 per cent below in Puddletown ward (8 per cent below in 2006).

71 Buckland Newton Parish Council enclosed a copy of its response to the District Council’s consultation process, which stated that there was unanimous agreement on the parish council that Buckland Newton should remain in a district ward with the constituent parishes of the existing Piddle Valley ward.

72 We have given careful consideration to all representations for this area. We note that the Council’s proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while, we judge, providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. However, it is our opinion that community identity could be better reflected by transferring the parish of Tolpuddle to Puddletown ward, rather than Owermoigne ward. This would secure better road links while also bringing together the constituent parishes of the Puddletown Area Group. While we note that these proposals would result in slightly worse electoral equality than under the Council’s proposals, we are of the view that this is acceptable given the better reflection of local communities which would result.

73 Subject to the above amendment, we are adopting the District Council’s proposals for these wards. Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 12 per cent below the district average (9 per cent below in 2006) in Owermoigne ward, which would comprise the parishes of Owermoigne, Crossways, Osmington, Poxwell, Tincton, Warmwell and Woodsford, 2 per cent above (2 per cent below in 2006) in Piddle Valley ward, which would comprise the parishes of Alton Pancras, Buckland Newton, Melcombe Horsey, Piddlehinton and Piddletrenthide, and 11 per cent above (9 per cent above in 2006) in Puddletown ward, which would comprise the parishes of Puddletown, Athelhampton, Burleston, Cheselbourne, Dewlish and Tolpuddle. We would welcome comments from all interested parties on these proposals at Stage Three. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2.

Cerne Valley, Charminster, Frome Valley and Yetminster wards

74 These single-member rural wards are situated in the north and centre of the district. The number of electors per councillor is 5 per cent below the district average (1 per cent below in 2006) in Cerne Valley ward, which comprises the parishes of Cerne Abbas, Godmanstone, Nether Cerne, Up Cerne, Stratton and Minterne Magna; 8 per cent above the district average (38 per cent above in 2006) in Charminster ward, which comprises the parish of Charminster; 6 per cent below (9 per cent below in 2006) in Frome Valley ward, which comprises the parishes of Cattistock, Chilfrome, Frampton, Frome St Quintin and Sydling St Nicholas, and 7 per cent above (4 per cent above in 2006) in Yetminster

ward, which comprises the parishes of Yetminster, Ryme Intrinseca, Chetnole, Stockwood and Beer Hackett.

75 At Stage One the District Council proposed a new two-member ward of Charminster & Cerne Valley as a solution to the projected sharp rise in the electorate of the existing Charminster ward. It proposed transferring the parishes of Stratton and Minterne Magna from the existing Cerne Valley ward to Frome Valley and Halstock wards respectively, and joining the remaining parishes in Cerne Valley ward (Cerne Abbas, Godmanstone, Nether Cerne and Upcerne) to Charminster ward to form the new ward. It also proposed enlarging the new ward by including the parish of Stinsford from the existing Puddletown ward. The Council stated that, under these proposals, the constituent parishes of the Cerne Valley Group would be kept together, while the similar parishes of Charminster and Stinsford, which both share a boundary with Dorchester, would be in the same ward. It noted that “whilst this may not be ideal, these arrangements would not interfere with the workings of either parish council”.

76 The District Council also proposed enlarging Frome Valley ward, in order to secure an improved level of electoral equality, by including the parish of Stratton from the existing Cerne Valley ward, noting that “Stratton Parish Council has, in the past, indicated that the parish had closer links with Bradford Peverell parish or the Frome Valley ward”. It further proposed transferring the parish of Melbury Osmond to Yetminster ward from Halstock ward, and transferring the parish of Beer Hackett from Yetminster ward to Bradford Abbas ward. The latter move would “unite all the constituent parishes of Thornhackett Group within a single ward”. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 18 per cent below the district average in Charminster & Cerne Valley ward (5 per cent below in 2006), 3 per cent above in Frome Valley ward (6 per cent above in 2006) and 3 per cent below in Yetminster ward (5 per cent below in 2006).

77 We have given careful consideration to all the District Council’s proposals for this area. We note that the Council’s proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while, we judge, providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. However, we are modifying the District Council’s proposals to include the parish of Bradford Peverell in the proposed Charminster and Cerne Valley ward (as detailed above) in order to secure good electoral equality. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent below the district average (4 per cent above in 2006) in Charminster & Cerne Valley ward, which would comprise the parishes of Charminster, Bradford Peverell, Cerne Abbas, Godmanstone, Nether Cerne, Stinsford and Up Cerne, 3 per cent above (6 per cent above in 2006) in Frome Valley ward, which would comprise the parishes of Cattistock, Chilfrome, Frampton, Frome St Quinton, Stratton and Sydling St Nicholas, and 3 per cent below (5 per cent below in 2006) in Yetminster ward, which would comprise the parishes of Yetminster, Chetnole, Melbury Osmond, Ryme Intrinseca and Stockwood. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from all interested parties on these proposals at Stage Three.

Bradford Abbas, Caundle Vale, Holnest and Queen Thorne wards

78 These single-member rural wards are situated in the north of the district, surrounding the town of Sherborne. The number of electors per councillor is 9 per cent above the district average (5 per cent above in 2006) in Bradford Abbas ward, which comprises the parishes of Bradford Abbas, Clifton Maybank and Thornford; 21 per cent below (24 per cent below in 2006) in Caundle Vale ward, which comprises the parishes of Bishop’s Caundle, Caundle Marsh, Folke, Haydon, Holwell, North Wootton and Purse Caundle; 4 per cent below (6 per cent below in 2006) in Holnest ward, which comprises the

parishes of Holnest, Batcombe, Hermitage, Hilfield, Leigh, Leweston, Lillington, Longburton and Melbury Bubb, and 13 per cent below (15 per cent below in 2006) in Queen Thorne ward, which comprises the parishes of Castleton, Goathill, Nether Compton, Over Compton, Osborne, Poyntington, Sandford Orcas and Trent.

79 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging Bradford Abbas ward by transferring to it the parish of Beer Hackett from Yetminster ward, thus including the constituent parishes of the Thornhackett Group in a single district ward. It also proposed modifying the boundary of Holnest ward by transferring to it the parishes of North Wootton, Holwell, and Folke from the existing Caundle Vale ward and transferring from it the parishes of Batcombe, Hilfield, Hermitage and Melbury Bubb to Halstock ward. In support of this proposal, the District Council stated that “there are sufficient road links between all the constituent parishes, which currently look to the towns of Sherborne or Yeovil for their local services”. The District Council further proposed enlarging Queen Thorne ward by including the parishes of Haydon, Bishops Caundle, Caundle Marsh and Purse Caundle from the existing Caundle Vale ward, citing a good road network and a “mix of similar parishes” in support. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average (3 per cent below in 2006) in Bradford Abbas ward, which would comprise the parishes of Bradford Abbas, Beer Hackett, Clifton Maybank and Thornford, 6 per cent above (3 per cent above in 2006) in Holnest ward, which would comprise the parishes of Holnest, Folke, Holwell, Leigh, Leweston, Lillington, Longburton and North Wootton, and 6 per cent above (3 per cent above in 2006) in Queen Thorne ward, which would comprise the parishes of Bishops Caundle, Castleton, Caundle Marsh, Goathill, Haydon, Nether Compton, Osborne, Over Compton, Poyntington, Purse Caundle, Sandford Orcas and Trent.

80 We have given careful consideration to the District Council’s proposals for this area. We note that the Council’s proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while, we judge, providing a reasonable reflection of local community identities. We acknowledge that, given the rural nature of this area, the configuration of parishes and the constraints of the district boundary, it is particularly difficult to secure revised district wards which provide for good electoral equality and meet the statutory criteria. Therefore, in the absence of evidence of opposition, we are adopting the proposals from the District Council as our draft recommendations for these wards. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from all interested parties on these proposals at Stage Three.

Sherborne East and Sherborne West wards

81 The urban wards of Sherborne East and Sherborne West, which are situated to the north of the district and together form the town of Sherborne, are represented by two and three members respectively. The boundaries of the district and parish wards are coterminous. The number of electors per councillor is 7 per cent above the district average (10 per cent above in 2006) in Sherborne East ward, which comprises the Sherborne East parish ward, and 4 per cent below (8 per cent below in 2006) in Sherborne West ward, which comprises the Sherborne West parish ward.

82 At Stage One the District Council proposed modifying the boundaries of both wards, transferring the Quarr Lane and Priestlands area from the West ward to the East ward in order to improve electoral equality. It further proposed reducing the number of councillors representing Sherborne West ward from three to two to ensure the appropriate balance of representation for the town under the reduced council size. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 6 per cent above the district

average in Sherborne East ward (8 per cent above 2006) and 13 per cent above in Sherborne West ward (8 per cent above in 2006).

83 We have given careful consideration to the District Council's proposals for this area. We note that the Council's proposals would provide significant improvements in electoral equality while, we judge, providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities. Therefore, in the absence of evidence of opposition, we are adopting the proposals from the District Council as our draft recommendations for these wards. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and Map A2 in Appendix A. We would welcome comments from Sherborne Town Council and local residents on these proposals at Stage Three.

Electoral Cycle

84 At Stage One we received one response regarding the District Council's electoral cycle. The District Council itself proposed that the electoral cycle remain unchanged with whole-council elections every four years. It stated that "a previous trial of elections by thirds in the 1980's resulted in significant confusion, particularly for the electorate. Members expressed the view that elections by thirds were unsuitable in an area such as West Dorset". **Until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order under the Local Government Act 2000, we continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas. We therefore propose no change to the Council's present system of whole-council elections at this time.**

Conclusions

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

- there should be a reduction in council size from 55 to 48;
- there should be 33 wards;
- the boundaries of 35 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of five, and three wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

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

- we propose modifications in and around Bridport, providing for a three-member Bridport South & Bothenhampton ward, a single-member Bradpole ward and a modified boundary between Bridport North and Bradpole wards;
- we propose retaining the parish of Bincombe in a revised Winterborne St Martin ward, and transferring the parish of Bradford Peverell to a new Charminster & Cerne Valley ward;

- we propose transferring the parish of Tolpuddle to Puddletown ward.

87 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	55	48	55	48
Number of wards	38	33	38	33
Average number of electors per councillor	1,358	1,556	1,435	1,644
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	17	4	19	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	8	0	9	0

88 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for West 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 four. By 2006 only Thorncombe ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Draft Recommendation

West Dorset District Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 33 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

89 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 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 ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes and towns of Bradpole, Bridport, Dorchester and Sherborne

90 The parish of Bradpole is currently served by 10 councillors and is unwarded. In the light of our draft recommendations for district wards in this area we are proposing to create two parish wards, Bradpole Village and Bradpole Claremont, to reflect the district ward boundaries. We propose that

Bradpole Village parish ward should be represented by nine councillors and Bradpole Claremont parish ward should be represented by a single councillor.

Draft Recommendation

Bradpole Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Bradpole Village (returning nine councillors) and Bradpole Claremont (one). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

91 The town of Bridport is currently served by 18 councillors representing two wards: Bridport North and Bridport South, each represented by nine councillors. In the light of our draft recommendations in this area we are proposing to modify the boundary between the two parish wards to reflect the district ward boundary.

Draft Recommendation

Bridport Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Bridport North and Bridport South, each returning nine councillors. The boundary between the two town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

92 The town of Dorchester is currently divided into four town wards, Dorchester East, Dorchester North, Dorchester South and Dorchester West, represented by four, three, five and five councillors respectively. In the light of our draft recommendations in this area we are proposing to modify the boundaries between the four parish wards to reflect the district ward boundaries. Furthermore, as the wards have a similar number of electors, we propose that each ward should be represented by four councillors, thus reducing the number of town councillors from 17 to 16.

Draft Recommendation

Dorchester Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, representing four wards: Dorchester East, Dorchester North, Dorchester South and Dorchester West, each returning four councillors. The boundaries between the four town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

93 The town of Sherborne is currently divided into two town wards, Sherborne East and Sherborne West, represented by five and seven councillors respectively. In the light of our draft recommendations in this area we are proposing to modify the boundary between the two parish wards to reflect the district ward boundary. Furthermore, as the wards have a similar number of electors, we propose that each ward should be represented by six councillors.

Draft Recommendation

Sherborne Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Sherborne East and Sherborne West, each returning six councillors. The boundary between the two town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

94 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 West Dorset

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

95 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for West 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.

96 Express your views by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
West 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

97 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 West Dorset: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the West 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 Map A2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Sherborne.

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

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for West Dorset: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Sherborne

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 D1: 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.