

Draft recommendations

The
Local Government
Boundary Commission
for England



New electoral arrangements for Sedgemoor District Council

May 2010

Translations and other formats

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Tel: 08703 810153

Email: publications@lgbce.org.uk

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Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body which conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. The broad purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements – the number of councillors and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions – for a specific local authority. We are conducting an electoral review of Sedgemoor to ensure that the local authority has appropriate electoral arrangements that reflect its functions and political management structure.

The review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same. The Boundary Committee for England commenced the review in 2009. However, on 1 April 2010, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee and is now conducting the review. It therefore falls to us to complete the work of the Boundary Committee.

This review is being conducted as follows:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	27 October 2009	Submission of proposals to the Boundary Committee on council size for the authority and warding arrangements
Two	19 January 2010	Boundary Committee's analysis and deliberation
Three	25 May 2010	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	20 July 2010	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Submissions received

The Boundary Committee received 12 representations during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from Sedgemoor District Council and the Labour Group on the council. The Committee also received localised evidence of community identity from parish and town councils in the district. All submissions can be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

Sedgemoor District Council submitted electorate forecasts for December 2013, a period five years on from the December 2008 electoral roll which is the basis for this review. These forecasts projected an increase in the electorate of 4.7% over this period. Although we have some concern that this level of growth appears somewhat high, we note that during the five-year period 2003-2008, the electorate in Sedgemoor increased by 5.6%. On balance, we are therefore satisfied that they are the most accurate electorate figures that can be provided at this time.

Council size

Sedgemoor currently has 50 councillors. The Boundary Committee received proposals for council size ranging from 48 to 46 members. Sedgemoor District Council proposed a council size of 48 members, while the Labour Group on the Council proposed 46. The Boundary Committee requested further evidence from both the Council and the Labour Group to support their proposed council sizes. Subsequently, the Council submitted further evidence in support of its proposal for a council size of 48 members. In light of that evidence, the Committee decided to adopt a council size of 48 members for the purposes of this review.

General analysis

Having considered the submissions received during Stage One, we have developed proposals which focus on achieving good electoral equality and strong boundaries that would provide for effective and convenient local government. Where respondents have provided evidence of community identity, we have sought to reflect this in the proposals.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on the draft recommendations on the proposed electoral arrangements for Sedgemoor District Council contained in the report. **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.** We will take into account all submissions received by **19 July 2010**. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We would particularly welcome local views backed up by demonstrable evidence. 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:

Review Officer
Sedgemoor Review
The Local Government Boundary Commission for England
76–86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG
reviews@lgbce.org.uk

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

1 Introduction

1 In March 2009, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee for England (the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's predecessor) to conduct a review of the electoral arrangements for Sedgemoor District Council. The review commenced on 27 October 2009. The Boundary Committee wrote to Sedgemoor as well as other interested parties, inviting the submission of proposals on the council size and warding arrangements for the new council. The submissions received during this stage of the review have informed the Commission's draft recommendations.

2 On 1 April 2010, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee. The Commission is now conducting a full public consultation on the draft recommendations. Following this period of consultation, we will consider the evidence received and will publish final recommendations for the new electoral arrangements for Sedgemoor District Council in autumn 2010.

What is an electoral review?

3 The main aim of an electoral review is to try to ensure 'electoral equality', which means that all councillors in a single authority represent approximately the same number of electors. Our objective is to make recommendations that will improve electoral equality, while also trying to reflect communities in the area and provide for effective and convenient local government.

4 Our three main considerations – equalising the number of electors each councillor represents; reflecting community identity; and providing for effective and convenient local government – are set out in legislation¹ and our task is to strike the best balance between them when making our recommendations.

5 Our powers, as well as the guidance we have provided for electoral reviews and further information on the review process, can be found on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Why are we conducting a review in Sedgemoor?

6 In March 2009, the Electoral Commission directed the review because, based on the December 2008 electorate figures, the existing Sandford ward and Bridgwater Victoria ward had 56% more and 38% more electors respectively than the district average.

7 As discussed in paragraphs 1–2 and 6, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to conduct an electoral review. However, following the Local Government Boundary Commission for England assuming the functions of the Boundary Committee, the Commission is now conducting the review. It therefore falls to us to complete the work of the Boundary Committee.

¹ Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

How will the recommendations affect you?

8 The recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the council. They will also decide which ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward and, in some instances, which parish or town council wards you vote in. Your ward name may change, as may the names of parish or town council wards in the area. If you live in a parish, the name or boundaries of that parish will not change.

9 It is therefore important that you let us have your comments and views on the draft recommendations. We encourage comments from everyone in the community, regardless of whether you agree with the draft recommendations or not. The draft recommendations are evidence-based and we would therefore like to stress the importance of providing evidence in any comments on our recommendations, rather than relying on assertion. We will be accepting comments and views until 19 July 2010. After this point, we will be formulating our final recommendations which we are due to publish in autumn 2010. Details on how to submit proposals can be found on page 19 and more information can be found on our website, at www.lgbce.org.uk.

What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

10 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Members of the Commission are:

Max Caller CBE (Chair)
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL (Deputy Chair)
Jane Earl
Joan Jones CBE
Professor Colin Mellors

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill
Director of Reviews: Archie Gall

2 Analysis and draft recommendations

11 Before finalising our recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Sedgemoor District Council, we invite views on these draft recommendations. We welcome comments relating to the proposed ward boundaries, ward names, and parish or town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

12 As described earlier, our prime aim when recommending new electoral arrangements for Sedgemoor is to achieve a level of electoral fairness – that is, each elector’s vote being worth the same as another’s. In doing so we must have regard to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009,² with the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government
- provide for equality of representation
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities, in particular
 - the desirability of arriving at boundaries that easily identifiable
 - the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties

13 Legislation also states that our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on the existing number of electors in an area, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of electors likely to take place over a five-year period. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for the wards we put forward at the end of the review.

14 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral fairness is unlikely to be attainable and there must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach is to keep variances in the number of electors each councillor represents to a minimum. We therefore recommend strongly that, in formulating proposals for us to consider, local authorities and other interested parties should also try to keep variances to a minimum, making adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. As mentioned above, we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral fairness over a five-year period.

15 These recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of Sedgemoor District Council or the external boundaries or names of parish or town councils, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that the recommendations will have an adverse effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. The proposals do not take account of parliamentary constituency boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Submissions received

16 Prior to and during the initial stage of the review, members and officers of the Boundary Committee visited Sedgemoor District Council and met with members, officers and parish and town councils. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-

² Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

operation and assistance. The Boundary Committee received 12 submissions during its initial consultation, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the Council. All representations received can also be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk.

Electorate figures

17 As part of this review, Sedgemoor District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2013, projecting an increase in the electorate by 4.7% over the five-year period from 2008–13.

18 The Boundary Committee raised some questions about whether this rate of growth would be realised. However, it was noted that during the five-year period 2003–08, the electorate of the area covered by Sedgemoor increased by 5.6%. We are also satisfied that the methodology provided by the Council to support the electorate figures was robust.

19 We acknowledge that electorate projections are not an exact science, but consider that the Council's forecasts are the best presently available and have based out draft recommendations on them.

Council size

20 Sedgemoor District Council currently has 50 members. However, this review provides an opportunity to consider the number of members required for the authority to provide effective and convenient local government.

21 During Stage One, the Boundary Committee consulted on the most appropriate number of councillors for Sedgemoor ('council size'). At that stage, only two submissions proposed council sizes for the authority: Sedgemoor District Council (the Council) proposed 48 members and the Labour Group on the Council 46 members.

22 The Council provided evidence in support of its proposed council size in the context of the proposed political management structure of the authority. The Council outlined the current Leader and Executive political management structure with an Executive of nine members that meets every three weeks. In addition, the Executive meets quarterly to discuss the Council's performance.

23 The Labour Group's proposal placed emphasis on maintaining the correct balance between the rural and urban divide within Sedgemoor. They took the view that single-member wards should be for clearly defined villages; two-member wards for linked rural communities and small towns; and three-member wards for large towns. Consequently, the Labour Group felt that 46 members would be sufficient for the Council to operate its governance arrangements effectively.

24 Following the Committee's deliberations, further information was requested from both respondents to support their proposed council sizes. The Council responded to this request, and we note from their further information that it undertook a full review of the committee structure and committee membership in 2006. The Council believed that 48 members would have little or no change in the average number of members serving on committees.

25 In the absence of persuasive evidence to the contrary, we are of the view that a council size of 48 members would provide effective and convenient local government within Sedgemoor District Council.

Electoral fairness

26 As discussed in the introduction to this report, the prime aim of an electoral review is to achieve electoral fairness within a local authority.

27 Electoral fairness, 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. It is expected that the Commission's recommendations should provide for electoral fairness whilst ensuring that we reflect communities in the area, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

28 In seeking to achieve electoral fairness, we work out the average number of electors per councillor. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district (88,589 in December 2008 and 92,788 by December 2013) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 48 under our draft recommendations. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 1,846 in 2008 and 1,933 by 2013.

29 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in two of the 23 wards will vary by more than 10% from the average across the district by 2013. However, overall, we are satisfied that we have achieved reasonable levels of electoral fairness under our draft recommendations for Sedgemoor.

General analysis

30 During Stage One, two district-wide schemes were received. These were from Sedgemoor District Council and the Labour Group on the Council. The district-wide schemes were based on council sizes of 48 and 46 respectively. The two schemes put forward a pattern of single- and multi-member wards. The Labour Group did not indicate where the exact boundaries of wards should fall. Both the Council and the Labour Group provided limited evidence of community identity to support their respective proposals.

31 Further examination of the Council's scheme showed what appeared to be a somewhat arbitrary split of the parish of Burnham Without. In addition, under the Council's proposals the parish of Lyng would be in the same ward as the parishes of Middlezoy, Othery, Greinton, Moorlinch and Stawell, despite being detached from this group of parishes. We do not believe that the use of detached wards is desirable, other than to recognise particularly unusual circumstances (e.g. offshore islands) and we do not normally recommend them.

32 The Council provided only limited evidence to support its warding proposals. It did not provide a commentary on, for example, the community identity considerations relating to each ward. We also had concerns over the level of electoral equality achieved under the Council's proposals: in seven out of 30 wards the number of

electors represented by each councillor would vary by more than 10% from the average by 2013.

33 The remainder of the submissions received during Stage One were localised comments, with several respondents providing evidence of community identities and interests to support of their particular proposals.

34 Given our observations on the Council's proposals, and the limited evidence received from other respondents, in developing our draft recommendations we have focused on achieving good electoral equality and strong ward boundaries that, in our view, reflect community identities. In doing so, we noted a number of overspill developments surrounding the two towns of Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge and Bridgwater, that fall outside the town councils' areas but nevertheless appear to form part of the towns. Having visited these areas, we believe that a better reflection of community identity would be achieved by warding these areas with the urban parts of the towns, rather than respecting the town council boundaries. Our draft recommendations reflect this approach. As a result, there is little comparison between our draft recommendations and the Council's proposals. Accordingly, we have not detailed the Council's proposals in this report. However, they can be viewed on our website, at www.lgbce.org.uk.

35 Given our views on the development overspill over the Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge and Bridgwater town council boundaries, we would encourage the Council to consider the merits of a community governance review to consider whether those boundaries areas are appropriate.

36 Our proposals are for a pattern of four single-member wards, 13 two-member wards and six three-member wards. We consider our proposals provide good electoral equality while, in our view, providing a reasonable reflection of community identities and interests.

37 A summary of our proposed electoral arrangements is set out in Table C1 (on pages 28–29) and Map 1.

38 During Stage Three we welcome comments on these draft recommendations, particularly in relation to those areas where we did not receive representations during Stage One. We also particularly welcome comments on the names of our proposed wards, at both district and parish level.

Electoral arrangements

39 In developing our draft recommendations, we have taken into account the six 'parish clusters' that Sedgemoor District Council has asserted will take on more devolved decision-making responsibilities. Having these six demarcated areas has been helpful when calculating the allocation of district councillors for each of these areas and developing ward patterns. We have departed from these clusters only in one area, where the Moors parish cluster spans the River Parrett to the south of Bridgwater, where there is no crossing point. Nevertheless, for ease of reference, our draft recommendations in this report are presented in the order of Sedgemoor's parish clusters. The following areas are considered in turn:

- Coastal parish cluster, less Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge (page 9)
- Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge (pages 9–10)
- Cheddar Valley parish cluster (pages 10–11)
- Polden Hills parish cluster and part of Moors parish cluster (pages 11–12)
- Quantock parish cluster and part of Moors parish cluster (pages 12–13)
- Bridgwater parish cluster (pages 13–14)

40 Details of the draft recommendations are set out in Table C1 on pages 28–29, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Coastal parish cluster, less Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge

41 The area designated as the Coastal parish cluster broadly comprises the north-western area of Sedgemoor. Excluding the area of Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge, this area is generally rural in character, with the extreme most north-westerly point being known as a summer tourist holiday area.

42 During Stage One, in addition to district-wide proposals discussed previously, the Boundary Committee received a submission in relation to this area from Berrow Parish Council, which expressed the view that it would not like to see the parish divided between wards.

43 Our draft recommendations ensure that the wards proposed have good access within them and, in our view and based on our visit to the area, would reflect the communities within them. We propose a mixture of single- and multi-member wards. Under our draft recommendations, our Berrow ward would contain the parishes of Berrow and Brean, and would have 2% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. Our Knoll ward would contain the parishes of Brent Knoll, East Brent, East Huntspill and Lympham and part of the parish of Burnham Without, and would have 7% more electors; and our Huntspill & Pawlett ward would contain the parish of Pawlett and part of the parish of West Huntspill, and would have 2% more electors than the average.

44 Our recommendations divide both West Huntspill and Burnham Without parishes, to take areas of overspill within these parishes into the town wards. This is discussed further below. Berrow parish would not be split between wards under these proposals.

45 Our draft recommendations for the wards in this cluster are outlined in Table C1 on pages 28–29 of the report, and are displayed on the large maps accompanying the report.

Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge

46 Although both towns form part of the Coastal parish cluster, for clarity we have treated them as a separate area as, taken together, they constitute the second largest settlement in Sedgemoor. Located at the mouths of the rivers Brue and Parrett, Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge is a popular seaside resort, sharing one town council.

47 During Stage One, in addition to district-wide proposals discussed previously, the Boundary Committee received a submission in relation to this area from Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge Town Council. The Town Council stated that it was satisfied with the existing warding arrangements but, if change was necessary, then the parish of Burnham Without should be included within the Highbridge ward due to the overspill in housing. The Town Council also expressed a preference for Marine Parish Ward to be in a Burnham-on-Sea district ward. It also said that consideration should be given to using police boundaries as the basis of warding patterns.

48 We have carefully considered the Town Council's arguments and, as detailed previously in the report, have taken note of the significant areas of housing overspill in Burnham Without parish. Having visited the area, we consider there are three areas – to the south in Alstone and two areas to the east in Burnham Without – that in the interests of better reflecting community identities in the area, should form part of the Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge district wards. We are therefore proposing three three-member wards covering the town.

49 Under our draft recommendations, Burnham North ward would have 5% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013; Burnham Central would have 1% fewer; and Highbridge & Burnham South would have 7% more.

50 Our draft recommendations for the wards in Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge are outlined in Table C1 on pages 28–29 of the report, and are displayed on the large maps accompanying the report.

Cheddar Valley parish cluster

51 The area designated as the Cheddar Valley parish cluster broadly comprises the north-eastern area of Sedgemoor and is generally rural in character, characterised by both large and small settlements.

52 During Stage One, in addition to district-wide proposals discussed previously, the Boundary Committee received a submission in relation to this area from Axbridge Parish Council. The Parish Council expressed a preference for retaining the existing ward, which is based on its parish boundaries.

53 As mentioned previously, generating warding arrangements within parish clusters has been difficult given the limited evidence received from respondents. Therefore, we have focused on achieving good electoral equality while not dividing parishes, other than where there is an evident overspill of housing which continues on to an adjacent parish.

54 Taking these factors into consideration, our draft recommendations ensure that the wards proposed have good access within them and, in our view and based on our visit to the area, would reflect the communities within them. We propose a mixture of two- and three-member wards. Under our draft recommendations, Axe ward would contain the parishes of Axbridge, Badgworth, Chapel Allerton, Compton Bishop and Weare, and would have 11% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. Our Cheddar & Shipham ward would contain the parishes of Cheddar and Shipham, and would have 2% fewer electors per councillor than the

average; and our Wedmore & Mark ward would contain the parishes of Mark and Wedmore, and would have 2% fewer electors than the average.

55 We considered the submission put forward by Axbridge Parish Council. However, retaining the existing Axbridge ward would result in it having 17% fewer electors than the district average. We do not consider such a variance is justified in the circumstances, given the lack of evidence provided and the alternatives available.

56 Our draft recommendations for the wards in this cluster are outlined in Table C1 on pages 28–29 of the report, and are displayed on the large maps accompanying the report.

Polden Hills parish cluster and part of Moors parish cluster

57 The area designated as the Polden Hills parish cluster and part of the Moors parish cluster, which lies to the east of the River Parrett, broadly comprises the south-eastern area of Sedgemoor and is typically characterised by rural settlements.

58 During Stage One, in addition to district-wide proposals discussed previously, the Boundary Committee received three submissions in relation to this area, from Stawell Parish Council, Ashcott Parish Council and Shapwick Parish Council. It also received a submission from a local resident who was unhappy with the current arrangements in Moorlinch Parish Meeting.

59 Stawell Parish Council expressed the view that it would not want to be separated from the village of Sutton Mallett. Ashcott Parish Council commented that it would prefer to see the whole parish contained within one ward. Shapwick Parish Council said it would like to see single-member wards across the entire district, arguing that this would be ‘cost-efficient’.

60 The geography of Sedgemoor has made it a challenge in developing warding arrangements in this area. The River Parrett cuts through the Moors parish cluster and there is no convenient crossing point (unless travelling through Bridgwater). This makes it problematic to base a scheme solely on the Moors area. Given the lack of a crossing, we have found it necessary to divide the Moors area along the River Parrett and, for the purposes of district warding, group the parishes on either bank with the adjoining parish cluster.

61 Our draft recommendations ensure that the wards proposed have good access within them and, in our view and based on our visit to the area, would reflect the communities within them. We propose a mixture of single- and multi-member wards. Under our draft recommendations, our Puriton & Woolavington ward would contain the parishes of Cossington, Puriton and Woolavington, and would equal the average number of electors per councillor by 2013. Our East Polden ward would contain the parishes of Ashcott, Greinton, Moorlinch and Shapwick, and would have 10% fewer electors; our West Polden ward would contain the parishes of Burtle, Catcott, Chilton Polden, Edington and Stawell, and would have 3% more electors than the average; and our King’s Isle ward would contain the parishes of Bawdrip, Bridgwater Without, Chedzoy, Middlezoy, Othery, and Westonzoyland, and would have 5% fewer electors per councillor than the average.

62 We are mindful that a two-member ward can be created in place of the two single-member wards (East Polden and West Polden), resulting in a ward with 4% fewer electors per councillor than the district average. However, we consider that two single-member wards would better reflect local views – particularly that of Shapwick Parish Council who recommended single-member wards across Sedgemoor – without adversely affecting electoral equality. Having visited the area, we are satisfied that the communication links between the parishes across the A39 are adequate.

63 Our draft recommendations for the wards in this cluster are outlined in Table C1 on pages 28–29 of the report, and are displayed on the large maps accompanying the report.

Quantock parish cluster and part of Moors parish cluster

64 For the reasons set out above, the area to the west of River Parrett in the Moors parish cluster has been grouped with the Quantock parish cluster. This area broadly comprises the south-western area of Sedgemoor and is generally rural and hilly in character. Much of the area is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

65 During Stage One, in addition to the district-wide proposals discussed previously, the Boundary Committee received submissions in relation to this area from Nether Stowey Parish Council and from a town councillor.

66 The Parish Council expressed its preference for remaining part of the existing Cannington & Quantocks ward. However, while this ward would have a variance of 1%, were we to adopt it as part of our draft recommendations, it would have a profound knock-on effect on the neighbouring wards resulting in large variances. After the close of the first consultation stage, the Parish Council sent in a further submission expressing its opposition to the Council's submission to link it with Cannington, arguing that it had always been a part of the Quantock Hills area.

67 The Deputy Mayor of North Petherton Town Council, writing in a personal capacity, proposed alternative parish warding arrangements for North Petherton Town Council. This is discussed in the 'Parish electoral arrangements' section later in the report.

68 After visiting this area and taking into consideration the fact that we had limited evidence from the local community on which to base our draft recommendations, we propose a mixture of two- and three-member wards for this area.

69 Under our draft recommendations, our North Petherton ward would contain the parishes of Broomfield, Goathurst, Lyng, Thurloxtan and part of North Petherton; and would have 1% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013. Our Cannington ward would contain the parish of Cannington, and parts of Durleigh and Wembdon parishes, and would have 2% fewer electors.

70 We have considered Nether Stowey Parish Council's submission and agree that the parish looks more to the Quantock Hills than to Cannington. Our Quantocks ward would contain the parishes of Enmore, Fiddington, Nether Stowey, Otterhampton,

Over Stowey, Spaxton and Stockland Bristol, and would have 6% fewer electors per councillor than the district average. While the Quantocks ward stretches along the south-west edge of the district, our visit revealed sufficient transport links between the parishes within this ward.

71 Our draft recommendations divide the parishes of Durleigh, North Petherton and Wembdon, to take areas of overspill within these parishes into the town wards. This is discussed further below.

72 Our draft recommendations for the wards in this cluster are outlined in Table C1 on pages 28–29 of the report, and are displayed on the large maps accompanying the report.

Bridgwater parish cluster

73 Bridgwater is the largest town in Sedgemoor, and third largest in Somerset. Developing warding arrangements for the town has presented challenges, since the River Parrett splits the town and provides a significant barrier between the east and west of the town. However, we have been able to respect this barrier and treat both halves of the town separately.

74 During Stage One, in addition to district-wide proposals discussed previously, the Boundary Committee received a submission in relation to this area from Bridgwater Town Council. The Town Council stated that the current number of district councillors who represent the area of Bridgwater should remain at 16; that the current boundaries of the town and town wards should remain the same; and that the number of members representing Bridgwater Victoria ward should be three and Bridgwater Quantock ward should be two.

Western half of Bridgwater

75 In the western half of Bridgwater, our visit to the area confirmed that there are three places with overspill of housing outside the town council's boundaries. Although Bridgwater Town Council commented in its submission that it wanted the town council boundaries to remain the same, our view is that this evident overspill should be included under each of the proposed wards in the western half of the town for district electoral arrangements. The parishes that are affected by the overspill of housing development are Wembdon (to the north of Bridgwater), Durleigh (to the west) and North Petherton (to the south).

76 Our draft recommendations for wards in this half of the town are for four two-member wards and, in our view, keep communities together while ensuring good access within the wards. Our proposed Bridgwater Hamp ward would have 9% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2013; Bridgwater Quantocks ward would have 6% more; Bridgwater Victoria ward would have 7% more and Bridgwater North ward would have 12% more.

Eastern half of Bridgwater

77 Our warding pattern in the east of the town is dictated to some degree by the railway line running north–south through the eastern half of the town. Having visited the area, we recommend retaining the existing Bridgwater Eastover ward, between the river and the railway line. It is necessary to breach the railway at some point as

there are not enough electors between the river and railway to merit two councillors. The railway line is only crossable in two places and the crossing further north does not allow for a suitable warding pattern; there are simply insufficient electors near this point to combine with the rest of Eastover ward. As confirmed during our visit to the area, there are evident communication links to housing situated across the railway line, which is necessary to be included as part of this ward; without these additional electors Bridgwater Eastover ward would have 12% fewer electors per councillor than the district average.

78 In reaching our conclusions for Bridgwater Parkway and Bridgwater Bower, we have sought not to divide significant housing estates and ensure there is good access between them.

79 Our draft recommendations for wards in this half of the town consist of a mixture of two- and three-member wards: Bridgwater Eastover ward would have 3% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2013; Bridgwater Parkway ward would have 5% fewer and Bridgwater Bower ward would equal the average number of electors per councillor by 2013.

80 Our draft recommendations for the wards in this cluster are outlined in Table C1 on pages 28–29 of the report, and are displayed on the large maps accompanying the report.

Conclusions

81 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Table C1 on pages 28–29 and illustrated on a number of large maps we have produced. The outline map which accompanies this report shows our draft recommendations for the whole authority. It also shows two boxes for which we have produced more detailed maps. These maps are available to be viewed on our website. If you require a copy of any large-scale detailed maps from our website, please contact us using the details found in Chapter 3 of this report.

82 Table 1 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements based on 2008 and 2013 electorate figures.

Table 1: Summary of electoral arrangements

	Draft recommendations	
	2008	2013
Number of councillors	48	48
Number of electoral wards	23	23
Average number of electors per councillor	1,846	1,933
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	1	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	0	0

Draft recommendation

Sedgemoor District Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 23 wards, as detailed and named in Table C1 and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

83 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

84 During Stage One, the Deputy Mayor of North Petherton Town Council, writing in a personal capacity, suggested changes to parish electoral arrangements in North Petherton. We have taken into consideration this submission but proposed alternative parish electoral arrangements which are discussed in detail below.

85 To meet our obligations under the 2009 Act, we propose consequential parish warding arrangements for the parishes of Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge, Burnham Without, Durleigh, North Petherton, Wembdon and West Huntspill.

86 We would particularly welcome comments on these proposals from the parish councils concerned and local residents during this consultation stage.

87 The town of Bridgwater is currently divided into six parish wards: Bower (returning three members), Eastover (returning two members), Hamp (returning three

members), Quantocks (returning three members), Sydenham (returning three members) and Victoria (returning two members).

88 As a result of our proposed electoral ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Bridgwater Town Council.

Draft recommendations

Bridgwater Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing seven wards: Hamp (returning two members), Quantocks (returning two members), Victoria (returning three members), North (returning two members), Eastover (returning two members), Parkway (returning two members) and Bower (returning three members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Maps 1 and 3.

89 The parish of Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge is currently divided into six parish wards: North (returning six members), West (returning one member), East (returning two members), Central & South (returning three members), Marine (returning one member) and Highbridge (returning five members).

90 As a result of our proposed electoral ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge Town Council.

Draft recommendations

Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, as at present, representing six wards: North (returning six members), West (returning one member), East (returning two members), Central (returning three members), Marine (returning one member) and Highbridge (returning five members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Maps 1 and 2.

91 The parish of Burnham Without is not currently divided into parish wards and has seven parish councillors representing the area.

92 As a result of our proposed electoral ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Burnham Without parish.

Draft recommendations

Burnham Without Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Edithmead (returning two members), Brue (returning two members) and Highbridge and Burnham South (returning three members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Maps 1 and 2.

93 The parish of Durleigh is not currently divided into parish wards and has six parish councillors representing the area.

94 As a result of our proposed electoral ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Durleigh parish.

Draft recommendations

Durleigh Parish Council should comprise six councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Durleigh (returning one member), and Bridgwater Quantocks (returning five members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Maps 1 and 3.

95 The parish of North Petherton is currently divided into three parish wards: North Newton (returning three members), North Petherton (returning eight members) and Northmoor Green (returning three members).

96 As a result of our proposed electoral ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for North Petherton parish.

Draft recommendations

North Petherton Parish Council should comprise 14 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Bridgwater Hamp (returning one member), North Newton (returning two members), North Petherton (returning ten members) and Northmoor Green (returning one member). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Maps 1 and 3.

97 The parish of Wembdon is not currently divided into parish wards and has 10 parish councillors representing the area.

98 As a result of our proposed electoral ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Wembdon parish.

Draft recommendations

Wembdon Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Wembdon (returning seven members), Bridgwater North (returning three members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Maps 1 and 3.

99 The parish of West Huntspill is not currently divided into parish wards and has seven parish councillors representing the area.

100 As a result of our proposed electoral ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for West Huntspill parish.

Draft recommendations

West Huntspill Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Alstone (returning one member) and West Huntspill (returning six members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Maps 1 and 2.

3 What happens next?

101 There will now be a consultation period of eight weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Sedgemoor District Council contained in this report. We will take into account fully all submissions received by 19 July 2010. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

102 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Sedgemoor and welcome comments from interested parties relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We would welcome alternative proposals 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.

103 Express your views by writing directly to:

Review Officer
Sedgemoor Review
The Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76–86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG

reviews@lgbce.org.uk

Submissions can also be made by using the consultation section of our website, www.lgbce.org.uk or by emailing reviews@lgbce.org.uk.

104 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, we make available for public inspection full copies of all representations the Commission 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 Sedgemoor District Council and at our offices in Layden House (London) and on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

105 If you are a member of the public and not writing on behalf of a council or organisation we will remove any personal identifiers, such as postal or email addresses, signatures or phone numbers from your submission before it is made public. We will remove signatures from all letters, no matter who they are from.

106 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 the draft recommendations. We will then publish our final recommendations.

107 After the publication of our final recommendations, the changes we have proposed must be approved by Parliament. An Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in draft in Parliament. Parliament can either accept or reject our recommendations. If accepted, the new electoral arrangements will come into force at the next elections for Sedgemoor District Council in 2011.

4 Mapping

Draft recommendations for Sedgemoor

108 The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Sedgemoor District Council:

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Sedgemoor District Council.
- **Sheet 2, Map 2** illustrates the proposed wards in Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge.
- **Sheet 3, Map 3** illustrates the proposed wards in Bridgwater.

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
Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England was a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Boundary Committee's functions were assumed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in April 2010
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve on a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever division they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. It regulates party and election finance and sets standards for well-run elections

Electoral fairness	When one elector's vote is worth the same as another's
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. For the purposes of this report, we refer specifically to the electorate for local government elections
Local Government Boundary Commission for England or LGBCE	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee for England in April 2010
Multi-member ward or division	A ward or division represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and can be found at www.nationalparks.gov.uk
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 or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority 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 electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town Council'
Parish (or Town) Council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; 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 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 and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enabled local authorities in England to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from two broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet or a cabinet with a leader
Town Council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at www.nalc.gov.uk
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average

Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (November 2000) (http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/consult/code/_consultation.pdf) 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 Local Government Boundary Commission for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table B1: The Local Government Boundary Commission 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 consult at the start of the review and on our draft recommendations. Our consultation stages are a minimum total of 16 weeks.

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.

Appendix C

Table C1: Draft recommendations for Sedgemoor District Council

	Electoral ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Axe	2	3,385	1,693	-8%	3,436	1,718	-11%
2	Berrow	1	1,837	1,837	0%	1,887	1,887	-2%
3	Bridgwater Bower	3	5,654	1,885	2%	5,788	1,929	0%
4	Bridgwater Eastover	2	3,309	1,655	-10%	3,745	1,873	-3%
5	Bridgwater Hamp	2	4,029	2,015	9%	4,206	2,103	9%
6	Bridgwater North	2	4,226	2,113	14%	4,328	2,164	12%
7	Bridgwater Parkway	2	3,630	1,815	-2%	3,663	1,832	-5%
8	Bridgwater Quantocks	2	3,770	1,885	2%	4,113	2,057	6%
9	Bridgwater Victoria	2	3,782	1,891	2%	4,135	2,068	7%
10	Burnham Central	3	5,553	1,851	0%	5,715	1,905	-1%
11	Burnham North	3	5,376	1,792	-3%	5,533	1,844	-5%
12	Cannington	2	3,740	1,870	1%	3,798	1,899	-2%
13	Cheddar & Shipham	3	5,515	1,838	0%	5,711	1,904	-2%

	Electoral ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
14	East Polden	1	1,719	1,719	-7%	1,741	1,741	-10%
15	Highbridge & Burnham South	3	5,528	1,843	0%	6,190	2,063	7%
16	Huntspill & Pawlett	1	1,923	1,923	4%	1,963	1,963	2%
17	King's Isle	2	3,546	1,773	-4%	3,676	1,838	-5%
18	Knoll	2	4,010	2,005	9%	4,146	2,073	7%
19	North Petherton	3	4,993	1,664	-10%	5,736	1,912	-1%
20	Puriton & Woolavington	2	3,834	1,917	4%	3,875	1,938	0%
21	Quantocks	2	3,586	1,793	-3%	3,625	1,813	-6%
22	Wedmore & Mark	2	3,717	1,859	1%	3,789	1,895	-2%
23	West Polden	1	1,927	1,927	4%	1,989	1,989	3%
	Totals	48	88,589	-	-	92,788	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,846	-	-	1,933	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Sedgemoor 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.

Appendix D

Additional legislation we have considered

Equal opportunities

In preparing this report we have 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 the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

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

We have 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.
- 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.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Layden House
76–86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG

Tel: 08703 810153
info@lgbce.org
www.lgbce.org

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament in April 2010. It is independent of Government and political parties, and is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. It is responsible for conducting boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government areas.