

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Weymouth & Portland in Dorset

October 2001

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

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

SUMMARY

We began a review of Weymouth & Portland'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 Weymouth & Portland:

- **in six of the 14 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and two wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to marginally deteriorate, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in seven wards and by more than 20 per cent in three wards.**

Our main proposals for Weymouth & Portland's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 71-72) are that:

- **Weymouth & Portland Borough Council should have 36 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 15 wards instead of 14 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of all the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In all of the proposed 15 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to marginally deteriorate, with the number of electors per councillor in 14 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough by 2006.**

Recommendations are also made for changes to Portland Town Council's electoral arrangements which provide for:

- **revised warding arrangements for Portland Town Council.**

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:

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Weymouth & Portland Review
LGCE
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU**

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Website: www.lgce.gov.uk**

Table 1: Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map Reference
1	Bincombe Valley	2	part of North Central ward; part of Preston ward	Large map and Map 2
2	Melcombe Regis	3	part of Radipole ward; part of Melcombe Regis ward	Large map and Map 2
3	Preston	3	part of Preston ward; part of North Central ward	Large map and Map 2
4	Radipole	2	part of North Central ward; part of Preston ward; part of Radipole ward	Large map and Map 2
5	Spa & Redlands	2	part of North ward; part of North Central ward; part of Preston ward; part of Radipole ward	Large map and Map 2
6	Tophill East (in Portland)	2	part of Portland Town (the proposed Tophill East town ward)	Maps 2, A2 and A3
7	Tophill West (in Portland)	3	part of Portland Town (the proposed Tophill West town ward)	Maps 2, A2 and A3
8	Underhill (in Portland)	2	part of Portland Town (the proposed Underhill town ward)	Maps 2 and A2
9	Upwey & Broadwey	2	part of North ward; part of North Central ward	Large map and Map 2
10	Westham East	2	part of Westham East ward; part of Westham North ward; part of Weymouth East ward	Large map and Map 2
11	Westham North	3	part of North Central ward; part of Westham East ward; part of Westham North ward; part of Westham West ward	Large map and Map 2
12	Westham West	2	part of Westham East ward; part of Westham North ward; part of Westham West ward	Large map and Map 2
13	Weymouth East	2	part of Weymouth East ward; part of Weymouth West ward	Large map and Map 2
14	Weymouth West	3	part of Weymouth East ward; part of Weymouth West ward	Large map and Map 2
15	Wyke Regis	3	part of Weymouth West ward; Wyke Regis ward	Large map and Map 2

Notes: 1 Portland is the only parished part of the borough and comprises the three wards indicated above.

2 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map at the back of this 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 Weymouth & Portland

	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	Bincombe Valley	2	2,460	1,230	-7	2,638	1,319	-5
2	Melcombe Regis	3	4,072	1,357	2	4,417	1,472	6
3	Preston	3	4,289	1,430	8	4,326	1,442	4
4	Radipole	2	2,788	1,394	5	2,812	1,406	1
5	Spa & Redlands	2	2,686	1,343	1	2,747	1,374	-1
6	Tophill East (in Portland)	2	2,384	1,192	-10	2,522	1,261	-9
7	Tophill West (in Portland)	3	3,745	1,248	-6	3,930	1,310	-6
8	Underhill (in Portland)	2	2,666	1,333	0	3,084	1,542	11
9	Upwey & Broadwey	2	2,816	1,408	6	2,852	1,426	3
10	Westham East	2	2,594	1,297	-2	2,802	1,401	1
11	Westham North	3	4,010	1,337	1	4,337	1,446	4
12	Westham West	2	2,490	1,245	-6	2,490	1,245	-10
13	Weymouth East	2	2,812	1,406	6	2,868	1,434	3
14	Weymouth West	3	3,865	1,288	-3	3,978	1,326	-5
15	Wyke Regis	3	4,192	1,397	5	4,209	1,403	1
	Totals	36	47,869	-	-	50,012	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,330	-	-	1,389	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Weymouth & Portland Borough 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 borough. 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 borough of Weymouth & Portland in 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 Weymouth & Portland. Weymouth & Portland's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in October 1978 (Report no. 297). 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 of parish and town councils in the borough.

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 borough 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 Weymouth & Portland Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Dorset County Council, Dorset Police Authority, the local authority associations, Dorset Local Councils Association, Portland Town Council, the Member of Parliament with Constituency interests in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the South West Region, local residents' associations and community groups and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Weymouth & Portland Borough 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 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 borough of Weymouth & Portland is situated in ‘Thomas Hardy country’, midway along the south Dorset coast. The district of West Dorset is situated to its north.

17 The borough contains the two separate settlements of Weymouth and Portland which are linked by the Causeway (Portland Road). The Island and Royal Manor of Portland, as it is known, is coterminous with the only parish in the borough, Portland Town Council, and contains approximately 18 per cent of the borough’s total electorate. Since the closure of the Ministry of Defence Operations in the 1990s the area has been designated an area of deprivation. This later resulted in the area being awarded Single Regeneration Budget.

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

19 The electorate of the borough is 47,869 (February 2001). The Council presently has 35 members who are elected from 14 wards. Seven of the wards are each represented by three councillors, and seven are two-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,368 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,429 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 six of the 14 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average and two wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in North Central ward where each of the three councillors represents 28 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Weymouth & Portland

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	Melcombe Regis	3	3,406	1,135	-17	3,705	1,235	-14
2	North	2	2,761	1,381	1	2,850	1,425	0
3	North Central	3	5,245	1,748	28	5,399	1,800	26
4	Preston	3	4,284	1,428	4	4,321	1,440	1
5	Radipole	2	3,454	1,727	26	3,478	1,739	22
6	Tophill East (in Portland)	2	2,434	1,217	-11	2,525	1,263	-12
7	Tophill West (in Portland)	3	4,025	1,342	-2	4,125	1,375	-4
8	Underhill (in Portland)	2	2,336	1,168	-15	2,836	1,418	-1
9	Westham East	2	2,905	1,453	6	3,515	1,758	23
10	Westham North	3	3,732	1,244	-9	3,784	1,261	-12
11	Westham West	2	2,418	1,209	-12	2,418	1,209	-15
12	Weymouth East	2	2,652	1,326	-3	2,708	1,354	-5
13	Weymouth West	3	4,052	1,351	-1	4,165	1,388	-3
14	Wyke Regis	3	4,165	1,388	2	4,183	1,394	-2
	Totals	35	47,869	–	–	50,012	–	–
	Averages	–	–	1,368	–	–	1,429	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Weymouth & Portland Borough 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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Melcombe Regis ward are relatively over-represented by 17 per cent, while electors in North Central ward are relatively under-represented by 28 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

21 At the start of this review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Weymouth & Portland Borough Council and its constituent Town Council.

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the Borough Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received three submissions during Stage One, including borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council and South Dorset Conservative Association, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council.

Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

23 The Borough Council proposed a council of 36 members, one more than at present, serving 15 wards, compared to the existing 14. Under its proposals, Weymouth would be allocated 29 councillors and Portland seven. A comprehensive consultation exercise was undertaken by the Council with interested parties. Its proposals were based largely on existing warding arrangements, utilising “clear boundaries maintaining natural communities to also be reflected in the modernisation programme”. In addition, its proposals included revised town ward boundaries for Portland Town Council. The Borough Council also proposed the retention of the existing electoral cycle of elections by thirds. Under the Borough Council’s proposals, which provided for a mixed pattern of two- and three-member wards, the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average in all of the proposed 15 wards initially, with three wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average by 2006.

South Dorset Conservative Association

24 South Dorset Conservative Association, ‘the Conservatives’, proposed a council of 33 members, two fewer than at present, representing 15 wards, compared to the existing 14. Under their scheme, Weymouth would be allocated 27 councillors and Portland six. They considered their scheme to be, “a logical solution to the problem of unequal representation which is currently present in the borough and uses much more sensible boundaries to the wards”. The Conservatives’ proposals would result in a mixed pattern of two- and three-member wards and would also result in revised warding arrangements for Portland Town Council. Under the Conservatives’ proposals, the number of electors per councillor in two of the proposed 15 wards would vary by more than 10 per cent from the borough average initially, deteriorating to three wards by 2006.

Other Submissions

25 We received one further representation from a local resident. He proposed that the Littlemoor area, which at present forms part of the geographically large North Central ward, should form a separate, two-member borough ward. He proposed that the suggested ward name should reflect the geographical area and proposed the name of Bincombe Valley ward.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

26 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Weymouth & Portland and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and Town Council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

27 As described earlier, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Weymouth & Portland 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”.

28 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.

29 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.

30 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

31 Since 1975 there has been an approximately 18 per cent increase in the electorate of Weymouth & Portland borough. The Borough Council originally submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 7 per cent from 47,869 to 51,130 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. However, following further analysis by the Borough Council, a revised 2006 projected electorate total of 50,012 was given as part of the Council’s submission. It expects most of the growth to be in Underhill and Westham East Wards. As a consequence, this resulted in the Conservatives’ initial proposals being based on inaccurate data, however, revised figures were submitted by the Conservatives, based on the modified 2006 projections. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries was obtained.

32 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having looked at the Borough Council's figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We would welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

Council Size

33 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.

34 Weymouth & Portland Borough Council presently has 35 members. The Borough Council proposed a council of 36 members, which was determined from the parameter of "preferably no more than 35 members, possibly one or two either way". Under its proposals, the Weymouth area would be entitled to 29 councillors and the Portland area seven.

35 South Dorset Conservative Association proposed a council size of 33 members, a reduction of two. It stated that it believes in "small, efficient government" and that as such, such a reduction was desirable, "provided electors were accorded adequate representation". In addition, it also argued that such a reduction would also make some cost savings without compromising the quality of representation. Under their proposals, the Weymouth area would be entitled to 27 councillors and the Portland area six.

36 We note that under the existing arrangements, the allocation of councillors between the two distinct areas of Weymouth and Portland in 2006 is broadly correct, with Weymouth entitled to 28.4 councillors (returning 28) and Portland entitled to 6.6 councillors (returning seven). By increasing the number of councillors by one, to 36, the Council's proposed allocation between the two areas is marginally improved by 2006, with Weymouth being entitled to 29.1 councillors (returning 29) and Portland entitled to 6.9 councillors (returning seven). We also note that under the Council's proposed council size, Portland would retain seven councillors. While we note that the Conservatives' proposed reduction in council size from 35 to 33 is not significant, we have not been persuaded that there is sufficient justification to reduce council size, and in particular, reduce the number of councillors serving Portland. In addition, we note that an element of cross-party support has been expressed for a council size of 36.

37 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 36 members.

Borough Administrative Boundary

38 As part of the Borough Council's submission, it was requested that "The Local Government Commission for England recommend that a Principle Area review be undertaken as soon as possible to realign the borough boundary in order to reflect more accurately the conurbation and communities in the Weymouth area." While we recognise that there are some anomalies in relation to the borough boundary of Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, it is not within our remit, as part of this Periodic Electoral Review to recommend modifications to external administrative boundaries or to recommend that such a review of the boundary should be undertaken.

Electoral Arrangements

39 We have carefully considered the borough-wide schemes submitted during Stage One. As detailed earlier, we have not been persuaded that Weymouth & Portland Borough Council would be best served by a council size of 33 members. In addition, we recognise that the level of electoral equality achieved under the Conservatives' proposals marginally deteriorated as a result of applying the revised projected electorate figures provided by the Borough Council. Furthermore, we have not been persuaded that all of the Conservatives' proposed wards provide for effective and convenient local government, as some of their proposed wards unite areas which we consider to share few community links. In particular, the proposed Radipole West (or Lakeside) ward would straddle the London to Weymouth railway line, creating a ward which combined settlements which we consider to be geographically separate. This is also apparent in the proposed Weyside ward, which would unite two settlements which we consider to have limited transport links. However, we recognise that there are some broad similarities between the Conservatives' and the Borough Council's proposals.

40 Therefore, in view of the cross-party 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 Borough Council's scheme. We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or the scheme submitted by the Conservatives at Stage One. However, to improve electoral equality further and bearing in mind local community identities and interests, we are moving away from the Borough Council's proposals in two areas, Westham and Tophill. In addition, we propose a number of minor amendments throughout the borough to ensure that existing boundaries being retained and proposed boundaries adhere to ground detail. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

Weymouth

- (a) North, North Central and Preston wards;
- (b) Melcombe Regis and Radipole wards;
- (c) Westham East, Westham North and Westham West wards;
- (d) Weymouth East, Weymouth West and Wyke Regis wards.

Portland

- (e) Tophill East, Tophill West and Underhill wards.

41 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.

Weymouth

North, North Central and Preston wards

42 The existing wards of North, North Central and Preston are situated in the north of the borough, forming part of the Weymouth area. All three wards border West Dorset District Council to the north. At present, North ward is represented by two councillors while North Central and Preston wards are each represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, North, North Central and Preston wards contain 1 per cent, 28 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough

average respectively (equal to the average, 26 per cent more and 1 per cent more than the average by 2006).

43 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing three-member Preston ward, subject to a minor amendment to its western boundary. It proposed a new two-member Bincombe Valley ward comprising the Littlemoor area, currently situated in the north of the existing North Central ward. The proposed Bincombe Valley ward's southern boundary would follow the line of the proposed 'Brown Route' (relief road) while the western boundary would fall to the east of the Sanderling Close area. The remaining part of the existing North Central ward (less the area to the south of the River Wey), together with the area to the south of Lorton Lane, from the existing North ward would form a new two-member Spa & Redlands ward. The remaining part of the existing North ward, together with the area to the west of Sanderling Close, would form a new two-member Upwey & Broadway ward. The Council argued that these proposals reflect not only the historic communities but also more recent communities and settlements such as the Littlemoor area, which "has a longstanding need for its own ward identity". Under the Borough Council's proposals, Spa & Redlands and Upwey & Broadway wards would contain 1 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more than the average by 2006). Bincombe Valley ward would contain 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (5 per cent fewer by 2006).

44 The Conservatives' proposed broadly similar proposals to the Borough Council in this area. However, their proposed two-member North ward would be largely based on the existing North ward with the addition of the Nottingham Lane area. In addition, the Conservatives' also proposed a new two-member Weyside ward which would unite the Southill area of Westham with the Dorchester Road and Radipole Lane area, north of the River Wey and west of Weymouth Way.

45 We received one further representation in relation to this area from a local resident. He proposed that the Littlemoor area, which at present forms part of the geographically large North Central ward, should form a separate, two-member borough ward. He stated that the suggested ward name should reflect the geographical area and proposed the name of Bincombe Valley ward.

46 Having considered the representations received, we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations. We consider that the Council's proposals on the whole utilise strong boundaries while maintaining good community links and improved levels of electoral equality. We do, however, propose a number of minor boundary amendments in order to ensure that boundaries adhere to ground detail. The Council's proposed southern boundary of the proposed Bincombe Valley ward follows the line of a proposed road that is not due to be under construction until 2005. Following advice from Ordnance Survey, a revised boundary has been proposed which adheres to existing ground detail while allowing for possible future development to the south of the Littlemoor area. We concur with the view expressed by the Council, the Conservatives and a local resident that there is justification in creating a separate borough ward for the Littlemoor area, and we further note that the Conservatives' proposed North Central ward is broadly similar to the Council's proposed Bincombe Valley ward. We have not been persuaded that the Conservatives' proposed North and Weyside wards would provide for effective and convenient local government, as we are of the view that they would unite areas which are geographically separated. In addition, we note that the proposed Bincombe Valley ward encompasses the proposals outlined by a local resident.

47 Under our draft recommendations, Spa & Redlands and Upwey & Broadwey wards would contain 1 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more than the average by 2006). Bincombe Valley ward would contain 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (5 per cent fewer by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Melcombe Regis and Radipole wards

48 The existing wards of Melcombe Regis and Radipole are situated in the east of the borough and form part of the Weymouth area. At present, Melcombe Regis ward is represented by three councillors and Radipole ward is represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Melcombe Regis ward contains 17 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (14 per cent fewer by 2006). Radipole ward has 26 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (22 per cent more by 2006).

49 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a revised two-member Radipole ward comprising the existing ward less the area south of Alexandra Road and west of Dorchester Road, which would be transferred to a revised three-member Melcombe Regis ward. The existing southern and western boundaries of the proposed Melcombe Regis ward would be retained. The Council stated that the proposed adjustment between these two wards is necessary in order to facilitate acceptable levels of electoral equality. Under the Borough Council's proposals, Melcombe Regis and Radipole wards would contain 2 per cent and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (6 per cent and 1 per cent more than the average by 2006).

50 The Conservatives' proposed a broadly similar Melcombe Regis ward to that proposed by the Borough Council, however, they proposed significantly different proposals in the Radipole area. They proposed a new two-member Radipole East (or Lodmoor) ward, which would comprise part of the existing Radipole ward broadly to the east of Dorchester Road. They also proposed a new two-member Radipole West (or Lakeside) ward which, as detailed earlier, would straddle the London to Weymouth Railway line.

51 Having considered the representations received, we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations. We have, however, proposed a number of minor amendments to ensure that boundaries adhere to ground detail. We consider that the proposed Radipole ward utilises strong boundaries such as Radipole Park Drive and the southern edge of the playing field to the south of Mercery Road. This is also evident in the proposed Melcombe Regis ward which unites Carlton Road South and Carlton Road North in the same ward, and also retains Custom House Quay as a strong southern boundary. We noted that the Conservatives proposed a broadly similar Melcombe Regis ward to that of the Borough Council, however, as detailed earlier, we have not been persuaded that the Conservatives' proposed wards in the Radipole area would provide for effective and convenient local government, as they would unite two settlements which we consider to be geographically separate.

52 Under our draft recommendations, Melcombe Regis and Radipole wards would contain 2 per cent and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (6 per cent and 1 per cent more than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Westham East, Westham North and Westham West wards

53 The existing wards of Westham East, Westham North and Westham West are situated in the centre of the borough, forming part of the Weymouth area. At present, Westham East and Westham West wards are each represented by two councillors while Westham North ward is represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Westham North and Westham West wards contain 9 per cent and 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (12 per cent and 15 per cent fewer by 2006). Westham East ward contains 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (23 per cent more by 2006).

54 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed revised Westham East, Westham North and Westham West wards. It proposed that a revised three-member Westham North ward should comprise the existing ward, less the areas to the west of Radipole Lane and broadly to the north of Milton Road, together with an area to the south of the River Wey from the existing North Central ward, as detailed earlier, and the area to the north of Longcroft Road from the existing Westham East ward, (less numbers 175 to 207 Abbotsbury Road). A revised two-member Westham West ward would comprise the existing ward together with the area to the west of Radipole Lane from the existing Westham North ward, while the revised two-member Westham East ward would comprise the existing ward, less the area to the north of Longcroft Road, together with numbers 175 to 207 Abbotsbury Road and the area broadly to the north of Milton Road. The Council stated that the modifications in this area had been necessary in order to “spread more evenly the representation between members and the electorate in the Westham wards”.

55 Under the Borough Council’s proposals, Westham East and Westham North wards would contain equal to the average and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (13 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Westham West ward would contain 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (13 per cent fewer by 2006).

56 The Conservatives’ proposals in this area were broadly similar to the Borough Council’s proposals in relation to the revised Westham East ward, however, they proposed a new three-member Westham North West ward which combined the existing Westham West ward with part of the existing Westham North ward to the south of Granby Way, with the area to the north of Granby Way forming part of a new Weyside ward, as detailed earlier.

57 Having considered the representations received, we propose basing our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Councils’ proposals. However, we propose three minor amendments in order to provide for improved levels of electoral equality. We propose transferring the properties on the east side of Kitchener Road to the proposed Westham West ward together with properties 175 to 207 Abbotsbury Road. In addition, we propose transferring Melcombe Regis Cemetery and part of Newstead Road into Westham North ward (uniting the whole road in the same borough ward). This would also involve the transfer of a future development to the east of Newstead Road. While we note that there are some broad similarities between the Borough Council’s and the Conservatives’ proposals in this area, we have noted that the Conservatives proposed that the Southill area form a ward with the Nottingham and Redlands area to the north of the River Wey. We have not been persuaded that this would provide for a better reflection of communities and, having visited the area, we consider that there are sufficient links between the Southill area and the northern part of Westham in order for the two areas to be located within the same borough ward.

58 Under our draft recommendations, Westham East and Westham West wards would contain 2 per cent and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more and 10 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Westham North ward would contain 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (4 per cent more by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Weymouth East, Weymouth West and Wyke Regis wards

59 The existing wards of Weymouth East, Weymouth West and Wyke Regis are situated in the south of the Weymouth area. At present, Weymouth West and Wyke Regis wards are each represented by three councillors while Weymouth East ward is represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Weymouth East and Weymouth West wards contain 3 per cent and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent and 3 per cent fewer by 2006). Wyke Regis ward contains 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (2 per cent fewer by 2006).

60 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing Weymouth East, Weymouth West and Wyke Regis wards subject to two minor amendments. It proposed that the boundary between the revised two-member Weymouth East ward and three-member Weymouth West ward should follow a former railway line, now a trail and cycle path, which the Council argues “provides a clear boundary between two communities”. This would result in the transfer of the area surrounding Prince of Wales Road to the revised Weymouth West ward and the area to the west of Rodwell Road to the revised Weymouth East ward. In relation to the revised three-member Wyke Regis ward, it proposed one minor amendment to its eastern boundary, resulting in the whole of Portland Road being united in Wyke Regis ward. Under the Borough Council’s proposals, Weymouth East and Wyke Regis wards would contain 6 per cent and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent and 1 per cent more than the average by 2006). Weymouth West ward would contain 3 per cent fewer electors than the average (5 per cent fewer by 2006).

61 The Conservatives proposed broadly similar Weymouth East, Weymouth West and Wyke Regis wards as those proposed by the Borough Council. However, they proposed a marginally different boundary between the proposed Weymouth East and Weymouth West wards, utilising the disused railway line for part of its length. In addition, they proposed that the area broadly to the west of Rylands Lane should form part of the revised Wyke Regis ward.

62 Having considered the representations received, we propose adopting the Borough Council’s proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations. We have, however, proposed a number of minor amendments to ensure that boundaries adhere to ground detail. We note the limitations on viable proposals for this area and consider that the Borough Council have maintained strong boundaries while applying minor modifications in order to provide for improved levels of electoral equality. We note that there are many similarities between the Borough Council’s and the Conservatives’ proposals in this area, in particular the proposed utilisation of the disused railway (cycle path) as a boundary between the revised Weymouth East and Weymouth West wards. In addition, we concur with the view expressed by the Borough Council that the whole of Portland Road should be united in the revised Wyke Regis ward.

63 Under our draft recommendations, Weymouth East and Wyke Regis wards would contain 6 per cent and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent and

1 per cent more than the average by 2006). Weymouth West ward would contain 3 per cent fewer electors than the average (5 per cent fewer by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Portland

Tophill East, Tophill West and Underhill wards

64 The existing wards of Tophill East, Tophill West and Underhill are situated in the extreme south of the borough and form the Island of Portland. The three wards combined represent Portland Town Council, with Tophill East ward coterminous with Tophill East town ward, Tophill West ward coterminous with Tophill West town ward and Underhill ward coterminous with Underhill town ward. At present, Tophill East and Underhill borough wards are each represented by two councillors, while Tophill West borough ward is represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, the Portland area is marginally over-represented with Tophill East, Tophill West and Underhill wards containing 11 per cent, 2 per cent and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (12 per cent, 4 per cent and 1 per cent fewer by 2006).

65 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing wards in Portland, subject to minor amendments which it argues “reflect more clearly two distinct communities and to recognise the increase in the community as a result of the ‘South West Regional Development Agency’s (SWRDA) outline plan for a large development”. It proposed that the southern boundary of the revised two-member Underhill ward should follow the ridge (including New Road and Verne Hill Road) between the two communities of Underhill and Tophill. This would result in the area bounded by Brymers Avenue, Cloverns Road and New Road being transferred to the revised Underhill ward. It stated that this adjustment also “reflects and recognise the height differential between two communities, which has been a significant bar to electors voting at Parish and Borough elections”. It proposed retaining the existing boundary between the two-member Tophill East ward and three-member Tophill West ward. Under the Borough Council’s proposals, Tophill East ward, Tophill West ward and Underhill ward would contain 8 per cent fewer, 8 per cent fewer and equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (9 per cent fewer, 6 per cent fewer and 11 per cent more than the average by 2006).

66 The Conservatives put forward broadly similar proposals to the Borough Council in this area, with both schemes proposing to transfer the area bounded by Brymers Avenue, Cloverns Road and New Road to a revised Underhill ward, albeit on slightly different boundaries. However, while the Borough Council proposed retaining the existing boundary between the revised Tophill East and Tophill West wards, the Conservatives proposed transferring the area surrounding Pound Piece and Greenways from Tophill West ward to Tophill East ward.

67 Having considered the representations received, we propose basing our draft recommendations for the Portland area on the Borough Council’s proposals. However, we propose one minor amendment in order to provide for a more clearly identifiable boundary and to unite the whole of Park Estate Road in the same borough ward. We propose that numbers one to 11 Park Estate Road and the area surrounding Tophill County Primary School and St Georges County Infant School be transferred from the proposed Tophill East ward to the proposed Tophill West ward. This would involve the transfer of 15 electors and would have no impact on electoral equality. We note that there was broad consensus between the Borough Council and the Conservatives in this area, particularly in relation to the proposed

transfer of the area bounded by Brymers Road, Cloverns Road and New Road to a revised Underhill ward. Having visited the area, we concur with the views expressed that this area should form part of the revised Underhill ward. We have not, however, been persuaded that the Conservatives' proposed boundary between Tophill East and Tophill West wards would provide for effective and convenient local government, resulting in a boundary which is not easily identifiable. We concur with the view expressed by the Borough Council and conclude that the existing boundary forms a good basis for the revised boundary in this area. We considered the Council's proposed southern boundary line of the revised Underhill ward, and following advice from Ordnance Survey, propose a revised line which adheres to ground detail. This amendment would affect no electors.

68 Under our draft recommendations, Tophill East, Tophill West and Underhill wards would contain 10 per cent fewer, 6 per cent fewer and equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (9 per cent fewer, 6 per cent fewer and 11 per cent more than the average by 2006). We note that under our draft recommendations, the proposed Underhill ward would contain equal to the average number of electors per councillor for the borough initially, deteriorating to 11 per cent more than the average by 2006 due to housing development. We have examined any possible modifications in this area in order to improve this projected level of electoral inequality. However, due to the limits created by the unique geography of the area and the location of settlements on the Island of Portland, we have been unable to identify any viable alternatives. However, we would welcome views during Stage Three. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Maps 2, A2 and A3 in Appendix A.

Electoral Cycle

69 We received one response regarding the Borough Council's electoral cycle. The Borough Council stated that it would like to continue with the process of elections by thirds. In addition, the Borough Council also requested that, given that the new electoral arrangements would be implemented by an election of the whole council in May 2003, elections due to be held in May 2002 should be postponed and that the term of office be extended for those councillors seeking election until May 2003.

70 We carefully considered the comments received. At present, the majority view appears to be that the present electoral cycle should be retained and we therefore propose no change. We are not able to make any recommendations on the implementation of the outcomes of this review, as this matter does not fall within our remit.

Conclusions

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

- there should be an increase in council size from 35 to 36;
- there should be 15 wards;
- the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

72 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following areas in order to provide for improved levels of electoral equality and provide for more clearly identifiable boundaries:

- in the Westham area, we propose transferring the properties on the east side of Kitchener Road to the proposed Westham West ward, together with properties 175 to 207 Abbotsbury Road;
- we propose transferring Melcombe Regis Cemetery and part of Newstead Road into Westham North ward (uniting the whole road in the same borough ward);
- in Portland, we propose that numbers one to 11 Park Estate Road and the area surrounding Tophill County Primary School and St Georges County Infant School be transferred from the proposed Tophill East ward to the proposed Tophill West ward;
- we propose a number of amendments throughout the borough to ensure that existing boundaries to be retained and proposed boundaries, all adhere to ground detail. These amendments do not involve the transfer of any electors.

73 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	35	36	35	36
Number of wards	14	15	14	15
Average number of electors per councillor	1,368	1,330	1,429	1,389
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	6	0	7	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	2	0	3	0

74 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Weymouth & Portland Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from six to none. By 2006, this would marginally deteriorate with one ward, Underhill, forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Draft Recommendation

Weymouth & Portland Borough Council should comprise 36 councillors serving 15 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 elections by thirds.

Town Council Electoral Arrangements

75 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, we propose consequential revised warding arrangements for the town of Portland to reflect the proposed borough wards.

76 The town of Portland is currently served by 14 councillors representing three wards: Tophill East, Tophill West and Underhill.

77 As previously discussed, we proposed revised warding arrangements for this area at borough level based on proposals submitted by the Borough Council. Accordingly, we propose revised warding arrangements for Portland Town Council.

Draft Recommendation

Portland Town Council should comprise 14 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Tophill East (returning four councillors), Tophill West (returning six councillors) and Underhill (returning four councillors). The town ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Maps 2, A2 and A3 in Appendix A.

78 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of Portland Town Council.

Draft Recommendation

Portland Town Council's elections should continue to take place every four years, at the same time as elections for the borough ward of which it is part.

Map 2: Draft Recommendations for Weymouth & Portland

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

79 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Weymouth & Portland 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 Borough Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

80 Express your views by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
Weymouth & Portland 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

81 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 Weymouth & Portland: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Weymouth & Portland area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on Maps A2 and A3 and the large map at the back of this report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding in the north of Portland.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding in the south of Portland.

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

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Weymouth & Portland: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed warding in the north of Portland

Map A3: Proposed warding in the south of Portland

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 Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table 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 co-ordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.	We comply with this requirement.