

Final recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest District Council

Electoral review

October 2014

Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Local Government Boundary Commission for England:

Tel: 020 7664 8534

Email: reviews@lgbce.org.uk

The mapping in this report is reproduced from OS mapping by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.

Licence Number: GD 100049926 2014

Contents

Summary	1
1 Introduction	3
2 Analysis and final recommendations	5
Submissions received	6
Electorate figures	6
Council size	6
Electoral fairness	7
General analysis	8
Electoral arrangements	9
Kidderminster	9
Stourport-on-Severn	11
The rural area	12
Conclusions	14
Parish electoral arrangements	15
3 What happens next?	17
4 Mapping	18
Appendices	
A Table A1: Final recommendations for Wyre Forest District Council	19
B Glossary and abbreviations	21

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 have conducted an electoral review of Wyre Forest District Council to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the authority.

The review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same. The Commission commenced the review in June 2013 and was conducted as follows:

Stage starts	Description
25 June 2013	Consultation on council size
24 September 2013	Invitation to submit proposals for warding arrangements to LGBCE
11 December 2013	LGBCE's analysis and formulation of draft recommendations
15 April 2014	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
25 June 2014	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Draft recommendations

We proposed a council size of 33 members, comprising a pattern of 11 three-member wards. Our draft recommendations for Wyre Forest sought to reflect the evidence of community identities received while also reflecting the electoral cycle of the council in which one-third of the total number of councillors is elected in every district council election year, and providing for effective and convenient local government. Our draft recommendations would provide good electoral equality.

Submissions received

During the consultation on our draft recommendations, the Commission received 43 submissions. Wyre Forest District Council opposed elements of our draft recommendations for Stourport-on-Severn, parts of Kidderminster and Upper Arley. Mark Garnier MP (Wyre Forest) shared the Council's view of our proposals for Stourport-on-Severn. We also received submissions from six parish and town councils, 21 submissions from local residents and 14 submissions from political groups and individual councillors. All submissions made at each stage of the review can be viewed on our website: www.lgbce.org.uk

Analysis and final recommendations

Electorate figures

Wyre Forest District Council ('the Council') submitted electorate forecasts for 2019, a period five years on from the scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2014. The forecasts projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 4.8% over this period. We are content that the forecasts are the most accurate available at this time and have used them as the basis of our final recommendations.

Council size

Wyre Forest District Council currently has 42 members. The Council proposed a council size of 33. We consider that we received no persuasive evidence to suggest any other council size and have therefore based our final recommendations on a council size of 33 members.

General analysis

Wyre Forest District Council is elected by thirds. This means that in each of three years in every four, elections are conducted for a third of the Council seats. Under legislation, we are required start with a presumption that, where a council elects by thirds, there will be a uniform pattern of three-member wards and a council size that is divisible by three, so that every elector has the same opportunity to vote whenever local elections take place.

Having considered submissions received, we developed proposals for a council of 33 members based on 11 three-member wards. Our final recommendations take account of submissions received during consultation on our draft recommendations. As a result, we recommend a single-member Lickhill ward and a two-member ward in the Wribbenhall area. We have proposed boundary amendments to draft recommendations for wards in Kidderminster and to the Wyre Forest Rural ward. We have also recommended changes to the name of one of our proposed Kidderminster wards and now recommend the name Blakebrook & Habberley South. No ward would have an electoral variance of greater than 10% by 2019.

What happens next?

We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest District Council. An Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament and will be implemented subject to Parliamentary scrutiny. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements which will come into force at whole-council elections for Wyre Forest District Council in 2015. In 2016, the Council will revert to elections by thirds.

We are grateful to all those organisations and individuals who have contributed to the review through expressing their views and advice. The full report is available to download at www.lgbce.org.uk

You can also view our final recommendations for Wyre Forest District Council on our interactive maps at <http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk>

1 Introduction

1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body which conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. This electoral review is being conducted following our decision to review Wyre Forest District Council's electoral arrangements to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same across the authority.

2 The submissions received from Wyre Forest District Council and others during the initial stage of consultation of this review informed our *Draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest District Council*, which were published on 15 April 2014. We then undertook a period of consultation which ended on 24 June 2014.

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. 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 have we conducted a review in Wyre Forest?

5 We decided to conduct this review in response to a formal request made by the Council that we review its electoral arrangements.

How will the recommendations affect you?

6 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 council ward you vote in. Your ward name may also change, as may the names of parish or town council wards in the area. The names or boundaries of parishes will not change as a result of our recommendations.

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

What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

7 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)
Professor Colin Mellors (Deputy Chair)
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL
Alison Lowton
Sir Tony Redmond
Dr Colin Sinclair CBE
Professor Paul Wiles CB

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill
Director of Reviews: Archie Gall

2 Analysis and final recommendations

8 We have now finalised our recommendations for the electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest District Council ('the Council').

9 As described earlier, our prime aim when recommending new electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest is to achieve a level of electoral equality – 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 ('the 2009 Act') 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 are easily identifiable
 - the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties

10 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 from the date of our final recommendations.

11 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 equality over a five-year period.

12 Our recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of Wyre Forest District Council 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.

13 As part of an electoral review, we must have regard to the statutory criteria set out in the 2009 Act. Schedule 2 provides that if a parish is to be divided between different divisions or wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single division or ward. Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make such changes as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority ward arrangements.

14 We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review. However, principal councils have powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct Community Governance Reviews to effect changes to parish boundaries and electoral arrangements.

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

Submissions received

15 Prior to, and during, the initial stages of the review, we visited Wyre Forest District Council ('the Council') and met with members and officers. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received preliminary submissions on council size from the Council and from the Labour group on the Council. Having considered these submissions, we undertook an initial public consultation on council size, receiving a further 13 submissions. In response to our consultation on warding patterns, we received 23 submissions including broadly similar district-wide schemes from the Council and Mark Garnier MP. We received 43 submissions during our consultation on our draft recommendations. All of the submissions may be inspected by appointment at our offices and can also be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Electorate figures

16 The Council provided us with the number of people registered as electors in each polling district. The 2009 Act also requires that we consider how the electorate may be expected to change. The Council therefore also submitted electorate forecasts at polling district level for 2019, a period five years on from the scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2014. These forecasts indicated an increase in Wyre Forest's electorate of approximately 4.8% to 2019. The forecasts suggested small increases in electorate in some rural parts of the district but also substantial increases in Stourport-on-Severn and parts of Kidderminster where major residential developments are expected during the five-year period.

17 The Council's forecasts were broadly consistent with those prepared by the Office for National Statistics. Having considered the Council's forecasts, we consider them to be the best available at this time and have used them as the basis of our draft recommendations.

Council size

18 The Council currently has 42 councillors elected from 17 district wards. The Council proposed a reduction in council size to 33 members. In support of its proposal, the Council argued that council size has not changed since 1973 and that 'very significant changes in functions and decision-making, in particular the transfer of the housing stock, the implementation of a wide range of shared services and the introduction of executive arrangements in place of service committees' warranted a reduction in the number of councillors. The Council considered that these changes meant that a Council of 33 members could operate effectively, and its members would be able to effectively carry out the representational activities expected of them.

19 The Council's Labour Group argued that the changes in functions and decision-making had little impact on councillors' workload. The Group proposed that the council size only be changed if doing so would provide improved allocation of members per ward. The Group did not propose a specific council size, instead suggesting that ward boundaries be reviewed first with the number of councillors then being modified to reflect the outcome of such a review.

20 Having considered the evidence received, we considered that the Council had made a persuasive case for a council size of 33 and we decided to consult publicly on this council size. This consultation ended on 6 August 2013. In response, we received 13 submissions. Of these, two were from town and parish councils, supporting the proposal for a council size of 33, two were from individual local councillors opposed to that proposal, and nine were from members of the public expressing a range of views.

21 Generally, those who favoured a reduction in council size cited an expectation that a smaller council could conduct its business more effectively, or a general belief that having fewer elected members in a council was desirable. Those who opposed a change argued either that a reduction would compromise the ability of councillors to represent their community or would discourage people from standing for election because of the increased workload that a reduction in the number of councillors would imply.

22 Having considered the information provided during the consultation period, we considered that the Council's proposal for a council size of 33 members still represented the strongest body of evidence received on council size. We therefore invited warding proposals on the basis of a council size of 33.

23 During consultation on warding patterns we received one submission in relation to council size. The Labour Group reiterated its earlier proposals and opposed a council size of 33. The Group also opposed a reduction in council size when it responded to our draft recommendations.

24 In response to our draft recommendations Councillor Oborski proposed that the Council should have 30 members and that there should be 10 three-member wards, suggesting that these wards be based on current county council electoral divisions. She argued that this would provide clarity for electors, facilitate working between the county and district councils and facilitate any future moves towards unitary local government in Worcestershire. However, we were not persuaded that a council of 30 members would have the capacity to operate effectively. One resident also opposed a reduction in council size, arguing that a council size of 42 be retained but that financial savings be made by reducing the value of allowances and expenses to councillors.

25 We consider that we received no persuasive evidence to suggest we change our original decision and have therefore confirmed as part of our final recommendations for Wyre Forest, a council size of 33 members.

Electoral fairness

26 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 our recommendations will provide for electoral fairness, reflect communities in the area, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

27 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 (78,141 in 2013 and 81,909 by 2019) by the total number of

councillors representing them on the council, 33 under our final recommendations. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 2,368 in 2013 and 2,482 by 2019.

28 Under our final recommendations none of our proposed wards will have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average for the district by 2019. We are therefore satisfied that we have achieved good levels of electoral equality for Wyre Forest.

General analysis

29 During the consultation on our draft recommendations, we received 43 submissions. The Council expressed concern about our draft recommendations for Stourport-on-Severn and proposed amendments to our recommendations for parts of Kidderminster and Upper Arley. Mark Garnier MP (Wyre Forest) also opposed our proposals for Stourport-on-Severn.

30 We also received submissions from six parish and town councils, 21 submissions from local residents and 14 submissions political groups and individual councillors.

31 A number of those responding objected to the effect of our recommendation that Wyre Forest be represented by a uniform pattern of three-member wards. Wyre Forest District Council elects by thirds. This means that in each of three years in every four, elections are conducted for a third of the council seats. Schedule 2 of the 2009 Act requires that in such circumstances, we consider the desirability that each ward returns three councillors. We therefore started with a presumption that there will be a uniform pattern of three-member wards so that every elector has the same opportunity to vote whenever local elections take place. This consideration does not take precedence over our other statutory criteria. We will not recommend a uniform pattern of wards if, in our view, it results in unacceptable levels of electoral inequality, does not reflect communities or hinders the provision of effective and convenient local government.

32 Our draft recommendations were therefore for 11 three-member wards. This pattern would mean that, in order to provide for acceptable levels of electoral equality, parts of Stourport-on-Severn would have to be combined with areas outside the town. We proposed as part of our draft recommendations, to combine the Lickhill area with the Wribbenhall area of Bewdley and with the parish of Kidderminster Foreign. This proposal attracted objection from Mark Garnier MP, the Council, party groups on the Council, individual councillors, from Bewdley and Stourport town councils, and several residents. Objectors argued that the combination of part of the town of Stourport-on-Severn with Wribbenhall and Kidderminster Foreign parish would create a ward in which residents would be disadvantaged because the nature of the ward would mean that councillors could not represent effectively all of the people in that ward.

33 Objectors proposed two-member wards for Wribbenhall & Kidderminster Foreign and for parts of Stourport-on-Severn. In such a warding pattern, almost 20% of the district's electorate would not have the opportunity to vote in each council election which the remainder enjoyed. Furthermore, a two-member Wribbenhall & Kidderminster Foreign ward would, without the addition of electors in other areas,

have 16% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the district, with no prospect of an improvement in electoral equality.

34 Independent Community and Health Concern asked us to consider an overall approach of establishing a pattern of single-member wards. Such an approach would be fundamentally at odds with the thrust of the 2009 Act. Whilst councils (as opposed to individual party groups) can request electoral reviews with the aim of establishing a pattern of single-member wards, they may only do so if the council has chosen to adopt a cycle of elections in which the whole council is elected once every four years. This is to ensure that all electors have the same opportunity to vote in all local elections.

35 Having considered the representations received, we are persuaded that we should move away from our draft recommendations and provide for a pattern of wards in which electors in Stourport-on-Severn are represented by a total of seven councillors. We recommend a single-member Lickhill ward and modifications to the three-member Areley Kings & Riverside and Mitton wards which we proposed as part of our draft recommendations. Consequent upon this, those in Wribbenhall and the rural area to the north will be represented by two councillors.

36 We have also moved away from our draft recommendations for the boundaries of the Aggborough & Spennells, Foley Park & Hoobrook, Franche & Habberley North, Offmore & Comberton, Sutton Park & Habberley South and Wyre Forest Rural wards. A summary of our proposed electoral arrangements is set out in Table 1 (on page 14).

37 A number of those making submissions objected to our proposed ward name of Severn Valley. We have taken account of these representations in making our final recommendations, proposing the name Wribbenhall & Arley. We also have decided to change the name of our Sutton Park & Habberley South ward to Blakebrook & Habberley South. We accept that these alternative names are more appropriate and therefore are adopting them as part of our final recommendations.

Electoral arrangements

38 This section of the report details the proposals we have received, our consideration of them, and our draft recommendations for each area of Wyre Forest. The following areas of the authority are considered in turn:

- Kidderminster (pages 9–11)
- Stourport-on-Severn (pages 11–12)
- The rural area (pages 12–14)

39 Details of the final recommendations are set out in Table A1 on pages 19–20 and are illustrated on the large map accompanying this report.

Kidderminster

40 Kidderminster is the district's largest town and centre for industry, shopping and commerce. The town is the only unparished part of Wyre Forest district. Our draft recommendations were for six three-member wards covering this area.

41 The Council supported our proposed Broadwaters ward. In our draft recommendations report, we invited comment on an alternative boundary for the ward which would exclude from it the area between the town centre and Chester Road North, and include the area between Chester Road North and the edge of the town. The Council opposed this alternative commenting that it would divide the community of Horsefair and its surrounding streets. We received no other representations which specifically addressed this proposal. We have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendations for this area as final.

42 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed that an area bounded by Chester Road North, Comberton Road and the railway line be included in Aggborough & Spennells ward. Whilst the Council broadly supported our proposed Offmore & Comberton ward, it argued that the railway line and Comberton Road would form an appropriate boundary between this and our Aggborough & Spennells ward.

43 The Conservative Group on the Council and a local resident suggested that the small triangular area bounded by the railway line, Chester Road North and Offmore Lane be included in our Offmore & Comberton ward. This is the most northern part of the area suggested by the Council in paragraph 43. We consider the Council's proposal to be preferable as it would not divide properties in this area between wards. We have therefore decided to adopt it as part of our final recommendations.

44 Councillors Hyde, Kelly and McFarland opposed changes to the current Habberley and Blakebrook wards, commenting on the community's interactions and use of services and amenities in the area. However, the reduction of the council to 33 members would mean that the present ward would have 28% fewer electors than the average for the district. We consider this to be an unacceptably high level of electoral inequality.

45 The Council broadly supported our proposed Sutton Park & Habberley South ward, but argued that the area centred on Abbey Road should be included in the Franche & Habberley North ward in order that the ward be coterminous with the county council division, providing greater clarity for electors. As the modification proposed by the Council would provide for good electoral equality, we are content to accept it as part of our final recommendations.

46 The Conservative Group noted that our proposed Sutton Park & Habberley South ward does not include any part of Sutton Park Road and suggested that we name the ward differently. We are content to accept this and have decided to adopt the ward names of Franche & Habberley North and Blakebrook & Habberley South as part of our final recommendations.

47 In our draft recommendations, we proposed to combine Hoobrook and the Foley Park area in a ward. Objections to this were made by nine local residents, citing their appreciation of the way in which they are currently represented in Aggborough & Spennells ward. We were not persuaded, however, that those objections could be accommodated in a way which would provide a better balance between our statutory criteria than was offered by our draft recommendation. We have decided, however, to include all of the properties in Cobham Road in the Foley Park & Hoobrook ward.

48 Councillor Dyke, of the Aggborough and Spennells Independent Group, objected to the inclusion of an area to the north of Comberton Hill in our proposed Aggborough & Spennells ward. We noted Councillor Dyke's description of service provisions to residents and their use of social and leisure facilities. However, we are not persuaded that the A448 marks an absolute distinction between communities. We also consider that were we to recommend Comberton Hill as a ward boundary, the consequential changes to our proposed ward boundaries throughout Kidderminster, which would be necessary in order to ensure electoral equality, would have the effect of dividing communities in other parts of the town. Councillor Dyke also said that our proposed Aggborough & Spennells ward excludes Aggborough. We are not persuaded that Aggborough & Spennells is an inappropriate name for our proposed ward and note that Aggborough Stadium, Kidderminster Harriers' football ground, lies within our proposed ward. We are therefore confirming as final, our draft recommendations for Aggborough & Spennells and Foley Park & Hoobrook wards.

49 Our final recommendations for Kidderminster are for the three-member wards of Aggborough & Spennells, Blakebrook & Habberley South ward, Broadwaters, Foley Park & Hoobrook, Franche & Habberley North and Offmore & Comberton wards. These wards would have 4% fewer, 1% fewer, 2% more, 5% more, 7% more and 2% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2019, respectively.

Stourport-on-Severn

50 As described in paragraph 32, our draft recommendations for Stourport-on-Severn attracted opposition because we proposed to include the Lickhill part of the town in a ward with Wribbenhall and Kidderminster Foreign parish. We have set out in paragraph 35 our response to those objections.

51 Some objectors appeared to interpret our draft recommendations as a denial of community linkages between the residents of the Lickhill area and other parts of Stourport-on-Severn. We would not, however, deny such linkages. Furthermore, we acknowledge the view of respondents who argued that elected councillors could not represent effectively the interests of the separate communities of Lickhill, Wribbenhall and the Kidderminster Foreign parish.

52 We considered whether Stourport-on-Severn could be represented in two three-member wards. Identifying boundaries for a Stourport North ward and a Stourport South ward would result in electoral variances of 20% and 16% by 2019. Furthermore, a three-member ward covering Wribbenhall, Kidderminster Foreign and parts of Upper Arley parish would have 39% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the district by 2019. These are levels of electoral inequality which we do not consider to be acceptable.

53 Stourport-on-Severn has, and is forecast to have in 2019, sufficient electors to warrant seven councillors without excessive electoral variances. We therefore considered whether a pattern could be devised which would provide wards which would lie wholly within the town boundary and satisfy our statutory criteria.

54 Seven councillors could be accommodated in a number of combinations, but we examined, in greatest detail, a pattern consisting of two three-member wards and one single-member ward and alternatively, two two-member wards and one three-member ward. Such patterns were proposed to us when we invited proposals for

warding patterns in September 2013. Either approach would also require a further two-member ward for the Wribbenhall area.

55 The Council's initial proposals submitted during consultation would result in two-member Areley Kings and Mitton wards and a three-member Lickhill ward having 4% fewer, 2% more and 2% more electors per councillor than the average for the district by 2019. This would represent good electoral equality and the River Severn would form a strong boundary to the Areley Kings ward. However, the local road network means that the area between St John's Road and Prospect Road would be connected to the remainder of the ward only by footpaths. In a modification to the Council's proposal, Minster Road would form the boundary between Lickhill and Mitton wards. With this amendment, these Stourport-on-Severn wards would have 4% fewer, 8% more and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the district by 2019.

56 If the Lickhill area shown in the draft recommendations as part of a Severn Valley ward were to become a single-member ward, it would have 31% more electors per councillor than the average for the district, by 2019. This would be an unacceptable level of electoral inequality. If that area were reduced however, by the exclusion of the Lower Lickhill Road and Burlish Close areas, a single-member Lickhill ward would have an electoral variance of 2%. Furthermore, three-member Areley Kings & Riverside and Mitton wards would have equal to and 2% more electors per councillor than the average for the district respectively, by 2019.

57 We consider this pattern of wards in Stourport-on-Severn to be preferable to the Council's proposal. It provides for good levels of electoral equality and would minimise the number of electors, 9% of the total, who would not be able to vote at each local election.

58 One resident suggested that a property in Zortech Avenue be included in our Foley Park & Hoobrook ward. Zortech Avenue lies in the parish of Stourport-on-Severn. Whilst Stourport-on-Severn is currently divided into parish wards, to include Zortech Avenue and any adjacent land in this district ward would require the creation of a further parish ward because the 2009 Act requires that a parish ward must lie wholly within a single district council ward. A parish ward which includes just one residential property would be unsustainable and therefore we have not accepted the objector's suggestion.

59 We did not receive any objection to any other aspect of our draft recommendations for Stourport-on-Severn and have therefore decided to confirm them as final.

60 Our final recommendations for Stourport-on-Severn are for a single-member Lickhill ward and three-member Areley Kings & Riverside and Mitton wards, having 2% fewer, equal to and 2% more electors per councillor by 2019, respectively.

The rural area

61 The rural area of Wyre Forest covers 84% of the area of the district but has only 24% of its total electorate. The electorate are currently represented by a mix of single-member, two-member and three-member wards.

62 One local resident proposed a single ward comprising the whole of Bewdley parish. Such a ward would have 6% more electors per councillor than the average for the district, an acceptable level of representation. However, if a ward were to be created in this way, we could not provide satisfactory warding arrangements for the rural parishes to the south and west of Bewdley town. Furthermore, if the electorate of those parishes were added to that of Bewdley parish, then the area would have 39% more electors per councillor than the average for the district, an unacceptable level of under-representation. It was for this reason that Bewdley Town Council, having considered the creation of a ward which combined Bewdley and Wribbenhall, rejected it. We concur and do not propose a ward which would include both Bewdley town and Wribbenhall.

63 We received representations regarding Upper Arley parish from the Council, the Conservative Group on the Council, Councillors Clee and Hart, Bewdley Town Council, Chaddesley Corbett and Rock parish councils and two local residents. They argued that including the whole of Upper Arley in Bewdley & Rock would better reflect the community identity of the parish and be conducive to effective and convenient local government. They also argued that the inclusion of parts of the parish of Upper Arley in the Wyre Forest Rural ward would extend the geographical extent of that ward to an unacceptable degree.

64 We are persuaded that the inclusion of Upper Arley parish in Wyre Forest Rural ward would not be conducive to effective and convenient local government given the geographical size of the ward. However, we are not persuaded that the whole of Upper Arley parish should be included in Bewdley & Rock ward. We consider that, notwithstanding the footbridge across the River Severn at Upper Arley village, the river forms a clear barrier and would provide for a strong and clearly identifiable ward boundary. Furthermore, the inclusion of the whole of Upper Arley parish in Bewdley & Rock would result in an unacceptable level of electoral inequality for Wribbenhall which would have 16% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the district by 2019.

65 We recommend therefore that those parts of the parish of Upper Arley which lie to the east of the River Severn are included with the Bewdley parish ward of Wribbenhall and Kidderminster Foreign parish to form a two-member ward having 8% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the district by 2019.

66 The Labour Group on the Council, Councillor Nicholls, Wolverley & Cookley Parish Council, and two local residents objected to the inclusion of Wolverley & Cookley in Wyre Forest Rural ward. They argued that the parish has little in common with the other parishes in our proposed ward and that its inclusion would result in a ward of excessive size. They therefore proposed a two-member ward for the parish. Independent Community and Health Concern shared the view about the size of the ward.

67 Councillors Hyde, Kelly and McFarland also suggested that part of the Franche ward could be joined with the current Wolverley and Cookley wards to form a two-member ward. Their view was based on an argument that council size should remain at 42. As described in paragraph 24, we were not persuaded by the evidence received to move away from our draft recommendation on council size.

68 A two-member ward for the area of Wolverley & Cookley parish would have 23% fewer electors per councillor than the average for the district by 2019, a degree of over-representation which we are not prepared to recommend. We were also not persuaded that it would be appropriate to include part of Kidderminster in a two-member ward for Wolverley and Cookley.

69 A number of representations we received about our proposed Wyre Forest Rural ward suggested this and that councillors would be unable to represent the interests of separate communities. Our proposed Wyre Forest Rural ward covers the area of six parishes. We recognise that each parish may have its own single or multiple communities but conclude that in other rural areas, district councillors are able to effectively represent the interests of communities of wards of similar composition. Furthermore, whilst we note that the Wyre Forest Rural ward would be around 10 miles in length, we do not consider this to be excessive in this instance.

70 A local resident proposed that a small area of housing at Kittiwake Drive which is part of Stone parish should be included within the Aggborough & Spennells ward. The impact on electoral equality in Wyre Forest Rural and Aggborough & Spennells wards would be minimal. Were we to accept this proposal, we would be required by the 2009 Act to create a parish ward for this area. However, there are only around 60 electors in this area, a number which we do not normally consider sufficient to establish a viable parish ward. We have therefore decided not to adopt this proposal as part of our final recommendations.

71 Our final recommendations for the rural area are for the three-member wards of Bewdley & Rock and Wyre Forest Rural and the two-member ward of Wribbenhall & Arely. These wards would have 4% fewer, 3% fewer and 8% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2019, respectively.

Conclusions

72 Table 1 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, based on 2013 and 2019 electorate figures.

Table 1: Summary of electoral arrangements

	Final recommendations	
	2013	2019
Number of councillors	33	33
Number of electoral wards	12	12
Average number of electors per councillor	2,368	2,482
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	0	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	0	0

Final recommendation

Wyre Forest District Council should comprise 33 councillors serving 12 wards as detailed and named in Table A1 and illustrated on the large map accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

73 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.

74 Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make changes to parish electoral arrangements where these are as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Wyre Forest District Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

75 To meet our obligations under the 2009 Act, we propose consequential parish warding arrangements for the parishes of Stourport-on-Severn.

76 As a result of our proposed 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 Stourport-on-Severn parish.

Final recommendation

Stourport-on-Severn Town Council should return 18 parish councillors, the same number as at present, representing six wards: Areley Kings East (returning three members), Areley Kings West (returning two members), Central (returning two members), Lickhill (returning three members), North (returning two members) and Stour & Wilden (returning six members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 1.

3 What happens next?

77 We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for Wyre Forest. A draft Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements which will come into force at a whole-council election for Wyre Forest District Council in 2015.

Equalities

78 This report has been screened for impact on equalities with due regard being given to the general equalities duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. As no potential negative impacts were identified, a full equality impact analysis is not required.

4 Mapping

Final recommendations for Wyre Forest

79 The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Wyre Forest District Council:

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Wyre Forest District Council.

You can also view our final recommendations for Wyre Forest District Council on our interactive maps at <http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk>

Appendix A

Table A1: Final recommendations for Wyre Forest District Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Aggborough & Spennells	3	7,107	2,369	0%	7,125	2,375	-4%
2	Areley Kings & Riverside	3	6,697	2,232	-6%	7,429	2,476	0%
3	Bewdley & Rock	3	7,021	2,340	-1%	7,154	2,385	-4%
4	Blakebrook & Habberley South	3	6,913	2,304	-3%	7,388	2,463	-1%
5	Broadwaters	3	6,570	2,190	-8%	7,589	2,530	2%
6	Foley Park & Hoobrook	3	7,192	2,397	1%	7,824	2,608	5%
7	Franche & Habberley North	3	7,830	2,610	10%	7,990	2,663	7%
8	Lickhill	1	2,221	2,221	-6%	2,431	2,431	-2%
9	Mitton	3	7,359	2,453	4%	7,600	2,533	2%
10	Offmore & Comberton	3	7,610	2,537	7%	7,619	2,540	2%

Table A1 (cont): Final recommendations for Wyre Forest District Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
11	Wribbenhall & Arley	2	4,533	2,267	-4%	4,551	2,276	-8%
12	Wyre Forest Rural	3	7,088	2,363	0%	7,209	2,403	-3%
	Totals	33	78,141	–	–	81,909	–	–
	Averages	–	–	2,368	–	–	2,482	

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Wyre Forest 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 B

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
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward or division, expressed in parishes or existing wards or divisions, 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 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 13 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 Commission 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 district, 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 district council
------	--