

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Christchurch in Dorset

October 2001

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

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

SUMMARY

We began a review of Christchurch 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 Christchurch:

- **in four of the 10 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in two wards.**

Our main proposals for Christchurch's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 52–53) are that:

- **Christchurch Borough Council should have 24 councillors, one less than at present;**
- **there should be 11 wards, instead of 10 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of nine of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one, and one ward should retain its existing boundary;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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 eleven proposed wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 8 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to continue with the number of electors per councillor in all eleven wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2006.**

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 the 1 April 2002 will be responsible for implementing change to local authority 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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Table 1: Draft Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Avon	2	part of Jumpers ward; part of Portfield ward	Map 2 & Large Map
2 Burton	2	<i>(unchanged)</i> parish of Burton	Map 2 & Large Map
3 Fairmile	2	part of Jumpers ward	Map 2 & Large Map
4 Highcliffe	2	part of Chewton ward; part of Nea ward	Map 2 & Large Map
5 Mudeford & Friars Cliff	3	part of Mudeford ward	Map 2 & Large Map
6 North Highcliffe & Walkford	2	part of Chewton ward; part of Nea ward	Map 2 & Large Map
7 Purewell & Stanpit	2	part of Grange ward; part of Mudeford ward; part of Twynham ward	Map 2 & Large Map
8 Somerford	2	part of Grange ward; part of Mudeford ward; part of Twynham ward	Map 2 & Large Map
9 St Catherine's	2	the parish of Hurn and part of the unparished area of St Catherine's ward; part of Jumpers ward	Map 2 & Large Map
10 Town Centre	2	part of Portfield ward; part of Twynham ward	Map 2 & Large Map
11 West Highcliffe & Hoburne	3	part of Grange ward; part of Mudeford ward; part of Nea ward; Wingfield ward	Map 2 & Large Map

Notes: 1 The whole borough is unparished apart from Burton and Hurn Parishes.

2 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2.

Table 2: Draft Recommendations for Christchurch

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 Avon	2	3,110	1,555	0	3,140	1,570	-3
2 Burton	2	3,268	1,634	5	3,210	1,605	-1
3 Fairmile	2	3,109	1,555	0	3,130	1,565	-3
4 Highcliffe	2	3,020	1,510	-3	3,210	1,605	-1
5 Mudeford & Friars Cliff	3	4,418	1,473	-5	4,501	1,500	-7
6 North Highcliffe & Walkford	2	2,918	1,459	-6	3,040	1,520	-6
7 Purewell & Stanpit	2	3,233	1,617	4	3,424	1,712	6
8 Somerford	2	3,349	1,675	8	3,405	1,703	5
9 St Catherine's	2	2,979	1,490	-4	3,050	1,525	-6
10 Town Centre	2	3,255	1,628	5	3,436	1,718	6
11 West Highcliffe & Hoburne	3	4,668	1,556	0	5,334	1,778	10
Totals	24	37,327	-	-	38,880	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,555	-	-	1,620	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Christchurch 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 Christchurch in Dorset, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing five districts in Dorset as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Christchurch. The last review of Christchurch was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in 1978. The electoral arrangements of Dorset County Council were last reviewed in 1978 (Report no. 301). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2005.

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 Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish 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 Electoral Commission

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 borough and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one, half of the borough 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 Christchurch Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Dorset County Council, Dorset Police Authority, the local authority associations, Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, parish councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the South West Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Christchurch Borough Council to publicise the review further. The Commission's Stage One consultation period was put into abeyance from 10 May until 7 June as a consequence of the General Election; the closing date for receipt of submissions (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 Subject to Parliamentary approval, with effect from 1 April 2002, the Electoral Commission will assume the functions of the Local Government Commission for England and take over responsibility for making Orders putting in place the new arrangements resulting from periodic electoral reviews (powers which currently reside with the Secretary of State). As part of this transfer the Electoral Commission will set up a Boundary Committee which will take over responsibility for the conduct of PERs from the Local Government Commission. The Boundary Committee will conduct electoral reviews following the same rules and in the same manner as the Local Government Commission. The Boundary Committee'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'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 Christchurch is situated in the south-east corner of the county of Dorset, abutting the Unitary Authority of Bournemouth to the west and the district of East Dorset to the north. It covers an area of 5,710 hectares and currently has an electorate of 37,327, an increase of 29 per cent since 1975. The present electorate is forecast to increase to 38,880 in 2006, an increase of 4 per cent. The borough is largely urban and unparished apart from the parishes of Burton and Hurn in the north of the borough. The main industries of the borough are electronics, aviation, tourism and retail. The borough also contains Bournemouth International Airport, the largest employer in the Dorset.

17 Christchurch town comprises 75 per cent of the borough's total electorate.

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 37,327 (February 2001). The Council presently has 25 members who are elected from 10 wards, eight of which are relatively urban in Christchurch and Highcliffe, with the remainder being mainly rural. Five of the wards are each represented by three councillors and five are represented by two councillors. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,493 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,555 by 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 four of the 10 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average. The worst imbalance is in Mundeford ward where the councillor represents 20 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Christchurch

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 Burton	2	3,324	1,662	11	3,260	1,630	5
2 Chewton	3	4,251	1,417	-5	4,410	1,470	-5
3 Grange	3	4,539	1,513	1	5,040	1,680	8
4 Jumpers	3	4,129	1,376	-8	4,180	1,393	-10
5 Mudeford	3	5,395	1,798	20	5,500	1,833	18
6 Nea	2	2,523	1,262	-16	2,740	1,370	-12
7 Portfield	2	3,306	1,653	11	3,350	1,675	8
8 St Catherine's	2	2,777	1,389	-7	2,830	1,415	-9
9 Twynham	3	4,359	1,453	-3	4,650	1,550	0
10 Wingfield	2	2,724	1,362	-9	2,920	1,460	-6
Totals	25	37,327	-	-	38,880	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,493	-	-	1,555	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Christchurch 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 Nea ward were relatively over-represented by 16 per cent, while electors in Mudeford ward were relatively under-represented by 20 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 Christchurch Borough Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

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 four submissions during Stage One, including a borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council.

Christchurch Borough Council

23 The Borough Council proposed a council of 24 members, one less than at present, serving 12 two-member wards, compared to the existing 10 mixed-member wards. It proposed substantially re-warding the borough with changes to nine of the existing 10 wards. The Borough Council's scheme provided for an improved level of electoral equality for the borough as a whole, resulting in the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 8 per cent from the borough average in all 12 wards. This level of electoral equality is expected to slightly worsen in 2006 with one ward expected to vary from the borough average by 11 per cent.

Parish and Town Councils

24 We received a submission from Burton Parish Council expressing support for the Borough Council's recommendation that Burton parish should continue to have its "unique identity" respected by remaining as a two-member ward.

Other Submissions

25 We received a further two submissions from Residents' Associations; The Jumpers & St Catherine's Residents Association and the Highcliffe Residents' Association. The Jumpers & St Catherine's Residents' Association proposed that the boundary between the existing Jumpers and Portfield wards should be amended but gave no reasons as to why this should occur. The Highcliffe Residents Association argued that the Hoburne area should be warded with the rest of Highcliffe, as opposed to parts of Christchurch, due to its greater community links with the Highcliffe area.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

27 As described earlier, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Christchurch 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 to 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 29 per cent increase in the electorate of Christchurch borough. The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of 4 per cent from 37,327 to 38,880 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in the Hoburne area. 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.

32 During Stage Two we queried the electorate figures supplied by Borough Council, having noticed discrepancies between both the existing and forecast electorates that had been provided during the preliminary stage of the review, and with the Council’s submission. After liaison with the County Council, the Borough Council confirmed the electorate figures that are contained within this report.

The existing figures are based on the February 2001 electoral register, and the forecast figures use the local plan to identify and potential new build.

33 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.

Council Size

34 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.

35 Christchurch Borough Council presently has 25 members. The Borough Council proposed a council size of 24, comprising 12 two-member wards. We received no other representations regarding council size.

36 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we are content that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council size of 24 members.

Electoral Arrangements

37 Having considered the representation received we have decided to base our draft recommendations largely on the Borough Council's scheme. We consider that the Borough Council's scheme allocates the correct number of councillors to the east and west of the River Avon, utilises good natural boundaries such as the River Avon and the main London to Bournemouth Railway Line to the west of the River Avon, and Mudeford Wood and Bure Brook to the east of the River Avon and recognises a number of distinct communities within Christchurch town itself. The Borough Council's scheme also retains the existing ward of Burton. On the whole we consider that its scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. However, to improve electoral equality further and better reflect community identity in certain areas, we are proposing to depart from the Council's two-member ward pattern in the east of the district, and we are proposing boundary modifications to the Borough Council's proposed Friars Cliff & Hoburne, Mudeford & Bure, Purewell & Stanpit, Town Centre and West Highcliffe wards. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Jumpers, Portfield, St Catherine's and Twynham wards;
- (b) Burton, Chewton, Grange, Mudeford, Nea and Wingfield wards.

38 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Jumpers, Portfield, St Catherine's and Twynham wards

39 The existing three-member wards of Jumpers and Twynham and the existing two-member wards of Portfield and St Catherine's (including of the parish of Hurn) cover the area of the borough to the west of the River Avon. Under the current arrangements of a 25-member council, the number of

electors per councillor in the four wards varies from the borough average by 8 per cent, 3 per cent, 11 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. The level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate in Jumpers and St Catherine's wards to vary from the borough average by 10 per cent and 9 per cent respectively in 2006, while the level of electoral equality is expected to improve in Portfield and Twynham wards to 8 per cent and equal to the borough average respectively.

40 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that this area should comprise four new two-member wards, thereby changing the boundaries of all of the existing wards. It proposed that the boundary of the existing St Catherine's ward should be amended, so that the area of the existing Jumpers ward to the north-east of Suffolk Avenue and Norfolk Avenue and to the east of Fairmile Road and Hurn Road, including Sandy Lane but excluding the properties on Fairmile Road, be included in St Catherine's ward. It also argued that the boundary of St Catherine's should run along the middle of The Grove, as opposed to carrying on along Oak Avenue as at present, and then along the middle of Barrack Road to the borough boundary. It also proposed that a new ward called Fairmile ward should be created from the remainder of Jumpers ward excluding that area to the south of the northern boundary of their proposed Avon ward which would run northwest to the rear of the properties on Cairns Close, Kimberly Close and Crofton Close, westwards to the rear of the cemetery, south-westwards to the rear of the properties on Gardiner Road and along the centre of Barrack Road to the borough boundary. It also proposed that, as mentioned above, a new ward called Avon ward should be created from the remainder of the existing Jumpers ward and that area of the existing Portfield Ward to the north of the railway line. Under the Council's proposals, the remaining area of the borough to the south of the railway line and the west of the River Avon would be named Town Centre ward. The Borough Council argued that all the wards to the west of the River Avon have entities that should be preserved and stated that "the opportunity has been taken to use natural boundaries where possible". Under the Borough Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the borough average in their proposed Avon and Fairmile wards and would vary from the average by 1 per cent and 4 per cent in Town Centre and St Catherine's ward respectively. In 2006 the level of electoral equality in both Avon and Fairmile wards would slightly worsen to 3 per cent in both wards. The level of electoral equality would worsen in St Catherine's ward to 6 per cent and in Town Centre ward to 2 per cent.

41 The Jumpers & St Catherine's Residents' Association proposed that the boundary between the existing Jumpers and Portfield ward should be amended so that it continues down the centre of the whole length of Jumpers Road, across Fairmile Road and down the centre of Knapp Mill Avenue. However, it did not provide any evidence for this proposal.

42 Having carefully considered the responses we received during Stage One, we have decided to base our draft recommendations largely on the Borough Council's scheme, while incorporating one boundary modification of our own. We consider that the Borough Council's recommendations for the area represent a good balance between electoral equality and community identity and utilise a number of good and well defined boundaries such as the London to Bournemouth railway line and the River Avon. However, we propose a boundary modification to its proposed Town Centre ward. We propose that the eastern boundary of the council's proposed Town Centre ward should be amended to run to the east of Bridge Street Island. We consider that bringing Bridge Street Island into the proposed Town Centre ward would better reflect the community links which the island has with the town centre and the transport links between the two areas. This boundary amendment does not significantly affect electoral equality in either of the proposed Purewell & Stanpit or Town Centre wards. We have noted Jumpers & St Catherine's Residents' Association's proposal to amend the boundaries between Jumpers and Portfield

ward. However, due to the lack of argumentation we have not been convinced of the merits of this proposal. We would welcome further views on this alternative proposal at Stage Three.

43 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the borough average in our proposed two-member Avon and Fairmile wards and would vary from the borough average by 4 per cent and 5 per cent in our proposed two-member St Catherine's and Town Centre wards respectively. By 2006 the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average by 3 per cent in both Avon and Fairmile wards and by 6 per cent in both St Catherine's and Town Centre wards respectively. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Burton, Chewton, Grange, Mudeford, Nea and Wingfield wards

44 The existing two-member wards of Burton (comprising the parish of Burton) Wingfield and Nea and the existing three-member wards of Chewton, Grange and Mudeford cover the area of the borough to the east of the River Avon. Under the current arrangements of a 25-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the five wards varies from the average by 11 per cent, 9 per cent, 16 per cent, 5 per cent, 1 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. The level of electoral equality is expected to continue at the same level in Chewton ward and to deteriorate in Grange ward to vary from the borough average by 8 per cent in 2006, while the level of electoral equality is expected to improve in Mudeford, Nea and Wingfield wards to vary from the borough average by 18 per cent, 12 per cent and 6 per cent respectively in 2006.

45 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that this area should comprise eight two-member wards; seven new two-member wards and the existing two-member Burton ward. It argued that retaining the Burton ward, comprising the parish of Burton, in its present form would recognise the "special identity" of Burton parish. The Borough Council proposed that four new wards should be created in the area between the River Avon and the Highcliffe area. It proposed a new Purewell & Stanpit ward, comprising the existing Twynham Ward (less that area to the west of Bridge Street Island and that area to the east of Mudeford Lane), that part of the existing Mudeford Ward to the west of Mudeford Lane and to the north of Warren Avenue and that part of Grange Ward to the west of Burton Road. It argued that this warding arrangement would link the two communities of Purewell and Stanpit together in the same ward, recognising that the two areas "are linked by the eponymous main roads [and] share shopping centres at Purewell Cross". It also proposed creating a new ward called Somerford Ward from that part of the existing Grange Ward to the west of Watery Lane, that part of the existing Twynham ward to the east of Mudeford Lane, and that part of the existing Mudeford ward to the south of the existing northern boundary of Mudeford where it runs through the Ambassador Industrial Estate. It argued that this ward would serve to unite the area to the north of the Somerford Road, which it considered is a definite community, with the area to the south of the Somerford Road and the east of Mudeford Lane formerly contained within the existing Twynham Ward. It argued that this warding arrangement recognises that the area to the south of Somerford Road looks northwards to Somerford Road rather than westwards to Purewell or southwards to Mudeford and that placing it in a ward with the area to the north of Somerford Road, would better reflect community identity in the area.

46 The Council also proposed that a new ward named Mudeford & Bure ward should be created from the areas of the existing Mudeford ward to the west of Bure Lane and the River Mude, to the east of Mudeford Lane, to the south of a boundary running southwest along Warren Avenue, south-east along the middle of Pauntley Road, southwest to the rear of the recreation ground, then northwest along the

middle of Stanpit, then southwest along Ledbury Road and to the rear of the properties on the north side of Coast Guard Way. It argued that this proposed ward would serve to unite the historical area of Mudeford within one ward, stating that “Mudeford is a distinct historical community, and is centred around a natural feature, the River Mude. It is proposed therefore to preserve many of the traditional boundaries while linking it to an area to the north.” The Council also proposed the creation of a ward called Friars Cliff & Hoburne from that part of the existing Grange ward to the east of Watery Lane, that area of the existing Wingfield Ward to the west of Hoburne and Verno Lane, and that area of the existing Mudeford ward to the east of Bure Lane. It argued that this ward would serve to unite two areas linked by the major “travel-to-school axis of Bure Lane and Hoburne Lane” stating that “It seems many residents of Hoburne use the small shopping area on Bure Lane [and it] seems sensible therefore to link these two areas in a Hoburne & Friars Cliff ward.”

47 The Council proposed three two-member wards in the Highcliffe area replacing the three-member Chewton ward and the two two-member wards of Nea and Wingfield. It proposed that a ward named West Highcliffe be created from that area of the existing Wingfield Ward to the east of Hoburne Lane, that area of the existing Mudeford ward to the northeast of East Cliff Way and that part of the existing Nea ward to the north of Lymington Road, to the west of Abbots Close including Castle Avenue and to the rear of the properties on the west side of Hinton Wood Avenue. It also argued that the remaining area of Highcliffe should be divided into two two-member wards, Highcliffe and North Highcliffe & Walkford. It proposed that Highcliffe ward should comprise the remaining area of Highcliffe to the south of Lymington Road and Braemar Drive, to the east of Castle Avenue and Hinton Wood Avenue and to the southwest of the eastern ends of Ringwood Road and Lymington Road. The Council proposed that the remaining area of Highcliffe to the north of this area should comprise its proposed two-member North Highcliffe & Walkford ward. The Council argued that Highcliffe is a distinct community separated physically and, to some extent, socially from Christchurch town. It argued that any warding of the borough should take account of the physical boundaries of the escarpment between Christchurch and Highcliffe; the “green wedge” that until recently existed between Christchurch and Highcliffe and the separate ecclesiastical arrangements in Highcliffe.

48 We also received a representation from the Highcliffe Residents’ Association. It objected to the Council’s proposed Friars Cliff & Hoburne ward, arguing that the proposed ward fails to recognise the community links between Hoburne and the Highcliffe area. It stated that “the area known as Hoburne is a new estate nearing completion and has always been incorporated into Highcliffe. It has a Highcliffe postal address. Also Hoburne has since its inception been part of the Highcliffe Residents’ Association.”

49 Having considered the representations received at Stage One regarding this area we have decided to draw to a large extent upon the proposals of the Borough Council. We consider that the Council’s scheme utilises a number of good natural boundaries such as Mudeford Wood, Chewton Common Road and Lymington Road. We are also of the opinion that the Council’s scheme recognises a number of distinct communities in the east of Christchurch such as Purewell, Stanpit, Mudeford and the area to the north of Somerford Road. We consider that the majority of wards proposed by the Borough Council have managed to reflect community identity and provide for good electoral equality. However, the Council’s scheme has resulted in a relatively poor level of electoral equality (11 per cent) in its proposed Friars Cliff & Hoburne ward. We are also of the opinion that the Council’s proposed Friars Cliff & Hoburne ward fails to recognise the continuing housing development in the former open space between the Hoburne Estate and the west of Highcliffe. This development has created an urban link between the West Highcliffe area and the Hoburne Estate. We have also noted the arguments of the

Highcliffe Residents' Association and we believe that the developments between Hoburne and West Highcliffe serve to justify its assertion that the Hoburne area is part of Highcliffe. Therefore we propose to address the relatively poor level of electoral equality in the council's proposed Friars Cliff & Hoburne ward and recognise the link between Hoburne and West Highcliffe by creating a new three-member ward called West Highcliffe & Hoburne. We propose creating this ward from the existing Wingfield ward, the area of the existing Mudford ward to the north of Mudford Wood and Bure Brook, the area of the existing Grange ward to the east of Mudford Wood, and the area of the existing Mudford ward to the north-east of East Cliff Way. We consider that this ward utilises good natural features such as Bure Brook and Mudford Wood, places the western part of Highcliffe into a single ward, and that by warding the Hoburne area with Highcliffe, this ward recognises the link between the Hoburne Estate and the town of Highcliffe.

50 After attempting various ward configurations in the rest of the area we are of the opinion that the remaining area of Friars Cliff & Hoburne should be placed in a ward with the Council's proposed Mudford & Bure ward to create a new three-member Mudford & Friars Cliff ward. This ward retains areas that are currently united in the existing Mudford ward and recognises the two communities of Mudford and Friars Cliff. We consider that this would strengthen the links between the two areas while providing a good level of electoral equality. We also considered transferring the area of the existing Mudford ward to the north-east of East Cliff Way into our proposed Mudford & Friars Cliff but we were not convinced that there were sufficient community links between the area and our proposed Mudford & Friars Cliff ward. However we would welcome further views on this at Stage Three. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would currently vary from the borough average in our proposed Burton, Highcliffe, Mudford & Friars Cliff, North Highcliffe & Walkford, Purewell & Stanpit, Somerford and West Highcliffe & Hoburne wards by 5 per cent, 3 per cent, 5 per cent, 6 per cent, 4 per cent, 8 per cent and equal to the borough average respectively. By 2006 the number of electors per councillor would vary from the borough average by 1 per cent, 1 per cent, 7 per cent, 6 per cent, 6 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map in the back of the report.

Electoral Cycle

51 At Stage One we did not receive any comments relating to the electoral cycle of the borough. We therefore make no recommendation for change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years.

Conclusions

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

- there should be a reduction in council size from 25 to 24;
- there should be 11 wards;
- the boundaries of nine of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one, and one ward should retain its existing boundary;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

53 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's scheme, but propose departing from them in the following areas:

- we propose that the boundary between Town Centre Ward and Purewell & Stanpit should be moved to the east of Bridge Street Island
- a new three-member Mudeford & Friars Cliff ward should be created;
- a new three-member West Highcliffe & Hoburne ward should be created.

54 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect 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	25	24	25	24
Number of wards	10	11	10	11
Average number of electors per councillor	1,493	1,555	1,555	1,620
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	4	0	2	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	0	0	0	0

55 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Christchurch Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from four to none. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Draft Recommendation

Christchurch Borough Council should comprise 24 councillors serving 11 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Map 2: Draft Recommendations for Christchurch

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

57 Express your views by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
Christchurch 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

58 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

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Non-Departmental Public Bodies, such as the Local Government Commission, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table D1: LGCE compliance with Code criteria

Criteria	Compliance/departure
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	We comply with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	We comply with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	We comply with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	We comply with this requirement.
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.	We consult on draft recommendations for a minimum of eight weeks, but may extend the period if consultations take place over holiday periods.
Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.	We comply with this requirement.
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.	We comply with this requirement.