

Executive summary

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Mendip in Somerset

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A further electoral review of Mendip is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. It aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee for England to undertake this review on 12 May 2005.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing arrangements, 12 wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average. As part of the previous review of Mendip, the District Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 5% between 1996 and 2001. Between 1996 and the start of this review the electorate has increased by 6%. This is predominantly due to growth in the towns of Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells.

Every review is conducted in four stages, as outlined below.

Submissions received

We received nine representations during Stage One. Mendip District Council

proposed to retain the current council size of 46 members, but did not submit a district-wide scheme. The Frome Branch of the Liberal Democrats submitted proposals to amend the five district wards in Frome. We received representations from six parish, town and city councils, five of whom commented on their respective areas and one commented on the issue of council size. One local district councillor commented on his area and on the issue of council size.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2009, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% from 80,400 to 85,805.

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	21 June 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 September 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	17 January 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	11 April 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

It expects most of the growth to be in the town areas of Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells. However, we noted that the 2004 electorate totals submitted by the District Council did not match the electorate totals defined by the December 2004 electoral roll. In order to provide for accurate electorate figures we have replaced the 2004 figures provided by the District Council with the figures defined by the December 2004 electoral roll.

Council size

We received proposals to either retain the present council size of 46 or to reduce the number of councillors. We concluded that the best approach would be to consider the issue of council size on the basis of retaining the current council size as the balance of evidence and argument indicates that this ensures effective and convenient local government for Mendip. However, we found that the current council size would require uniting town and rural areas around Frome. We found that an increase of one councillor allows for a separation between town and rural areas, and therefore we recommend a council of 47 members.

General analysis

In light of the lack of proposals we have received for new electoral arrangements we have put forward our own recommendations, which secure

a good level of electoral equality for the district.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on our draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Mendip contained in the report. We welcome views from all parts of the community and believe that the more feedback we receive, based on clear evidence, the better informed we will be in forming our final recommendations. We will take into account all submissions received by 10 April 2006. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Mendip and welcome comments from interested parties. We would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

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Further information

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