

Executive summary

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane in Somerset

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

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing arrangements, 11 wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the borough average. This is due to sustained development since the previous review.

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

Submissions received

The Borough Council submitted a borough-wide scheme. It proposed to increase the number of members from 54 to 56, serving 26 wards which broadly reflect the existing arrangements. Five parish councils expressed either their support or opposition to the Borough Council's proposals, while one parish council

proposed an amendment to the Borough Council's proposals.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

The Borough Council projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 10% from 81,767 to 89,783 over the five-year period from 2004 to 2009. We are concerned that the assumptions underpinning this forecast may lead to an over-estimation. Nevertheless, we recognise that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the Borough Council's figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	17 May 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	9 August 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	29 November 2005	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	7 March 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Council size

The Borough Council proposed to increase the number of members from 54 to 56 to address the increased pressure on councillor workload generated by the need to exercise a greater representational role and undertake their community leadership responsibilities. We accept the Borough Council's argument and, although we are concerned that it has not considered in detail how an increase of two councillors will alleviate these pressures, we propose to adopt its proposed increase in council size.

General analysis

In general we are adopting the Borough Council's proposals subject to amendments to ensure a better level of electoral equality. However, in the north-eastern and western areas of the borough we have proposed our own ward patterns.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on our draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane contained in this 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 6 March 2006. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane and welcome comments from interested parties. In particular, we found our decisions regarding our own proposed ward patterns in the north-eastern and western areas of the borough to be a difficult judgement between our statutory criteria. 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