

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

Further electoral review

November 2005

Translations and other formats

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by The Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)

Robin Gray

Joan Jones CBE

Ann M. Kelly

Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

When conducting reviews 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 and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

Executive summary

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. This review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each borough councillor is approximately the same. As a result of the poor levels of electoral inequality that existed in 2003, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to undertake an electoral review of Taunton Deane 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:

| 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 |

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.

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 east 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-east 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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This report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Constituent areas |
|----|--|------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Bishop's Hull | 2 | Bishop's Hull ward and part of Taunton Manor & Wilton ward |
| 2 | Bishop's Lydeard | 3 | The parishes of Ash Priors, Bishop's Lydeard, Combe Florey, Cothelstone, Halse and West Bagborough |
| 3 | Blackdown | 1 | (unchanged) The parishes of Churchstanton, Otterford and Pitminster |
| 4 | Comeytrowe | 3 | Comeytrowe ward and part of Taunton Manor & Wilton ward |
| 5 | Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory | 3 | The parishes of Burrowbridge, Creech St Michael, Durston, North Curry and Stoke St Gregory |
| 6 | Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane | 2 | The parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Bradford-on-Tone, Langford Budville, Milverton, Nynehead, Oake and Stawley |
| 7 | Monument | 1 | (unchanged) The parishes of Sampford Arundel, Wellington Without and West Buckland |
| 8 | Norton Fitzwarren | 2 | (unchanged) Norton Fitzwarren parish |
| 9 | Ruishton & Neroche | 2 | The parishes of Bickenhall, Curland, Staple Fitzpaine, Corfe, Hatch Beauchamp, Orchard Portman, Stoke St Mary, West Hatch, Ruishton and Thornfalcon |
| 10 | Staplegrove | 2 | (unchanged) the parishes of Kingston St Mary, Staplegrove, Cheddon parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish and an unparished area |
| 11 | Taunton Blackbrook & Holway | 3 | Part of Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward |
| 12 | Taunton Eastgate | 2 | Part of Taunton Eastgate ward |

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary (cont.)

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Constituent areas |
|----|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 13 | Taunton Fairwater | 3 | (unchanged) Taunton Fairwater ward |
| 14 | Taunton Halcon | 3 | Taunton Halcon ward and part of Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward |
| 15 | Taunton Killams & Mountfield | 2 | Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward (which includes Killams parish ward of Trull parish) and part of Taunton Eastgate ward |
| 16 | Taunton Lyngford | 3 | Part of Taunton Lyngford ward |
| 17 | Taunton Manor & Wilton | 3 | Part of Taunton Manor & Wilton and part of Taunton Eastgate ward |
| 18 | Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton | 3 | Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton ward and part of Taunton Lyngford ward |
| 19 | Trull | 1 | (unchanged) Trull parish ward of Trull parish |
| 20 | Wellington East | 2 | Part of Wellington East ward |
| 21 | Wellington North | 2 | Part of Wellington North ward |
| 22 | Wellington Rockwell Green & West | 3 | Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward, part of Wellington East ward and part of Wellington North ward |
| 23 | West Monkton | 3 | (unchanged) West Monkton parish and Maidenbrook parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish |
| 24 | Wiveliscombe & North Deane | 2 | The parishes of Chipstable, Fitzhead, Lydeard St Lawrence, Tolland, and Wiveliscombe |

Notes:

1. The whole of the borough is parished except for the town of Taunton.
2. The maps accompanying this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.
3. We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Taunton Deane

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|--|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Bishop's Hull | 2 | 3,099 | 1,550 | 6 | 3,099 | 1,550 | -3 |
| 2 | Bishop's Lydeard | 3 | 4,450 | 1,483 | 2 | 5,010 | 1,670 | 4 |
| 3 | Blackdown | 1 | 1,704 | 1,704 | 17 | 1,704 | 1,704 | 6 |
| 4 | Comeytrove | 3 | 4,521 | 1,507 | 3 | 4,521 | 1,507 | -6 |
| 5 | Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory | 3 | 4,422 | 1,474 | 1 | 4,492 | 1,497 | -7 |
| 6 | Milverton, Bradford on Tone & West Deane | 2 | 3,427 | 1,714 | 17 | 3,427 | 1,714 | 7 |
| 7 | Monument | 1 | 1,702 | 1,702 | 17 | 1,702 | 1,702 | 6 |
| 8 | Norton Fitzwarren | 2 | 1,561 | 781 | -47 | 3,101 | 1,551 | -3 |
| 9 | Ruishton & Neroche | 2 | 3,056 | 1,528 | 5 | 3,056 | 1,528 | -5 |
| 10 | Staplegrove | 2 | 3,032 | 1,516 | 4 | 3,278 | 1,639 | 2 |
| 11 | Taunton Blackbrook & Holway | 3 | 5,017 | 1,672 | 15 | 5,017 | 1,672 | 4 |

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Taunton Deane (cont.)

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 12 | Taunton Eastgate | 2 | 2,783 | 1,392 | -5 | 3,091 | 1,546 | -4 |
| 13 | Taunton Fairwater | 3 | 4,603 | 1,534 | 5 | 4,995 | 1,665 | 4 |
| 14 | Taunton Halcon | 3 | 4,793 | 1,598 | 9 | 4,893 | 1,631 | 2 |
| 15 | Taunton Killams & Mountfield | 2 | 3,018 | 1,509 | 3 | 3,044 | 1,522 | -5 |
| 16 | Taunton Lyngford | 3 | 3,938 | 1,313 | -10 | 5,028 | 1,676 | 5 |
| 17 | Taunton Manor & Wilton | 3 | 4,057 | 1,352 | -7 | 4,571 | 1,524 | -5 |
| 18 | Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton | 3 | 4,794 | 1,598 | 9 | 4,794 | 1,598 | 0 |
| 19 | Trull | 1 | 1,513 | 1,513 | 4 | 1,613 | 1,613 | 1 |
| 20 | Wellington East | 2 | 2,574 | 1,287 | -12 | 3,074 | 1,537 | -4 |
| 21 | Wellington North | 2 | 2,956 | 1,478 | 1 | 3,298 | 1,649 | 3 |

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Taunton Deane (cont.)

| Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 22 Wellington Rockwell Green & West | 3 | 4,573 | 1,524 | 4 | 4,601 | 1,534 | -4 |
| 23 West Monkton | 3 | 3,183 | 1,061 | -27 | 5,183 | 1,728 | 8 |
| 24 Wiveliscombe & North Deane | 2 | 2,991 | 1,496 | 2 | 3,191 | 1,596 | 0 |
| Totals | 56 | 81,767 | - | - | 89,783 | - | - |
| Averages | | - | 1,460 | - | - | 1,603 | - |

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Taunton Deane Borough 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 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 draft proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Taunton Deane, on which we are now consulting.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 The Electoral Commission agreed that The Boundary Committee should make on-going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a Periodic Electoral Review (PER) has elapsed. More specifically, it was agreed that there should be a closer scrutiny where either:

- 30% of wards in an authority had electoral variances of over 10% from the average; or
- any single ward had a variance of more than 30% from the average.

3 The intention of such scrutiny was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances, to consider likely future trends, and to assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Taunton Deane. Taunton Deane's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in November 1997. An electoral change Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 5 October 1998 and the first elections on the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out our work, The Boundary Committee has to work within a statutory framework¹. This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
- secure effective and convenient local government; and
- achieve equality of representation.

In addition we are required to work within Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of Taunton Deane is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (published by The Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review and will be helpful in both understanding the approach taken by The Boundary Committee for England and in informing comments interested groups and individuals may wish to make about our recommendations.

7 Our task is to make recommendations to The Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for any parish and town councils in the borough. We do not in these reviews consider changes to the external boundaries of areas.

¹ As set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962).

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the borough as a whole, i.e. that all councillors in the local authority represent similar numbers of electors. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

9 Electoral equality, 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. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as near as is possible, the same across a district. In practice, each councillor cannot represent exactly the same number of electors given geographic and other constraints, including the make-up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identity and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive about council size and acknowledge that there are valid reasons for variations between local authorities. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction, or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. Indeed, we believe that consideration of the appropriate council size is the starting point for our reviews and whatever size of council is proposed to us should be developed and argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure.

11 As indicated in its *Guidance*, The Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just by addressing any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's optimum political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government and that there is evidence for this.

12 In addition, we do not accept that an increase or decrease in the electorate of the authority should automatically result in a consequent increase or decrease in the number of councillors. Similarly, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of neighbouring or similarly sized authorities; the circumstances of one authority may be very different from that of another. We will seek to ensure that our recommended council size recognises all the factors and achieves a good allocation of councillors across the district.

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an

unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

14 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the review

| 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 |

15 Stage One began on 17 May 2005, when we wrote to Taunton Deane Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Somerset Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Somerset Local Councils' Association, parish and town councils in the borough, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, 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 Taunton Deane Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 8 August 2005.

16 During Stage Two we considered all the submissions received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

17 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 29 November 2005 and will end on 6 March 2006, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation about 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.**

18 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 the Commission to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an electoral changes Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report The Boundary Committee has had regard to:

- The general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and
 - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Broads

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by section 97 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

2 Current electoral arrangements

21 The borough of Taunton Deane comprises both rural and urban areas. Its largest town is the county town of Taunton and its other principle towns are Wellington and Wiveliscombe. The borough encompasses parts of the Quantock Hills and the Blackdown Hills. The borough is well served by mainline train services and the M5 motorway connecting it with the rest of the county.

22 We identified Taunton Deane as an authority where more than 30% of its ward had electoral variances of more than 10%. This prompted further research, which indicated that this level of electoral inequality would not improve. As a result of further research, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to undertake a review of the electoral arrangements of Taunton Deane Borough Council on 6 January 2005.

23 The electorate of the borough is 81,767 (December 2004). The Council presently has 54 members who are elected from 27 wards, eight of which are relatively urban in Taunton, with the remainder being predominantly rural. There are eight single-member wards, 11 two-member wards and eight three-member wards.

24 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,514 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,663 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to the fact that there has been sustained development since the previous review was undertaken, the number of electors per councillor in 11 of the 27 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average and in two wards by more than 20%. The worst imbalance is in Stoke St Gregory ward, where the councillors represent 26% fewer electors than the borough average.

25 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the borough average in percentage terms. The borough average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough (81,767) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, currently 54. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor is currently 1,514. In Bishop's Lydeard ward, currently represented by two councillors, there are 3,587 electors, therefore, each councillor represents, on average, 1,794 electors, 18% more than the current borough average.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in Taunton Deane

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Bishop's Hull | 2 | 2,880 | 1,440 | -5 | 2,880 | 1,440 | -13 |
| 2 | Bishop's Lydeard | 2 | 3,587 | 1,794 | 18 | 4,147 | 2,074 | 25 |
| 3 | Blackdown | 1 | 1,704 | 1,704 | 13 | 1,704 | 1,704 | 2 |
| 4 | Bradford-on-Tone | 1 | 1,832 | 1,832 | 21 | 1,832 | 1,832 | 10 |
| 5 | Comeytrove | 3 | 4,264 | 1,421 | -6 | 4,264 | 1,421 | -15 |
| 6 | Milverton & North Deane | 2 | 2,549 | 1,275 | -16 | 2,549 | 1,275 | -23 |
| 7 | Monument | 1 | 1,702 | 1,702 | 12 | 1,702 | 1,702 | 2 |
| 8 | Neroche | 1 | 1,794 | 1,794 | 18 | 1,794 | 1,794 | 8 |
| 9 | North Curry | 1 | 1,396 | 1,396 | -8 | 1,396 | 1,396 | -16 |
| 10 | Norton Fitzwarren | 1 | 1,561 | 1,561 | 3 | 3,101 | 3,101 | 87 |
| 11 | Ruishton & Creech | 2 | 3,169 | 1,585 | 5 | 3,239 | 1,620 | -3 |
| 12 | Staplegrove | 2 | 3,032 | 1,516 | 0 | 3,278 | 1,639 | -1 |

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in Taunton Deane (cont.)

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 13 | Stoke St Gregory | 1 | 1,119 | 1,119 | -26 | 1,119 | 1,119 | -33 |
| 14 | Taunton Blackbrook & Holway | 3 | 5,087 | 1,696 | 12 | 5,087 | 1,696 | 2 |
| 15 | Taunton Eastgate | 2 | 3,429 | 1,715 | 13 | 3,857 | 1,929 | 16 |
| 16 | Taunton Fairwater | 3 | 4,603 | 1,534 | 1 | 4,995 | 1,665 | 0 |
| 17 | Taunton Halcon | 3 | 4,723 | 1,574 | 4 | 4,823 | 1,608 | -3 |
| 18 | Taunton Killams & Mountfield | 2 | 2,544 | 1,272 | -16 | 2,570 | 1,285 | -23 |
| 19 | Taunton Lyngford | 3 | 4,222 | 1,407 | -7 | 5,312 | 1,771 | 6 |
| 20 | Taunton Manor & Wilton | 3 | 4,361 | 1,454 | -4 | 4,755 | 1,585 | -5 |
| 21 | Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton | 3 | 4,510 | 1,503 | -1 | 4,510 | 1,503 | -10 |
| 22 | Trull | 1 | 1,513 | 1,513 | 0 | 1,613 | 1,613 | -3 |
| 23 | Wellington East | 2 | 2,641 | 1,321 | -13 | 3,141 | 1,571 | -6 |

