

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

Further electoral review

July 2006

Translations and other formats

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Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: publications@boundarycommittee.org.uk

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Contents

What is the Boundary Committee for England?	5
Executive summary	7
1 Introduction	15
2 Current electoral arrangements	19
3 Draft recommendations	23
4 Responses to consultation	25
5 Analysis and final recommendations	27
Electorate figures	27
Council size	28
Electoral equality	28
General analysis	29
Warding arrangements	30
Neroche, North Curry, Ruishton & Creech and Stoke St Gregory wards	30
Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards	34
Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards	35
Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton wards	36
Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards	37
Bishop's Hull, Comeytrove, Taunton Eastgate, Taunton Manor & Wilton and Taunton Killams & Mountfield wards	38
Bishop's Lydeard, Bradford-on-Tone, Milverton & North Deane and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards	41
Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards	45
Conclusions	46
Parish electoral arrangements	47
6 What happens next?	51
7 Mapping	53

Appendices

A	Glossary and abbreviations	54
B	Code of practice on written consultation	58

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

Director:

Archie Gall

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. 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 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.

The review has been 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

Draft recommendations

We proposed to endorse the Borough Council's proposal to increase the number of borough councillors from 54 to 56. We adopted large parts of the scheme that the Borough Council proposed during Stage One, with a number of amendments to improve electoral equality. In the north-eastern and western areas of the borough we proposed our own warding pattern.

Responses to consultation

We received 51 submissions during Stage Three. The proposed council size was generally supported by respondents. We received opposition from seven respondents, including the Borough Council, for the proposed Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory and Ruishton & Neroche wards. The Borough Council and 34 other respondents objected to the proposed Wiveliscombe & North Deane and Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane wards in the rural west of the borough.

Analysis and final recommendations

Electorate figures

In our draft recommendations report we noted our concern in relation to the relatively high electorate forecasts that the Borough Council provided during Stage One, which

we used when considering the warding pattern for the borough. During Stage Three we received no further comments in relation to the projections used and so have therefore continued to use these figures when considering the final recommendations for the borough.

Council size

The Borough Council supported the proposed increase in council size during Stage Three. One other respondent expressed concern relating to the cost of two additional councillors. However, we did not receive any alternative proposals and are endorsing the proposal to increase the council size from 54 to 56 as part of our final recommendations.

General analysis

We are confirming our draft recommendations for the two towns of Wellington and Taunton as well as the rural centre of the borough. In the rural west of the borough we propose to move away from our draft recommendations and are proposing to retain the existing Bradford-on-Tone and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards. We are also proposing an amended Milverton & North Deane ward comprising Fitzhead, Lydeard St Lawrence, Milverton and Tolland parishes. In the rural east, we are also moving away from our draft recommendations and have proposed retaining the existing Ruishton & Creech and Neroche wards as well as proposing a revised North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward comprising Burrowbridge, Durston, North Curry and Stoke St Gregory parishes.

What happens next?

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be sent to the Electoral Commission through the contact details below. The Commission will not make an Order implementing them before 22 August 2006. The information in the representations will be available for public access once the Order has been made.

**The Secretary
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Fax: 020 7271 0667

Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk

The contact details above should only be used for implementation purposes.

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

Table 1: Final recommendations summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent parts
1 Bishop's Hull	2	The existing Bishop's Hull ward (the parish of Bishop's Hull and an unparished area); part of the existing Taunton Manor & Wilton ward (unparished)
2 Bishop's Lydeard	3	The existing Bishop's Lydeard ward (Cothelstone parish and the parish of Bishop's Lydeard comprising the proposed Bishop's Lydeard parish ward and the proposed Cotford St Luke parish ward); part of the existing Milverton & North Deane ward (the parishes of Ash Priors, Combe Florey, Halse and West Bagborough)
3 Blackdown	1	The existing Blackdown ward (the parishes of Churchstanton, Otterford and Pitminster)
4 Bradford-on-Tone	1	The existing Bradford-on-Tone ward (the parishes of Bradford-on-Tone, Langford Budville, Nynehead and Oake)
5 Comeytrowe	3	The existing Comeytrowe ward (Comeytrowe parish) and part of the existing Taunton Manor & Wilton ward (unparished)
6 Milverton & North Deane	1	Part of the existing Milverton & North Deane ward (the parishes of Fitzhead, Lydeard St. Lawrence, Milverton and Tolland)
7 Monument	1	The existing Monument ward (the parishes of Sampford Arundel, Wellington Without and West Buckland)
8 Neroche	1	The existing Neroche ward (the parishes of Bickenhall, Corfe, Curland, Hatch Beauchamp, Orchard Portman, Staple Fitzpaine, Stoke St. Mary and West Hatch)
9 North Curry & Stoke St Gregory	2	The existing North Curry ward (the parishes of Durston and North Curry) and the existing Stoke St. Gregory ward (the parishes of Burrowbridge and Stoke St Gregory)
10 Norton Fitzwarren	2	The existing Norton Fitzwarren ward (the parish of Norton Fitzwarren)
11 Ruishton & Creech	2	The existing Ruishton & Creech ward (the parishes of Creech St. Michael, Ruishton and Thornfalcon)

Table 1 (continued): Final recommendations summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent parts
12 Staplegrove	2	The existing Staplegrove ward (the parishes of Kingston St Mary, Staplegrove; Cheddon parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish and an unparished area)
13 Taunton Blackbrook & Holway	3	Part of the existing Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward (unparished)
14 Taunton Eastgate	2	Part of the existing Taunton Eastgate ward (unparished)
15 Taunton Fairwater	3	The existing Taunton Fairwater ward (unparished)
16 Taunton Halcon	3	The existing Taunton Halcon ward (unparished); part of Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward (unparished)
17 Taunton Killams & Mountfield	2	The existing Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward (an unparished area and the existing Killams parish ward of Trull parish) and part of the existing Taunton Eastgate ward (unparished)
18 Taunton Lyngford	3	Part of the existing Taunton Lyngford ward (unparished)
19 Taunton Manor & Wilton	3	Part of the existing Taunton Manor & Wilton ward (unparished); part of the existing Taunton Eastgate ward (unparished)
20 Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton	3	The existing Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton ward; part of the existing Taunton Lyngford ward (unparished)
21 Trull	1	The existing Trull ward (the existing Trull parish ward of Trull parish)
22 Wellington East	2	Part of the existing Wellington East ward (the proposed parish ward of Wellington East of Wellington parish)
23 Wellington North	2	Part of the existing Wellington North ward (the proposed parish ward of Wellington North of Wellington parish)

Table 1 (continued): Final recommendations summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent parts
24 Wellington Rockwell Green & West	3	The existing Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward (the proposed parish wards of Rockwell Green and Wellington West of Wellington parish)
25 West Monkton	3	The existing West Monkton ward (the parish of West Monkton and Maidenbrook parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish)
26 Wiveliscombe & West Deane	2	The existing Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward (the parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Chipstable, Stawley and Wiveliscombe)

Notes

- 1 The whole borough is parished, with the exception of 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: Final 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	Bradford-on-Tone	1	1,832	1,832	25	1,832	1,832	14
5	Comeytrove	3	4,521	1,507	3	4,521	1,507	-6
6	Milverton & North Deane	1	1,686	1,686	15	1,686	1,686	5
7	Monument	1	1,702	1,702	17	1,702	1,702	6
8	Neroche	1	1,794	1,794	23	1,794	1,794	12
9	North Curry & Stoke St Gregory	2	2,515	1,258	-14	2,515	1,258	-22
10	Norton Fitzwarren	2	1,561	781	-47	3,101	1,551	-3
11	Ruishton & Creech	2	3,169	1,585	9	3,239	1,620	1
12	Staplegrove	2	3,032	1,516	4	3,278	1,639	2

Table 2 (continued): Final 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 %
13	Taunton Blackbrook & Holway	3	5,017	1,672	15	5,017	1,672	4
14	Taunton Eastgate	2	2,783	1,392	-5	3,091	1,546	-4
15	Taunton Fairwater	3	4,603	1,534	5	4,995	1,665	4
16	Taunton Halcon	3	4,793	1,598	9	4,893	1,631	2
17	Taunton Killams & Mountfield	2	3,018	1,509	3	3,044	1,522	-5
18	Taunton Lyngford	3	3,938	1,313	-10	5,028	1,676	5
19	Taunton Manor & Wilton	3	4,057	1,352	-7	4,571	1,524	-5
20	Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton	3	4,794	1,598	9	4,794	1,598	0
21	Trull	1	1,513	1,513	4	1,613	1,613	1

Table 2 (continued): Final 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 %
22	Wellington East	2	2,574	1,287	-12	3,074	1,537	-4
23	Wellington North	2	2,956	1,478	1	3,298	1,649	3
24	Wellington Rockwell Green & West	3	4,573	1,524	4	4,601	1,534	-4
25	West Monkton	3	3,183	1,061	-27	5,183	1,728	8
26	Wiveliscombe & West Deane	2	2,900	1,450	-1	3,100	1,550	-3
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 final recommendations for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Taunton Deane.

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 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 framework.¹ This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- secure effective and convenient local government
- 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 cannot consider changes to the external boundaries of either the borough or of parish areas as part of this review.

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. to ensure 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 borough. 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 borough 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 borough.

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, 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 Stage Three began on 29 November 2005 with the publication of the report *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane in Somerset* and ended on 6 March 2006.

18 During Stage Four we reconsidered the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decided whether to modify them, and now submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission. It is now 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 the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) 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 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 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 principal 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 wards had electoral variances of more than 10%. This prompted further research, which indicated that this level of electoral inequality was unlikely to 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. That then gives the current average number of electors per councillor set out in the previous paragraph i.e. 1,514. In Bishop's Lydeard ward, represented at present 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 (continued): 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 %
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

Table 4 (continued): 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 %
24	Wellington North	2	3,112	1,556	3	3,454	1,727	4
25	Wellington Rockwell Green & West	3	4,350	1,450	-4	4,378	1,459	-12
26	West Monkton	2	3,183	1,592	5	5,183	2,592	56
27	Wiveliscombe & West Deane	2	2,900	1,450	-4	3,100	1,550	-7
	Totals	54	81,767	-	-	89,783	-	-
	Averages		-	1,514	-	-	1,663	-

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 varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2004, Wellington East ward had 13% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average, while Neroche ward had 18% more electors per councillor than borough average. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Draft recommendations

26 During Stage One we received six submissions, including a borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council and five parish councils. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane in Somerset*.

27 When considering the draft recommendations for the borough, we departed from Taunton Deane Borough Council's proposals in a number of areas due to a lack of evidence to support its proposed wards which would have variances of more than 10% from the borough average. We proposed amendments to provide for better electoral equality in the towns of Wellington and Taunton. For the same reason, we also put forward our own proposals for two-member Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane and Wiveliscombe & North Deane wards in the western rural area. We also proposed a three-member Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward and a two-member Ruishton & Neroche ward in the east of the borough.

In our draft recommendations we proposed that:

- Taunton Deane borough should be served by 56 councillors, two more than at present, representing 24 wards, three fewer than at present
- the boundaries of seven of the existing wards should be retained, while the boundaries of each of the remaining wards should be modified
- there should be new parish warding arrangements for Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council and Wellington Town Council

28 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 17 of the 24 wards varying by less than 10% from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 8% from the average by 2009.

4 Responses to consultation

29 During the consultation on the draft recommendations report, 51 representations were received, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the Borough Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Taunton Deane Borough Council

30 The Borough Council supported the majority of our draft recommendations, including the proposed council size. However, it opposed our proposals in the rural east for Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory and Ruishton & Neroche wards and in the rural west around Wiveliscombe and Bradford-on-Tone. It also opposed our proposals in some areas of Taunton town.

Parish and town councils

31 Representations were received from 19 parish and town councils. North Curry, Stoke St Gregory, Ruishton & Thornfalcon, Creech St Michael and Neroche parish councils all opposed the three-member Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward as they considered it would not reflect community identity. Burrowbridge Parish Council supported the ward.

32 We received support from Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone and West Bagborough parish councils and Wellington Town Council for the borough warding proposals in their respective areas. Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council also put forward revised parish electoral arrangements for Bishop's Lydeard parish.

33 Comeytrove Parish Council considered that the parish should not be combined with part of Taunton town.

34 In the west of the borough we received considerable opposition to our proposed Wiveliscombe & North Deane and Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane wards. Milverton, Bathealton, Chipstable, Stawley, Bradford-on-Tone, Ashbrittle, Wiveliscombe, Oake and Nynehead parish councils all opposed the recommendations and considered that the proposals did not reflect community identities.

Other representations

35 One local resident expressed similar opposition to the proposed Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward as the parish councils in the area. In the rural west, we received more opposition to the proposed Wiveliscombe & North Deane and Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane wards. Waterrow, Chipstable & Raddington Community Group, Ashbrittle Arts, Wiveliscombe Area Partnership, the 10 Parishes Festival, Stawley Community Association, Councillor Bone (Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward), Councillor Whitmarsh (Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward) and 15 local residents all objected to the proposals, considering that they did not reflect community identities. The respondents all generally considered that the existing arrangements in these areas work well and reflect community identities.

36 Councillor Bradley (Staplegrave ward) proposed revised warding arrangements in the north of the town of Taunton based on two-member wards. Councillor Weston (Lyngford ward) opposed Councillor Bradley's proposal and considered three-member wards should be adopted in the town. Councillor Lees (Eastgate ward) considered the existing Eastgate ward should be retained to reflect community identity. A local resident considered that a smaller ward than the proposed three-member Taunton Lyngford ward would be preferable.

37 Taunton & Wellington Pensioners' Forum stated it was concerned there would be additional costs due to the increase in council size. A local resident considered that the existing wards should be retained. Another resident was concerned that multi-member wards cause difficulties in rural areas and that more weight should be given to the reflection of community identities.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

38 We have now finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane.

39 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended), with the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- secure the matters in respect of equality of representation referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972

40 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'. 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 clearly identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

41 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep variances to a minimum.

42 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 should also be taken into account, and we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

43 The recommendations do not affect county, borough or parish external boundaries, local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Electorate figures

44 As part of the previous review of Taunton Deane, the Borough Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 5% between 1996 and 2001. However, between 1996 and the start of this review the electorate increased by 7%. There has been growth in the settlement of Cotford St Luke, within the existing Bishop's Lydeard ward, and within the towns of Wellington and Taunton. The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2009, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 10% from 81,767 to 89,783 over the five-year period from 2004 to

2009. It expects most of the growth to be in North Fitzwarren ward and in West Monkton ward, although a significant amount is also expected in the town of Taunton.

45 In our draft recommendations report we stated that we were concerned that the assumptions about development in Taunton Deane underpinning the Borough Council's electorate forecasts might lead to an over-estimation by 2009. We noted that most of the forecast growth relates to allocations assigned to areas within the Local Plan, rather than sites either under construction or at a particular stage of the planning process. We were also concerned about the Borough Council's allocation of two electors to each new dwelling and their overall assumption about the high level of the forecast increase represented by new electors moving into the borough.

46 We acknowledged the difficulties in forecasting electorate figures and accepted that the estimates were the best that could reasonably be made at the time and welcomed further evidence during Stage Three. However, we received no further comments regarding electorate forecasts at this stage and have continued to use them when preparing our final recommendations.

Council size

47 Taunton Deane Borough Council presently has 54 members. During Stage One the Borough Council proposed a small increase to a council of 56 members to reflect 'the increased pressures placed upon members when new governance requirements and commitments were implemented'. As part of our draft recommendations we supported the Borough Council's proposal to increase the council size by two members, though we noted that we had not received detailed evidence of how an additional two councillors would alleviate the pressures of new governance requirements.

48 During Stage Three the only comment we received in relation to council size was from Taunton & Wellington Pensioners' Forum who expressed concern in relation to any costs the two additional councillors might generate. However, we do not consider its comments are sufficient to revisit the issue of council size and we are therefore confirming our draft recommendation for a council size of 56 as final.

Electoral equality

49 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. The Electoral Commission expects the Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. However, when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where no justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality, seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as is possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and securing effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances

proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria.

50 The average number of electors represented by a councillor in a borough (the borough average) is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough (81,767 in December 2004) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, (56 under our final proposals). Therefore the average number of electors per councillor under our final recommendations is 1,460. Due to growth that is forecast to occur across the borough, the borough average is forecast to increase to 1,603 by 2009.

51 As part of our draft recommendations we proposed wards with good levels of electoral equality, with no ward having a variance greater than 8% from the borough average. As a result of the representations received during Stage Three we are recommending a revised warding pattern which results in three wards having significantly poorer levels of electoral equality. The proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward is projected to have 22% fewer electors than the borough average by 2009. The proposed Neroche and Bradford-on-Tone wards will have variances of 12% and 14%, respectively. We consider that these variances are justified in light of the evidence provided during Stage Three in relation to community identities in these areas and also in the surrounding areas.

General analysis

52 The draft recommendations that we produced were based on the proposals of the Borough Council. However, we departed from its scheme in a number of areas due to a lack of evidence to support wards with variances of more than 10% from the borough average. We proposed amendments to provide for better electoral equality in the towns of Wellington and Taunton. For the same reason, we also put forward our own proposals for two-member Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane and Wiveliscombe & North Deane wards in the western rural area. We also proposed a three-member Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward and a two-member Ruishton & Neroche ward in the east of the borough. Under our draft recommendations, no ward would have a variance greater than 8% by 2009.

53 During Stage Three the majority of the representations received were in relation to two main areas. We received opposition to our proposals in the rural east of the borough where we recommended a three-member Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward. We also received significant opposition to the proposals in the Wiveliscombe & North Deane and Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane wards. Respondents considered that our proposals in these areas did not reflect community identities. As part of our final recommendations, we are making amendments in light of the evidence received and are proposing to retain the existing two-member Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward. Having decided to retain Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward, the warding arrangements for the remainder of the western area needed to be addressed. Consequently, we are proposing an amended Milverton & North Deane ward which was proposed by the Borough Council during Stage One. In order to facilitate these proposals and to reflect community identity, we are also proposing to retain the existing Bradford-on-Tone ward. In all of these areas we considered we received sufficient justification for recommending wards with poorer levels of electoral equality.

Warding arrangements

54 For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- Neroche, North Curry, Ruishton & Creech and Stoke St Gregory wards (page 30)
- Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards (page 34)
- Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards (page 35)
- Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton wards (page 36)
- Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards (page 37)
- Bishop's Hull, Comeytrove, Taunton Eastgate, Taunton Manor & Wilton and Taunton Killams & Mountfield wards (page 38)
- Bishop's Lydeard, Bradford-on-Tone, Milverton & North Deane and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards (page 41)
- Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards (page 45)

55 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively), and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Neroche, North Curry, Ruishton & Creech and Stoke St Gregory wards

56 Under the existing arrangements Neroche ward comprises the parishes of Corfe, Curland, Staple Fitzpaine, Hatch Beauchamp, Orchard Portman, Bickenhall, West Hatch and Stoke St Mary. North Curry ward comprises the parishes of Durston and North Curry. Ruishton & Creech ward comprises the parishes of Creech St Michael, Ruishton and Thornfalcon. Stoke St Gregory ward comprises the parishes of Burrowbridge and Stoke St Gregory. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

57 During Stage One we received five submissions regarding this area. The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Ruishton & Creech ward and the existing Neroche ward subject to one amendment. It put forward a new, as yet unnamed, two-member ward comprising the existing North Curry and Stoke St Gregory wards and West Hatch parish (transferred from the existing Neroche ward). This proposed ward, henceforth referred to as North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward, would have 14% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009.

58 With regard to its proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward the Borough Council explained that it had received 'a number of representations against the proposed changes' and that 'it is clear...that there is strong opposition to this proposal' due to its impact on community identities and interests. It noted that the resulting electoral imbalance 'is still far from satisfactory', and expressed the opinion that the 'geographical position' of this area at the edge of the borough and the 'rural nature of North Curry, Stoke St Gregory and Burrowbridge makes a suitable alternative very difficult to envisage'. It concluded that it may be more appropriate for the 'status quo [to] be maintained in the three existing wards of Stoke St Gregory, North Curry and Neroche'.

59 Corfe, West Hatch and Stoke St Gregory parish councils expressed their opposition to the Borough Council's proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward. They explained that the proposed ward, by including West Hatch parish, would combine two geographically distinct areas. They explained that the A358 represents a demarcation between 'the hills and forest of Neroche and the wetlands of North Curry and Stoke St Gregory' and pointed out that the majority of the population of West Hatch parish is south of this road.

60 We carefully considered the representations and proposals we received for this area and concluded that the evidence we received was insufficient to justify the significant electoral imbalance secured by retaining Stoke St Gregory ward or by adopting the North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward proposed by the Borough Council. We examined a number of options to address this issue and found that the distribution of electors constrains the opportunities for resolving the imbalance without resorting to either parish warding or substantial changes to the existing Neroche and Ruishton & Creech wards. Therefore, due to the limited evidence in support of alternative ward patterns and in order to achieve a good level of electoral equality while avoiding dividing parishes between wards, we proposed our own pattern of wards in this area. We proposed a new three-member ward combining the existing North Curry and Stoke St Gregory wards with Creech St Michael parish, which we proposed to name Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward. We also proposed a new two-member ward combining the existing Neroche ward with the parishes of Ruishton and Thornfalcon, which we proposed to name Ruishton & Neroche ward.

61 Under our draft recommendations, none of the wards in this area would have a variance greater than 7% by 2009.

62 During Stage Three we received eight representations regarding this area. The Borough Council opposed the recommendation to divide the existing Ruishton & Creech ward between Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory and Ruishton & Neroche wards as proposed under our draft recommendations. It argued that Creech St Michael and Ruishton parishes 'have, for many years, been closely linked and ... have a strong, joint sense of community along with the sharing of many services and interests'. It also contended that splitting 'this long-established partnership would represent a seriously retrograde step'. The Borough Council further maintained that placing Creech St Michael parish in a ward with North Curry and Stoke St Gregory parishes would damage existing community identities and impede the provision of effective and convenient local government.

63 The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Ruishton & Creech ward as it would have an acceptable level of electoral equality and that to 'propose ... change merely to improve electoral imbalance in neighbouring wards is unacceptable'. It stated that it is aware of the high variances that would exist if the existing Stoke St Gregory and North Curry wards were retained and therefore argued that its Stage One proposal for this area would provide the 'solution', despite previous local opposition. During Stage One, the Borough Council proposed to transfer West Hatch parish from the existing Neroche ward, into a two-member ward also comprising Burrowbridge, Durston, North Curry and Stoke St Gregory parishes. This ward is expected to contain 14% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009, and the Borough Council maintained that it would be 'far less disruptive to communities' than the draft recommendations. The Borough Council also proposed to broadly retain the existing Neroche ward, less West Hatch parish (3% fewer

electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009). The Borough Council argued that Ruishton parish has clearly defined boundaries and has no links with Neroche parish but shares 'close ties' with Creech St Michael parish. The Borough Council also provided copies of letters it received in opposition to the draft recommendations for this area of the borough.

64 Burrowbridge Parish Council stated that it supports the draft recommendation to place Burrowbridge parish in a three-member Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward.

65 North Curry Parish Council objected to including Creech St Michael parish in the Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward, as Creech St Michael parish has 'totally different community characteristics from both North Curry and Stoke St Gregory' parishes. It argued against 'creating artificial community groups merely to support the removal of so called "electoral imbalance"'. The Parish Council also expressed concern regarding the size of this ward and requested that the existing North Curry ward be retained.

66 Stoke St Gregory Parish Council stated that it considers the draft recommendations for North Curry and Creech St Michael parishes to be an improvement on the Borough Council's Stage One proposal, but expressed concern in relation to three-member rural wards. It argued that councillors representing the proposed three-member Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward would have to cover a large geographical area connected by poor roads. It contended that all three councillors for the proposed ward could potentially come from Creech St Michael, the biggest parish, 'leaving North Curry and Stoke St Gregory [parishes] out on a limb'. It stated that a two-member ward comprising North Curry and Stoke St Gregory parishes would be 'preferable'.

67 Ruishton & Thornfalcon Parish Council expressed a number of concerns regarding the draft recommendations for its area and argued that the draft recommendations should be reconsidered. It argued that the existing Ruishton & Creech ward functions very effectively. Ruishton and Thornfalcon parishes are distinct, with clear boundaries, and have no community ties with Neroche ward. The Parish Council described its strong community links with Creech St Michael parish, where children attend school and residents use facilities such as the post office, shops, vets and garages. The village of Creech also has an industrial estate which provides employment for residents of Ruishton and Thornfalcon parishes. The River Tone runs through the middle of the existing ward and so the constituent parishes share the same issue of regular flooding and work together to improve flood defences as well as all being part of the Somerset Levels and Moors Partnership. The strong sense of community between the parishes of Ruishton and Creech St Michael is cemented by shared local groups such as Creech & Ruishton Dramatic Society, joint flower shows and churches. The Parish Council therefore argued that it does not make sense to split the existing Ruishton & Creech ward, which is located on the edge of the Taunton urban area, and divide it between more rural wards.

68 Creech St Michael Parish Council strongly opposed the draft recommendations for its area and argued that the existing Ruishton & Creech ward be retained. It maintained that Creech St Michael and Ruishton parishes share a medical centre, primary school, vets and post office/shop. The parishes work together as a community, often attending shared events and community groups and working

together on common issues such as annual flooding. It stated that there is no similar level of cooperation with the neighbouring more rural parishes.

69 Neroche Parish Council stated that it supports the principle of a single-member ward for its area in order to reflect community interests and argued that the draft two-member Ruishton & Neroche ward would not achieve this. A local resident of Creech St Michael stated that she disagreed with the draft recommendation to place Creech St Michael and Ruishton villages in different wards. She argued that these two villages share strong links such as shared organisations, social groups, schools, shops and joint concerns such as flooding. She further argued that the villages of Ruishton and Creech St Michael 'are dormitory areas of Taunton and have little in common with the more distant rural areas they are proposed to be linked with'.

70 We carefully considered the representations received for this area. We noted the strong support from the Borough Council, Ruishton & Thornfalcon and Creech St Michael parish councils and a local resident for retaining the existing Ruishton & Creech ward. We noted the evidence regarding the strong links within this ward, in terms of shared social events and amenities and common issues such as flooding. Based on the evidence received, we are persuaded that this area does not have strong links with the existing North Curry, Stoke St Gregory or Neroche wards. We consider that the parishes of Ruishton, Creech St Michael and Thornfalcon should remain in the same ward in order to reflect their evident community ties. We therefore propose to move away from our draft recommendations and retain the existing Ruishton & Creech ward. We consider that this would provide a better reflection of community identity and good electoral equality, with a projected variance of 1% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. This ward comprises Creech St Michael, Ruishton and Thornfalcon parishes.

71 Having decided to move away from our draft recommendations for Ruishton, Creech St Michael and Thornfalcon parishes, we then considered the warding arrangements for the remainder of this area. We noted that the Borough Council resubmitted its Stage One proposal to transfer West Hatch parish from Neroche ward into a ward with the existing North Curry and Stoke St Gregory wards. However, we do not propose to adopt this proposal in view of the opposition to this proposal during Stage One. We also note the lack of supporting evidence as well as the poor road links between West Hatch parish and the North Curry area. We consider that this proposal would not reflect community identities or provide convenient and effective local government.

72 In addition we do not propose to adopt Stoke St Gregory Parish Council's proposed two-member ward comprising North Curry and Stoke St Gregory parishes. This ward would have a variance of 38% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009 and would leave Burrowbridge parish, containing just 405 electors, isolated at the edge of the borough. In light of this, we are not endorsing this proposal as we consider it would not provide effective local government or reasonable electoral equality.

73 We note that North Curry Parish Council proposed to retain the existing North Curry ward. This ward is projected to have a variance of 13% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009 under the proposed council size. However, as a result of the "peninsula" nature of the external borough boundary in this part of Taunton Deane, it would mean the retention of the existing Stoke St

Gregory ward which would contain 30% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. In view of this electoral imbalance and the alternative options available, we do not intend to adopt this proposal.

74 Instead we are putting forward an alternative two-member North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward comprising the existing North Curry and Stoke St Gregory wards. In view of the arguments received opposing the draft recommendation to include Creech St Michael parish with the latter two wards, as well as the support for retaining the existing Ruishton & Creech ward, we are convinced that this would provide a significantly better reflection of community identities. We acknowledge that our proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward would have a variance of 22% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. However, having decided to retain the neighbouring existing Ruishton & Creech ward, we consider that our North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward would best reflect the community links outlined in the submissions received. We note the unusual geography of this area, in terms of its peninsular nature, and consequently consider this to be a special case. In view of the factors outlined above we consider a variance of 22% to be acceptable in this case since it will significantly improve the reflection of community identities and reflect the area's unique geography.

75 Consequently, we propose to move away from our draft recommendations and retain the existing single-member Neroche ward, which would have a variance of 12% by 2009. We note that the Borough Council argued that this ward should be retained and Neroche Parish Council supported a single-member ward for its area. In view of these comments and our amendments to our recommendations elsewhere to better reflect community identities, we consider that the current Neroche ward would provide the most suitable warding arrangement. We note that the ward would have a variance of more than 10% from the borough average, but we judge that it would provide a very good reflection of community identity.

76 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for North Curry & Stoke Gregory, Ruishton & Creech and Neroche wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards

77 Under the existing arrangements Blackdown ward comprises the parishes of Churchstanton, Otterford and Pitminster. Monument ward comprises the parishes of Sampford Arundel, Wellington Without and West Buckland. Trull ward comprises the Trull parish ward of Trull parish. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

78 During Stage One, the Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards. It did not provide evidence to support its proposal, but given the good levels of electoral equality that these wards provide we recommended retaining the existing Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards as part of our draft recommendations.

79 Under our draft recommendations no ward in this area would have a variance greater than 6% by 2009.

80 During Stage Three the Borough Council supported our recommendations in this area. We received no other representations and we are therefore endorsing our draft recommendations as final.

81 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Maps 1, 2 and 3 accompanying this report.

Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards

82 Under the existing arrangements Norton Fitzwarren ward comprises the parish of Norton Fitzwarren. Staplegrove ward comprises the parishes of Kingston St Mary, Staplegrove and Cheddon parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish and an unparished area. West Monkton ward comprises West Monkton parish and Maidenbrook parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

83 During Stage One the Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards, but it proposed to allocate an additional councillor to its proposed North Fitzwarren ward and West Monkton wards to address their projected high levels of electoral inequality. The Borough Council did not provide strong evidence in support of its proposals, but given the good levels of electoral equality that its recommendations would provide we adopted its proposals without amendments in this area.

84 Under our draft recommendations no ward would have a variance greater than 8% by 2009.

85 During Stage Three, we received three representations in relation to this area. The Borough Council stated that it accepted the draft recommendations to retain the existing Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards. It maintained that the existing wards 'provide the most satisfactory reflection of local community identities and effective and convenient local government'.

86 Councillor Bradley proposed an alternative two-member Nerrols St Peters ward predominantly based on the existing Maidenbrook parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish. She also proposed to include part of Taunton Lyngford ward broadly east of St Augustine of Canterbury School, plus the Grange Drive area and part of Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton ward. Councillor Bradley maintained that the housing developments of Nerrols and Maidenbrook, within Maidenbrook parish ward look to Lyngford for such amenities as shops and churches. She argued that 'their natural orientation is away from West Monkton and towards Taunton'.

87 Councillor Bradley consequently proposed an amended two-member West Monkton ward comprising West Monkton parish. She noted that a new housing development is about to commence in Monkton Heathfield and contended that a two-member ward for this area would help to develop the identity and social cohesion of this growing settlement. Her proposed West Monkton ward would have a variance of 29% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009.

88 Councillor Weston expressed concerns regarding Councillor Bradley's proposals, contending that the proposed wards would 'draw together communities which have very little shared interest and no shared sense of community identity'. She also maintained that three-member wards have been proven to work effectively, with members working together across party lines.

89 Having considered the representations received we have decided to endorse the draft recommendations for Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards. We have considered the argument for two alternative Nerrols St Peters and West Monkton wards put forward by Councillor Bradley but note that one of her proposals would result in an electoral imbalance of 29% by 2009. We consider that she provided insufficient evidence to justify moving away from our draft recommendations for this area, especially in view of the high electoral imbalance. Her proposals did not include any persuasive justification for the specific boundaries which she proposed. We also note the concerns of Councillor Weston in relation to Councillor Bradley's proposals, as well as the support of the Borough Council for our draft recommendations. We therefore propose to confirm our draft recommendations for Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards as final.

90 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton wards

91 Under the existing arrangements Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton wards are currently unparished. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

92 During Stage One, the Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Taunton Fairwater ward and put forward an amendment to the existing Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton wards which would provide an improved level of electoral equality. This amendment would ensure that Taunton Lyngford ward would have 7% more electors per councillor than the borough average and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton ward would have 2% fewer electors than the borough average by 2009.

93 We considered the Borough Council's proposals, and due to the good levels of electoral equality we adopted its proposed Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton wards with a minor amendment. We considered that it would be appropriate for the proposed boundary between Taunton Lyngford ward and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton ward to follow the backs of the properties (numbered 2 to 48) on the southern side of Eastwick Road and the backs of the properties on the southern side of Buckland Road.

94 Under our draft recommendations, no ward would have a variance greater than 5% by 2009.

95 During Stage Three, we received four submissions in relation to this area. The Borough Council stated that it accepted the draft recommendation to retain the

existing Taunton Fairwater ward. It also accepted the draft recommendations for minor boundary changes to improve the electoral equality of Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton wards. A Taunton resident expressed concerns regarding the proposed three-member Lyngford ward. She suggested that a smaller ward, with fewer electors for councillors to represent, would allow for better-quality representation.

96 Councillor Bradley argued that smaller wards allow for more effective representation than three-member wards. She put forward a proposal for a new two-member Obridge ward broadly based on the western half of Taunton Lyngford ward, less the part she transferred to her proposed Nerrols St Peters ward described above in paragraph 86. She proposed that Obridge ward's eastern boundary run along the southern boundary of St Augustine of Canterbury School and to the west of Lyngford Park and the Grange Drive area. She argued that her proposed Obridge ward would help to 'produce a better social balance' within western Lyngford.

97 As noted in the previous section in paragraph 88, Councillor Weston objected to Councillor Bradley's proposals and expressed concerns in terms of their reflection of community identity and the proven effectiveness of three-member wards.

98 Having considered the representations received we have decided to endorse the draft recommendations for Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton wards. We have considered the arguments put forward by Councillor Bradley and the local resident but consider that neither provided sufficient evidence to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations. We note that Councillor Bradley considered that two-member wards provide more effective representation than three-member wards. However, we do not consider that she has provided evidence to show that three-member wards provide less effective and convenient local government than two-member wards. Nor are we not convinced that her proposed boundaries would better reflect community identities, particularly in light of Councillor Weston's concerns and the Borough Council's support for our recommendations.

99 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards

100 Under the existing arrangements Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards are currently unparished. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

101 During Stage One the Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards.

102 We considered the Borough Council's proposals, and due to the good levels of electoral equality that they would provide we adopted its proposed Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards subject to a minor amendment. We noted that the current boundary divides Severn Drive between these two wards. To

address this issue we transferred those properties on Severn Drive within the existing Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward into Taunton Halcon ward.

103 Under our draft recommendations no ward would have a variance greater than 4% by 2009.

104 During Stage Three the Borough Council supported the draft recommendation for these two wards. We received no other representations regarding this area and we are therefore endorsing our draft recommendations as final.

105 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Bishop's Hull, Comeytrove, Taunton Eastgate, Taunton Manor & Wilton and Taunton Killams & Mountfield wards

106 Under the existing arrangements Bishop's Hull ward comprises Bishop's Hull parish and an unparished area. Comeytrove ward comprises the parish of Comeytrove. Taunton Eastgate and Taunton Manor & Wilton wards are currently unparished, while Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward comprises Killams parish ward of Trull parish and an unparished area. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

107 During Stage One the Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Bishop's Hull, Comeytrove and Taunton Manor & Wilton wards. It proposed to amend the boundary between the existing Taunton Eastgate and Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward to provide for an improved level of electoral equality. We considered the Borough Council's proposals and adopted its proposed Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward due to the good level of electoral equality it would provide.

108 However, we did not consider that the Borough Council had sufficiently justified the variances resulting from its proposal to retain Bishop's Hull and Comeytrove wards. Therefore, we examined the potential for modifying the Borough Council's proposals to provide for an improved level of electoral equality. We proposed to transfer two areas from Taunton Manor & Wilton ward to alleviate the electoral imbalances within Bishop's Hull and Comeytrove wards. We proposed to transfer the properties on, and south of, Southwood Grove and Hoveland Lane to Comeytrove ward (affecting some 250 electors), and we proposed to transfer the area broadly west of Musgrove Park Hospital, Henley Road and Somerset College of Arts and Technology to Bishop's Hull ward (affecting some 220 electors). Our proposals would ensure an improved level of electoral equality, with the proposed Bishop's Hull and Comeytrove wards having variances of 3% fewer and 6% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009 respectively.

109 We examined options to address the detrimental effect these two transfers would have on the level of electoral equality secured by Taunton Manor & Wilton ward. As it is effectively separated from Taunton Fairwater ward and Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward, we considered that the most appropriate option would be to transfer electors from Taunton Eastgate ward. Therefore we proposed to transfer the

area broadly west of Foundary Road, Lower Middle Street, St Mary Magdalene's Church and Eastgate Gardens from Taunton Eastgate ward to Taunton Manor & Wilton ward. Subject to this amendment we proposed to adopt the existing Taunton Eastgate and Taunton Manor & Wilton wards.

110 Under our draft recommendations no ward would have a variance greater than 7%.

111 During Stage Three we received three submissions in relation to this area. The Borough Council supported the draft recommendation to transfer an area north of Holway Avenue from Taunton Eastgate ward into Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward. However, it opposed the draft recommendation to transfer electors from an unparished area north of Mary Street and east of County Hall, from Taunton Eastgate ward to Taunton Manor & Wilton ward. The Borough Council stated that it objected to this proposal in view of its opposition to the draft recommendation for Bishop's Hull ward to include the area around Musgrove Park Hospital, currently in Taunton Manor & Wilton ward. It argued that this recommendation would not provide convenient and effective local government, since the existing Bishop's Hull ward is predominantly based on Bishop's Hull parish plus a small unparished area. The Borough Council argued that adding an additional unparished area could cause 'confusion and loss of identity' as Bishop's Hull parish 'forms a coherent, identifiable community'. It re-submitted its Stage One proposal that the existing Bishop's Hull ward be retained.

112 Similarly, the Borough Council also objected to the draft recommendation to transfer electors south of Hoveland Lane and north of Galmington Road from the unparished Taunton Manor & Wilton ward into the parished Comeytrowe ward. It argued that this recommendation would not provide convenient and effective local government. The boundaries of Comeytrowe parish were 'chosen to reflect the fact that this represented a single, identifiable community' and therefore the current arrangements should remain in place.

113 Comeytrowe Parish Council also opposed the draft Comeytrowe ward and contended that the existing Comeytrowe ward, based solely on Comeytrowe parish, should be retained. It described how the boundaries of Comeytrowe parish were created following considerable discussion. The agreed Comeytrowe parish formed 'an identifiable and recognisable neighbourhood and community, which is self-contained with its own wide range of local facilities ... [and] identifiable boundaries' including Galmington Road. Comeytrowe Parish Council argued that there is no logic to the proposal to transfer electors on the other side of Galmington Road into Comeytrowe ward as this area has 'no sense of community or belonging' with this unparished area.

114 Councillor Lees opposed the draft recommendations for Eastgate ward and contended that they do not take communities into consideration. He objected to the proposal to transfer part of Taunton Eastgate ward into Taunton Manor & Wilton ward. Councillor Lees argued that Taunton Eastgate ward has only recently been 'allied' and this proposal would cause confusion amongst the electorate. He also opposed the draft recommendation to transfer part of Taunton Eastgate ward into Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward. He maintained that this recommendation would split the community of Trinity and the only reason behind it is to improve electoral equality. Councillor Lees suggested that it may be better to look to neighbouring wards such as Taunton Blackbrook & Holway to help ensure electoral equality.

115 Having considered the representations received we have decided to endorse the draft recommendation for Eastgate ward. We considered the arguments put forward by the Borough Council and Councillor Lees. However we consider that they did not provide adequate community identity evidence to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations for Taunton Eastgate and Taunton Killams & Mountfield wards. We note Councillor Lees' suggestion that changes could be made to Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward instead of Eastgate ward. However, the Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward has comparatively good electoral equality (6% more electors than the borough average by 2009), therefore we do not propose to make any changes to this ward. We also note that under the existing arrangements and proposed council size, Taunton Eastgate ward is projected to contain 20% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009, while the neighbouring Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward is projected to contain 20% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. In the absence of any strong evidence to support the existing wards, we consider that such high electoral imbalances are unwarranted in an urban area. Therefore, we intend to endorse our draft recommendations for Taunton Eastgate and Taunton Killams & Mountfield wards as they provide improved electoral equality.

116 We note that the Borough Council and Comeytrowe Parish Council opposed the draft recommendation to transfer part of Taunton Manor & Wilton ward into Comeytrowe ward. We also note that they state that Comeytrowe parish forms a separate community. However, they provided insufficient evidence to support their claim and there are clear road links between the two wards. Given the ward's relatively poor electoral equality (11% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average under the proposed council size by 2009) we would require more persuasive community identity arguments to convince us to move away from our draft recommendations which improve electoral equality in this urban area. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for Comeytrowe ward as final.

117 We considered the Borough Council's objections to the draft recommendation to amend the eastern boundary of Bishop's Hull ward to include part of Taunton Manor & Wilton ward. The Borough Council argued that the existing ward boundary should be retained in order to reflect the community identity of Bishop's Hull parish. However, we note that the ward currently contains an unparished area of Taunton and is projected to have an electoral imbalance of 10% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. As above, in order to justify this level of electoral imbalance in an urban area, we would require considerable community identity evidence and we judge the evidence provided to be limited. As a result we propose to endorse our draft recommendation for Bishop's Hull ward as part of our final recommendations.

118 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Bishop's Hull, Comeytrowe, Taunton Eastgate, Taunton Manor & Wilton and Taunton Killams & Mountfield wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Bishop's Lydeard, Bradford-on-Tone, Milverton & North Deane and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards

119 Under the existing arrangements Bishop's Lydeard ward comprises the parishes of Bishop's Lydeard and Cothelstone. Bradford-on-Tone ward comprises the parishes of Bradford-on-Tone, Langford Budville, Nynehead and Oake. Milverton & North Deane ward comprises the parishes of Ash Priors, Combe Florey, Fitzhead, Halse, Lydeard St Lawrence, Milverton, Tolland and West Bagborough. Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward comprises the parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Chipstable, Stawley and Wiveliscombe. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

120 During Stage One the Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Bradford-on-Tone and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards. It noted that the existing Bradford-on-Tone ward would result in a variance of 14% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009, but considered that it had been 'unable to see any alternative to maintaining the status quo'.

121 In order to alleviate the high level of electoral imbalance secured by the existing Bishop's Lydeard ward, the Borough Council put forward a new single- and three-member ward pattern. It proposed to transfer the parishes of Ash Priors, Combe Florey, Halse and West Bagborough from the existing two-member Milverton & North Deane ward and combine them with the existing Bishop's Lydeard ward to comprise a new, as yet unnamed, three-member ward (henceforth referred to as Bishop's Lydeard ward). The Borough Council proposed that the remaining parishes of Milverton, Fitzhead, Lydeard St Lawrence and Tolland comprise a new single-member Milverton & North Deane ward.

122 The Borough Council explained that 'since the last review the development at Cotford St Luke [within Bishop's Lydeard parish] has continued and some additional dwellings remain to be built in the near future' and proposed to create a parish ward comprising the village of Cotford St Luke. However, as part of the Borough Council's submission, the Liberal Democrat Group proposed an amendment to the proposed three-member Bishop's Lydeard ward whereby the proposed Cotford St Luke parish ward would comprise a new single-member borough ward.

123 Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council declared its support for the Borough Council's proposed three-member Bishop's Lydeard ward and the proposal to create a parish ward comprising Cotford St Luke. It also noted 'the potential' for a single-member ward comprising Cotford St Luke, but did not put this forward as a formal proposal.

124 As part of our draft recommendations we adopted the Borough Council's proposed Bishop's Lydeard ward due to the good level of electoral equality it would provide. We considered the alternative proposal put forward by the Liberal Democrat Group, but as this achieves a worse level of electoral equality we did not propose to adopt it at this stage. We considered the proposals for amending the electoral arrangements of Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council, and these are discussed in more detail in the parish arrangements section below.

125 However, we considered the Borough Council provided only limited evidence in support of its proposed Bradford-on-Tone ward which would have a relatively high

level of electoral inequality and we therefore examined options to address this. We found that the distribution of electors constrains the opportunities for resolving the imbalance without resorting to either parish warding or substantial changes to surrounding wards. After identifying options involving parish warding, such as an option to ward Oake parish in order to transfer Heathfield and Hill Common to the proposed Bishop's Lydeard ward, we concluded such an approach would result in a division of communities and are of the view that a better approach would be to improve electoral equality by combining whole parishes. While this approach results in larger wards that include a number of communities that do not have strong links we consider this preferable to smaller wards that divide villages and communities.

126 Therefore, in light of the limited evidence in support of the proposed Bradford-on-Tone ward and in order to achieve a good level of electoral equality while avoiding dividing parishes, we proposed our own pattern of two two-member wards. We proposed to combine Bradford-on-Tone ward with the parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Stawley and Milverton to comprise a new two-member Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane ward and we proposed to combine the parishes of Chipstable, Fitzhead, Lydeard St Lawrence, Tolland and Wiveliscombe to comprise a new two-member Wiveliscombe & North Deane ward.

127 Under our draft recommendations no ward would have a variance greater than 8% by 2009.

128 During Stage Three we received 37 representations in relation to this area. We received support for our proposed Bishop's Lydeard ward from the Borough Council and Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone and West Bagborough parish councils. Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council also requested that the apostrophe in the proposed ward be removed so that it is called Bishop's Lydeard ward. It also proposed revised electoral arrangements for the parish which are discussed in more detail in the 'parish electoral arrangements' section in paragraph 158 below. The Borough Council supported the proposals of the parish council in relation to both the electoral arrangements of the parish and regarding the ward name.

129 In relation to our proposed Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane and Wiveliscombe & North Deane wards, respondents considered that the draft recommendations did not reflect community identities and considered that the existing arrangements should be retained.

130 The Borough Council along with Milverton, Bathealton, Chipstable, Stawley, Bradford-on-Tone, Ashbrittle, Wiveliscombe, Oake and Nynehead parish councils all opposed the recommendations and considered that the proposals did not reflect community identity. Waterrow, Chipstable & Raddington Community Group, Ashbrittle Arts, Wiveliscombe Area Partnership, the 10 Parishes Festival, Stawley Community Association, Councillor Bone (Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward), Councillor Whitmarsh (Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward), a Chipstable parish councillor, a Wiveliscombe parish councillor and 15 local residents also objected to the proposals considering that they did not reflect community identity.

131 Respondents provided some good evidence as to why the existing Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward should be retained. The Borough Council noted the considerable local opposition to the draft recommendations and expressed its support for the local views and also proposed that the existing arrangements should be retained. Councillor Whitmarsh (Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward) noted that

Wiveliscombe is the focal point for the activities in which the constituent parishes have been involved in recent years. She noted that the Wiveliscombe Area Partnership 'has been running for 5 years and maintains a community Office in the town, serving the whole area. She noted that 'through the office a Market and Coastal Towns Initiative has been [running projects] ... including the Wivey Link bus service'. Respondents noted that the Wiveliscombe Community Office serves all the parishes in the ward and that links that have been forged have resulted in strong community identity reflected by the 10 Parishes Arts Festival that all the parishes are involved in.

132 Bathealton Parish Council noted that its parish 'has both physical and cultural links with Wiveliscombe – the local area for schools, shopping, post office, doctor, dentist, work and business'. It considered that the draft recommendations would link the parish with others that it shared no links with and therefore proposed that the existing arrangements be retained. Milverton Parish Council expressed concern regarding the geographical size of the proposed Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane ward. It stated that the proposed ward links parishes which have poor links, noting that 'Milverton has nothing in common with Ashbrittle, Bradford-on-Tone or Stawley. They are some distance apart, access between them is poor and interdependence virtually non-existent'.

133 Councillor Whitmarsh also objected to the proposed division of Milverton and Fitzhead parishes between wards. She noted that the parishes 'share a vicar, use Milverton School, and run a longstanding society, the Milverton and Fitzhead Society'. Chipstable Parish Council also noted that the parishes of Ashbrittle, Stawley, Bathealton and Chipstable are 'grouped closely together geographically, with the main shopping facilities, schools, banking and surgery located in Wiveliscombe'. It went on to explain how the Community Office in Wiveliscombe 'offers the services of the Citizens Advice Bureau, a visiting optician, the opportunity to inspect planning applications and speak to parish councillors'.

134 Stawley Parish Council also provided information regarding how it considers that the parish has strong links to the parishes in the existing Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward, noting that it contributes to the administration of the Community Office which provides many community connections in relation to secondary and further education in the area. It also described youth activities in and around Wiveliscombe that it is involved with as well as the fact that it uses the doctor's surgery. It also considered that as a rural parish it has little in common with the more urban parishes of Bradford-on-Tone, Oake and Milverton.

135 We received a proposal from Wiveliscombe Area Partnership who also considered that the existing arrangements reflect community identities and that the Partnership's work would be eroded if the draft recommendations were implemented. It stated that these parishes should be retained in a ward 'rather than fragmenting an established community'. It considered a better alternative to the draft recommendations would be for a three-member ward comprising the existing Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward and the parishes of Milverton and Fitzhead, which would have 8% fewer electors than the borough average by 2009.

136 Bradford-on-Tone Parish Council stated that the existing warding arrangements for the town should be retained, but provided no further evidence. All respondents in this area provided similar representations, noting that the proposed

Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane ward would combine parishes which share no community links and which combine relatively urban areas with very rural parishes and all respondents considered that the existing arrangements reflect community identities in the area and should be retained.

137 Having considered the representations received we have decided to endorse the draft recommendation for the boundaries of the proposed Bishop's Lydeard ward. We note the support of the Borough Council and Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone and West Bagborough parish councils for the proposed Bishop's Lydeard ward and are confirming this ward as part of our final recommendations. We note the Borough Council's support for Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council's proposal that the apostrophe should be removed from the ward name. In view of this local agreement, we propose to adopt this proposal as part of our final recommendations. However, we note that the parish will continue to be spelt Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone. In view of the local consensus achieved at Stage Three, we also intend to adopt Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council's and the Borough Council's proposals for amended electoral arrangements for Bishop's Lydeard parish. These proposals are discussed in more detail in the 'parish electoral arrangements' section at the end of this report in paragraph 158.

138 We carefully considered the representations for the remainder of this area. We noted Wiveliscombe Area Partnership's consideration an alternative three-member ward comprising the existing Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward and Fitzhead and Milverton parishes. This ward would have 8% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. We note that Wiveliscombe Area Partnership maintained that this proposal would reflect the nature of the area and would avoid splitting a community. However, this would result in the parishes of Tolland and Lydeard St Lawrence being isolated on the edge of the borough with insufficient numbers of electors to form a viable ward. The only subsequent option would be to transfer these two parishes into the neighbouring ward of Bishop's Lydeard. However, this would reduce the electoral equality of Bishop's Lydeard ward to 12%. In light of the better level of electoral equality and support for Bishop's Lydeard ward we are not adopting Wiveliscombe Area Partnership's proposed ward.

139 We note the strong opposition to the proposed two-member Wiveliscombe & North Deane and Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane wards from the Borough Council, nine parish councils, local community groups, councillors and local residents. All of the comments received agreed that these two wards would not reflect community identities, while the existing wards do so very effectively. Substantial evidence was provided in support of this argument, particularly in relation to the Wiveliscombe area, in terms of local schools, churches, doctors, shops, facilities, social activities, road links, bus links and a community office.

140 The draft recommendations for this area aimed to improve electoral equality and were put forward as a result of the limited evidence provided at Stage One. In light of the evidence provided during Stage Three and outlined above, we are persuaded that the draft recommendations for Wiveliscombe & North Deane and Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane wards would not reflect community identities. We conclude that the existing Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward, in particular, reflects the strong community links between its constituent parishes and note this ward would contain 3% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. In light of the evidence received we consider that the existing arrangements mirror

Wiveliscombe's role as a rural community hub serving the whole ward. We are therefore proposing to move away from our draft recommendations to adopt the existing Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward as part of our final recommendations.

141 Having decided to move away from our draft recommendations for the Wiveliscombe area, we then examined the options for the remainder of the area. We noted that the Borough Council, Milverton Parish Council and Borough Councillor Whitmarsh argued Milverton and Fitzhead parishes share community links but Milverton parish does not have links with the existing Bradford-on-Tone ward to its south. We therefore investigated the possibility of a ward based around Milverton and Fitzhead parishes. We found that there are limited viable options using whole parishes, due to the distribution of electors among the relevant parishes. We concluded that the single-member Milverton & North Deane ward proposed by the Borough Council during Stage One would better reflect the community identity links identified during Stage Three while providing good electoral equality. We therefore propose an amended Milverton & North Deane ward comprising Fitzhead, Milverton, Lydeard St Lawrence and Tolland parishes. We consider this ward would reflect community identity and it is projected to contain 5% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009.

142 We note the support received during Stage Three for the retention of the existing Bradford-on-Tone ward. In view of our final recommendations elsewhere in this area, we consider the existing Bradford-on-Tone ward would provide the best reflection of community identity. We acknowledge that it is projected to vary by 14% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. However, in light of the strong evidence in support of the existing Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward, which demonstrates the absence of any significant links between the Bradford-on-Tone area and the Milverton or Wiveliscombe areas, we are persuaded to adopt the existing Bradford-on-Tone ward as part of our final recommendations. We consider that the better reflection of community identity this ward would provide compensates for the electoral imbalance. This ward comprises Bradford-on-Tone, Langford Budville, Nynehead and Oake parishes.

143 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Bishop's Lydeard, Bradford-on-Tone, Milverton & North Deane and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards

144 Under the existing arrangements Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards comprise Wellington parish. Wellington East ward comprises Wellington East parish ward, Wellington North comprises Wellington North parish ward, and Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward comprises Rockwell Green and Wellington West parish wards. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

145 During Stage One the Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards, but

did not explain why retaining the existing wards would provide a good reflection of the statutory criteria.

146 Retaining the three existing wards in Wellington does result in relatively good levels of electoral equality. However, we noted that Wellington North ward would have 8% more electors per councillor than the borough average and Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward would have 9% fewer by 2009 and, as there is no evidence to support these levels of electoral variance we examined options to minimise them.

147 We considered the option of transferring electors from Wellington East ward to Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward and from Wellington North ward to Wellington East ward. However, we considered that the existing boundary between Wellington North ward and Wellington East ward (following the High Street) provided a clear demarcation within the town. Consequently, we proposed to transfer some 150 electors broadly west of Waterloo Road and south of Corams Lane from Wellington North ward to Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward. In addition, we proposed to transfer the properties west of Hoyles Road from Wellington East ward to Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward, which would affect some 70 electors.

148 Under our draft recommendations no ward would have a variance greater than 4% by 2009.

149 During Stage Three the Borough Council and Wellington Town Council supported the proposals and the related alterations to the parish warding, as outlined in the 'parish electoral arrangements' section in paragraph 161 below. We are therefore endorsing our draft recommendations as final.

150 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 3 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

151 We are confirming our draft recommendations for the two towns of Wellington and Taunton as well as the rural centre of the borough. In the rural west of the borough we propose retaining the existing Bradford-on-Tone and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards. We are also proposing an amended Milverton & North Deane ward based on part of the existing ward. In the rural east, we have proposed retaining the existing Ruishton & Creech and Neroche wards and are proposing a revised North Curry & Stoke Gregory ward.

152 Table 5 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements based on 2004 and 2009 electorate figures.

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Final recommendations	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
Number of councillors	54	54	56	56
Number of wards	27	27	26	26
Average number of electors per councillor	1,514	1,663	1,460	1,603
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	11	11	10	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	2	6	4	1

153 As shown in Table 5, our final recommendations for Taunton Deane Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 11 to 10. By 2009 three wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%. We propose to increase the council size from 54 members to 56.

Final recommendation

Taunton Deane Borough Council should comprise 56 councillors serving 26 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

154 As part of an FER the Committee can make recommendations for new electoral arrangements for parishes. Where there is no impact on the borough council's electoral arrangements, the Committee will generally be content to put forward for consideration proposals from parish and town councils for changes to parish electoral arrangements in FERs. However, the Boundary Committee will usually wish to see a degree of consensus between the borough council and the parish council concerned. Proposals should be supported by evidence, illustrating why changes to parish electoral arrangements are required. The Boundary Committee cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an FER.

155 Responsibility for reviewing and implementing changes to the electoral arrangements of existing parishes, outside of an electoral review conducted by the

Boundary Committee, lies with borough councils.² If a borough council wishes to make an Order amending the electoral arrangements of a parish that has been subject to an electoral arrangements Order made by either the Secretary of State or the Electoral Commission within the past five years, the consent of the Commission is required.

156 During Stage One we received proposals for revised parish council electoral arrangements from the Borough Council and Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council for Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council. Currently the Parish Council comprises 16 councillors where 15 councillors are returned from Bishop's Lydeard parish and one councillor is returned from Cothelstone parish. During Stage One, the Borough Council and the Parish Council proposed to create a parish ward based on the settlement of Cotford St Luke (within Bishop's Lydeard parish). However, they submitted conflicting proposals to revise the distribution of parish councillors.

157 When formulating our draft recommendations we did not adopt either the Borough Council or Parish Council's proposals for revised electoral arrangements in the parish as we noted there was no consensus between the proposals. We proposed retaining the existing electoral arrangements.

158 During Stage Three the Borough Council and Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council recommended that the Parish Council's Stage One proposal for the parish should be adopted. They proposed that there should continue to be 16 parish councillors, and that the village of Cotford St Luke in Bishop's Lydeard parish should form a new parish ward and be represented by five councillors. They proposed that the remainder of Bishop's Lydeard parish should represent a new Bishop's Lydeard parish ward and that Cothelstone parish should be represented by one parish councillor. In light of the consensus between the Borough Council and Parish Council regarding the parish's electoral arrangements, we propose to adopt their proposals as part of our final recommendations.

Final recommendation

Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council should continue to comprise 16 parish councillors: Bishop's Lydeard parish ward of Bishop's Lydeard parish (returning 10 councillors), Cothelstone parish (returning one councillor) and Cotford St Luke parish ward of Bishop's Lydeard parish (returning five councillors). The proposed parish wards are illustrated on Map 4.

159 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, during Stage One we proposed consequential warding arrangements for the parish of Wellington to reflect the proposed borough wards.

160 The parish of Wellington is currently served by 15 councillors representing four wards: Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington West parish wards all return four councillors, while Rockwell Green parish ward returns three councillors.

² Such reviews must be conducted in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

Wellington East and Wellington North parish wards comprise the borough wards of the same name and the parish wards of Rockwell Green and Wellington West together comprise Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward. Under our draft recommendations we proposed to retain the current number and distribution of councillors, but we recommended that the parish wards' boundaries are amended to reflect our proposed amendments to Wellington East, Wellington West and Wellington Rockwell Green & West borough wards.

161 During Stage Three the Borough Council and Wellington Town Council supported the amended parish ward boundaries in light of the changes to the proposed borough ward boundaries. We are therefore endorsing our draft recommendations as final.

Final recommendation

Wellington Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Wellington East (returning four councillors); Wellington North (returning four councillors); Wellington West (returning four councillors); and Rockwell Green (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 3.

6 What happens next?

162 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Taunton Deane and submitted our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation.³

163 It is now up to the Electoral Commission to decide whether or not to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 22 August 2006 and the Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representation made to them by that date.

164 All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

**The Secretary
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Fax: 020 7271 0667

Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk

The contact details above should only be used for implementation purposes.

³ Under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI No. 2001/3962).

7 Mapping

Final recommendations for Taunton Deane

165 The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Taunton Deane:

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Taunton Deane, including constituent parishes.
- **Sheet 2, Map 2** illustrates the proposed boundaries in the town of Taunton.
- **Sheet 3, Map 3** illustrates the proposed boundaries in the town of Wellington.
- **Sheet 4, Map 4** illustrates the proposed boundaries for Bishop's Lydeard ward.

Appendix A

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
Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Consultation	An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve on a council
Order (or electoral change Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process
Electoral equality	A measure of ensuring that every person's vote is of equal worth

Electoral imbalance	Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the borough
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections
FER (or further electoral review)	A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last periodic electoral review conducted between 1996 and 2004
Multi-member ward	A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	<p>The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and will soon be joined by the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is:</p> <p>‘An extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation's benefit and by appropriate national decision and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; – access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; – wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; – established farming use is effectively maintained’
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 than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single district or borough 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 residents of the parish who are on the electoral register, which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries
Parish electoral arrangements	The total number of parish councillors; 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 Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England

Political management arrangements	The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet, a cabinet with a leader, or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the borough average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the borough council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (available at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm) requires all government departments and agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as the Boundary Committee for England, 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 B1: The Boundary Committee for England's 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 comply with this requirement.
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.