

Dorset

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Comment text:

Please find attached my response to the 2026 Consultation on the Dorset Council warding arrangements. I attach my response document (word file) which contains maps created from GIS system. To support this, I attach a jpeg of the map for the whole of Weymouth and Chickerell within Dorset and the GIS files which were used to create this. Please confirm you are able to read these files which are referenced in the word document.

Sincerely
David J Northam.

Attached Documents:

- lgbce-2026-consultation-response-on-dorset-council-warding-v2.docx
- af4.jpeg

LGBCE Consultation on Dorset Council Warding

Response submitted by Cllr David Northam.

Summary

I generally support the Dorset Council submission and was a member of the working group which prepared the response. However, I have a few personal observations and recommendations to add which I hope the Boundary Commission will consider. These concern three topics:

1. Observations on the approach to warding and how this might provide clearer boundaries for Dorset Wards.
2. Revisions to the Dorset Council proposed 1-member ward for North Weymouth.
3. A revision to the Dorset Council proposed 2-member for Littlemoor & Preston to make this 2 single-member wards reflecting the distinct communities known as Littlemoor and Preston.

I am married and have lived in Weymouth since 1978. We have brought up our two children who attended local schools and Weymouth College. I have worked in several businesses in Weymouth, Portland and Chickereall. I retired in 2019.

In 2019 I was elected to Wey Valley Ward in the Weymouth Town Council Elections. The Town Council ward boundaries were revised as part of a Community Governance Review in 2022 - these came into effect in 2024. In 2024 I was elected to Upwey & Broadwey ward in the Weymouth Town Council and also Upwey & Broadwey ward in Dorset Council elections and am still a serving member of both councils. The views in this response are my own and not either of the councils.

I believe my recommendations will enable an equitable approach to electoral representation and will provide clearly defined wards with clear and distinct identities which form sensible units of local government.

Background

I have been a resident of Dorset since 1978 when I moved to Preston in Weymouth to teach at Broadwey Secondary Modern School which serviced parts of Weymouth and surrounding districts. With the bulk of its pupils coming from Littlemoor, Preston, Upwey & Broadwey, Radipole, Lodmoor and Melcombe Regis.

My first house was a rented property in Bridge Lane in Preston. After 3 months, my wife and I bought a property in Puddledock Lane, Preston in which we lived until 1982 when we moved to Upwey.

In 1985 we moved to The Finches, Littlemoor and lived there until 1997. Whilst, living in Littlemoor I became Chair of the Littlemoor Scout Group and supported my son as a member of Littlemoor Youth Football Club.

I was involved in the 2022 Community Governance Review and recommended changes to warding in Weymouth to better represent the communities within the town for the areas adjacent to the town where development had spread outside the town boundary.

I joined the Dorset Council Boundary Review working group to develop the warding recommendations for Dorset Council. As a member of the working group I fed back progress and sought confirmation of

emerging principles and boundaries from members in Dorset and particularly in Weymouth & Chickerehell from the LibDem party. The initial recommendations from Dorset Council officers were for 83 members across 48 wards but no ward boundaries were recommended for Weymouth (it was shown as a single area with 11 councillors). I worked with other Weymouth members, and we expanded this to include the adjacent Chickerehell Ward members. As a group we met and, agreed that boundaries should include consideration of Chickerehell polling Districts also (CHC1-6). With the exception of Littlemoor & Preston, ward members felt single member wards are more democratic (ie allow single election candidates to compete on a fair basis), they allow councillors to build better relationships with residents (as there are fewer residents per councillor and vice versa), and they provide direct accountability between councillor and electors.

Councillor Alex Furhmann proposed arrangements for revised Weymouth and Chickerehell Dorset Council wards for 13 councillors in 12 wards. This proposal was submitted to the Dorset Council working group. These wards were all 1-member wards with clear boundaries between communities, with the exception of Westham Ward which was proposed as a 2-member ward as there was no natural boundary in this densely populated and coherent community.

When this warding arrangement was presented to the working group it was noted that this arrangement was generally acceptable, but that Preston Ward would have 4380 electors ie +14.1% over the desired +10% limit. Rather than accepting this as an anomaly, along with Blandford +12.5%, Portland -14.0%, and St Leonards and St Ives -12.0%. The Working Group suggested that Preston ward and Littlemoor ward should be combined into a two-member ward of 8319 electors ie with electoral equality of +8.50%. I spoke against this as I think it fails to meet the coherent and distinctive community identity criteria - there are no two areas in Dorset that are so close yet so different. But at the working group I was outvoted and this position was subsequently endorsed at Full Council.

It remains the view of Weymouth & Chickerehell LibDem Councillors, that 'where possible we have single member wards unless the community has common identity and there is no clear boundary'.

I support the main Dorset Council recommendations but wish to comment and recommend some changes detailed in the following paragraphs.

1. Observations on the approach to warding and how this might provide clearer boundaries for Dorset Wards.

Dorset is regarded as a rural council most of the wards are single member wards covering a number of parishes and present a significant geographic challenge. Dorset is bounded by the sea to the south and Portland is an island joined by a causeway to mainland Weymouth which is itself on a peninsula with sea bounding much of its area. This presents challenges to adjusting the boundary for electoral equality.

The South Dorset Ridgeway represents a significant natural boundary to the North of Weymouth. The mainline railway divides Weymouth into land West of the Railway line land to the East. Much of this line runs through cuttings or embankments making the railway line a distinctive natural boundary. The Weymouth Relief Road provides another north south feature which again splits Weymouth to the West

and East. The town centre is mostly on reclaimed land and densely populated and bounded by the sea, the inner harbour and Radipole Lake and the Lodmoor Marsh to the East.

But the external and internal boundaries following old field boundaries representing past land holdings. This is reflected in the boundaries of the Polling Districts. But modern development has developed through ribbon and area development as landholding have been released.

Recommendation 1.1 it is recommended that Polling Districts are also considered in the revised boundaries together with availability of venues for Polling Stations.

Weymouth is the largest town by a considerable margin, it and other towns in Dorset have had multi-member wards. The Working Group considered that 3-member wards were not desirable, and warding should comprise, where possible, 1 or 2- member wards. However, what has emerged for Dorset is a recommendation for 5 3-member wards, 14 2-member wards and 40 1-member wards. Only in Weymouth and West Purbeck ward has the challenge to create meaningful single-member wards been addressed. For Weymouth and Chickerell this is with the initial proposal recommending 11 single-member wards and 1 two-member ward as described above.

Dorset Council took the practical approach of determining the 2032 electoral levels for existing polling districts and then seeking to allocate polling districts to achieve desired electoral numbers per ward. This was carried out by starting in the Lyme Regis and Charmouth and then working eastwards. This left limited choices and resulted in the number of ward members increasing initially to 83 and following the Weymouth & Chickerell changes to 84.

Recommendation 1.2 A more logical approach might have been to consider the existing wards with their allocated Polling Districts and identify those that sat above the desired +/- 10% electoral equality prioritising those with the greatest deviation first so as to achieve electoral equality.

Portland as an island with fixed boundaries. It presents a challenge as the 2032 electoral level provide -14% for 3 members. Portland is very independent and distinct – having a ward bridging Weymouth & Portland would be seen as retrogressive by many residents of Portland who welcome Portland's independent voice. But there are distinct boundaries on Portland the most noticeable being the Tophill and Underhill. **Recommendation 1.3** Consider splitting Portland into 3 1-member wards. I believe 3 single member-wards could be achieved in Portland, albeit with electoral levels ranging from -10% to -20% with Underhill being one ward and the Tophill split into two wards. Portland Town Council has 3 wards Underhill, Tophill East and Tophill West. The Dorset Council wards could be based on these with adjustment to reflect 2032 electors to achieve equitable electoral numbers of roughly 3,300 electors.

In the Weymouth area the boundary between Weymouth and Chickerell has blurred as new development between the Town (and New Town) of Chickerell have extended the urban areas. The proposed warding focussed on determining what an area was most connected to and where it looked to for its services. Thus, the area to the West of Southill (WEY15) in the draft Dorset Local Plan (2021) for development is included in the revised Radipole & Southill ward boundary even though at this stage it has no electors. The existing Dorset Council wards do not reflect either the Town Council boundary nor the extended urban area connected by road to Weymouth and utilising Weymouth for

most of its community life. For this reason, the proposed DC warding includes areas with Chickerell Polling Codes and some of these cross the Town Council boundaries.

The Upwey & Broadwey ward for the Town Council includes Nottingham village (CHC6) but for Dorset Council this was previously added to the Dorset Council Chickerell Ward. The residents of Nottingham look to Weymouth and Dorchester Road in Broadwey for its local connection and services and not to Chickerell. The new warding proposes that Nottingham should be part of the revised Dorset Council Upwey and Broadwey ward with proposed name North Weymouth. There is an existing development of 340 homes underway which will increase the number of residents in Nottingham.

Radipole Lake in Weymouth forms a natural boundary – but before the dam its area was much bigger. Land was reclaimed for the Railway into Weymouth and then, with further reclamation, a park and road was built parallel to the railway. Because much of the park land and road are within the flood relief area and issues within this area need to be led by a single ward member. **Recommendation 1.4** The boundary between DC proposed wards of Westham, Radipole, & Southill, Lodmoor and Melcombe Regis should be amended so that whole of Radipole Lake and Radipole Park Drive is within proposed Radipole & Southill ward. This does not affect electoral numbers. ie the railway line should represent the eastern boundary of this ward with the lake area north of Westham Bridge should be within Radipole & Southill ward.

I feel strongly that 3-member wards offer less electoral accountability and less opportunity for 3 times the number of residents to forge relationships with their councillors. Additionally, with first past the post electoral system, I find them less democratic in that with 3 times the number of voters of single member wards the opportunity for independents and small parties to field candidates is more daunting and effectively reduced. **Recommendation 1.5** LGBCE reviews the five Dorset Council 3-members wards to seek opportunities for these to be split to improve electoral accountability and better democratic opportunities for independent candidates.

2. Revisions to the Dorset Council proposed 1-member ward for North Weymouth.

The grouping of Nottingham, Broadwey, Upwey and Bincombe into a single ward with suggested name of North Weymouth brings together suburban and village areas which were previously (pre 1933) villages outside Weymouth and Melcombe Regis. These villages retain aspects of the village life with good access to countryside through a network of footpaths. They are bound together by services access mainly via Dorchester Road. The proposed Dorset Council warding for North Weymouth groups these similar communities into a single ward serviced by 3 churches (St Laurence, St Nicholas and Holy Trinity) and St Nicholas & St Laurence primary school and Wey Valley secondary school, with Redlands Leisure and Community Park, Upwey & Broadwey Memorial Hall, Reynolds Community Centre and Upwey Old School Hall providing community centres along with the 2 pubs (The Old Ship and The Standard) and 3 cafes (Wishing Well, Island Garden Nursery and Redlands Leisure & Community Park). Shops, are limited to parts Dorchester Road but residents benefit from regular bus services (Number 2 and 10) to Weymouth and Dorchester Town Centres. Significant development has taken place within the area since 2000 and this continues with further sites identified as options in the draft Dorset Local Plan to the West of Dorchester Road and North of Icen Lane.

There is an existing development of 500 homes underway north of Littlemoor road in the Local Plan (2025) which was oddly added to the Upwey and Broadwey Town Council Ward rather than the more connected Littlemoor this is remedied in the proposed Dorset Council warding arrangement. To the north of this sits the small village of Bincombe (WIB1). The road connections are to Upwey and Littlemoor but the rural nature of Bincombe better associates it with Upwey. The Dorset Council proposed warding arrangement includes Bincombe (WIB1) within the Weymouth North ward and has a clearly defined northern boundary running along the Ridgeway identified by road and y road. Putting all this Polling Area into Upwey & Broadwey may not provide the best allocation.

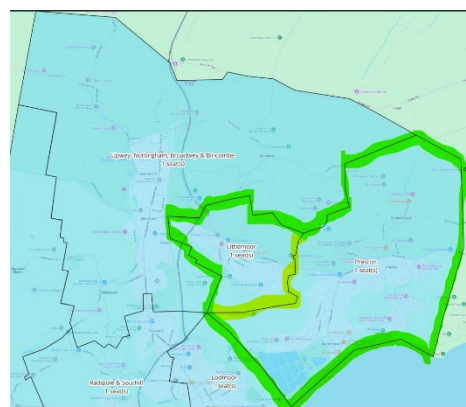
Recommendation 2.1 when assigning Bincombe Polling District to Weymouth North ward consider splitting this along Coombe Valley Road between Weymouth North and Preston – this does not affect electoral numbers.

3. Revision to the Dorset Council proposed 2-member for Littlemoor & Preston

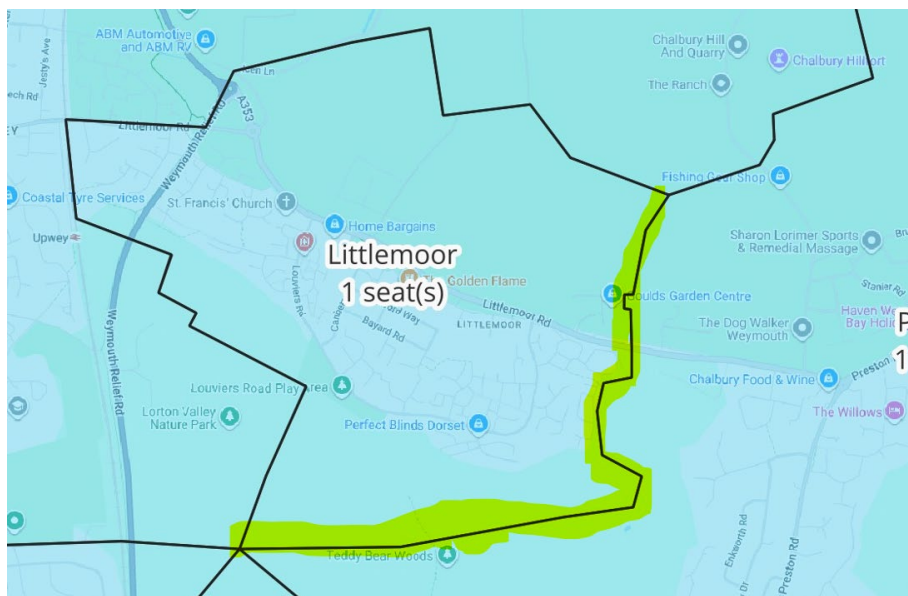
Recommendation

The original proposal from Weymouth Dorset Council ward members (with the exception of the members for Littlemoor & Preston ward members) was that this ward should be split into two wards as Littlemoor and Preston are distinct, separate and very different communities within Weymouth. This division has Littlemoor with 3939 Electors electoral equality +2.6% and Preston 4380 Electors electoral equality +14.1%. This was rejected by the Working Group as it left Preston with 14.1% electoral inequality but combining these two separate areas into a single ward with 2 councillors provided electoral equality because the number of electors in Littlemoor was lower than Preston.

Recommendation 3.1 Dorset Council's proposed Littlemoor and Preston ward be split into two wards representing the distinctly different communities of Littlemoor (3939 electors – LIT1, LIT2, and parts of WIB2) and Preston (4380 electors – LIT3, LIT4, LIT5, and WIB15) as shown on the attached map and accompanying files. This aligns with the Town Council warding which treats these two areas as distinct and separate wards.



The proposed boundary line (yellow highlight) between the two separate and different communities is clear and identifiable – this reflects the boundary between the two Town Council Wards of Preston & Littlemoor (noting the addition of Boxwood Road and Harebell Drive). To the east of these roads is a gap in settlement (ENV3 Important Open Gap in the extant 2015 Local Plan and W09 Green Gap in the 2026 Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan.



It is not considered possible to sensibly adjust the boundary of the Preston area in Weymouth as the area's main boundary is coterminous with the Town Council Boundary and to the south the sea. The next settlement to the North or East is several miles away. The settlement to the West is Littlemoor adjusting this boundary has been considered but is not recommended because the communities are so distinctly different.

Recommendation 3.2 the LGBCE consider whether there are acceptable boundary changes which could be made to Preston to provide better electoral equality of number of voters.

Dorset Council's recommendation to combine Littlemoor & Preston wards is based upon providing greater electoral equality. But simply adding the number of electors in each are does not provide electoral equality. In 2024 the number of electors in Preston 4304 was greater than in Littlemoor 3322. The turnout in 2019 for the Preston Town Council ward was 49.7% in 2019 and 46.6% in 2024 and for Littlemoor was 28.5% in 2019 and 26.5% in 2025. This means that on electorate size the Preston Community's vote has greater value than the Littlemoor vote by 30% and factoring in the turnout is 128% greater. The 2032 predicted number of electors for Preston is 4380 and for Littlemoor is 3939. This means that on electorate size the Preston Community's vote has greater value than the Littlemoor vote by 11% and assuming the same percentage turnouts is 96% greater. This is not electoral equality given the two communities are diverse. This is remedied by separating the ward into two separate wards so that the Preston vote only affects the Preston candidates and similarly the Littlemoor vote only affects the Littlemoor candidates.

Description of distinct and different communities.

Littlemoor came about as a large council estate developed after 2nd World War. The council estate has since expanded and is now fringed by newer commercially developed estates. This is changing the character of Littlemoor, but it remains a recognizable community with its own centre which includes retail centre (shops), health centre, doctors' surgery, library and church. Within its bounds are the Littlemoor Community Centre, Top Club with Family Hub and Recreation and Play facilities and Bincombe Primary School. The proposed boundary for Littlemoor recognises these areas and includes the new 500 home development at Bincombe Park which has 35% affordable homes.

Preston was a separate village but was incorporated into Weymouth in 1930s along with the adjoining village of Sutton Poyntz. It too, has seen considerable development as large homes have been converted into apartments and open spaces has been developed as new estates. It has two village halls (Preston and Sutton Poyntz) and 3 small shopping areas (Overcombe Corner, Chalbury Corner and Preston Road), St Andrew's primary school and special school, a church and three pubs. Preston has its own identity and whilst spread over a wider area it is characterised by large estates with predominantly owner occupiers.

The boundary of Preston is set by the Town Council boundary to the north, east and south. There is a clear green gap between Littlemoor & Preston around Wyke Oliver Farm.

Given the distinct and very different communities the existences of a clear boundary it is felt that this outweighs the higher level of electoral inequality.

Differences between Littlemoor and Preston.

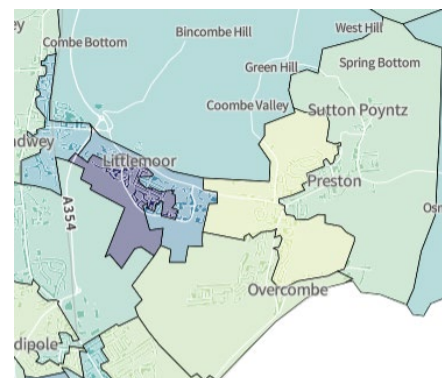
The 2021 Census and the 2025 Index of Deprivation figures show how different these two communities are with Littlemoor LSOA having an LSOA in the bottom 10% and Preston having an LSOA in the top 10%. Life expectancy, at birth, in Littlemoor is 7 years lower than Preston. Preston has an aging population with 90% owning their homes and 1% in Social Rented housing whereas Littlemoor has a younger demographic with 53% owning their homes and 29% living in Social Rented housing. In Littlemoor there are nearly twice as many children and more people under 50 than over. Littlemoor has 60% who are economically active compared to Preston with only 41%.

Until recently Littlemoor has regularly returned 2 Labour councillors whilst Preston has returned 3 councillors a mix of Conservative and Lib Dem.

Supporting Data demonstrating distinctness and differences.

The following data is taken either from the 2021 Census or the 2025 Index of Deprivation extracted and summed for the 5 LSOAs which lie within these two areas. The Indices are population deciles ranked from 1 being bottom 10% (dark blue) and 10 being top 10% (light green) nationally as shown in the map.

The map shows the 3 LSOAs within Preston proposed ward; Preston, Preston & Sutton Poyntz, and Preston & Overcombe. To the west are the 2 LSOAs within Littlemoor proposed ward, Littlemoor East and Littlemoor West.



Characteristic	Littlemoor		Preston		
LSOA	38A	38B	40A	40B	40C
Overall Index of Deprivation - Nationally	4 - bottom 40%	1 - bottom 10%	9 - Top 20%	8 - Top 30%	10 - top 10%
IoD 2025 Income	4	1	10	8	10
IoD 2025 Employment	3	1	8	8	9
IoD 2025 Education, Skills & Training	2	1	7	7	8
IoD 2025 Health Deprivation & Disability	4	1	8	6	9
IoD Crime Rank	4	1	9	6	10
IoD Barriers to Housing	4	3	5	4	4
Life Expectancy at Birth	M - 76.5, F- 80.2		N-83.5, F-88.1		
Household Size	1 35%, 2 34%, 3 16%, 4+ 16%		1 28%, 2 52%, 3 11%, 4+ 10%		
Tenure of Households	Social Rented 29%, Private Rented 18%		Social Rented 1%, Private Rented 9%		
	Owned 53%		Owned 90%		
General Health - Bad or Very bad	6.8%		4.4%		
No Qualifications	20.0%		14.0%		
Student	18.4%		10.0%		
Number of Electors 2032	3939		4380		
Turnout at 2019 Town Council Election	28.50%		49.70%		

In 2019 and 2024 Dorset Council Elections for the ward of Littlemoor & Preston returned 2 Conservative Councillors.

In 2019 Weymouth Town Council returned 2 Labour Councillors for Littlemoor and 2 Conservative and 1 Lib Dem Councillors for Preston.

In 2024 Weymouth Town Council returned 2 Conservative Councillors for Littlemoor and 3 Conservative Councillors for Preston.

Attachments

AF4.jpeg geographically shows the warding arrangement proposed to the working group for Weymouth & Chickerell wards and includes the proposed boundary splitting Littlemoor & Preston into two single-member wards. AF4 OSGB36.geojson provides the GIS Files for this.

Disclaimer

These views are my views as an individual and do not represent the views of a group. The criticism of the combined warding arrangement is not criticism of the existing ward councillors for Dorset Council's Littlemoor & Preston ward who are diligent representatives of the ward and have demonstrated their appeal to the electors by getting re-elected in 2024 with an increased majority. I do not believe that changing the wards to two single member wards will, in itself, affect the results in a future election. I do believe that two single member wards will enable the electors to have clear and accountable representation, and encourages, and enables, single candidates to stand for councils on a fairer basis than in a two-member ward particularly when wards have significantly sized different groups within the ward.

Proposal AF4

