

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Harlow in Essex

June 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations to the Government on whether there should be changes to local authorities' electoral arrangements.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)
Peter Brokenshire
Kru Desai
Pamela Gordon
Robin Gray
Robert Hughes CBE

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

We are statutorily required to review periodically the electoral arrangements – such as the number of councillors representing electors in each area and the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions – of every principal local authority in England. In broad terms our objective 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, and the number of councillors and ward names.

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SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Harlow on 30 November 1999.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during the first stage of the review, and makes draft recommendations for change.**

We found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Harlow:

- **in 12 of the 16 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and four wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 12 wards and by more than 20 per cent in six wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraph 57) are that:

- **Harlow District Council should have 33 councillors, nine fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 11 wards, instead of 16 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of five;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

These draft recommendations seek to ensure that the number of electors represented by each district councillor is as nearly as possible the same, having regard to local circumstances.

- **In nine of the proposed 11 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by less than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2004.**

This report sets out our draft recommendations on which comments are invited.

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for 11 weeks from 20 June 2000. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away**

from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.

- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by Monday 4 September 2000:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Bush Fair	3	Brays Grove ward; Latton Bush ward (part); Tye Green ward (part)
2	Church Langley	3	Mark Hall South ward (part); Potter Street ward (part)
3	Great Parndon North	3	Great Parndon ward; Katherines with Sumners ward (part)
4	Great Parndon South	3	Katherines with Sumners ward (part); Kingsmoor ward (part)
5	Harlow Common	3	Latton Bush ward (part); Potter Street ward (part)
6	Little Parndon & Hare Street	3	Hare Street & Town Centre ward (part); Little Parndon ward
7	Mark Hall	3	Mark Hall North ward (part); Mark Hall South ward (part)
8	Netteswell	3	Mark Hall North ward (part); Netteswell East ward; Netteswell West ward
9	Old Harlow	3	Old Harlow ward; Mark Hall South ward (part); Potter Street ward (part)
10	Staple Tye	3	Kingsmoor ward (part); Latton Bush ward (part); Stewards ward
11	Toddbrook	3	Hare Street & Town Centre ward (part); Passmores ward; Tye Green ward (part)

Notes: 1 The whole of Harlow district is unparished.

2 The large map in the back of the report illustrates the proposed wards outlined above.

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Harlow

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bush Fair	3	5,769	1,923	8	5,774	1,925	3
2 Church Langley	3	4,479	1,493	-16	6,181	2,060	10
3 Great Parndon North	3	5,395	1,798	1	5,398	1,799	-4
4 Great Parndon South	3	5,732	1,911	8	5,734	1,911	2
5 Harlow Common	3	5,733	1,911	8	5,761	1,920	3
6 Little Parndon & Hare Street	3	5,459	1,820	3	5,461	1,820	-3
7 Mark Hall	3	5,191	1,730	-3	5,191	1,730	-8
8 Netteswell	3	5,509	1,836	3	5,586	1,862	-1
9 Old Harlow	3	4,733	1,578	-11	5,539	1,846	-1
10 Staple Tye	3	5,428	1,809	2	5,431	1,810	-3
11 Toddbrook	3	5,148	1,716	-3	5,725	1,908	2
Totals	33	58,576	-	-	61,781	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,775	-	-	1,872	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Harlow District Council's submission.

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 district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Harlow in Essex on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the 12 districts in Essex as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Harlow. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in September 1975 (Report No. 60). We completed a directed electoral review of Thurrock in 1996 and a periodic electoral review of Southend-on-Sea in 1999. The electoral arrangements of Essex County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 401). We expect to undertake a periodic electoral review of Thurrock in 2000 and a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

3 In undertaking these reviews, we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, ie the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (see Appendix A).

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the District Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

5 We also have regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999). This sets out our approach to the reviews.

6 In our *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been prepared locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local interests are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while allowing proper reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable, having regard to our statutory criteria. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward.

Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the general assumption that the existing council size already secures effective and convenient local government in that district but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified: in particular, we do not accept that an increase in a district’s electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a district council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other districts.

9 The review is in four stages (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to the Commission
Two	The Commission’s analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Secretary of State

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities.

11 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Essex districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State’s intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals were taken forward in the Local Government Bill, published in December 1999, and are currently being considered by Parliament.

12 Stage One began on 30 November 1999, when we wrote to Harlow District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Essex County Council, Essex Police

Authority, the local authority associations, Essex Association of Local Councils, the Member of Parliament with constituency interests in the district and the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 28 February 2000.

13 At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

14 Stage Three began on 20 June 2000 and will end on 4 September 2000. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

15 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to move away from them in any areas, and submit final recommendations to the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to make representations to the Secretary of State. It will then be for him to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Secretary of State accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, he will make an order. The Secretary of State will determine when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 Harlow district covers some 10 square miles, with a population of around 76,700. It is centred around the “new town” of Harlow, formed in the 1960s from a series of neighbourhoods centred around shopping and community facilities, and separated from each other by roads and landscape green wedges. Harlow town is surrounded by Green Belt land and is well served by road and rail links, particularly with London and East Anglia. The whole of Harlow district is unparished.

17 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the district average in percentage terms. In the text which follows this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term ‘electoral variance’.

18 The electorate of the district is 58,576 (February 1999). The Council presently has 42 members who are elected from 16 wards. Ten of the wards are each represented by three councillors and the remainder are two-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

19 Since the last electoral review there has been a decrease in the electorate in Harlow district, with around 2 per cent fewer electors than two decades ago. This decrease has not, however, been uniform across the district, with increases in certain areas due to new housing developments, most notably in Potter Street ward.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,395 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,471 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 12 of the 16 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, four wards vary by more than 20 per cent and three wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Potter Street ward where each of the three councillors represents 73 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Harlow

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Brays Grove	3	2,836	945	-32	2,836	945	-36
2 Great Parndon	2	3,083	1,542	11	3,086	1,543	5
3 Hare Street & Town Centre	2	2,623	1,312	-6	3,117	1,559	6
4 Katherines with Sumners	2	4,676	2,338	68	4,676	2,338	59
5 Kingsmoor	3	4,473	1,491	7	4,475	1,492	1
6 Latton Bush	3	3,846	1,282	-8	3,849	1,283	-13
7 Little Parndon	3	3,701	1,234	-12	3,703	1,234	-16
8 Mark Hall North	2	2,082	1,041	-25	2,082	1,041	-29
9 Mark Hall South	3	3,632	1,211	-13	3,632	1,211	-18
10 Netteswell East	2	2,719	1,360	-3	2,719	1,360	-8
11 Netteswell West	2	2,414	1,207	-13	2,491	1,246	-15
12 Old Harlow	3	4,735	1,578	13	5,541	1,847	26
13 Passmores	3	3,434	1,145	-18	3,517	1,172	-20
14 Potter Street	3	7,227	2,409	73	8,957	2,986	103
15 Stewards	3	3,653	1,218	-13	3,653	1,218	-17
16 Tye Green	3	3,442	1,147	-18	3,447	1,149	-22
Totals	42	58,576	-	-	61,781	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,395	-	-	1,471	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Harlow District 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 district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1999, electors in Brays Grove ward were relatively over-represented by 32 per cent, while electors in Potter Street ward were significantly under-represented by 73 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

21 At the start of the review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Harlow District Council.

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received three representations during Stage One, including a district-wide scheme from the District Council, each of which may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

Harlow District Council

23 During Stage One the District Council consulted twenty-two organisations and publicised the review in its magazine, delivered to every household in the district. The Council's proposals were considered by its seven area committees, attended in total by 125 members of the public. The Council stated that "no strong views were expressed and any comments made were supportive".

24 The District Council unanimously proposed a council of 33 members, nine fewer than at present, serving 11 wards, compared to the existing 16. The Council provided supporting evidence, in the light of its proposed move to a streamlined political management structure, that a council of 33 members would be able to carry out its functions fully. All the proposed wards would return three councillors, with modifications to all of the existing ward boundaries. Under the Council's proposals, the number of electors per councillor would initially vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average in two wards, with all wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the average in 2004.

Member of Parliament

25 Bill Rammell, Member of Parliament for Harlow, supported the District Council's proposals, in particular the reduction in council size from 42 to 33.

Other Representations

26 We received one further representation from a local resident, who also favoured a reduction in council size.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

27 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Harlow is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is as nearly as possible the same, as stated in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972. In doing so we have regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities.

28 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

29 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which provides for exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum.

30 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, the objective 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 start from the standpoint of electoral equality, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

31 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 5 per cent from 58,576 to 61,781 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the growth to be in Potter Street ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Old Harlow ward. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

32 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the District Council's figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

33 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

34 Harlow District Council presently has 42 members. The District Council unanimously proposed a significant reduction in council size to 33. It stated that this reduction was sought as part of the review of its political management structures, currently being undertaken by an all-party working group in anticipation of forthcoming legislation. It felt that a significant reduction in council size would provide an opportunity “to ensure that sufficient benefit is gained in moving away from the traditional committee-based administration to adequately provide for a streamlined executive and scrutiny approach and to further develop the council’s decentralisation and democratisation agenda focused on the ward members’ role working in partnership with their constituents”. The District Council also argued that a council size of 33 would facilitate the establishment of a pattern of three-member wards to coincide with the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds. The proposed reduction in council size was also supported by Bill Rammell, MP for Harlow, and by a local resident.

35 We have carefully considered the representations received before reaching a conclusion on the most appropriate council size for Harlow. The Commission will not generally seek a substantial increase or decrease in council size but will be prepared to consider the case for change where there is persuasive evidence. We note the District Council’s justification for its proposed reduction, specifically its decentralisation agenda, together with the evidence of cross-party support. In particular, given the Council’s supporting evidence, we are reassured that the effective operation of the Council has been fully considered. We also note the Council’s widespread consultation which it stated did not elicit any local objections. Moreover, a 33-member council would achieve good electoral equality, while having regard to the statutory criteria.

36 Therefore, having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 33 members.

Electoral Arrangements

37 As mentioned earlier, we received one district-wide scheme for a 33-member council representing 11 wards from the District Council. We found that this scheme provided substantial improvements to electoral equality and a ward pattern which respected the individual neighbourhoods in Harlow as much as possible, achieving a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. In the light of this and the degree of consensus behind the Council’s proposals following the consultation exercise it undertook with interested parties, we have concluded that we should adopt the District Council’s scheme without amendment as our draft recommendations. The following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Great Parndon, Katherines with Sumners, Kingsmoor and Stewards wards;
- (b) Hare Street & Town Centre, Little Parndon and Passmores wards;
- (c) Mark Hall North, Mark Hall South, Netteswell East, Netteswell West and Old Harlow wards;
- (d) Brays Grove, Latton Bush, Potter Street and Tye Green wards.

38 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Great Parndon, Katherines with Sumners, Kingsmoor and Stewards wards

39 Great Parndon, Katherines with Sumners, Kingsmoor and Stewards wards are located in the south west of the district. Great Parndon and Katherines with Sumners wards are each represented by two councillors, while Kingsmoor and Stewards wards elect three councillors each. The number of electors represented by each councillor is 11 per cent above the district average in Great Parndon ward (5 per cent above in 2004), 68 per cent above in Katherines with Sumners ward (59 per cent above in 2004), 7 per cent above in Kingsmoor ward (1 per cent above in 2004) and 13 per cent below in Stewards ward (17 per cent below in 2004).

40 To achieve a better balance of representation in this area, the District Council proposed reconfiguring these four wards into three three-member wards. The whole of the existing Great Parndon ward would be combined with the northern part of Katherines with Sumners ward (polling district D) to form a new Great Parndon North ward, utilising Southern Way as a clearly identifiable boundary in the south. The southern part of Katherines with Sumners ward (polling district E), together with the southern part of Kingsmoor ward (polling district G) plus Morningsons, Brockles Mead, Watersmeet, Wissants and Millersdale estates from the northern part of Kingsmoor ward (polling district F) would form a new Great Parndon South ward. The boundaries of Great Parndon South ward would be formed by Southern Way in the north, the district boundary in the west and south, and Pye Hill Road, Paringdon Road and Ployters Road in the east. The remainder of Kingsmoor ward would be combined with the whole of Stewards ward and Commonsie Road, Latton Green, Fernhill Lane, The Readings, Sakins Croft and Tysea Close from the existing Latton Bush ward to form a new Staple Tye ward, focused on the Staple Tye shopping area. It would be bounded by Southern Way and the district boundary to the north and south respectively. Its western boundary would be Great Parndon South ward and its eastern boundary Riddings Lane, Tysea Road and the footpath running behind Latton Green Primary School.

41 Under the Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average in Great Parndon North ward (4 per cent below in 2004), 8 per cent above in Great Parndon South ward (2 per cent above in 2004) and 2 per cent above in Staple Tye ward (3 per cent below in 2004).

42 We have carefully considered the District Council's proposals for these wards, noting in particular the good levels of electoral equality achieved, together with the clearly identifiable boundaries which are utilised. We judge that the Council's scheme for this area represents a good balance of the need to seek improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We are therefore including the District Council's proposals for Great Parndon North, Great Parndon South and Staple Tye wards without modification as part of our draft recommendations. The proposals are shown on the large map at the back of this report.

Hare Street & Town Centre, Little Parndon and Passmores wards

43 Hare Street & Town Centre, Little Parndon and Passmores wards cover Harlow town centre and the north-western corner of the district. Hare Street & Town Centre ward is represented by two councillors, while Little Parndon and Passmores wards are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 6 per cent below the district average in Hare Street & Town Centre ward (6 per cent above in 2004), 12 per cent below in Little Parndon ward (16 per cent below in 2004) and 18 per cent below in Passmores ward (20 per cent below in 2004).

44 The District Council proposed combining the whole of the existing Little Parndon ward with that part of Hare Street & Town Centre ward furthest from the town centre (polling district C less Appleton Close, Miles Close, Northbrooks, Sharpecroft and Toddbrook, which would be transferred to the Council's proposed Toddbrook ward) to form a new three-member Little Parndon & Hare Street ward. The boundaries of this ward would be formed by the existing boundaries of Little Parndon ward in the north, east and west. The southern boundary of the ward would be formed by the eastern edge of Collins Meadow Playing Field, the edges of Hare Street County Junior and Infants Schools playing fields, Haydens Road and Fourth Avenue. The Council also proposed a three-member Toddbrook ward focused on the town centre. The ward would include the area of planned town centre development; the whole of the existing Passmores ward; Appleton Close, Miles Close, Northbrooks, Bushey Croft and Toddbrook from the existing Hare Street & Town Centre ward; and Stony Wood and Westfield from the existing Tye Green ward. The northern boundary of this ward would be formed by the southern boundary of the proposed Little Parndon & Hare Street ward, as detailed above, and Second Avenue. To the west the ward would border the proposed Great Parndon North ward, its southern boundary would be Southern Way and its eastern boundary would be formed by the brook running north to south behind Hook Field and Rushes Mead, the eastern edge of Bushey Croft, Tendring Road, the cycle track running north to Todd Brook and then Tripton Road as far as the Mansion Road roundabout.

45 Under the Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Little Parndon & Hare Street ward (3 per cent below in 2004) and 3 per cent below in Toddbrook ward (2 per cent above in 2004).

46 We have concluded that the proposals put forward by the District Council for these areas secure a substantially improved level of electoral equality without having an adverse effect on local community ties. Furthermore, the District Council argued that it "seems logical and democratically equitable to link the residential areas nearest to the Town Centre (in the present Hare Street district) to the new residences in the Town Centre". We are therefore including the District Council's proposals for the new wards of Little Parndon & Hare Street and Toddbrook in our draft recommendations. The proposed ward boundaries are shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Mark Hall North, Mark Hall South, Netteswell East, Netteswell West and Old Harlow wards

47 These five wards cover the north and west of the district and contain some of the most well-established communities in the district. Mark Hall North, Netteswell East and Netteswell West

wards are each currently represented by two councillors, while Mark Hall South and Old Harlow wards each return three councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 25 per cent below the district average in Mark Hall North ward (29 per cent below in 2004), 13 per cent below in Mark Hall South ward (18 per cent below in 2004), 3 per cent below in Netteswell East ward (8 per cent below in 2004), 13 per cent below in Netteswell West ward (15 per cent below in 2004) and 13 per cent above in Old Harlow ward (26 per cent above in 2004).

48 Broadly, the District Council proposed reconfiguring these five wards into three three-member wards. The Council proposed a new Netteswell ward, which included Netteswell East and Netteswell West wards in their entirety, together with the addition of Altham Grove from the existing Mark Hall North ward. The Council argued that the new ward resulted in very good electoral equality and that the inclusion of Altham Grove was justified both in terms of community identity and in order to provide a strong eastern boundary (Howard Way). In the Mark Hall area the Council proposed a new Mark Hall ward, comprising the existing Mark Hall South ward (less the New Hall Farm development, The Gardeners and the areas to the east of the A414, detailed later) and the existing Mark Hall North ward (less Altham Grove, as detailed above). The boundaries of the new ward would be formed by the A414, Howard Way, Second Avenue and the district boundary. The District Council also proposed that the existing Old Harlow ward be extended in the south-west to include Mark Hall Sports Ground, Mark Hall Comprehensive School and the laboratories in the area to the east of the A414 from Mark Hall South ward, thereby using the A414 as a clear boundary; and in the south to include the New Hall Farm development, currently in Potter Street ward.

49 Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Netteswell ward (1 per cent below in 2004), 3 per cent below in Mark Hall ward (8 per cent below in 2004) and 11 per cent below in Old Harlow ward (1 per cent below in 2004).

50 Having considered the District Council's proposals for this area, we conclude that they provide a highly satisfactory ward configuration, which achieves good electoral equality and uses clear, identifiable boundaries, having regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore propose endorsing the District Council's proposals for this area without modification as part of our draft recommendations. Our draft recommendations for Netteswell, Mark Hall and Old Harlow wards are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of the report.

Brays Grove, Latton Bush, Potter Street and Tye Green wards

51 These wards are located in the south and east of the district and are each served by three councillors. Brays Grove ward is relatively over-represented, with 32 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (36 per cent fewer in 2004), while in contrast Potter Street ward is severely under-represented, with 73 per cent more electors than the average (deteriorating to 103 per cent in 2004, due to considerable growth in the Church Langley area). The number of electors per councillor in Latton Bush ward is 8 per cent below the average (13 per cent below in 2004) and in Tye Green ward 18 per cent below the average (22 per cent below in 2004).

52 To achieve a better balance of representation in the area the District Council proposed that the Church Langley area of Potter Street ward (polling district S), together with The Gardiners (from Mark Hall South ward), should form a new three-member Church Langley ward. The northern boundary of this ward would be modified slightly, transferring the New Hall Farm development to the proposed Old Harlow ward, as mentioned earlier. The number of electors per councillor in this ward would be 16 per cent below the district average, improving to 10 per cent above in 2004, due to extensive development within the area. The District Council argued that Church Langley represents a unique and self-enclosed community with a different profile to the rest of the district, and therefore has rather different community interests to those of other areas in Harlow. Moreover, the majority of the development is only accessible along Church Langley Way, and any properties not included in the proposed Church Langley ward would be isolated from the rest of the ward. The Council added that it had received a formal request from the residents of The Gardiners to be represented by Church Langley's councillors.

53 In the rest of the area the District Council proposed creating two further three-member wards. The remainder of the existing Potter Street ward (polling district T) would be combined with part of the existing Latton Bush ward (polling district H) in a new Harlow Common ward, as all the communities it encompasses border on the Common. The southern boundary of this ward would be formed by the district boundary, the northern boundary with the proposed Church Langley ward would be the polling district boundary and the eastern boundary would be the M11. The western boundary with the proposed Bush Fair ward would follow the existing boundary (the A414 and Southern Way), then run south along Trotters Road, Tysea Road and Ridings Lane, west around the edge of Pear Tree Mead and Little Pynchons, then around the edges of Latton Green Primary School, as detailed above. Additionally, the Council proposed a new Bush Fair ward, comprising the existing Brays Grove ward, Pear Tree Mead and Little Pynchons from the existing Latton Bush ward, as mentioned above, and the remainder of the existing Tye Green ward, not included in Toddbrook ward, discussed earlier.

54 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in both Harlow Common and Bush Fair wards would be 8 per cent above the district average (3 per cent above in both in 2004) and 16 per cent below in Church Langley ward (10 per cent above in 2004).

55 Having carefully considered the District Council's scheme for this area, we note that the Council provided evidence of a clear separation of Church Langley from surrounding neighbourhoods in terms of community identities and interests. Moreover, we note that the substantial growth in the Church Langley area means that under the Council's proposals it would be expected to move from a position of over-representation (16 per cent) to one of slight under-representation (10 per cent). The Council stated that all the proposed development in Church Langley is expected to be completed within five years and therefore the predicted variance in Church Langley for 2004 is not expected to worsen further. Additionally, the achievement of any significantly better electoral equality in this area would be at the cost of imbalances elsewhere in the district. In the light of this, and the good electoral equality achieved for the district as a whole, while having regard to the statutory criteria, we are including the District Council's proposals unchanged for these three wards as part of our draft recommendations. Our draft recommendations for Bush Fair, Church Langley and Harlow Common wards are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

56 We did not receive any proposals for change to the District Council's electoral cycle, and therefore make no recommendation for change to the present system of elections by thirds.

Conclusions

57 Having considered all the evidence and representations received during the initial stage of the review, we propose that:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 42 to 33;
- there should be 11 wards, compared to 16 as at present;
- the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of five wards;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

58 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the District Council's proposals without modification. Figure 5 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 electorate figures and with forecast electorates for the year 2004.

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	42	33	42	33
Number of wards	16	11	16	11
Average number of electors per councillor	1,395	1,775	1,471	1,872
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	12	2	12	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	4	0	6	0

59 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Harlow District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 12 to two. By 2004 all wards are forecast to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

Draft Recommendation

Harlow District Council should comprise 33 councillors serving 11 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

60 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Harlow and welcome comments from the District Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle and ward names. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Harlow

5 NEXT STEPS

61 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 4 September 2000. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the District Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

62 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
Harlow Review
Local Government Commission for England
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
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63 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Secretary of State, who cannot make an order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after he receives them.

APPENDIX A

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: The Commission's Role

1 Section 13(2) of the Local Government Act 1992 places a duty on the Commission to undertake periodic electoral reviews of each principal local authority area in England, and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. Section 13(3) provides that, so far as reasonably practicable, the first such review of any area should be undertaken not less than 10 years, and not more than 15 years, after this Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), submitted an initial electoral review report on the county within which that area, or the larger part of the area, was located. This timetable applies to districts within shire and metropolitan counties, although not to South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear¹. Nor does the timetable apply to London boroughs; the 1992 Act is silent on the timing of periodic electoral reviews in Greater London. Nevertheless, these areas will be included in the Commission's review programme. The Commission has no power to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London.

2 Under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, the Commission is required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for any changes to the electoral arrangements within the areas of English principal authorities as appear desirable to it, having regard to the need to:

- (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (b) secure effective and convenient local government.

3 In reporting to the Secretary of State, the Commission may make recommendations for such changes to electoral arrangements as are specified in section 14(4) of the 1992 Act. In relation to principal authorities, these are:

- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
- the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards or divisions);
- the number of councillors to be elected for each electoral area, and the years in which they are to be elected; and
- the name of any electoral area.

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

¹ The Local Government Boundary Commission did not submit reports on the counties of South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear.

- the number of councillors;
- the need for parish wards;
- the number and boundaries of any such wards;
- the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward or, in the case of a common parish, for each parish; and
- the name of any such ward.

5 In conducting the review, section 27 of the 1992 Act requires the Commission to comply, so far as is practicable, with the rules given in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 for the conduct of electoral reviews.

Local Government Act 1972: Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements

6 By virtue of section 27 of the Local Government Act 1992, in undertaking a review of electoral arrangements the Commission is required to comply so far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. For ease of reference, those provisions of Schedule 11 which are relevant to this review are set out below.

7 In relation to shire districts:

Having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the district likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration (by the Secretary of State or the Commission):

- (a) the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors to be elected shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward in the district;
- (b) in a district every ward of a parish council shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district;
- (c) in a district every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district.

8 The Schedule also provides that, subject to (a)–(c) above, regard should be had to:

- (d) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- (e) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

9 The Schedule provides that, in considering whether a parish should be divided into wards, regard shall be had to whether:

- (f) the number or distribution of electors in the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and
- (g) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

10 Where it is decided to divide any such parish into parish wards, in considering the size and boundaries of the wards and fixing the number of parish councillors to be elected for each ward, regard shall be had to:

- (h) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration;
- (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- (j) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

11 Where it is decided not to divide the parish into parish wards, in fixing the number of councillors to be elected for each parish regard shall be had to the number and distribution of electors of the parish and any change which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the fixing of the number of parish councillors.

