

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
MERTON

*Report to the Secretary of State for the
Environment, Transport and the Regions*

June 1999

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Merton.

Members of the Commission are:

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Merton is inserted inside the back cover of the report.



Local Government Commission for England

22 June 1999

Dear Secretary of State

On 23 June 1998 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Merton under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in January 1999 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 92) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Merton.

We recommend that Merton Borough Council should be served by 60 councillors representing 20 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

We note that you have now set out in the White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People* (Cm 4014, HMSO), legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as that new legislation is in place we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

I would like to thank members and officers of the Borough Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Merton on 23 June 1998. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 26 January 1999, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during consultation on our draft recommendations, and offers our final recommendations to the Secretary of State.**

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

- **in five of the 20 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough;**
- **by 2003 electoral equality shows no overall improvement, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in five wards, and by more than 20 per cent in one ward.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 92-93) are that:

- **Merton Borough Council should be served by 60 councillors, compared with 57 at present;**
- **there should be 20 wards, as at present, which would involve changes to the boundaries of all of the existing wards.**

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

- **In all of the 20 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 6 per cent from the borough average.**

- **This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 3 per cent from the average for the borough in 2003.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 2 August 1999:

**The Secretary of State
Department of the Environment,
Transport and the Regions
Local Government Sponsorship Division
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU**

*Figure 1:
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas (existing wards)
1 Abbey	3	Abbey ward (part)
2 Cannon Hill	3	Cannon Hill ward (part); Lower Morden ward (part); St Helier ward (part)
3 Colliers Wood	3	Abbey ward (part); Colliers Wood ward (part); Lavender ward (part)
4 Cricket Green	3	Colliers Wood ward (part); Phipps Bridge ward (part); Pollards Hill ward (part)
5 Dundonald	3	Dundonald ward; West Barnes ward (part)
6 Figge's Marsh	3	Figge's Marsh ward (part); Lavender ward (part); Longthornton ward (part); Phipps Bridge ward (part)
7 Graveney	3	Graveney ward; Figge's Marsh ward (part)
8 Hillside	3	Hillside ward (part); Village ward (part)
9 Lavender Fields	3	Abbey ward (part); Colliers Wood ward (part); Lavender ward (part); Phipps Bridge ward (part)
10 Longthornton	3	Figge's Marsh ward (part); Longthornton ward (part)
11 Lower Morden	3	Lower Morden ward (part); St Helier ward (part)
12 Merton Park	3	Abbey ward (part); Merton Park ward (part)
13 Pollards Hill	3	Pollards Hill ward (part); Longthornton ward (part)
14 Ravensbury	3	Ravensbury ward (part); St Helier ward (part)
15 Raynes Park	3	Hillside ward (part); Raynes Park ward (part); West Barnes ward (part)
16 St Helier	3	Merton Park ward (part); Ravensbury ward (part); St Helier ward (part);
17 Trinity	3	Abbey ward (part); Colliers Wood ward (part); Trinity ward (part)
18 Village	3	Hillside ward (part); Raynes Park ward (part); Village ward (part)
19 West Barnes	3	Cannon Hill ward (part); Lower Morden ward (part); West Barnes ward (part)
20 Wimbledon Park	3	Colliers Wood ward (part); Durnsford ward; Trinity ward (part); Village ward (part)

Note: Map 2 and the large map in the back of the report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

Figure 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Merton

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Abbey	3	6,741	2,247	2	6,838	2,279	2
2 Cannon Hill	3	6,869	2,290	4	6,873	2,291	2
3 Colliers Wood	3	6,584	2,195	0	6,600	2,200	-2
4 Cricket Green	3	6,465	2,155	-2	6,839	2,280	2
5 Dundonald	3	6,407	2,136	-3	6,548	2,183	-3
6 Figge's Marsh	3	6,618	2,206	0	6,911	2,304	3
7 Graveney	3	6,730	2,243	2	6,776	2,259	1
8 Hillside	3	6,332	2,111	-4	6,504	2,168	-3
9 Lavender Fields	3	6,429	2,143	-2	6,600	2,200	-2
10 Longthornton	3	6,428	2,143	-3	6,858	2,286	2
11 Lower Morden	3	6,531	2,177	-1	6,599	2,200	-2
12 Merton Park	3	6,771	2,257	3	6,890	2,297	2
13 Pollards Hill	3	6,969	2,323	6	6,719	2,240	0
14 Ravensbury	3	6,544	2,181	-1	6,709	2,236	0
15 Raynes Park	3	6,747	2,249	2	6,809	2,270	1
16 St Helier	3	6,591	2,197	0	6,679	2,226	-1
17 Trinity	3	6,225	2,075	-6	6,633	2,211	-1
18 Village	3	6,258	2,086	-5	6,579	2,193	-2
19 West Barnes	3	6,868	2,289	4	6,931	2,310	3
20 Wimbledon Park	3	6,754	2,251	2	6,781	2,260	1
Totals	60	131,861	—	—	134,676	—	—
Averages	—	—	2,198	—	—	2,245	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Merton 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. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the London borough of Merton.

2 In broad terms, the objective of this periodic electoral review of Merton is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor on the Borough Council is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the Borough Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (second edition published in March 1998), which sets out our approach to the reviews. We are not required to have regard to parliamentary constituency boundaries in developing our recommendations. Any new ward boundaries will be taken into account by the Parliamentary Boundary Commission in its reviews of parliamentary constituencies.

5 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the borough as a whole. Wherever possible we try 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.

6 We are not prescriptive on council size but, as indicated in our *Guidance*, would expect the overall number of members on a London borough council

usually to be between 40 and 80. We start from the general assumption that the existing council size already secures effective and convenient local government in that borough but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against an 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 borough's electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a borough council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other boroughs.

The London Boroughs

7 Our programme of periodic electoral reviews of all 386 local authorities in England started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004. The 1992 Act requires us to review most local authorities every 10 to 15 years. However, the Act is silent on the timing of the first London borough reviews by the Commission. The Commission has no power to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London.

8 Most London boroughs have not been reviewed since 1977. Following discussions with local authority interests on the appropriate timing of London borough reviews, we decided to start as soon as possible after the May 1998 London local government elections so that all reviews could be completed, and the necessary orders implementing our recommendations made by the Secretary of State, in time for the next London elections scheduled for May 2002. Our reviews of the 32 London boroughs started on a phased basis between June 1998 and February 1999.

9 We have sought to ensure that all concerned were aware of our approach to the reviews. Copies of our *Guidance* were sent to all London boroughs, along with other major interests. In March 1998 we briefed chief executives at a meeting of the London branch of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, and we also met with the Association of London Government. Since then we

welcomed the opportunity to meet with chief officers and, on an all-party basis, members in the great majority of individual authorities. This has enabled us to brief authorities about our policies and procedures, our objective of electoral equality having regard to local circumstances, and the approach taken by the Commission in previous reviews.

10 Before we started our work in London, the Government published for consultation a Green Paper, *Modernising Local Government – Local Democracy and Community Leadership* (February 1998) which, inter alia, promoted the possibility of London boroughs having annual elections with three-member wards so that one councillor in each ward would stand for election each year. In view of this, we decided that the order in which the London reviews are undertaken should be determined by the proportion of three-member wards in each borough under the current arrangements. On this basis, Merton was in the first phase of reviews.

11 The Government's subsequent White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, published in July 1998, set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. For all unitary councils, including London boroughs, it proposed elections by thirds. It also refers to local accountability being maximised where the whole electorate in a council's area is involved in elections each time they take place, thereby pointing to a pattern of three-member wards in London boroughs to reflect a system of elections by thirds.

12 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1998/99 PER programme, including the London boroughs, that until any direction is received from the Secretary of State, the Commission would continue to maintain the approach to PERs as set out in the March 1998 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we added that local authorities and other interested parties would no doubt 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. Our general experience has been that proposals for three-member ward patterns emerged from most areas in London.

13 Finally, it should be noted that there are no parishes in London, and in fact there is no legislative provision for the establishment of parishes in London. This differentiates the reviews of London boroughs from the majority of the

other electoral reviews we are carrying out elsewhere in the country, where parishes feature highly and provide the building blocks for district or borough wards.

The Review of Merton

14 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements for Merton. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1977 (Report No. 247).

15 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 23 June 1998, when we wrote to Merton Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified the local authority associations, the Metropolitan Police, Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following publication of our draft recommendations, we placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and other publicity, and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations was 28 September 1998. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

16 Stage Three began on 26 January 1999 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Merton*, and ended on 22 March 1999. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

¹⁷ The borough of Merton is an outer London borough situated in the south-west of Greater London, encompassing the three main settlements of Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden. With a population of some 168,000 covering an area of 3,796 hectares, Merton has a population density of just over 44 people per hectare. The borough is mainly residential in character, although it has some areas of commerce and industry and nearly 30 per cent of the borough is devoted to parks, public open spaces and recreation grounds. Merton has good transport links, with the Wimbledon/Waterloo mainline railway, local rail services via the Wimbledon/Sutton/Streatham loop, London Underground connections with the Northern and District lines and many main roads including the A3 (Kingston by-pass) and the A24 London Road.

¹⁸ 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 borough average in percentage terms. In the text which follows, this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

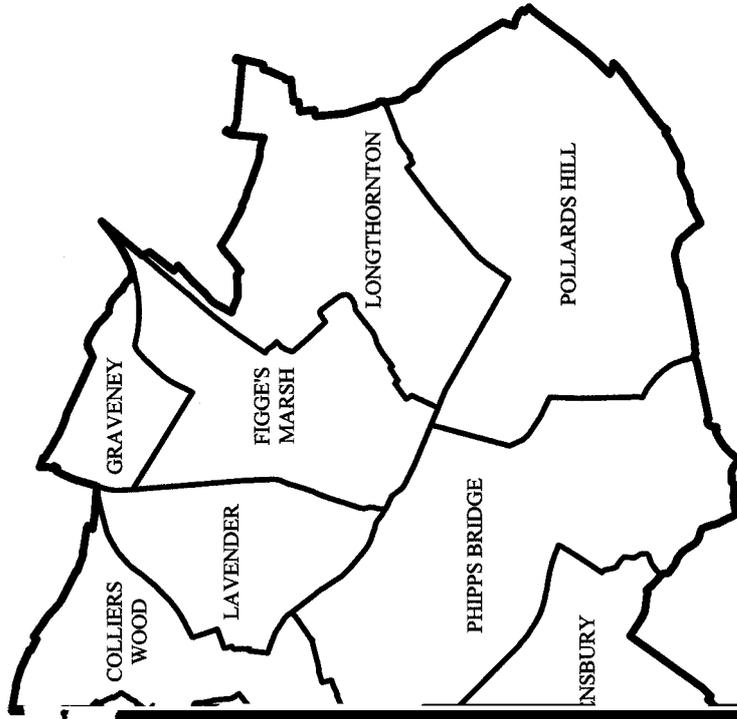
¹⁹ The electorate of the borough (February 1998) is 131,861. The Council currently has 57 councillors who are elected from 20 wards (Map 1 and Figure 3). Seventeen wards are each represented by three councillors and three wards elect two councillors each. As in all London boroughs, the whole council is elected together every four years.

²⁰ Since the last electoral review, there has been a small decrease in electorate in the borough, with around 3 per cent fewer electors than two decades ago.

²¹ At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,313 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,363 by the year 2003 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 five of the 20 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average. The worst imbalance is in Lavender ward where each of the two councillors represents on average 19 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Merton



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Figure 3:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Abbey	3	7,365	2,455	6	7,545	2,515	6
2 Cannon Hill	3	6,755	2,252	-3	6,759	2,253	-5
3 Colliers Wood	3	7,453	2,484	7	7,705	2,568	9
4 Dundonald	3	6,356	2,119	-8	6,497	2,166	-8
5 Durnsford	2	4,391	2,196	-5	4,416	2,208	-7
6 Figge's Marsh	3	7,678	2,559	11	7,846	2,615	11
7 Graveney	2	4,390	2,195	-5	4,434	2,217	-6
8 Hillside	3	7,242	2,414	4	7,462	2,487	5
9 Lavender	2	5,509	2,755	19	5,761	2,881	22
10 Longthornton	3	7,407	2,469	7	7,702	2,567	9
11 Lower Morden	3	6,784	2,261	-2	6,852	2,284	-3
12 Merton Park	3	6,874	2,291	-1	6,993	2,331	-1
13 Phipps Bridge	3	7,768	2,589	12	8,098	2,699	14
14 Pollards Hill	3	6,170	2,057	-11	6,055	2,018	-15
15 Ravensbury	3	6,561	2,187	-5	6,724	2,241	-5
16 Raynes Park	3	7,254	2,418	5	7,402	2,467	4
17 St Helier	3	6,417	2,139	-8	6,505	2,168	-8
18 Trinity	3	6,290	2,097	-9	6,471	2,157	-9
19 Village	3	6,116	2,039	-12	6,305	2,102	-11
20 West Barnes	3	7,081	2,360	2	7,144	2,381	1
Totals	57	131,861	—	—	134,676	—	—
Averages	—	—	2,313	—	—	2,363	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Merton Borough Council's Stage One 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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1998, electors in Village ward were relatively over-represented by 12 per cent, while electors in Lavender ward were relatively under-represented by 19 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

²² During Stage One we received two representations, from the Borough Council and the Merton Borough Liberal Democrats, both of which submitted borough-wide schemes. 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 Merton*.

²³ Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's scheme, which achieved improved electoral equality, generally provided for good boundaries while having regard to the statutory criteria and proposed a pattern of entirely three-member wards. However, we slightly modified the Borough Council's scheme in eight areas, affecting 12 wards. We proposed that:

- (a) Merton Borough Council should be served by 60 councillors;
- (b) there should be 20 wards, involving changes to the boundaries of all existing wards.

Draft Recommendation

Merton Borough Council should comprise 60 councillors serving 20 wards.

²⁴ Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in all of the 20 wards varying by no more than 6 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with all wards expected to vary by no more than 3 per cent from the borough average in 2003.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

25 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, seven representations were received. A list of respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Merton Borough Council and the Commission.

Merton Borough Council

26 The Council generally supported our draft recommendations, as they were based on its own initial scheme, and did not make any representations on ward boundaries. However, having consulted locally on ward names, it put forward changes to seven of our suggested ward names. It proposed that South Wimbledon ward be named Abbey, East Wimbledon ward be named Trinity, North Mitcham ward be named Graveney and St Helier West ward be named St Helier. It also proposed that Mitcham Central ward be named Fair Green, Mitcham South ward be named Cricket Green and Mitcham West ward be named Lavender Fields.

Wimbledon and Mitcham & Morden Constituency Labour Parties

27 The Wimbledon and Mitcham & Morden Constituency Labour Parties were generally in favour of our draft recommendations but put forward some slight amendments. Its submission proposed that the boundary between the Mitcham Central and Mitcham West wards should continue along London Road/Holborn Way, thus transferring Sadlers Close into Mitcham West ward, as these roads formed “a natural boundary and the people who live in Sadlers Close do not identify themselves with residents to the east of London Road/Holborn Way”. It also suggested that the boundary between our proposed East Wimbledon and South Wimbledon wards be modified and that, consequentially, the former be named South Park “as it contains South Park Gardens and the prominent South Park Road”.

Wimbledon Conservative Association

28 The Wimbledon Conservative Association opposed the inclusion of the Copse Hill/Drax Avenue area (currently within Raynes Park ward) in a revised Wimbledon Village ward, stating that the area was quite distinct and separate from what is known as the ‘Village’. It argued that under the new proposals councillors would have to represent “three distinct areas of different character”, and stated that the Commission should reconsider this western side of the borough, although it did not put forward any specific modifications for this area. It also proposed that the South Park Road/All Saints Road areas of east and south Wimbledon should remain in their existing wards.

Other Representations

29 A further four representations were received in response to our draft recommendations, three from local residents’ associations and one from a local resident. The Queens Road Residents’ Association expressed its concern at the loss of some “historic” ward names under our draft proposals, stating that “Merton’s history is enshrined in such names such as Abbey and Lavender,” and also proposed retaining the existing ward names of Trinity, Figge’s Marsh, Phipps Bridge, Graveney and Durnsford. It also suggested that the southern boundary of the proposed East Wimbledon ward should be redrawn as our proposed boundary would “split some long-standing Residents’ Associations ... who have worked together for the good of Wimbledon Town Centre”.

30 The Mitcham Village Residents’ Association expressed its concern over the proposed ward names for the Mitcham area, suggesting that consideration should be given to the area’s historical past. It proposed that Mitcham South ward be named Wicford ward (from the Domesday Book), Mitcham North ward be named Graveney or Biggin, Mitcham West ward be named Lavender

Park and Mitcham Central be named Fair Green or Mitcham Village. It also suggested that, to avoid any confusion, Village ward could be named Wimbledon Village or Wimbledon Common ward.

31 The Longthornton & Tamworth Residents' Association supported our proposed Longthornton ward and considered that our modifications to the present ward were "reasonable and beneficial in ensuring that the number of electors represented by each of the Longthornton ward councillors is nearly as possible comparable to the number of electors represented by each councillor in other [wards]".

32 A local resident proposed a boundary modification in Morden Park, between Lower Morden and St Helier wards, which he believed to be more "concise" than our proposal, and also proposed changes to six ward names. He proposed that Mitcham South ward be named Mitcham Common, North Mitcham ward be named Graveney (or Gorringer Park), Mitcham West ward be named Lavender and Mitcham Central be named Figge's Marsh. He also proposed that South Wimbledon ward should be re-named Abbey and that East Wimbledon ward be named Haydons.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

33 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Merton is to achieve electoral equality. 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 interests and identities of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

34 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 ensuing five years. We must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

35 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.

36 Our *Guidance* states that, while we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, 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. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. We will require particular justification for schemes which result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance over 10

per cent in any ward. In reviews of predominantly urban areas such as the London boroughs, our experience suggests that we would expect to achieve a high degree of electoral equality in all wards.

Electorate Forecasts

37 At Stage One the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2003, projecting an increase in the electorate of around 2 per cent from 131,861 to 134,676 over the five-year period from 1998 to 2003. It expected most of the growth to be fairly evenly distributed throughout the borough, although it expected there to be a decrease in electorate in the Pollards Hill ward. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to the unitary development plan for the borough, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries was obtained.

38 In our draft recommendations report we accepted that forecasting electorate is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

39 We received no comments on the Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates presently available.

Council Size

40 We indicated in our *Guidance* that we would normally expect the number of councillors serving a London borough to be in the range of 40 to 80. As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates convenient and effective local government.

41 Merton Borough Council currently has 57 members. At Stage One the Council and the Merton Borough Liberal Democrats both proposed a council of 60 members, an increase of three. In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. We concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by a council of 60 members.

42 At Stage Three, the Council agreed with our draft recommendations in respect of council size and no other comments were received regarding this aspect of the review. Given the general support for a council of 60 members, which would facilitate a good electoral scheme providing good electoral equality, we are confirming our draft recommendation for a council size of 60 as final.

Ward Names

43 During Stage One the Council proposed eight new ward names (predominantly in the Wimbledon and Mitcham areas) which we adopted as part of our draft recommendations for consultation purposes. During Stage Three the majority of the representations that we received commented on these amended ward names. Having consulted locally on ward names during Stage Three, the Council proposed retaining four existing ward names (Trinity, Graveney, Abbey and St Helier) and put forward three new ward names (Fair Green, Cricket Green and Lavender Fields). Some representations supported the Council's amendments, while others put forward other alternative ward names. Given the opposition to some of our draft proposals and in the light of broad support locally for a number of alternative ward names, we are proposing to modify seven of the ward names put forward in our draft recommendations report, as detailed later in this chapter.

Electoral Arrangements

44 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered the representations received at Stage One from the Borough Council and the Merton Borough Liberal Democrats. We acknowledged the positive approach taken by respondents who had each submitted detailed borough-wide proposals for change to the present electoral arrangements. From these representations some considerations emerged

which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

45 First, there was a consensus between the Council and the Liberal Democrats for an increase in council size to 60, by allocating an additional councillor to each of the three existing two-member wards. Second, the current electoral arrangements provide for predominantly three-member wards in Merton, although there are also three two-member wards. Both schemes submitted were based on a pattern of entirely three-member wards for the borough.

46 Third, there was also consensus between the two submissions, particularly with regard to the retention of sections of the Wimbledon/Waterloo, Wimbledon/Tooting and Wimbledon/Mitcham railway lines as ward boundaries which are clear and identifiable. There was also some broad agreement between these two schemes on the warding arrangements for the remainder of the borough. Fourth, we noted the arguments put to us about community identities in the borough. We tried to reflect such considerations in our draft recommendations where it would be consistent with our objective of electoral equality, although we noted that there was not always local consensus on the precise boundaries of such communities.

47 Finally, both borough-wide schemes provided for improved electoral equality, although to varying degrees. Under both the Borough Council's and the Liberal Democrats' proposals, the number of wards where the electoral variance would be more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough would reduce from five to zero. By 2003, under the Council's scheme no ward would vary by more than 4 per cent from the average for the borough.

48 In view of the degree of consensus behind significant elements of the Council's proposals, we concluded that we should base our draft recommendations on the Council's scheme. The scheme would provide much improved electoral equality than under the current arrangements and it would secure good boundaries, having regard to the statutory criteria. However, to improve electoral equality further, we made modifications to the Council's scheme which affected 12 wards.

49 In response to our draft recommendations report, a number of respondents expressed the view that the boundary between our proposed East Wimbledon and South Wimbledon wards should

be modified, in the interests of community identities, so that it would be as near as possible to the existing boundary. Additionally, a number of revised ward names were put forward, including suggestions on seven wards from the Council.

50 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three, and judge that a modification should be made to one of our proposed boundaries (affecting two wards) and that seven of our proposed ward names should be changed. The following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Durnsford, Village, Hillside and Raynes Park wards;
- (b) Trinity, Abbey and Colliers Wood wards;
- (c) Dundonald and Merton Park wards;
- (d) West Barnes, Cannon Hill and Lower Morden wards;
- (e) St Helier and Ravensbury wards;
- (f) Graveney, Lavender, Figge's Marsh and Phipps Bridge wards;
- (g) Longthornton and Pollards Hill wards.

51 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover of the report.

Durnsford, Village, Hillside and Raynes Park wards

52 These four wards are situated in the north and north-western part of the borough. The two-member Durnsford ward and the three-member Village ward are both currently over-represented, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average by 5 per cent and 12 per cent respectively (7 per cent and 11 per cent by 2003). The three-member wards of Hillside and Raynes Park are both slightly under-represented, by 4 per cent and 5 per cent respectively (5 per cent and 4 per cent by 2003).

53 During Stage One the Council and the Liberal Democrats proposed that this area as a whole should be represented by one additional councillor and put forward similar proposals for four three-member wards. The Council proposed that the two-member Durnsford ward should be enlarged so as to enable it to become a three-member ward, suggesting that the ward's southern boundary

should follow the Wimbledon/Tooting railway line, from Wimbledon Station as far as the borough boundary, thus bringing in 781 electors from Trinity ward.

54 The Council also proposed amendments to other ward boundaries in this area in order to improve electoral equality and provide for effective boundaries. It proposed that 1,582 electors in the eastern part of the current Village ward should be included in Durnsford ward. As a result of this amendment, and in light of Village ward currently being over-represented by 12 per cent, the Council further proposed that 1,282 electors in the northern part of the current Raynes Park ward, and a net total of 348 electors from Hillside ward, should be included in a revised Village ward. To counter-balance the loss of the electors from Raynes Park ward into Village ward, and in order to provide for better boundaries, the Council proposed transferring 358 electors from West Barnes ward and 562 electors from Hillside ward into Raynes Park ward. Finally in this area, the Council also proposed that the new three-member Durnsford ward be re-named Wimbledon Park ward.

55 We based our draft recommendations on the Council's Stage One submission, subject to two minor modifications. In order to improve electoral equality further in both the proposed Village and Raynes Park wards we put forward two slight amendments to the Council's proposals which would involve transferring 94 electors (mostly on the northern side of Coombe Lane) from the proposed Raynes Park ward into the proposed Village ward and transferring 51 electors from the proposed Raynes Park ward into Dundonald ward. This second modification would also improve electoral equality in Dundonald ward. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Wimbledon Park and Hillside wards would be 2 per cent above and 4 per cent below the borough average respectively (1 per cent above and 3 per cent below the average by 2003). The number of electors per councillor in our revised Village and Raynes Park wards would be 5 per cent below and 2 per cent above the borough average (improving to 2 per cent below and 1 per cent above the average by 2003).

56 During Stage Three the Council supported all of our draft recommendations for this area. However the Wimbledon Conservative Association opposed the inclusion of the Copse Hill/Drax Avenue area in a revised Village ward stating that it

was “quite distinct and separate from what is known as the ‘village’”. It believed that our proposals had “concentrated on the numbers [of electors] and ignored natural boundaries [and] communities”, suggesting that the Commission should “look again at the whole west side of the borough”; however it did not put forward any alternative proposals. The Mitcham Village Association suggested that as a result of its proposal to re-name Mitcham Central ward as Mitcham Village ward (see paragraph 82), the proposed Village ward could be re-named Wimbledon Village (to avoid confusion) or Wimbledon Common ward. The Queens Road Residents’ Association proposed that Wimbledon Park ward should be named Durnsford ward.

57 We have considered the representations received regarding our proposed wards in this area, but we are not convinced that there is sufficient evidence to justify substantial change to our draft recommendations. We have also noted the suggestions to amend Village ward’s name to Wimbledon Common and to re-name Wimbledon Park ward as Durnsford. While we accept that Wimbledon Common covers a large part of that ward and could be considered a unifying feature of the ward, we have also noted that the support for such a change is limited. Similarly, given the support at Stage One, from the Council and the Liberal Democrats, for the proposed ward name of Wimbledon Park, we do not agree that it should be re-named Durnsford. Therefore, given the Council’s support for our draft recommendations, and given the good electoral equality that would result, we are confirming our draft recommendations for these four wards, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, as final.

Trinity, Abbey and Colliers Wood wards

58 The three-member wards of Abbey and Colliers Wood are both under-represented at present, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average by 6 per cent and 7 per cent respectively (6 per cent and 9 per cent by 2003). The number of electors per councillor in the three-member Trinity ward is 9 per cent below the borough average (remaining at 9 per cent below the average in 2003).

59 The Council proposed modifications to these three wards in order to accommodate the knock-on effect of using the Wimbledon/Tooting railway line

as the northern boundary of Trinity ward and in order to address anomalies which exist under the current arrangements. It proposed transferring 436 electors from the Mead Park Estate, currently in Colliers Wood ward, into Trinity ward, as these residents currently have no direct vehicular access to the rest of Colliers Wood ward: the existing boundary effectively means that they are ‘cut-off’ from the ward in which they vote. The Council also proposed a modification which would place Wandle Park in Colliers Wood ward and which would transfer 1,353 electors to the north of Merton High Street and the east of Haydon Road from Abbey ward into Trinity ward. However, to balance electoral equality in these wards it also proposed transferring 866 electors from around the South Park Road area of Trinity ward into Abbey ward. The Council proposed maintaining the majority of the southern boundary of Abbey ward which follows a section of the Wimbledon/Mitcham railway, but proposed transferring 344 electors from the Runnymede area into the proposed Mitcham West ward in order to correct a boundary anomaly.

60 The Council also proposed modifying the south-eastern boundary of Colliers Wood ward, arguing that the present boundary, which follows a disused railway line, was a poor one as it divides Myrna Close and Singleton Close from the present Lavender ward. In the light of this anomaly and in order to improve boundaries and electoral equality, the Council proposed transferring 1,576 electors into a revised Colliers Wood ward from the north of Lavender ward, using Victoria Road as the new ward boundary. Finally, the Council proposed that Trinity ward should be re-named East Wimbledon ward and that Abbey ward should be re-named South Wimbledon ward.

61 Given the similarities between the Council’s and the Liberal Democrats’ proposals for three three-member wards in this area during Stage One, and in the light of the greater regard that the Council had given to residential development in this area, we adopted the Council’s proposals in their entirety as our draft recommendations. We were of the view that the Council’s proposals would provide for more convenient and identifiable boundaries as well as improved electoral equality. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed new wards of East Wimbledon, South Wimbledon and Colliers Wood would be 2 per cent below, 1 per cent below and almost equal to the borough average initially (1 per cent above, 1 per cent below and 2 per cent below the average by 2003).

62 At Stage Three the Council generally supported our draft recommendations, but having consulted locally, contended that the proposed East Wimbledon and South Wimbledon wards should retain their existing ward names of Trinity and Abbey respectively. The Wimbledon and Mitcham & Morden Constituency Labour Parties, the Wimbledon Conservative Association and the Queens Road Residents' Association all proposed that the South Park Road/All Saints Road areas of east and south Wimbledon should remain in their existing wards. They each suggested that the boundary between the two wards should be as near to the existing boundary as possible, on the grounds of community identities.

63 The Conservative Association and the Queens Road Residents' Association also suggested that the existing ward names, Trinity and Abbey, be retained, as the proposed Trinity ward would have Holy Trinity church as its focus and the remains of Merton Abbey would be within the proposed Abbey ward. The Constituency Labour Parties supported our proposed South Wimbledon ward name but suggested that East Wimbledon ward be named South Park (as it would contain South Park Gardens and the prominent South Park Road). A local resident suggested that East Wimbledon ward be named Haydons (as Haydons Road and Haydons Road railway station are both within the ward) and also supported the retention of Abbey as a ward name.

64 In our draft recommendations report we stated that Trinity, Abbey and Colliers Wood wards would be subject to change as a result of our proposal to use the length of the Wimbledon/Tooting railway line as a boundary, and in the light of residential development in the eastern part of this area. However, having considered the representations received during Stage Three, we noted the broad support in favour of the retention of the existing Trinity and Abbey wards. The Constituency Labour Parties suggested that the existing boundary between East Wimbledon and South Wimbledon wards should be retained as far as Haydons Road, so that a modified boundary could follow the centre of All Saints Road, thus including almost all of the eastern part of the GB polling district within South Wimbledon ward. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor in revised East Wimbledon and South Wimbledon wards would be initially 6 per cent below and 2 per cent above the borough average respectively (1 per cent below and 2 per cent above

the average by 2003). Electoral equality in the proposed Colliers Wood ward would be the same as under our draft recommendations with the number of electors per councillor being almost equal to the borough average initially (2 per cent below the average by 2003).

65 While these revised proposals would not provide for such good boundaries as under our draft recommendations, reasonable electoral equality would still be achieved. Given the local support in favour of these changes, we are proposing to endorse the Constituency Labour Parties' suggested ward boundaries in the area as our final recommendations, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report. Furthermore, we have also noted that the majority of representations were in favour of the retention of the existing ward names in this area. Therefore we are also proposing, as our final recommendations, that the modified East Wimbledon ward be re-named Trinity ward and that the modified South Wimbledon ward be re-named Abbey ward. We are also confirming our proposed Colliers Wood ward as final.

Dundonald and Merton Park wards

66 Situated towards the centre of the borough, the three-member Dundonald ward is currently over-represented by 8 per cent (forecast to remain at 8 per cent by 2003), while the three-member Merton Park ward has a good level of electoral equality, the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average by 1 per cent (1 per cent by 2003).

67 At Stage One the Council proposed that Dundonald ward should remain unchanged, but proposed a minor modification to the Merton Park ward which would correct a boundary anomaly affecting 103 residents in Birchwood Close which, it argued, should be included in St Helier ward. Our draft recommendations endorsed the Council's proposals for two three-member wards in this area, subject to one minor modification (affecting 51 electors) which would improve electoral equality in Dundonald ward. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Dundonald and Merton Park wards would be 3 per cent below and 3 per cent above the borough average initially (3 per cent below and 2 per cent above the average by 2003). At Stage Three the Council supported our draft recommendations for these two wards and no other representations were received.

68 Given the Council's support for our draft recommendations, which would achieve good electoral equality and identifiable boundaries, and since we have not received any other submissions, we are confirming our proposed Dundonald and Merton Park wards, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, as final.

West Barnes, Cannon Hill and Lower Morden wards

69 These three wards are situated in the south-west of the borough. The three-member ward of West Barnes is slightly under-represented by 2 per cent (1 per cent by 2003), while the three-member wards of Cannon Hill and Lower Morden are both slightly over-represented by 3 per cent and 2 per cent respectively (5 per cent and 3 per cent by 2003).

70 At Stage One the Council proposed some relatively minor amendments to the boundaries of all three wards, in order to address a number of current anomalies and to improve ward boundaries, and the Liberal Democrats suggested broadly similar modifications. The Council proposed amendments to the northern boundary of West Barnes ward and the south-western boundary of Cannon Hill ward, as well as a significant modification to the eastern boundary of Lower Morden ward which would bring in 625 electors from the south-west of the existing St Helier ward. Under the Council's scheme, electoral equality for this area would be worse than under the current arrangements, as the modified wards of Cannon Hill, West Barnes and Lower Morden would all be somewhat under-represented, by 7 per cent, 5 per cent and 6 per cent respectively (4 per cent, 3 per cent and 4 per cent by 2003).

71 In order to improve electoral equality, and to secure better boundaries, we put forward, as our draft recommendations, modifications to the Council's proposals which would transfer 36 electors from the Council's proposed West Barnes ward and 159 electors from its proposed Cannon Hill ward into a revised Lower Morden ward. Our changes would also transfer 625 electors from the Council's proposed Lower Morden ward 'back' into the St Helier ward. Overall, these amendments would mean that electoral equality across Merton would be more evenly balanced between the east and south-west of the borough. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed West

Barnes, Cannon Hill and Lower Morden wards would be 4 per cent above, 4 per cent above and 1 per cent below the borough average initially (3 per cent above, 2 per cent above and 2 per cent below the average by 2003). However, the knock-on effect of our boundary modifications also resulted in a number of the Council's proposed ward boundaries in the east and south-east of the borough needing to be modified.

72 At Stage Three the Council supported our draft recommendations for these three revised wards in full. A local resident proposed a boundary modification in the Morden Park area, which he believed to be more "concise" than our proposal, which would in effect include Merton College and the Morden Park sports ground in the Lower Morden ward.

73 We have considered the local resident's boundary proposal, but given the Council's support for our draft recommendations (which were based on its own submission), we remain of the view that our draft proposals, which take into account the small number of electors from around the Merton College area, are the more appropriate in this area. We are therefore endorsing them as our final recommendations, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

St Helier and Ravensbury wards

74 These three-member wards, which are in the south of the borough, are both currently over-represented, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the average by 8 per cent in St Helier ward and by 5 per cent in Ravensbury ward. These levels of electoral inequality are forecast to remain constant by 2003.

75 In its Stage One submission, in addition to a transfer from St Helier ward of 103 electors into Merton Park ward and 625 electors into Lower Morden ward, the Council proposed modifying the boundary between St Helier and Ravensbury wards so that it would follow along the centre of St Helier Avenue to the borough boundary, thus eradicating a present anomaly. This would have the effect of transferring 795 electors into the revised St Helier ward, which the Council proposed to rename 'St Helier West'. To improve electoral equality, the Council also proposed to amend the north-eastern boundary of Ravensbury ward so

that it would include an area containing 754 electors (to the south and east of London Road and to the north of the Wimbledon/Mitcham railway line) from the current Phipps Bridge ward.

76 Our draft recommendations for these two wards were based on the Council's Stage One submission. However, as a consequence of our modifications to some of the boundaries in the south-western part of the borough (in order to improve electoral equality in that area), electoral equality in St Helier ward would deteriorate to an unacceptable level. We therefore proposed modifying the northern boundary of the Council's proposed St Helier West ward, transferring 718 electors into a modified Ravensbury ward. This had a desirable side-effect as the electors from Phipps Bridge ward, which the Council proposed transferring to Ravensbury ward, would be able to remain in the former. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed St Helier West and Ravensbury wards would be almost equal to and 1 per cent below the borough average initially (1 per cent below and almost equal to the average by 2003).

77 During Stage Three, the Council supported our draft recommendations but proposed that the existing St Helier ward name be retained, rather than changing the name to St Helier West. Given that this proposed ward would contain both the St Helier railway station and part of the St Helier housing estate and that it is the Council's preference, we agree that the existing ward name should be retained. We did not receive any other representations relating to these wards. In light of the Council's support for our draft recommendations in this area, we are confirming them as final, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, subject to the retention of the St Helier ward name.

Graveney, Lavender, Figge's Marsh and Phipps Bridge wards

78 These four wards, covering broadly the Mitcham area, currently possess some of the highest levels of electoral inequality in the borough. The two-member Graveney ward is over-represented with the number of electors per councillor varying by 5 per cent from the borough average (6 per cent by 2003). The two-member Lavender ward is currently the most under-

represented ward in the borough with an electoral variance of 19 per cent. This level of electoral inequality is forecast to worsen further to 22 per cent above the average by 2003. The three-member wards of Figge's Marsh and Phipps Bridge are also considerably under-represented with electoral variances of 11 per cent and 12 per cent respectively (11 per cent and 14 per cent by 2003). It is clear, therefore, that this area, which is presently represented by 10 councillors, is entitled to additional representation.

79 In its Stage One submission the Council proposed four three-member wards for this area, in order to address the under-representation that currently exists. It proposed creating a new three-member Mitcham South ward by transferring 754 electors into Ravensbury ward and 1,131 electors into Lavender ward, although the new ward would gain 425 electors from Colliers Wood ward. The Council also proposed creating a new Mitcham Central ward, loosely based on the existing Figge's Marsh ward, by transferring 2,340 electors currently in Figge's Marsh ward into an enlarged Graveney ward, and by bringing in 563 electors currently in Lavender ward and 488 electors currently in Longthornton ward. The enlarged Graveney ward would return three members and, the Council argued, should be re-named North Mitcham. Finally in this area, the Council proposed substantially modifying the boundaries of the current Lavender ward to create a new Mitcham West ward which would be represented by three members rather than the existing two. The modifications would bring in a net total of 3,059 electors, currently in the Colliers Wood, Abbey and Phipps Bridge wards (from the area to the west of Western Road), and transfer 563 electors into its proposed Mitcham Central ward.

80 We generally agreed with the boundaries of the Council's proposed new three-member wards of Mitcham West and North Mitcham and put those wards forward as our draft recommendations. However, we made a minor modification to the boundary of the proposed North Mitcham ward (affecting no electors) in order to secure a more identifiable boundary. Additionally, in order to provide a better boundary for Mitcham South ward (along the Wimbledon/Mitcham railway), and in light of the knock-on effect of our modifications to the Ravensbury ward, we proposed transferring 537 electors (from an area to the east of London

Road and the west of Commonsides West) out of the Council's proposed Mitcham South ward and into its proposed Mitcham Central ward.

81 We also proposed modifying the northern and eastern boundaries of the Council's suggested Mitcham Central ward, in order to improve overall electoral equality and to provide for a better boundary in the Oakleigh Way area. Our modifications would involve a net transfer of 308 electors from the Council's proposed Mitcham Central ward into its proposed Longthornton ward. Under our proposals, the number of electors per councillor in the new Mitcham South and Mitcham Central wards would be 2 per cent below and almost equal to the borough average initially (2 per cent above and 3 per cent above the average by 2003). The number of electors per councillor in the new three-member Mitcham West and North Mitcham wards would be 2 per cent below and 2 per cent above the borough average initially (2 per cent below and 1 per cent above the average by 2003). We put forward these arrangements as our draft recommendations.

82 At Stage Three the Council supported our draft recommendations for this area except for our proposed ward names (which were those which had been put forward by the Council in its Stage One submission). Having consulted locally, the Council proposed that Mitcham Central, Mitcham South, Mitcham West and North Mitcham wards be re-named Fair Green, Cricket Green, Lavender Fields and Graveney respectively. The Mitcham Village Residents' Association proposed that Mitcham Central could be named Mitcham Village, but also supported the Council's suggested ward name of Fair Green. It also proposed that North Mitcham ward could be named Graveney; that Mitcham South ward could be named Wicford (after a reference in the Domesday Book); and that Mitcham West ward could be named Lavender Park.

83 The Queens Road Residents' Association proposed that Mitcham Central, Mitcham South, Mitcham West and North Mitcham wards be named Figge's Marsh, Phipps Bridge, Lavender Fields and Graveney respectively, and a local resident suggested that the four wards respectively be named Figge's Marsh, Mitcham Common, Lavender and Graveney.

84 The Constituency Labour Parties proposed that the boundary between Mitcham Central and Mitcham West wards should continue along London Road/Holborn Way, thus transferring Sadlers Close into Mitcham West ward, as these roads formed "a natural boundary and the people who live in Sadlers Close do not identify themselves with residents to the east of London Road/Holborn Way". However, the resultant level of electoral inequality would be unacceptable, with the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Mitcham West and Mitcham Central wards being initially 6 per cent above and 8 per cent below the borough average respectively (8 per cent above and 8 per cent below the average by 2003).

85 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three, we have noted the broad support in favour of our proposed ward boundaries in this area and therefore wish to confirm them as our final recommendations. However, in view of the representations regarding ward names that we received, we propose amending the ward names in the Mitcham area.

86 We have noted the broad agreement that the existing ward name of Graveney be retained for the proposed North Mitcham ward, which would reflect the fact that the river Graveney forms the northern boundary of the ward, and we are therefore putting it forward as part of our final recommendations. The majority of representations were also in favour of retaining a reference to the name 'lavender' in the Mitcham West ward. The Queen's Road Residents' Association stated that Mitcham "was known internationally for its lavender fields" and thus proposed that Mitcham West ward be re-named Lavender Fields; a suggestion which was supported by the Council. Given this support we agree that Mitcham West ward be re-named Lavender Fields ward, and are putting this forward as part of our final recommendations.

87 There were a number of alternative names put forward for the Mitcham Central ward. However, given that there was little evidence put forward to support the name Fair Green, and given that the majority of the representations did not support our 'Mitcham' references in our draft recommendations, we agree with the Queens Road Residents' Association and the local resident who both suggested that the existing Figge's Marsh ward

name be retained, as it is an identifiable topographical feature in the ward, and we are therefore putting it forward as part of our final recommendations in this area. Having considered the alternative names put forward for Mitcham South ward, we agree with the Council that Cricket Green would be the most appropriate as this is an identifiable local feature in the centre of the proposed ward. We are therefore putting this ward name forward as part of our final recommendations, which are shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Longthornton and Pollards Hill wards

88 The number of electors per councillor in these three-member wards, which lie at the eastern extremity of the borough, is 7 per cent above the average in Longthornton ward, and 11 per cent below the average in Pollards Hill ward. These variances are projected to become 9 per cent above and 15 per cent below respectively by 2003. Pollards Hill is the only ward in the borough where a net decrease in the electorate is forecast for 2003. The ward is bounded to the east and south by the borough boundary, and hence there is only limited scope for amending its boundaries to address the relatively high level of over-representation.

89 At Stage One the Council proposed slight modifications to the existing wards in order to improve electoral equality. It proposed maintaining the majority of the boundary between Longthornton and Pollards Hill wards to follow the centre of Manor Road, and also proposed modifying part of the western boundary of Pollards Hill ward to include an area around Tamworth Lane, thereby improving electoral equality in the ward. In addition, it proposed transferring part of the western area of Longthornton ward (around Oakleigh Way) into the proposed Mitcham Central ward in order to improve electoral equality in both wards.

90 However, as a consequence of our modifications to its proposals in other parts of the borough, and in order to improve electoral equality further, our draft recommendations modified its proposed Longthornton and Pollards Hill wards. We agreed with the Council that the present boundary between the wards (Manor Road) was identifiable and therefore proposed retaining the majority of it as a ward boundary. However, in order to improve electoral equality, we proposed incorporating an area to the south of Tamworth Lane in a revised Pollards Hill ward, and proposed changes to the western

boundary of Longthornton ward in order to take account of our proposals in respect of Mitcham Central ward. Our modifications involved the net transfer of 308 electors into the new Mitcham Central ward from Longthornton ward, and a net transfer of 281 electors into the revised Pollards Hill ward from Longthornton ward. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Longthornton and Pollards Hill wards under our draft recommendations would be 3 per cent below and 6 per cent above the borough average initially (2 per cent above and almost equal to the average by 2003).

91 At Stage Three the Council and the Longthornton & Tamworth Residents' Association both supported our draft recommendations, with the latter stating that it considered our modifications to the Longthornton ward to be "reasonable and beneficial in ensuring that the number of electors represented by each of the Longthornton ward councillors is nearly as possible comparable to the number of electors represented by each councillor in other [wards]". Given the support for our draft recommendations in this area we are confirming them, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of the report, as final.

Conclusions

92 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- (a) Five ward names should be modified – Mitcham Central, Mitcham South, Mitcham West, North Mitcham and St Helier West wards should be re-named Figge's Marsh, Cricket Green, Lavender Fields, Graveney and St Helier respectively;
- (b) The boundary between our proposed East Wimbledon and South Wimbledon wards should be modified to follow the centre of All Saints Road and the existing ward names, Trinity and Abbey, should be retained.

93 We conclude that, in Merton:

- (a) there should be an increase in council size from 57 to 60;
- (b) there should be 20 wards, as at present, which would involve changes to the boundaries of all of the existing wards.

94 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1998 and 2003 electorate figures.

95 As shown in Figure 4, our final recommendations for Merton Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards where the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from five to zero. The balance of representation is expected to improve further with all wards expected to vary by no more than 3 per cent by 2003. Our final recommendations are set out in more detail in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

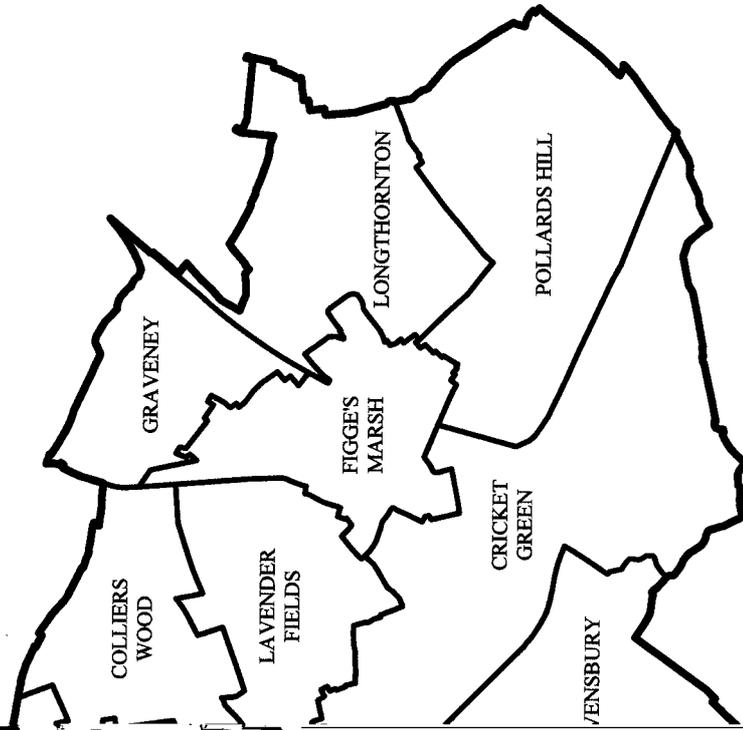
Final Recommendation

Merton Borough Council should comprise 60 councillors serving 20 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map in the back of the report.

*Figure 4 :
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements*

	1998 electorate		2003 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	57	60	57	60
Number of wards	20	20	20	20
Average number of electors per councillor	2,313	2,198	2,363	2,245
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	5	0	5	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	0	0	1	0

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Merton



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6. NEXT STEPS

96 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Merton and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

97 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made earlier than six weeks from the date that our recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

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

The Secretary of State
Department of the Environment,
Transport and the Regions
Local Government Sponsorship Division
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Merton

Our final recommendations differ substantively from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of two wards where our draft proposals are set out below. Our amendments affect both the boundaries and the names of these wards: we are proposing to name the modified East Wimbledon ward as Trinity and the modified South Wimbledon ward as Abbey. The other changes between our draft and final recommendations, which are not included in Figure A1, are that we also propose renaming Mitcham Central ward as Figge's Marsh, Mitcham South ward as Cricket Green, Mitcham West ward as Lavender Fields, North Mitcham ward as Graveney and St Helier West ward as St Helier.

Figure A1:

The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
East Wimbledon	3	6,432	2,144	-2	6,832	2,277	-1
South Wimbledon	3	6,534	2,178	-1	6,639	2,213	-1

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Merton 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. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

