

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Dartford in Kent

October 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
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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. We can also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the district.

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

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Dartford on 9 May 2000.

- **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 Dartford:

- **in 13 of the 23 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and five wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 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 13 wards and by more than 20 per cent in seven wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 100-101) are that:

- **Dartford Borough Council should have 44 councillors, three fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 17 wards, instead of 23 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of six, and two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

These draft 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 but five of the proposed 17 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all 17 wards expected to vary by no more than 7 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

Recommendations are also made for changes to parish council electoral arrangements which provide for:

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Darenth, Stone and Wilmington.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 17 October 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 11 December 2000:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Bean & Darenth	3	Bean ward (Bean parish); Darenth ward (part – the proposed Darenth Park, Lane End, Ladywood and Green Street Green parish wards of Darenth parish)	Large map
2	Brent	3	Brent ward; Darenth ward (part – the proposed Fleet Downs parish ward of Darenth parish)	Large map
3	Castle	1	Stone ward (part – the proposed Castle parish ward of Stone parish)	Large map
4	Greenhithe	3	<i>Unchanged:</i> Greenhithe ward (Greenhithe and Knockhall parish wards of Swanscombe & Greenhithe parish)	Large map
5	Heath	3	Heath ward; Miskin ward (part); Princes ward (part); Wilmington Central ward (part)	Large map
6	Joyce Green	2	Joyce Green ward (part)	Large map
7	Joydens Wood	3	Maypole ward; Wilmington West ward (part – the proposed Birchwood parish ward of Wilmington parish)	Large map
8	Littlebrook	2	Joyce Green ward (part); Littlebrook ward; Stone ward (part)	Large map
9	Longfield & Southfleet	3	Longfield ward (Longfield & New Barn parish); Southfleet ward (Southfleet parish)	Large map
10	Newtown	3	Newtown ward; Stone ward (part – the proposed Milestone parish ward of Stone parish)	Large map
11	Princes	3	Princes ward (part); Wilmington East ward (part – the proposed Oakfield parish ward of Wilmington parish)	Large map
12	Stone	3	Horns Cross and Stone wards (part – the proposed East, Horns Cross and St Johns parish wards of Stone parish)	Large map
13	Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley	2	<i>Unchanged:</i> Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward (Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley parish)	Large map
14	Swanscombe	3	Galley Hill and Swanscombe wards (Galley Hill and Swanscombe parish wards of Swanscombe & Greenhithe parish)	Large map
15	Town	2	Gundulf ward (part); Miskin ward (part); Priory ward	Large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
16	West Hill	3	Gundulf ward (part); Miskin ward (part)	Large map
17	Wilmington	2	Wilmington Central, Wilmington East and Wilmington West wards (part – the proposed Central parish ward of Wilmington parish)	Large map

Notes: 1 Dartford borough comprises the eight parishes indicated above. The town of Dartford is unparished.

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Dartford

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Bean & Darenth	3	3,891	1,297	-12	4,290	1,430	-7
2	Brent	3	4,886	1,629	10	4,770	1,590	3
3	Castle	1	979	979	-34	1,520	1,520	-1
4	Greenhithe	3	3,109	1,036	-30	4,600	1,533	0
5	Heath	3	4,844	1,615	9	4,540	1,513	-2
6	Joyce Green	2	2,718	1,359	-8	3,110	1,555	1
7	Joydens Wood	3	4,510	1,503	2	4,960	1,653	7
8	Littlebrook	2	3,138	1,569	6	2,970	1,485	-3
9	Longfield & Southfleet	3	5,085	1,695	14	4,930	1,643	7
10	Newtown	3	5,035	1,678	13	4,890	1,630	6
11	Princes	3	4,703	1,568	6	4,860	1,620	5
12	Stone	3	4,546	1,515	2	4,480	1,493	-3
13	Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley	2	3,241	1,621	9	3,070	1,535	0
14	Swanscombe	3	4,514	1,505	2	4,540	1,513	-2
15	Town	2	2,807	1,404	-5	2,870	1,435	-7
16	West Hill	3	4,084	1,361	-8	4,330	1,443	-6
17	Wilmington	2	3,078	1,539	4	2,950	1,475	-4
	Totals	44	65,168	-	-	67,680	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,481	-	-	1,538	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Dartford Borough 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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Dartford in Kent on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the 12 two-tier districts in Kent 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 Dartford. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in July 1975 (Report No. 18). The electoral arrangements of Kent County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 402). We completed a directed electoral review of Medway in 1996. We expect to commence a periodic electoral review of Medway later this year, and of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

- the statutory criteria contained 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* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (see Appendix B).

4 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. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the borough.

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 borough as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. 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, ie 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 Kent 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 have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities’ electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas, and our present *Guidance*.

12 Stage One began on 9 May 2000, when we wrote to Dartford Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Kent County Council, Kent Police Authority, the local authority associations, Kent Local Councils Association, parish councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 1 August 2000.

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

14 Stage Three began on 17 October 2000 and will end on 11 December 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 The borough of Dartford is situated in the north-west of Kent and covers some 7,287 hectares. The area has experienced significant recent development which will continue over the next 10 years. This includes residential development as a result of the borough's strong road connections with London, the channel and areas to the north via the M25, the M20 and the Dartford Crossing. A passenger station for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is currently under construction. Europe's biggest out-of-town shopping centre, Bluewater, is situated at the centre of the borough. However, the south of the borough retains its rural character.

17 The borough contains eight parishes, but Dartford town itself is unparished.

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 is 65,168 (February 2000). The Council presently has 47 members who are elected from 23 wards. Seven of the wards are each represented by three councillors, 10 are each represented by two councillors and six are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years.

20 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate of Dartford Borough, with around 13 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Priory, Stone and Wilmington Central wards.

21 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,387 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,440 by the year 2005 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 13 of the 23 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, in five wards by more than 20 per cent and in one ward by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Wilmington Central ward where the councillor represents 33 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Dartford

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Bean	1	1,304	1,304	-6	1,250	1,250	-13
2	Brent	3	4,274	1,425	3	4,170	1,390	-3
3	Darenth	2	3,199	1,600	15	3,640	1,820	26
4	Galley Hill	2	2,351	1,176	-15	2,500	1,250	-13
5	Greenhithe	2	3,109	1,555	12	4,600	2,300	60
6	Gundulf	3	3,329	1,110	-20	3,760	1,253	-13
7	Heath	3	4,208	1,403	1	4,000	1,333	-7
8	Horns Cross	1	1,371	1,371	-1	1,310	1,310	-9
9	Joyce Green	2	2,756	1,378	-1	3,150	1,575	9
10	Littlebrook	2	3,100	1,550	12	2,930	1,465	2
11	Longfield	3	4,003	1,334	-4	3,870	1,290	-10
12	Maypole	2	2,689	1,345	-3	3,230	1,614	12
13	Miskin	2	2,336	1,168	-16	2,230	1,115	-23
14	Newtown	3	4,070	1,357	-2	3,920	1,307	-9
15	Princes	3	4,196	1,399	1	4,170	1,390	-3
16	Priory	1	1,681	1,681	21	1,610	1,610	12
17	Southfleet	1	1,082	1,082	-22	1,060	1,060	-26
18	Stone	3	5,119	1,706	23	5,660	1,887	31
19	Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley	2	3,241	1,621	17	3,070	1,535	7
20	Swanscombe	2	2,163	1,082	-22	2,040	1,020	-29
21	Wilmington Central	1	1,849	1,849	33	1,780	1,780	24
22	Wilmington East	1	1,314	1,314	-5	1,430	1,430	-1

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
23 Wilmington West	2	2,424	1,212	-13	2,300	1,150	-20
Totals	47	65,168	–	–	67,680	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,387	–	–	1,440	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Dartford Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Southfleet ward were relatively over-represented by 22 per cent, while electors in Wilmington Central ward were relatively under-represented by 33 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

22 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 Dartford Borough Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

23 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met officers and members from the Borough Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 52 representations during Stage One, including borough-wide schemes from the officers of the Borough Council, Dartford Borough Council Conservative Group and Dartford Borough Council Labour Group, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the Borough Council and the Commission.

Dartford Borough Council Officers

24 At Stage One the different groups on the Borough Council were unable to agree on a scheme to send to the Commission, therefore the officers of the Council put forward their own scheme. This scheme had not been widely consulted on, although it was based on initial consultations with the three main political groups on the council and attempted “to seek a compromise”. The scheme was drawn up by the Chief Executive, as Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer, and the Head of Corporate Services, as Deputy Returning Officer and Project Leader for the PER, with support from Electoral Registration and Planning staff.

25 They proposed a council size of 44 members, three fewer than at present, serving 18 wards, compared to the existing 23. They proposed 10 three-member wards, six two-member wards and two single-member wards, with change to all but three of the existing wards. They supported retaining whole-council elections every four years.

26 Under the officers’ proposals there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average by more than 10 per cent in only six wards. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve over the next five years, with the number of electors per councillor projected to vary by less than 10 per cent from the borough average in all 18 wards in 2005. The officers’ proposal is summarised in Appendix A.

Dartford Borough Council Conservative Group

27 Dartford Borough Council Conservative Group (“the Conservative Group”) proposed a council of 44 members, a reduction of three, serving 19 wards, compared to the existing 23. It proposed 10 three-member wards, five two-member wards and four single-member wards. Overall, change was proposed to all but two of the existing wards.

28 Under the Conservative Group’s proposals there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average by more than 10 per cent in only six wards. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve over the next five years, with the number of electors per councillor projected to vary by less than 10 per cent from the borough average in all 19 wards by 2005. The Conservative Group’s proposals are summarised in Appendix A.

Dartford Borough Council Labour Group

29 Dartford Borough Council Labour Group (“the Labour Group”) proposed a council of 45 members, a reduction of two, serving 18 wards, compared to the existing 23. It proposed 11 three-member wards, five two-member wards and two single-member wards. The Labour Group’s scheme was largely based on the officers’ scheme and differed from it in only six wards in the west of the borough. Overall, change was proposed to all but three of the existing wards.

30 Under the Labour Group’s proposals for a 45-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average by more than 10 per cent in 10 wards. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve over the next five years, with the number of electors per councillor projected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the borough average in two wards in 2005. The Labour Group’s proposals are summarised in Appendix A.

Parish and Town Councils

31 We received representations from three parish and town councils. Southfleet Parish Council opposed the Conservative Group’s proposal to divide Southfleet parish between wards in particular, and opposed proposals to change the existing Southfleet ward in preference to retaining the existing arrangements. Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council generally supported the officers’ scheme, but put forward alternative arrangements for the Swanscombe and Greenhithe area. Wilmington Parish Council proposed that the parish wards of Wilmington parish should be coterminous with the borough wards in the area.

Other Representations

32 We received a further 46 representations from residents’ associations, local councillors and local residents. Swanscombe & Greenhithe Residents Association generally supported the officers’ scheme, but put forward alternative arrangements for the Swanscombe and Greenhithe area, which were identical to those put forward by Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council. We received a representation from a borough councillor who opposed the Conservative Group’s proposal to divide the existing Southfleet ward between wards, and objected to all proposals to change the existing Southfleet ward, arguing instead that the existing electoral arrangements for Southfleet should be retained. We received a representation from a member of Stone parish council who suggested alternative arrangements for the parish and borough wards in Stone. We also received 42 representations from local residents opposing proposals to change the existing electoral arrangements for Southfleet. A further local resident raised concerns regarding the Borough Council’s approach to the review.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

33 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Dartford is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor 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 next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

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 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

37 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 4 per cent from 65,168 to 67,680 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Greenhithe ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Darenth, Joyce Green and Stone wards. 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. Advice from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

38 The Conservative Group supported the Council’s projections. Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council and Swanscombe & Greenhithe Residents Association argued that we should base our recommendations on the electorate projections for 2008, in order to allow for the large amount of development that will take place in the area after 2005. However, while we appreciate concerns regarding future increases in the electorate of Swanscombe and Greenhithe after 2005, we are required by Schedule 11 of the 1972 Local Government Act to have regard to the number and distribution of electors at present and in five years’ time only.

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

Council Size

40 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.

41 Dartford Borough Council presently has 47 members. The officers proposed a council of 44 members in order to "seek a compromise" between proposals for significant increases and decreases in council size which had been suggested by between the different groups on the council. Their proposed 44-member council size "received broad agreement from the political groups presently represented on the Council". The Conservative and Labour Groups both modelled their schemes, to varying degrees, on the officers' scheme. The Conservative Group opposed a significant reduction in council size, arguing that the demands of the modernising agenda and abolition of decision-making committees meant that a "sufficient number of representatives" were required in order to carry out the representational role of members conveniently and effectively. It supported the proposed 44-member council, arguing that this "will not affect adversely the council's ability to carry out convenient and effective local government" and would allow for "suitable solutions" for the representation of Priory and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards. The Labour Group proposed a 45-member council, as a result of its modifications to the officers' scheme in the centre of Dartford town. It argued that its proposals generally sought to improve on the officers' scheme in terms of "electoral equality and community identity". However, it did not put forward any evidence in support of a 45-member council.

42 Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council and Swanscombe & Greenhithe Residents Association based their proposals on the officers' scheme with modifications in the Swanscombe and Greenhithe area. They based their proposals on a 46-member scheme, as a result of proposals to increase the level of representation in the north-east of the borough.

43 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we consider that the officers' proposal for a 44-member council would result in the best balance between electoral equality and the representation of community identities and interests across the borough. We have noted, in particular, that there would be worse levels of electoral equality across the borough under a 45- or 46-member council. We also note that a marginal decrease in the number of councillors has received general support. We have therefore concluded that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 44 members.

Electoral Arrangements

44 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. While we judge that there is merit in all of the borough-wide schemes, we consider that the officers' proposals would generally provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or the other schemes submitted at Stage One. We were particularly

concerned that the boundaries proposed by the Conservative and Labour Groups and would not be as clearly identifiable as those put forward by the officers, we also considered that the proposals of the Conservative and Labour Groups would not offer the best possible reflection of community identities and interests. We also note that there is a consensus of support behind large elements of the officers' proposals. We have concluded therefore that we should base our recommendations on the officers' scheme. However, in order to offer more clearly identifiable boundaries and to have greater regard to local community identities and interests, we have decided to move away from the officers' proposals in Dartford town and in Castle and Stone wards. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Gundulf, Joyce Green, Littlebrook, Newtown and Priory wards;
- (b) Heath, Maypole, Miskin, Princes, Wilmington Central, Wilmington East and Wilmington West wards;
- (c) Galley Hill, Greenhithe, Horns Cross, Stone and Swanscombe wards;
- (d) Bean, Brent, Darenth, Longfield, Southfleet and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards.

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

Gundulf, Joyce Green, Littlebrook, Newtown and Priory wards

46 The existing wards of Gundulf, Joyce Green, Littlebrook, Newtown and Priory cover the north-western area of the borough and the north of Dartford town, which is unparished. Gundulf and Newtown wards are each currently represented by three councillors, Joyce Green and Littlebrook wards are each represented by two councillors and Priory ward is represented by a single councillor. Under the current arrangements of a 47-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the five wards varies from the borough average by 20 per cent, 1 per cent, 12 per cent, 2 per cent and 21 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate in Joyce Green and Newtown wards, to vary by 9 per cent from the borough average in 2005, while the level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Gundulf, Littlebrook and Priory wards to vary by 13 per cent, 2 per cent and 12 per cent respectively.

47 The officers proposed that this area should comprise five wards, with the proposed wards of Newtown and West each being represented by three councillors and Joyce Green, Littlebrook and Town wards each being represented by two councillors. They proposed that Joyce Green and Littlebrook wards should continue to represent the Temple Hill area which they stated is a distinct community. However, they proposed that the north-eastern boundary of Littlebrook ward should be extended to follow the new Stone parish ward boundary in order to include the industrial riverside area which shares road links with the existing Littlebrook ward. They proposed that Newtown ward should comprise the existing ward, less that part to the west of Merryweather Close and Mount Pleasant Road, in order to offer improved levels of electoral equality. They also proposed including the whole of the estates in the Milestone area on the eastern side of the M25, to the west of Cotton Lane, Invicta Road and Meadow Way in Newtown ward, arguing that these communities share facilities with each other.

48 They put forward a new Town ward comprising the whole of the town centre of Dartford and the whole of the Priory area in order to combine these two distinct communities within a single ward. They argued that this would result in a “distinct ward” with good levels of electoral equality. This new ward would comprise the existing Priory ward, the remainder of the existing Newtown ward, that part of the existing Gundulf ward to the east of Anne of Cleves Road, Priory Hill and Priory Place, that part of the existing Miskin ward to the east of Highfield Road and that part of the existing Princes ward to the north of Vauxhall Place. They proposed a new West ward which would include the West Hill area of Dartford town and the new West Hill Hospital development in order to create a ward with reasonable levels of electoral equality. They stated that it should comprise the remainder of the existing Gundulf ward and that part of the existing Miskin ward to the west of Highfield Road and east of Devonshire Avenue and Sullivan Close.

49 Under the officers’ scheme for a 44-member council, there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Joyce Green, Littlebrook, Newtown, Town and West wards by 7 per cent, 5 per cent, 9 per cent, 6 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 2 per cent, 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 5 per cent in Joyce Green, Newtown, Town and West wards in 2005, with the number of electors per councillor continuing to vary by 5 per cent from the borough average in Littlebrook ward.

50 The Conservative Group proposed that this area should comprise five wards, with the proposed wards of Newtown & Milestone and West Hill each being represented by three councillors, Joyce Green and Littlebrook wards each being represented by two councillors, while Priory ward would be represented by a single councillor. It proposed that Joyce Green ward should comprise the existing ward, less Hardy Grove and the area to the south of University Way, in order to offer a clearer boundary and to combine the whole of the riverside area in a single ward. It argued that Littlebrook ward should comprise the majority of the existing ward, less that part to the east of the railway line in order to provide a clearer boundary, and the remainder of Joyce Green ward. It proposed that Newtown & Milestone ward should comprise the existing ward, less the Osbourne Road Estate to the east of the M25, and include that part of the existing Stone ward to the west of Cotton Lane, London Road, St John’s Road and Salisbury Road. It argued that the officers’ proposed Newtown ward “divides the community of Milestone”.

51 It proposed that Priory ward should comprise the existing ward in order to keep this “well-defined community” together and distinct from the town centre. It opposed the officers’ proposal to link Priory ward with the town centre, arguing that Priory contains a distinct community and has few road connections with the town. It proposed that West Hill ward should comprise that part of Gundulf ward to the west of Priory Gardens and Priory Hill and that part of Miskin ward to the west of Highfield Road and to the east of Devonshire Avenue, Shepherds Lane and Somerset Road. It argued that this proposal offered clearer boundaries than those proposed by the officers, by ensuring that areas identifying with the centre of the town would be included in the town centre ward. It argued that this ward should be named West Hill because the West Hill is located within this ward and that this ward name would avoid confusion with the county division of West Dartford. It raised concerns regarding the officers’ proposal to move away from using the River Darent as a boundary in their proposed Town ward, arguing that the River Darent is “a clearly defined ward boundary, reflecting community ties”.

52 Under the Conservative Group's scheme for a 44-member council, there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Joyce Green, Littlebrook, Newtown & Milestone, Priory and West Hill wards by 8 per cent, 6 per cent, 6 per cent, 13 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 1 per cent, 3 per cent, 4 per cent, 5 per cent and 5 per cent respectively in 2005.

53 The Labour Group proposed that this area should comprise five wards, with the proposed wards of Dartford West and Newtown each being represented by three councillors and Joyce Green, Littlebrook and Priory wards each being represented by two councillors. It supported the officers' proposed boundaries for Joyce Green, Littlebrook and West wards. However, it suggested that the officers' proposed West ward should be named Dartford West, arguing that this would "better reflect community identity" given the area's relationship with the centre of Dartford town.

54 It proposed that the officers' proposed Newtown ward should include the whole of the existing Newtown ward, using the River Darent as its western boundary. It also put forward a modified version of the officers' proposed Town ward, excluding that part of the existing Princes ward which the officers proposed including in the ward. It also proposed that this ward should be named Priory after the existing ward that forms the northern part of the proposed ward.

55 Under the Labour Group's scheme for a 45-member council, there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Dartford West, Joyce Green, Littlebrook, Newtown and Priory wards by 5 per cent, 5 per cent, 7 per cent, 16 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 3 per cent, 3 per cent and 8 per cent in Dartford West, Littlebrook and Newtown wards by 2005, while continuing to vary by 5 per cent and 11 per cent from the borough average in Joyce Green and Priory wards respectively.

56 We received no further representations regarding this area at Stage One.

57 We have carefully considered the representations received and, while we note that there is merit in all three schemes, we consider that the officers' scheme would offer the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, while using clearly identifiable boundaries having regard to community identities and interests. We do not consider that the Conservative Group's proposal to include the riverside area, to the north of the existing Littlebrook ward, in Joyce Green ward would offer a better representation of the communities concerned given that this would involve dividing the riverside development from those parts of the existing Littlebrook ward to which they are directly connected by road. The officers' and Labour Group's schemes for Littlebrook and Joyce Green wards would retain these links and would also largely retain the well-established existing ward boundaries with minor amendments in order to offer more easily identifiable boundaries.

58 We consider that the officers' proposed Town and West wards utilise strong boundaries and combine similar communities. We are concerned that the southern boundary of the Labour Group's proposed Priory ward would divide areas of similar character in the town centre that are closely connected by road. We are also concerned that the Conservative Group's proposed West

Hill ward appears to divide communities on Shepherds Lane and Somerset Road. While we appreciate that the Priory ward area is distinct and self-contained it has strong road links with the town. We are content, therefore, that the two areas should be combined in a new Town ward, as proposed by the officers. While we support the officers' proposed West ward, we consider that the Conservative Group's proposal to name the western town ward West Hill would better reflect this area, given the Hill's central position in this area and to avoid confusion between the borough ward and the county division.

59 Having considered the representations received, we have decided to adopt the officers' scheme as the basis for our draft recommendation. However, we consider that the boundaries of Joyce Green, Newtown, Town and West Hill wards need amending in order to offer more clearly identifiable boundaries. In Joyce Green ward the officers and the Labour Group both proposed retaining the existing ward boundaries. While this proposal would offer good levels of electoral equality, the Conservative Group proposed a minor modification to the existing arrangements in order to offer a more clearly identifiable boundary and to ensure that Hardy Grove would be included in a ward with those areas to which it is directly connected by road. We consider that the Conservative Group's proposal to clarify the boundaries of the existing Joyce Green ward would offer clearer boundaries and a better reflection of community links, therefore we propose that the north-eastern boundary of the existing Joyce Green ward should be amended to follow the clearly identifiable boundary of the centre of Marsh Street, to the north of Henderson Drive.

60 While we consider that the officers' proposals for the east of Newtown ward respect community identity and offer clear boundaries, we share the concerns of the Conservative and Labour Groups that the River Darent should continue to be utilised as the western boundary of the ward. We are content that the river forms a clear and significant geographical feature and are proposing to use it as a boundary throughout the borough. We therefore support the Labour Group's proposal for the river to form the western boundary of the officers' proposed Newtown ward. This would have a minimal effect on the level of electoral equality in Newtown ward. However, in order to address the consequential alteration in the level of electoral equality in the proposed Town ward, we propose that the area of the existing Miskin ward comprising Rutland Close and Summerhill Road should be transferred to Town ward. In order to address the resulting inequalities in West Hill ward, we propose transferring the remainder of the existing Miskin ward, comprising Devonshire Avenue and the adjoining field, to West Hill ward. We consider that the areas which we propose combining are well connected by road and are of a similar character.

61 Under our draft recommendations for a 44-member council, there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Joyce Green, Littlebrook, Newtown, Town and West Hill wards by 8 per cent, 6 per cent, 13 per cent, 5 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 1 per cent, 3 per cent, 6 per cent and 6 per cent in Joyce Green, Littlebrook, Newtown and West Hill wards in 2005. The level of electoral equality would deteriorate marginally in Town ward, to vary by 7 per cent from the borough average.

Heath, Maypole, Miskin, Princes, Wilmington Central, Wilmington East and Wilmington West wards

62 The existing wards of Heath, Maypole, Miskin, Princes, Wilmington Central, Wilmington East and Wilmington West cover the south-western area of the borough and the south of Dartford town and include the parish of Wilmington. Heath and Princes wards are each currently represented by three councillors, Maypole, Miskin and Wilmington West wards are each represented by two councillors, and Wilmington Central and Wilmington East wards are each represented by a single councillor. Under the current arrangements of a 47-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the seven wards varies from the borough average by 1 per cent, 3 per cent, 16 per cent, 1 per cent, 33 per cent, 5 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate in Heath, Maypole, Miskin, Princes and Wilmington West wards, to vary by 7 per cent, 12 per cent, 23 per cent, 3 per cent and 20 per cent from the borough average in 2005, while the level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Wilmington Central and Wilmington East wards to vary by 24 per cent and 1 per cent respectively.

63 The officers proposed that this area should be represented by five wards, with the proposed wards of Heath and Joydens Wood each being represented by three councillors, Princes and Wilmington wards each being represented by two councillors, while Fairfield ward would be represented by a single councillor. They suggested that Fairfield ward should comprise that part of Princes ward bounded by Heath Lane, Heath Street, Princes Road, Vauxhall Place and the River Darent. This ward mainly comprises the northern part of the Tree Estate which they asserted shares a community identity. They proposed that Heath ward should combine the existing ward with that part of Miskin ward to the west of Devonshire Avenue, Roseberry Gardens and Shepherds Lane, that part of Princes ward containing the Windermere Close area, the heath and golf course, in order to include the small area of development which extends just beyond the boundary of the existing Heath ward. They argued that this is a “relatively easily identifiable area” with the heath as the focus of the ward. They also proposed including that part of Wilmington Central ward that lies to the north of the Wilmington parish boundary so that the new ward boundary of Wilmington Central ward will follow the northern Wilmington parish boundary.

64 They put forward a Joydens Wood ward comprising the existing Maypole ward and the majority of the existing Wilmington West ward, excluding properties on Hook Green Lane and to the north. They argued that this ward would combine the three distinct geographical communities of Joydens Wood, Maypole and the new development on the site of Bexley Hospital. They proposed that the remainder of Princes ward should be combined with that part of the existing Wilmington East ward that lies to the north-east of Carsington Gardens, Church Hill, Hawley Road, Oakfield Lane and Oakfield Park Road, arguing that the shopping centre and schools in this area form the focus of the whole community in the revised Princes ward. They proposed that Wilmington ward should comprise Wilmington Central ward and the remainder of Wilmington East and Wilmington West wards, arguing that this ward retains those areas which have community ties, while excluding those parts of Wilmington parish which share strong links and a sense of identity with areas outside the parish.

65 Under the officers’ scheme for a 44-member council, there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in

Fairfield, Heath, Joydens Wood, Princes and Wilmington wards by 11 per cent, 13 per cent, 2 per cent, 3 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 7 per cent and 1 per cent in Fairfield and Heath wards in 2005, while deteriorating marginally in Joydens Wood and Princes wards to vary by 7 per cent and 3 per cent respectively, with the number of electors per councillor continuing to vary by 4 per cent from the borough average in Wilmington ward.

66 The Conservative Group proposed that this area should be represented by five wards, with the proposed wards of Heath, Princes and Wilmington each being represented by three councillors, Maypole ward being represented by two councillors, and Anne of Cleves ward by a single councillor. It proposed that Anne of Cleves ward should comprise that part of the existing Gundulf ward that lies to the east of Priory Gardens and Priory Hill, that part of the existing Miskin ward that lies to the north-east of Highfield Road, and that part of the existing Princes ward lying to the north of Lowfield Street and Princes Road. It argued that this offered better representation for the residents of the properties to the south of Central Park by linking this area with the town centre rather than the Tree Estate. It proposed naming the ward after Anne of Cleves Road and the priory in which Anne of Cleves was exiled, which are both contained in the proposed ward. It put forward a Heath ward comprising the existing ward, together with that part of Miskin ward to the west of Devonshire Avenue, Shepherds Lane and Sullivan Close, which it argued has an affinity with Heath ward, and that part of the existing Princes ward containing the Windermere Close area and the heath and golf course, in order to include the small area of development which extends just beyond the boundary of the existing Heath ward. It argued that the existing Heath ward is a “well-defined community” but that the proposed boundary changes were necessary in order to address the level of equality in the ward.

67 It proposed a Maypole ward comprising the existing Maypole ward less that part to the east of Joydens’s Wood Road, Spurrell Avenue, Summerhouse Drive and Woodlands Park in order to use clearer road boundaries. It proposed that Princes ward should comprise the remainder of the existing Princes ward and that part of the existing Wilmington East ward to the north-east of Carsington Gardens, Church Hill, Hawley Road, Hill Road, Oakfield Park Road, The Spires and Warren Road. It argued that this was preferable to the officers’ proposed Fairfield and Princes wards which would divide the Tree Estate community. It also stated that its proposals for the boundary with Wilmington ward would better reflect community identity. Its proposed Wilmington ward would comprise the remainder of Maypole, Wilmington Central, Wilmington East and Wilmington West wards, encompassing the majority of the parish of Wilmington.

68 Under the Conservative Group’s scheme for a 44-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Anne of Cleves, Heath, Maypole, Princes and Wilmington wards by 14 per cent, 9 per cent, 20 per cent, 6 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 2 per cent, 5 per cent, 4 per cent and 4 per cent respectively in Heath, Maypole, Princes and Wilmington wards by 2005, while equalling the borough average in Anne of Cleves ward.

69 The Labour Group proposed that this area should be represented by five wards, with the proposed wards of Heath, Joydens Wood and Princes each being represented by three councillors, Wilmington ward being represented by two councillors, and The Dell ward by a single councillor.

It proposed a Heath ward comprising the existing Heath ward, that part of the existing Miskin ward that lies to the west of Devonshire Avenue, Roseberry Gardens and Shepherds Lane and that part of Wilmington Central ward to the north of the parish boundary and west of Heath Lane. It proposed that Joydens Wood ward should combine the existing Maypole ward, less that part to the north of Dykewood close and Tile Kiln Lane, that part of Wilmington Central ward lying to the south-west of Hook Green and Rowhill Road, including Hazlewood, Paxwood and Rowhill Grange, and that part of Wilmington West ward to the south of Hook Green Lane. This ward would unite the whole Joydens Wood area which, it considers to have a clear community identity. It argued that Princes ward should comprise the existing Princes ward, in order to unite the whole of the Tree Estate, and that part of the existing Wilmington Central ward lying to the north of the parish boundary and east of Heath Lane. It put forward The Dell ward comprising the remainder of Maypole and Wilmington West wards, in order to combine the Bexley Hospital development and the Leyton Cross area of Wilmington parish. It also proposed a Wilmington ward comprising the remainder of Wilmington Central ward and Wilmington East ward. It argued that this ward would reflect the area's community identity.

70 Under the Labour Group's scheme for a 45-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Heath, Joydens Wood, Princes, The Dell and Wilmington wards by 11 per cent, 5 per cent, 3 per cent, 27 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 1 per cent, 6 per cent and 5 per cent in Heath, The Dell and Wilmington wards in 2005, while deteriorating marginally in Joydens Wood and Princes wards to vary by 12 per cent and 8 per cent respectively.

71 Having carefully considered the representations received, we consider that the officers' scheme respects the communities in the area, offers clear boundaries and results in good levels of electoral equality. We have decided therefore to adopt this scheme as our draft recommendation for this area with modifications. We note that the Conservative and Labour Groups' proposals for this area have merit and share a number of similarities with the officers' proposals. However, we are concerned that the Conservative Group's proposed Heath ward would divide the communities on Shepherds Lane and Sullivan Close, while its proposed Princes ward would divide the properties to the east of Lowfield Street from the areas to which they are directly connected by road. We also consider that it has proposed a less clearly identifiable boundary between Princes and Wilmington wards.

72 We are concerned that the Labour Group's proposed Heath ward fails to incorporate the development beyond Heath Lane which is directly connected to the rest of Heath ward. Its proposed Princes ward would also divide the community in the centre of Dartford town. We considered that there was merit in the Labour Group's proposal to combine the whole of Joydens Wood in a single ward and to combine the Bexley Hospital estate with those parts of Wilmington with which it shares road links. Indeed, we have some concern regarding the officers' proposal to combine the Bexley Hospital estate with the Joydens Wood area, with which it does not share road links. However, we consider that residents of the Bexley Hospital estate would share facilities in the Joydens Wood area, and there are footpaths connecting the two areas. Also, the Labour Group's The Dell ward would divide the Leyton Cross area from Wilmington Village to which it is directly connected. Therefore, we consider that the officers' proposal for Joydens

Wood offers the best balance between the reflection of community identity and interests and electoral equality.

73 While we considered that the officers' proposed boundaries of Fairfield and Princes wards are clearly identifiable, we agreed with the Conservative and Labour Groups that the Tree Estate should be represented in a single ward, given the strong shared community identity and interests among residents of the estate. Therefore we propose combining the officers' proposed Fairfield and Princes wards to form a three-member Princes ward. As detailed above, in order to address the deterioration in the levels of electoral equality in the modified Town ward, we have made modifications to the officers' proposed boundaries of Heath, Town and West Hill wards. As a result, we propose that Devonshire Avenue, in the existing Miskin ward, should be excluded from the proposed Heath ward and included in West Hill ward in order to provide a reasonable level of electoral equality. The areas we propose combining share strong road links and are of a similar character. We have received little evidence in support of the proposed name of Anne of Cleves ward, and have not been persuaded that this name would receive greater local support than the name of Town ward. However, we welcome comments regarding this matter at Stage Three of the review.

74 Under our draft recommendations for a 44-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Heath, Joydens Wood, Princes and Wilmington wards by 9 per cent, 2 per cent, 6 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 2 per cent and 5 per cent in Heath and Princes wards in 2005, while deteriorating marginally in Joydens Wood ward to vary by 7 per cent, with the number of electors per councillor continuing to vary by 4 per cent from the borough average in Wilmington ward.

Galley Hill, Greenhithe, Horns Cross, Stone and Swanscombe wards

75 The existing wards of Galley Hill, Greenhithe, Horns Cross, Stone and Swanscombe cover the north-eastern area of the borough and include the parishes of Stone and Swanscombe & Greenhithe. Stone ward is currently represented by three councillors, Galley Hill, Greenhithe and Swanscombe wards are each represented by two councillors, and Horns Cross ward by a single councillor. Under the current arrangements of a 47-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the five wards varies from the borough average by 15 per cent, 12 per cent, 1 per cent, 23 per cent and 22 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate in Greenhithe, Horns Cross, Stone and Swanscombe wards, to vary by 60 per cent, 9 per cent, 31 per cent and 29 per cent from the borough average in 2005, while the level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Galley Hill ward to vary by 13 per cent.

76 The Council officers proposed that this area should comprise four wards, with the proposed wards of Greenhithe, Stone and Swanscombe each being represented by three councillors, while a new Castle ward would be represented by a single councillor. They proposed that Castle ward should comprise that part of the existing Stone ward that lies to the north-east of Cowley Avenue, Dawes Close, Hedge Place Road, Perkins Close, London Road and Steele Avenue. This utilises the natural boundaries of the River Thames and the chalk cliffs above Bluewater, as well as the B255 dual-carriageway, and combines the area of primarily new and proposed housing estates. They proposed that the remainder of Stone ward should be combined with the existing Horns

Cross ward to form a new Stone ward, achieving reasonable levels of electoral equality. They proposed retaining the existing boundaries of Greenhithe ward which they argued would comprise the “fairly discreet” area of Greenhithe and Knockhall. They put forward a Swanscombe ward comprising the existing Galley Hill and Swanscombe wards which they claim share interests and a community identity, making use of the same shopping centres and schools.

77 Under the officers’ scheme for a 44-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Castle, Greenhithe, Stone and Swanscombe wards by 29 per cent, 30 per cent, 1 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 3 per cent in Castle ward in 2005 and to equal the borough average in Greenhithe ward, while deteriorating marginally in Stone ward, to vary by 4 per cent. The number of electors per councillor would continue to vary by 2 per cent from the borough average in Swanscombe ward.

78 The Conservative Group also proposed that this area should comprise four wards, with the proposed wards of Greenhithe, Stone and Swanscombe each being represented by three councillors, while Knockhall ward would be represented by a single councillor. It proposed that Greenhithe ward should comprise the existing ward less the area bounded by Alkerden Lane, Avenue Lane, London Road, Knockhall Chase, Knockhall Road, Pilgrims View, Spring Vale and The Crescent which would form Knockhall ward, and including that part of the existing Stone ward which the officers propose should form Castle ward. It argued that the Castle area is distinct from the rest of Stone parish, given that it comprises new development which centres on facilities in the Stone Castle valley, and that it is more clearly linked with Greenhithe given that residents of the Castle area use Greenhithe station. It argued that the Knockhall Estate should form a separate single-member ward because it comprises a “well-established” community on the hilltop above Greenhithe. It proposed that Stone ward should comprise the existing Horns Cross ward and the remainder of the existing Stone ward while Swanscombe ward should comprise the existing wards of Galley Hill and Swanscombe, as under the officers’ scheme. It agreed with the officers that the proposed Swanscombe ward contains “a distinct and self-contained community”.

79 Under the Conservative Group’s scheme for a 44-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Greenhithe, Knockhall, Stone and Swanscombe wards by 37 per cent, 10 per cent, 8 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 1 per cent, 6 per cent and 1 per cent respectively in Greenhithe, Stone and Swanscombe wards in 2005, while equalling the borough average in Knockhall ward.

80 The Labour Group supported the officers’ proposals for this area. It argued that the proposed wards would reflect the “strong community identity” in the Swanscombe and Greenhithe area while also offering good levels of electoral equality. Under the Labour Party’s scheme for a 45-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Castle, Greenhithe, Stone and Swanscombe wards by 28 per cent, 28 per cent, 3 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 6 per cent, 2 per cent, 2 per cent and 1 per cent respectively under a 45-member scheme.

81 The Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council and Swanscombe & Greenhithe Residents Association proposed that the Greenhithe and Swanscombe area should be represented by eight borough councillors representing four two-member wards – Galley Hill, Greenhithe, Knockhall and Swanscombe. They proposed that Galley Hill ward should comprise the existing Galley Hill ward and that part of the existing Swanscombe ward lying to the north of Ames Road and Milton Street, with the remainder of the existing Swanscombe ward forming a new Swanscombe ward. They proposed that Greenhithe ward should comprise that part of the existing Greenhithe ward that lies to the north of London Road, while the remainder of the existing Greenhithe ward should form a new Knockhall ward following the existing parish boundary. They argued that the level of representation in Swanscombe and Greenhithe should be increased in order to allow for significant development in the area before 2008.

82 Under the proposals of Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council and Residents Association for a 46-member council, the level of electoral equality in Galley Hill, Greenhithe, Knockhall and Swanscombe wards would vary from the borough average by 17 per cent, 71 per cent, 19 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Galley Hill, Greenhithe and Knockhall wards to vary by 15 per cent, 27 per cent and 17 per cent respectively in 2005, while the level of electoral equality in Swanscombe ward is projected to deteriorate to vary by 31 per cent from the borough average.

83 A local councillor proposed that the Stone Castle area of the existing Stone ward should be combined with the Persimmon development and that part of Stone village to the north of London Road to form a new two-member Stone East ward, with the remainder of the existing Stone ward forming a new two-member Stone West ward. He argued that this would “fairly reflect the demographic changes within the area”. However, he did not suggest specific boundaries or provide figures for this proposal.

84 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and we judge that the officers’ scheme would offer the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria for this area. There is a consensus of support for significant elements of the officers’ proposals for this area, and the Labour Group supported their proposals in their entirety. With regard to the proposed Castle ward, while the Conservative Group and a local councillor proposed different warding arrangements for this area, they drew attention to the distinct community around Stone Castle which they argued should be reflected in a ward separate from the remainder of Stone parish. We consider, therefore, that the officers’ proposal to create a separate Castle ward would best represent the communities in this area. The officers’ proposed Stone ward would offer clear boundaries and would combine closely connected communities, while we consider that the Conservative Group’s proposals for Stone ward would divide the estates to the east of the M25 from the parts of Newtown ward with which they share strong road links. Also, given that we have proposed using the officers’ proposed boundaries for the west of Stone ward, we estimate that the wards suggested by a local councillor would provide worse levels of electoral equality. We note that the officers’ scheme has received support while we have no evidence that the Conservative Group’s or the local councillor’s proposals would receive local support.

85 With regard to Greenhithe and Swanscombe wards, we consider that the officers’ scheme would offer the best representation of this area given that their proposals have received local support. We also consider that their proposals would respect the clear communities of Greenhithe

and Swanscombe while retaining the established ward boundaries of Greenhithe ward. We do not consider that the Conservative Group's proposed Greenhithe and Knockhall wards would offer improved community representation, given that they would result in the Knockhall area being divided from those parts of Greenhithe to which it is closely connected by road and with which it shares facilities. We have not been persuaded by Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council's and Swanscombe & Greenhithe Residents Association's proposals for this area, given that they would offer extremely poor levels of electoral equality in both 2000 and 2005. While we consider that the officers' proposals would generally offer clear boundaries, we note that the southern part of the proposed boundary between Greenhithe and Swanscombe follows the existing borough ward and parish ward boundary which is currently undefined. We would appreciate local advice at Stage Three as to where this boundary would be best placed in order to tie it to ground detail.

86 While we are proposing to adopt the officers' proposals, we consider that minor amendments should be made to the boundary between the proposed Castle and Stone wards in order to create a clearer boundary between communities. That part of the officers' proposed Castle ward north of the railway is of a similar character and is well connected to that part of the proposed Stone ward to the north of the railway. We consider, therefore, that these areas would be best combined within the proposed Stone ward in order to offer improved representation of communities. We also consider that the southern boundary of the proposed Castle ward should be amended to follow the clearer boundary of the Bluewater road, rather than the cliff edge.

87 Under our draft recommendations for a 44-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Castle, Greenhithe, Stone and Swanscombe wards by 34 per cent, 30 per cent, 2 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 1 per cent in Castle ward in 2005 and to equal the borough average in Greenhithe ward, while deteriorating marginally in Stone ward, to vary by 3 per cent, with the number of electors per councillor continuing to vary by 2 per cent from the borough average in Swanscombe ward.

Bean, Brent, Darenth, Longfield, Southfleet and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards

88 The existing wards of Bean, Brent, Darenth, Longfield, Southfleet and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley cover the south-eastern area of the borough. Brent and Longfield wards are each currently represented by three councillors, Darenth and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards are each represented by two councillors, and Bean and Southfleet wards are each represented by a single councillor. Under the current arrangements of a 47-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the six wards varies from the borough average by 6 per cent, 3 per cent, 15 per cent, 4 per cent, 22 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate in Bean, Darenth, Longfield and Southfleet wards, to vary by 13 per cent, 26 per cent, 10 per cent and 26 per cent from the borough average in 2005, while the level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward to vary by 7 per cent, while continuing to vary by 3 per cent from the borough average in Brent ward.

89 The officers proposed that this area should comprise four wards, with the proposed wards of Bean & Darenth, Brent and Longfield & Southfleet each being represented by three councillors

and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward being represented by two councillors. They proposed that Brent ward should comprise the existing Brent ward, together with that part of the existing Darenth ward to the north-west of Gore Road, Trolling Down Hill and the A2. They argued that this ward ensures that the whole of the Fleet and Fleetdown estates are included in a single ward and offers clear boundaries. They proposed that the remainder of the existing Darenth ward should be combined with the existing Bean ward to form a Bean & Darenth ward. While they acknowledged that the areas of Bean, Darenth and Green Street Green are separate and distinct, they argued that they should be linked in the interest of electoral equality. They put forward a new Longfield & Southfleet ward comprising the existing wards of Longfield and Southfleet. While they recognised that the communities of Longfield, New Barn and Southfleet are distinct, they argued that they should be combined in the interest of electoral equality. They proposed retaining the existing boundaries of Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward, arguing that this ward has clear community boundaries.

90 Under the officers' scheme for a 44-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Bean & Darenth, Brent, Longfield & Southfleet and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards by 12 per cent, 10 per cent, 14 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 7 per cent, 3 per cent and 7 per cent in Bean & Darenth, Brent and Longfield & Southfleet wards in 2005 while equalling the borough average in Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward.

91 The Conservative Group proposed that this area should comprise five wards, with the proposed wards of Brent and Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet each being represented by three councillors, Darenth and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards each being represented by two councillors, and Bean & Betsham ward being represented by a single councillor. It proposed that the existing Bean ward should be combined with the Betsham village area of the existing Southfleet ward to form a Bean & Betsham ward. It put forward a Brent ward identical to that put forward by the officers, with the remainder of the existing Darenth ward forming a new Darenth ward. It opposed the officers' proposed Bean & Darenth ward, arguing that there are no direct road links between Bean and Darenth villages, but only with Green Street Green, and that the two villages are different in character. It argued that, in contrast, the villages of Bean and Betsham are well connected by road and have "close affinities". It proposed that Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet ward should combine the remainder of the existing Southfleet ward with the existing Longfield ward. It argued that the existing Southfleet ward should be divided between wards because the villages of Betsham and Southfleet are "two distinct settlements". It emphasized that there is "an affinity of interest" between the villages of Southfleet and New Barn, as well as between Longfield and Newbarn. It agreed with the officers' proposal to retain the existing boundaries of Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward, arguing that the settlements of Sutton-at-Hone and Hawley have no obvious links with neighbouring areas.

92 Under the Conservative Group's scheme for a 44-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Bean & Betsham, Brent, Darenth, Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards by 9 per cent, 10 per cent, 13 per cent, 7 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 2 per cent,

4 per cent and 6 per cent in Bean & Betsham, Brent and Darenth wards in 2005, while equalling the borough average in Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards.

93 The Labour Group supported the officers' scheme in this area. It argued that the proposal to combine the whole Fleet Downs area in Brent ward had received support from councillors representing this area. It noted that Southfleet is too small to remain as a single ward and that it would be preferable, therefore, to link the whole of the existing Southfleet ward with the existing Longfield ward rather than dividing the existing Southfleet ward between wards. It also argued that the existing boundaries of Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward should be retained because it has "strong community identity".

94 Under the Labour Group's scheme for a 45-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Darenth & Bean, Longfield & Southfleet, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley and The Brent wards by 10 per cent, 17 per cent, 12 per cent and 12 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 5 per cent, 9 per cent, 2 per cent and 6 per cent in 2005.

95 Southfleet Parish Council opposed any changes to the existing Southfleet ward, particularly those which proposed dividing the existing ward between wards, arguing that Southfleet parish should be retained within a single ward on the grounds of community identity. It was concerned the Southfleet might be unfairly dominated by the interests of the larger settlements of Longfield and Newbarn should the areas be combined in the same ward. A borough councillor opposed the Conservative Group's proposal to divide the existing Southfleet ward and to combine it with villages whose interests might dominate. We received 42 representations from local residents who supported retaining the existing arrangements for Southfleet ward, of which 40 opposed proposals to divide the existing ward.

96 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have concluded that the officers' proposals offer the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and we propose adopting them as our draft recommendations. We note that their proposals for Brent and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards have been supported without objection. While we recognise that the villages of Bean and Darenth are not directly linked, they are linked via Green Street Green, which would also be included in the officers' proposed Bean & Darenth ward. We consider that the three areas are of a rural character and share similar interests.

97 We consider that the officers' proposals for Southfleet offer the best possible balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria given that they would not involve dividing Southfleet parish between wards. While we recognise the considerable local support for retaining the existing boundaries of Southfleet ward, we note that this would result in poor levels of electoral equality. If the existing arrangements were retained in Southfleet ward, the number of electors per councillor under the proposed 44-member council would vary from the borough average by 27 per cent. This level of electoral equality would deteriorate further over the next five years, to vary by 31 per cent from the borough average by 2005. We do not consider that the Conservative Group's proposal to divide Betsham village from the rest of Southfleet parish would offer the best representation of the community in this area given the strong transport and community links between Betsham and Southfleet and the considerable opposition this proposal

has received. We also note that the Conservative and Labour Groups have supported combining Southfleet with Longfield and New Barn.

98 Under our draft recommendations for a 44-member council there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average in Bean & Darenth, Brent, Longfield & Southfleet and Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley wards by 12 per cent, 10 per cent, 14 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years to vary by 7 per cent, 3 per cent and 7 per cent in Bean & Darenth, Brent and Longfield & Southfleet wards in 2005 while equalling the borough average in Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward.

Electoral Cycle

99 At Stage One we received no proposals in relation to the electoral cycle of the borough. Accordingly, we make no recommendation for change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years as part of our draft recommendations.

Conclusions

100 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 47 to 44 members;
- there should be 17 wards;
- the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of six wards;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

101 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the officers' proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following areas:

- we propose transferring the northern and southern parts of the officers' proposed Castle ward to the proposed Stone ward;
- the boundary between the officers' proposed Joyce Green and Littlebrook wards should be modified;
- the officers' proposed Fairfield and Princes wards should be combined to form an enlarged three-member Princes ward;
- we propose modifying the proposed Newtown ward to use the River Darent as a boundary and consequently amending the officers' proposed Heath, Town and West wards;
- the officers' proposed West ward should be renamed West Hill.

102 Figure 5 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2000 electorate figures and with forecast electorates for the year 2005.

Figure 5: Comparison of Existing and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	47	44	47	44
Number of wards	23	17	23	17
Average number of electors per councillor	1,387	1,481	1,440	1,538
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	13	5	13	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	5	2	7	0

103 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Dartford Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from 13 to five. By 2005 no wards are forecast to vary by more than 7 per cent from the average for the borough.

Draft Recommendation
 Dartford Borough Council should comprise 44 councillors serving 17 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

104 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Darenth, Stone and Wilmington to reflect the proposed borough wards.

105 The Conservative Group proposed changes to the parish ward boundaries of Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council in line with its proposed borough ward boundaries. However, given that we have not received any further support for changes to the Town Council’s arrangements,

and our proposals do not result in consequential changes to parish arrangements, we have not therefore been persuaded to propose changes to the warding of the Town Council. However, we welcome representations regarding the Town Council's arrangements at Stage Three.

106 The parish of Darenth is currently served by 12 councillors representing four wards: Green Street Green, Ladywood, Lane End and The Downs. The four wards currently return one, four, four and three parish councillors respectively. The Conservative Group proposed that the existing The Downs parish ward should be divided into two new parish wards in line with its proposed boundary between the borough wards of Brent and Darenth. It proposed that the part of the existing The Downs parish ward to be included in the proposed Brent borough ward should be named Fleetdown, while that part that is to remain in Darenth ward should be named Darenth Park ward. It proposed that the existing boundary between Ladywood and Lane End parish wards should be amended in order to reflect new housing development in the area. It proposed that the boundary should be redrawn in order to include the whole of Bennett Way and Moss Way in Lane End parish ward. It stated that there was local concern regarding the existing size of the parish council and proposed that the size should be reduced to seven members, with Green Street Green, Fleetdown and Darenth Park ward each returning a single councillor, and Ladywood and Lane End parish wards each returning two councillors.

107 As a consequence of borough warding proposals, we concur with the Conservative Group's proposal that The Downs parish ward should be divided into two new parish wards. We consider that the parish ward name of Darenth Park would best represent that part of The Downs parish ward that is to be included in the proposed Bean & Darenth borough ward, given that this area includes Darenth Park Hospital. We also propose that the part of the existing The Downs parish ward to be included in the proposed Brent borough ward should be named Fleet Downs to reflect the area contained within the ward. We recognise that the Conservative Group proposed that this ward should be named Fleetdown after the Fleetdown estate, but we consider that the parish ward name of Fleet Downs would best reflect the whole area, rather than just the Fleetdown estate. We support the Conservative Group's proposal to amend the boundary between Ladywood and Lane End parish wards in order to clarify the boundary in line with recent housing development. We also support retaining the existing boundaries of Green Street Green ward.

108 We have not received any representation from Darenth Parish Council regarding its parish arrangements, and we have no evidence that a reduction in council size would receive local support, as proposed by the Conservative Group. We are not, therefore, proposing a change in the size of the parish council. In line with its proportion of the electorate of the existing The Downs ward, we propose that the proposed Fleet Downs parish ward should be represented by two councillors, while Darenth Park parish ward should be represented by a single councillor. The changes to the boundaries of Ladywood and Lane End parish wards would have a minor effect on the existing arrangements, therefore, we are not proposing a change to their levels of representation.

109 We would welcome representations at Stage Three from the Parish Council and other local interested parties regarding our proposals, particularly regarding the name of the proposed Fleet Downs ward, the size of the council and the level of representation for each of the proposed parish wards.

Draft Recommendation

Darenth Parish Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Darenth Park and Green Street Green (each returning a single councillor), Fleet Downs (returning two councillors) and Ladywood and Lane End (each returning four councillors). The parish ward boundaries of Darenth Park and Fleet Downs should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

110 The parish of Stone is currently served by 11 councillors representing four wards: East, Horns Cross, Milestone and St Johns. The four wards currently return four, two, two and three parish councillors respectively. The Conservative Group proposed that the Stone Castle area, to be included in its proposed Greenhithe borough ward, should form a new Castle parish ward, while the remainder of the existing East parish ward should form a new St Mary's parish ward. It suggested that those parts of the existing Milestone and St John's parish wards to be included in its proposed Newtown & Milestone borough ward should form a new Milestone parish ward, while the remaining area should form a new St John's parish ward. It drew attention to the existing boundary between East and Milestone parish wards, which is not tied to ground detail and divides the Crossways Business Park; it proposed using Cotton Lane as the boundary between its proposed St John's and St Mary's parish wards. It proposed that the size of the council should be increased to 12 members in order to allow for the "considerable increase in electorate" in the proposed Castle ward. It suggested that the proposed Castle and St John's parish wards should each be represented by three councillors, while Horns Cross, Milestone and St Mary's parish wards should each be represented by two councillors.

111 A parish councillor proposed that a new two-member parish ward should be created, to be named Stone Castle, to include the Stone Castle development, the Persimmon development and Charles Street. He also proposed that the number of councillors representing East parish ward should be reduced from four to three, while the number of councillors representing St Johns parish ward should be reduced from three to two in order to "more fairly reflect the change in population".

112 Having adopted the officers' proposals for this area at borough level, we are required to make consequential parish warding arrangements which mean that we are unable to adopt the Conservative Group's or local councillor's proposals in their entirety. However, both the Conservative Group and the local councillor proposed that the Stone Castle area should form a new Castle parish ward, and we concur with this view. We propose therefore that the part of the existing East parish ward to be included in the proposed Castle borough ward should form a Castle parish ward. The eastern boundary of the existing Horns Cross parish ward should be amended in line with the proposed boundary between the proposed Castle and Stone borough wards. We support the Conservative Group's proposal that the part of Stone parish to be included in the proposed Newtown borough ward should form a new Milestone parish ward and that the western boundary of St Johns parish ward should be amended accordingly. We also agree that the northern boundary of St Johns parish ward should be amended in order to tie it to strong ground detail; therefore we have sought the advice of Ordnance Survey and propose that Cotton

Lane and field edges should form the boundary between St Johns and East parish wards. We note that the Conservative Group proposed that the remainder of East parish ward should form a new St Mary’s parish ward, but we have received no local support for such a change and we propose therefore retaining the existing ward name.

113 While Stone Parish Council has not commented on its electoral arrangements, a parish councillor has suggested changes to the representation of the parish wards, therefore, we concur with the proposal of the Conservative Group that the representation of parish wards should be amended in order to reflect significant changes in the electorate of the parish. We propose that the size of Stone Parish Council should be increased to 12 members, with the proposed East, Horns Cross and Milestone parish wards each returning two councillors, while the proposed Castle and St Johns parish wards should each return three councillors. We would welcome views at Stage Three from the Parish Council and other interested parties.

Draft Recommendation
Stone Parish Council should comprise 12 councillors, one more than at present, representing five wards: East, Horns Cross and Milestone (each returning two councillors) and Castle and St Johns (each returning three councillors). The boundaries between Castle, East and Horns Cross parish wards should reflect the proposed boundary between the proposed Castle and Stone borough wards, while the boundaries between East, Milestone and St Johns parish wards should reflect the proposed boundary between Newtown and St Johns parish wards, as illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

114 The parish of Wilmington is currently served by nine councillors representing four wards: Barn End, Birchwood, Church Hill and Leyton Cross. The four wards currently return three, three, two and one councillor respectively. The Conservative Group proposed that the existing Church Hill ward should be divided into two new wards in line with its proposed borough ward boundaries. That part to be included in the proposed Princes borough ward would form a new Hawley Road parish ward, while that part to be included in the proposed Wilmington borough ward would form a new Church Hill parish ward. It also proposed amending the boundary between Barn End and Birchwood parish wards to address an existing anomaly. Wilmington Parish Council proposed that “for reasons of consistency and logistics”, and to avoid confusing the electorate, the parish ward boundaries should be the same as the borough ward boundaries.

115 Given that we have decided to adopt the officers’ proposals for the borough ward boundaries in Wilmington, we are proposing consequential parish warding in line with these borough ward boundaries and cannot, therefore, adopt the proposals of the Conservative Group. According to the wishes of the Parish Council, we are proposing to create three new parish wards of Birchwood, Oakfield and Central in line with the proposed Joydens Wood, Princes and Wilmington borough wards respectively. We consider that the existing name of Birchwood adequately reflects the existing parish ward which is almost identical to that part of Wilmington parish to be included in the proposed Joydens Wood parish ward. The central part of Wilmington parish would be included in the proposed Central ward, therefore, this ward name seems more appropriate than the existing ward names which refer to specific parts of this area. The proposed

Oakfield parish ward includes the majority of the existing Oakfield polling district, therefore, we considered that this name would offer the best reflection of community identity in this area. In line with their proportions of the parish electorate, we propose that Birchwood ward should return three councillors, Central should return five and Oakfield should return one.

Draft Recommendation
Wilmington Parish Council should comprise nine parish councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Birchwood (returning three councillors), Central (returning five councillors) and Oakfield (returning one councillor). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries of Joydens Wood, Princes and Wilmington wards, as illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

116 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the borough.

Draft Recommendation
For parish and town councils, whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that of the Borough Council.

117 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Dartford and welcome comments from the Borough Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. 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 Dartford

5 NEXT STEPS

118 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 11 December 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 Borough Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

119 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
Dartford 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
www.lgce.gov.uk

120 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

Dartford Borough Council Officers' Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those put forward by the officers in 10 wards, where the Council officers' proposals were as follows:

Figure B1: Dartford Borough Council Officers' Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Castle	Stone ward (part)
Fairfield	Princes ward (part)
Heath	Heath ward; Miskin ward (part); Princes ward (part); Wilmington Central ward (part)
Joyce Green	<i>Unchanged:</i> Joyce Green ward
Littlebrook	Littlebrook ward; Stone ward (part)
Newtown	Newtown ward (part); Stone ward (part)
Princes	Princes ward (part); Wilmington East ward (part)
Stone	Horns Cross ward; Stone ward (part)
Town	Gundulf ward (part); Miskin ward (part); Newtown ward (part); Princes ward (part); Priory ward
West	Gundulf ward (part); Miskin ward (part)

Figure B2: Dartford Borough Council Officers' Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Castle	1	1,048	1,048	-29	1,590	1,590	3
Fairfield	1	1,643	1,643	11	1,650	1,650	7
Heath	3	5,001	1,667	13	4,680	1,560	1
Joyce Green	2	2,756	1,378	-7	3,150	1,575	2
Littlebrook	2	3,100	1,550	5	2,930	1,465	-5
Newtown	3	4,850	1,617	9	4,650	1,550	1
Princes	2	3,060	1,530	3	3,210	1,605	4
Stone	3	4,477	1,492	1	4,410	1,470	-4
Town	2	2,784	1,392	-6	2,930	1,465	-5
West	3	4,135	1,378	-7	4,370	1,457	-5

Source: Electorate figures are based on the officers' 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. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Dartford Borough Council Conservative Group's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Figure B3: Dartford Borough Council Conservative Group's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Anne of Cleves	Gundulf ward (part); Miskin ward (part); Princes ward (part)
Bean & Betsham	Bean ward (Bean parish); Southfleet ward (part – West parish ward of Southfleet parish)
Brent	Brent ward; Darenth ward (part – the proposed Fleetdown parish ward of Darenth parish)
Darenth	Darenth ward (part – the proposed Darenth Park, Green Street Green, Ladywood and Lane End parish wards of Darenth parish)
Greenhithe	Greenhithe ward (part – the proposed Greenhithe Mount and Greenhithe Village parish wards of Swanscombe & Greenhithe parish); Stone ward (part – the proposed Castle parish ward of Stone parish)
Heath	Heath ward; Miskin ward (part); Princes ward (part)
Joyce Green	Joyce Green ward (part)
Knockhall	Greenhithe ward (part – the proposed Knockhall parish ward of Swanscombe & Greenhithe parish)
Littlebrook	Joyce Green ward (part); Littlebrook ward
Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet	Longfield ward (Longfield & New Barn parish); Southfleet ward (part – East parish ward of Southfleet parish)
Maypole	Maypole ward (part)
Newtown & Milestone	Newtown ward (part); Stone ward (part – the proposed Milestone parish ward of Stone parish)
Princes	Princes ward (part); Wilmington Central and Wilmington East wards (part – the proposed Hawley Road parish ward of Wilmington parish)
Priory	<i>Unchanged:</i> Priory ward
Stone	Horns Cross ward (Horns Cross parish ward of Stone parish); Stone ward (part – the proposed St John's and St Mary's parish wards of Stone parish)
Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley	<i>Unchanged:</i> Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward (Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley parish)
Swanscombe	Galley Hill and Swanscombe wards (the proposed Galley Hill and Swanscombe parish wards of Swanscombe & Greenhithe parish)
West Hill	Gundulf ward (part); Miskin ward (part)
Wilmington	Maypole ward (part); Wilmington Central, Wilmington East and Wilmington West wards (part – the proposed Barn End, Birchwood and Leyton Cross parish wards of Wilmington parish)

Figure B4: Dartford Borough Council Conservative Group's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Anne of Cleves	1	1,271	1,271	-14	1,530	1,530	0
2	Bean & Betsham	1	1,616	1,616	9	1,560	1,560	2
3	Brent	3	4,886	1,629	10	4,770	1,590	4
4	Darenth	2	2,587	1,294	-13	2,900	1,450	-6
5	Greenhithe	3	2,821	940	-37	4,650	1,550	1
6	Heath	3	4,830	1,610	9	4,530	1,510	-2
7	Joyce Green	2	2,718	1,359	-8	3,110	1,555	1
8	Knockhall	1	1,336	1,336	-10	1,540	1,540	0
9	Littlebrook	2	3,138	1,569	6	2,970	1,485	-3
10	Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet	3	4,773	1,591	7	4,620	1,540	0
11	Maypole	2	2,359	1,180	-20	2,920	1,460	-5
12	Newtown & Milestone	3	4,699	1,566	6	4,430	1,477	-4
13	Princes	3	4,698	1,566	6	4,800	1,600	4
14	Priory	1	1,681	1,681	13	1,610	1,610	5
15	Stone	3	4,813	1,604	8	4,870	1,623	6
16	Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley	2	3,241	1,621	9	3,070	1,535	0
17	Swanscombe	3	4,514	1,505	2	4,540	1,513	-1
18	West Hill	3	4,155	1,385	-6	4,400	1,467	-5
19	Wilmington	3	5,032	1,677	13	4,770	1,590	4
	Totals	44	65,168	-	-	67,590	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,481	-	-	1,536	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Dartford Borough Council Conservative Group'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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Dartford Borough Council Labour Group's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Figure B5: Dartford Borough Council Labour Group's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Castle	Stone ward (part)
Darenth & Bean	Bean ward (Bean parish); Darenth ward (part)
Dartford West	Gundulf ward (part); Miskin ward (part)
Greenhithe	<i>Unchanged:</i> Greenhithe ward (Greenhithe and Knockhall parish wards of Swanscombe & Greenhithe parish)
Heath	Heath ward; Miskin ward (part); Wilmington Central ward (part)
Joyce Green	<i>Unchanged:</i> Joyce Green ward
Joydens Wood	Maypole ward (part); Wilmington Central ward (part); Wilmington West ward (part)
Littlebrook	Littlebrook ward; Stone ward (part)
Longfield & Southfleet	Longfield ward (Longfield & New Barn parish); Southfleet ward (Southfleet parish)
Newtown	Newtown ward; Stone ward (part)
Princes	Princes ward; Wilmington Central ward (part)
Priory	Gundulf ward (part); Miskin ward (part); Priory ward
Stone	Horns Cross ward (Horns Cross parish ward of Stone parish); Stone ward (part)
Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley	<i>Unchanged:</i> Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward (Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley parish)
Swanscombe	Galley Hill ward and Swanscombe wards (Galley Hill and Swanscombe parish wards of Swanscombe & Greenhithe parish)
The Brent	Brent ward; Darenth ward (part)
The Dell	Maypole ward (part); Wilmington West ward (part)
Wilmington	Wilmington Central ward (part); Wilmington East ward

Figure B6: Dartford Borough Council Labour Group's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Castle	1	1,048	1,048	-28	1,590	1,590	6
2	Darenth & Bean	3	3,891	1,297	-10	4,290	1,430	-5
3	Dartford West	3	4,135	1,378	-5	4,380	1,460	-3
4	Greenhithe	3	3,109	1,036	-28	4,600	1,533	2
5	Heath	3	4,830	1,610	11	4,550	1,517	1
6	Joyce Green	2	2,756	1,378	-5	3,150	1,575	5
7	Joydens Wood	3	4,119	1,373	-5	3,990	1,330	-12
8	Littlebrook	2	3,100	1,550	7	2,930	1,465	-3
9	Longfield & Southfleet	3	5,085	1,695	17	4,930	1,643	9
10	Newtown	3	5,035	1,678	16	4,890	1,630	8
11	Princes	3	4,196	1,399	-3	4,170	1,390	-8
12	Priory	2	2,589	1,259	-11	2,680	1,340	-11
13	Stone	3	4,477	1,492	3	4,410	1,470	-2
14	Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley	2	3,241	1,621	12	3,070	1,535	2
15	Swanscombe	3	4,514	1,505	4	4,540	1,513	1
16	The Brent	3	4,886	1,629	12	4,770	1,590	6
17	The Dell	1	1,055	1,055	-27	1,600	1,600	6
18	Wilmington	2	3,102	1,551	7	3,150	1,575	5
	Totals	45	65,168	–	–	67,690	–	–
	Averages	–	–	1,448	–	–	1,504	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on Dartford Borough Council Labour Group'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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

APPENDIX B

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

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

or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

- 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.

