

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Maidstone in Kent

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

May 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Maidstone in Kent.

Members of the Commission are:

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



Local Government Commission for England

9 May 2001

Dear Secretary of State

On 9 May 2000 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Maidstone under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in November 2000 and undertook a ten-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of that consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 106) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Maidstone.

We recommend that Maidstone Borough Council should be served by 55 councillors representing 26 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to be hold elections by thirds.

The Local Government Act 2000, contains provisions relating to changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as Orders are made implementing those arrangements we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Maidstone on 9 May 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 14 November 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 16 of the 28 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and 11 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 electoral equality 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 17 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 13 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 106-107) are that:

- **Maidstone Borough Council should have 55 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 26 wards, instead of 28 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified and five wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 21 of the proposed 26 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 forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward, Staplehurst, expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for Boughton Monchelsea and Boxley parishes;**
- **an increase in the number of councillors for Boughton Monchelsea.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 20 June 2001:

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Allington*	3	Allington ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
2	Barming	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Barming and Teston)	Map 2
3	Bearsted	3	Bearsted ward (part – that part of Bearsted parish that lies in Bearsted ward); Thurnham ward (part – that part of Bearsted parish that lies in Thurnham ward)	Map 2 and large map
4	Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton	1	Boughton Monchelsea ward (part – the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton)	Map 2 and large map
5	Boxley	3	Boxley ward (part – the Boxley North and Boxley South parish wards of Boxley parish); Detling ward (part – the parish of Bredhurst)	Map 2 and large map
6	Bridge*	2	Allington ward (part); Bridge ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
7	Coxheath & Hunton	2	Coxheath ward (the parish of Coxheath); Farleigh ward (part – the parishes of East and West Farleigh); Marden ward (the parishes of Linton and Hunton)	Map 2
8	Detling & Thurnham	1	Boxley ward (part – the Boxley South East parish ward of Boxley parish); Detling ward (part – the parish of Detling); Thurnham ward (part – the parish of Thurnham)	Map 2 and large map
9	Downswood & Otham	1	Langley ward (part – the parishes of Downswood and Otham)	Map 2 and large map
10	East*	3	Boxley ward (part – the Boxley Woodlands parish ward of Boxley parish); East ward	Map 2 and large map
11	Fant*	3	Bridge ward (part); Heath ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
12	Harrietsham & Lenham	2	Harrietsham and Lenham ward (part – the parishes of Harrietsham and Lenham)	Map 2
13	Headcorn	2	Headcorn ward (part – the parishes of Headcorn, Ulcombe and Boughton Malherbe); Sutton Valence ward (part – the parish of East Sutton)	Map 2
14	Heath*	2	Heath ward (part); Bridge ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
15	High Street*	3	High Street ward; South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
16	Langley & Sutton Valence	1	Langley ward (part – the parish of Langley); Sutton Valence ward (part – the parish of Sutton Valence)	Map 2
17	Leeds	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Leeds and Broomfield & Kingswood)	Map 2
18	Loose	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Loose)	Map 2 and large map
19	Marden	2	Marden ward (part– the parish of Marden); Yalding ward (the parishes of Collier Street, Nettlestead and Yalding)	Map 2
20	North*	3	<i>Unchanged</i> ; North ward	Map 2 and large map
21	North Downs	1	Hollingbourne ward (part – the parishes of Hollingbourne, Huckling, Bicknor, Wormshill and Frinsted); Detling ward (part – the parish of Stockbury); Harrietsham & Lenham ward (part – the parishes of Wichling and Otterden)	Map 2
22	Park Wood*	2	Park Wood ward (part); Boughton Monchelsea ward (part – the parish ward of Boughton Monchelsea North)	Map 2 and large map
23	Shepway North*	2	Shepway West ward (part); Shepway East ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
24	Shepway South*	3	Shepway East ward (part); Park Wood (part)	Map 2 and large map
25	South*	3	South ward (part – including the parish of Tovil)	Map 2 and large map
26	Staplehurst	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Staplehurst)	Map 2

Notes: 1 Maidstone is largely unparished and comprises the 11 wards indicated by an * above.

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Maidstone

	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	Allington	3	5,391	1,797	-9	6,510	2,170	4
2	Barming	1	1,894	1,894	-4	1,964	1,964	-6
3	Bearsted	3	6,521	2,174	10	6,642	2,214	6
4	Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton	1	2,086	2,086	6	2,109	2,109	1
5	Boxley	3	6,553	2,184	11	6,596	2,199	5
6	Bridge	2	3,977	1,989	1	4,100	2,050	-2
7	Coxheath & Hunton	3	5,509	1,836	-7	5,759	1,920	-8
8	Detling & Thurnham	1	2,203	2,203	12	2,254	2,254	8
9	Downswood & Otham	1	2,148	2,148	9	2,293	2,293	10
10	East	3	6,406	2,135	8	6,535	2,178	4
11	Fant	3	5,810	1,937	-2	6,058	2,019	-3
12	Harrietsham & Lenham	2	4,051	2,026	3	4,231	2,116	1
13	Headcorn	2	3,941	1,971	0	3,985	1,993	-5
14	Heath	2	3,111	1,556	-21	3,965	1,983	-5
15	High Street	3	5,829	1,943	-2	6,027	2,009	-4
16	Langley & Sutton Valence	1	2,151	2,151	9	2,183	2,183	4
17	Leeds	1	1,883	1,883	-5	1,910	1,910	-9
18	Loose	1	1,894	1,894	-4	1,920	1,920	-8
19	Marden	3	6,012	2,004	1	6,070	2,023	-3
20	North	3	5,649	1,883	-5	5,868	1,956	-6
21	North Downs	1	1,992	1,992	1	2,030	2,030	-3
22	Park Wood	2	2,630	1,315	-33	3,917	1,959	-6

	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	Shepway North	3	6,471	2,157	9	6,509	2,170	4
24	Shepway South	2	4,257	2,129	8	4,291	2,146	4
25	South	3	5,743	1,914	-3	6,576	2,192	5
26	Staplehurst	2	4,505	2,253	14	4,737	2,369	13
	Totals	55	108,617	-	-	115,039	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,975	-	-	2,092	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Maidstone in Kent. We have now reviewed the 12 two-tier districts and boroughs 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 Maidstone. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in October 1975 (Report No. 101). 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 have had 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.

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 councils in the borough.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000), which 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, so far as practicable, 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 borough but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against 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 or borough's electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a district or borough council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other districts or boroughs.

9 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 or borough and county councils would hold elections every two years, ie in year one, half of the district or borough 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. 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 Orders 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 the two-tier district or borough areas, and our current *Guidance*.

10 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 9 May 2000, when we wrote to Maidstone Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Kent County Council, Kent Police Authority, Kent Association of Parish Councils, 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 31 July 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 14 November 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Maidstone in Kent*, and ended on 22 January 2001. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 The borough of Maidstone covers 39,368 hectares and has a population of 140,700. It includes the town of Maidstone which is the commercial and industrial centre of the borough, having direct road and rail access to London and the Kent and Sussex coasts. Maidstone covers one of the largest hop-growing areas in the country and through it runs the River Medway. Agriculture is the area's main industry although general and light industry and commerce have strong footholds. The borough contains 41 parishes although Maidstone town is largely unparished. The Council is elected by thirds.

13 The electorate of the borough is forecast to increase by 6 per cent from 108,617 to 115,039 in 2005. The most significant reason for the increases in the electoral is the consideration of the allocations in the emerging Maidstone borough-wide Local Plan for housing development. In addition to the housing allocations, planning permissions outstanding for housing development throughout the borough also explain the significant increases in electorate, although to a lesser extent.

14 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'.

15 The electorate of the borough is 108,617 (May 2000). The Council at present has 55 members who are elected from 28 wards, 12 of which are relatively urban in Maidstone town and Bearsted wards, and the remainder being predominantly rural. Of the 28 wards 11 are represented by three councillors, five are represented by two councillors and 12 are single-member wards.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Maidstone borough, with around 22 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in the Grove Green area of Boxley, Heath and Allington wards.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,975 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,092 by the year 2005 if the current number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 16 of the 28 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, 12 wards by more than 20 per cent and four wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Boxley ward where the councillor represents 265 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Maidstone

Figure 3: 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	Allington	3	5,851	1,950	-1	7,005	2,335	12
2	Barming	1	1,894	1,894	-4	1,964	1,964	-6
3	Bearsted	3	5,134	1,711	-13	5,236	1,745	-17
4	Boughton Monchelsea	1	2,110	2,110	7	2,937	2,937	40
5	Boxley	1	7,214	7,214	265	7,271	7,271	248
6	Bridge	3	6,447	2,159	9	6,839	2,280	9
7	Coxheath	2	3,083	1,542	-22	3,263	1,632	-22
8	Detling	1	1,538	1,538	-22	1,589	1,589	-24
9	East	3	6,042	2,014	2	6,170	2,057	-2
10	Farleigh	1	1,516	1,516	-23	1,543	1,543	-26
11	Harrietsham & Lenham	2	4,289	2,145	9	4,477	2,239	7
12	Headcorn	2	3,705	1,853	-6	3,745	1,873	-10
13	Heath	3	5,961	1,987	1	6,869	2,290	9
14	High Street	3	4,735	1,578	-20	4,869	1,623	-22
15	Hollingbourne	1	1,181	1,181	-40	1,208	1,208	-42
16	Langley	1	3,124	3,124	58	3,307	3,307	58
17	Leeds	1	1,883	1,883	-5	1,910	1,910	-9
18	Loose	1	1,894	1,894	-4	1,920	1,920	-8
19	Marden	2	3,842	1,921	-3	3,875	1,938	-7
20	North	3	5,649	1,883	-5	5,868	1,956	-6
21	Park Wood	3	4,678	1,559	-21	5,005	1,668	-20
22	Shepway East	3	4,315	1,438	-27	4,349	1,450	-31
23	Shepway West	3	4,431	1,477	-25	4,466	1,489	-29
24	South	3	6,837	2,279	15	7,794	2,598	24
25	Staplehurst	2	4,505	2,253	14	4,737	2,369	13

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 (%)
26 Sutton Valence	1	1,411	1,411	-29	1,438	1,438	-31
27 Thurnham	1	2,238	2,238	13	2,272	2,272	9
28 Yalding	1	3,080	3,080	56	3,113	3,113	49
Totals	55	108,617	-	-	115,039	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,975	-	-	2,092	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Maidstone 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 Hollingbourne ward were relatively over-represented by 40 per cent, while electors in Boxley ward were significantly under-represented by 265 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received 13 representations, including a borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council and a borough-wide scheme that was submitted independently by three Conservative Associations. We also received representations from six parish councils, the leader of Kent County Council, a local councillor and a resident. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Maidstone in Kent*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the proposals of both the Borough Council and the Conservatives, and we endeavoured to reflect the consensus between the two schemes where it existed. We proposed that:

- Maidstone Borough Council should be served by 55 councillors, as at present, representing 27 wards, one fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, while five wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea and Boxley.

Draft Recommendation

Maidstone should comprise 55 councillors, serving 27 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 6 of the 27 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all but one of the wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent for the average for the borough in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 24 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Maidstone Borough Council and the Commission.

Maidstone Borough Council

22 The Borough Council did not make any specific comments on our draft recommendations, stating that it preferred to leave individual political groups to submit their own comments.

The Conservatives

23 The Conservative Group on Maidstone Borough Council, Maidstone & The Weald Conservative Association and Faversham & Mid Kent Conservative Association (hereafter referred to as the ‘Conservatives’) proposed amending the boundary between the proposed Shepway East and Shepway West wards. They also reiterated their Stage One proposals to create a new Ringlestone ward from the existing North and East wards in Maidstone. The Conservatives also submitted the comments made by Borough Councillor Horne to the Borough Council regarding Thurnham ward, which argued that the boundary between Boxley ward and Detling & Thurnham should run along Weaving Street.

The Labour Party

24 The Parkway, Senacre and Shepway branches of the Labour Party (hereafter referred to as the ‘Labour Party’) made a joint submission proposing amendments to the boundary between the proposed Shepway East and Shepway West wards. They proposed using the clear boundary of Northumberland Road, arguing that North and South Shepway are distinct and separate communities to the north and south of Northumberland Road. The Labour Party also proposed that Shepway East and Shepway West be renamed Shepway South and Shepway North respectively.

The Liberal Democrats

25 Maidstone and Weald Liberal Democrat Constituency Party (hereafter referred to as the Liberal Democrats) supported the proposed North and East wards in Maidstone Town and the rural wards of Barming and Loose. However, it objected to the Commission’s proposed Coxheath & Hunton, Marden and Yalding & Farleigh wards, and proposed replacing these wards with two three-member wards. It proposed a new Coxheath ward comprising the parishes of Coxheath, East Farleigh, West Farleigh, Linton and Hunton, and a new Marden ward comprising the parishes of Marden, Collier Street, Yalding and Nettlestead. It argued that these wards would better reflect community identity in the area. Maidstone Rural West Liberal Democrats also supported the proposed Barming and Loose wards.

Parish Councils

26 We received nine submissions from parish councils. Detling and Stockbury parish councils objected to our proposed Detling & Thurnham and North Downs wards, arguing that Stockbury parish should be included in Detling & Thurnham ward rather than in the proposed North Downs ward. Ulcombe Parish Council supported our draft recommendations across the borough.

27 Boxley Parish Council objected to our proposals to divide Boxley parish between three borough wards. Chart Sutton Parish Council proposed that Boughton Monchelsea ward be renamed Chart Sutton & Boughton Monchelsea and that Coxheath ward be renamed Coxheath & Hunton ward. East Farleigh Parish Council objected to the proposed Yalding & Farleigh ward, arguing that East Farleigh has no links with Yalding Parish Council. Marden Parish Council reiterated its Stage One proposal that Marden Parish Council should be warded with Collier Street and Hunton parishes rather than with Collier Street and Linton parishes.

28 Bredhurst Parish supported our proposal combining Bredhurst parish with part of Boxley parish. However, it raised concerns regarding the boundary between Boxley and Detling & Thurnham wards. Thurnham Parish Council proposed an amendment to the boundary between Thurnham & Detling ward.

Other Representations

29 We received six representations from local councillors. Councillor Williams objected to our proposed Marden, Coxheath & Hunton and Yalding & Farleigh wards. He proposed the same ward pattern in the area as had the Liberal Democrats: namely two three-member wards. Councillor Simpson objected to our proposals for Detling & Thurnham and North Downs wards, arguing that Stockbury parish should be included in Detling & Thurnham ward. She also proposed that Boxley parish should be within a single borough ward. However, she broadly supported our proposal to combine Bredhurst parish with part of Boxley parish and supported Bearsted parish forming a three-member borough ward.

30 Councillor Luxton repeated the objections he had raised at Stage One. He argued that the Coombe Farm Estate should not be included in High Street ward and should remain in South ward. He also objected to including the residents of Busbridge Road and Stockett Lane in the proposed South borough ward.

31 Councillor Marlow proposed that the boundary between the proposed Shepway East and West wards should use the clear boundary of Northumberland Road. Councillor Marlow supported our proposed North ward and Councillor Fitzgerald proposed that Boughton Monchelsea ward be renamed as Chart Sutton & Boughton Monchelsea Ward.

32 We also received a further three representations from local residents. One resident supported our draft recommendations, one resident proposed an amendment to the boundary between Shepway East and Shepway West wards (similar to that proposed by the Labour Party and the Conservatives), and another resident proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between Yalding & Farleigh and Marden wards so that it follows the centre of a road rather than crossing fields.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

33 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Maidstone 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 ensuing five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

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

36 Our *Guidance* states that 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, such an objective 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 absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate Forecasts

37 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of 6 per cent from 108,617 to 115,039 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Allington, Heath and Park Wood 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 In our draft recommendations we received no comments on the Council’s electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates presently available.

Council Size

39 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.

40 Maidstone Borough Council at present has 55 members. At Stage One The Borough Council and the Conservatives proposed retaining the existing council size.

41 A resident argued that there are currently too many councillors and that reducing the number would give more importance to those elected. The resident stated that "about half the existing number on Maidstone Borough Council would be about right". We noted the resident's argument in favour of a significant reduction in council size but, in view of the lack of support for such a proposal, we were not persuaded to adopt such a recommendation.

42 In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, and concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 55 members.

43 At Stage Three we received no specific comments regarding the council size. We are therefore content to confirm our draft recommendations for a council size of 55 as final.

Electoral Arrangements

44 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council and the Conservatives. From these representations, some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

45 The Borough Council proposed a council of 55 members, the same as at present, serving 29 wards, compared to the existing 28. The Council's proposals would result in the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average in 21 wards and by no more than 20 per cent in 27 of the 29 wards. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve by 2005 with the number of electors per councillor varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average in only one ward

46 The Conservatives' proposals provided for a council size of 55 members, as at present, serving 28 wards. The Conservatives' proposals would result in the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average in 22 of the 28 wards and by more than 20 per cent in only one ward. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve by 2005 with the number of electors per councillor varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average in only one ward and with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent.

47 While we recognised that a greater improvement of electoral equality was achieved by the Borough Council's scheme we concluded that we should base our recommendations on a mixture

of the Borough Council’s and the Conservatives’ schemes. We noted that the Borough Council and the Conservatives submitted similar warding arrangements for the rural area of the borough and that the two schemes were also similar in Maidstone town. We endeavoured to reflect the consensus between the two schemes where it existed. We considered that the Conservatives’ and Borough Council’s schemes for the rural area of the borough had good local support while reflecting the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and we were therefore content to adopt them as part of our draft recommendations.

48 However, we proposed amendments to both the Council’s and the Conservatives’ schemes in the town of Maidstone, which would improve electoral equality and use more easily identifiable boundaries.

49 At Stage Three we noted that our proposals for the majority of the borough were supported and therefore we are content to largely confirm our draft recommendations as final. However, we recognise that we have received opposition to specific areas of our recommendations in the rural south-western part of the borough and in the Shepway area of Maidstone town.

50 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three and are proposing amendments to the boundary between Shepway East and West wards and revised warding arrangements in the rural south-west of the borough. We are also proposing that Shepway East and Shepway West wards be renamed Shepway South and Shepway North wards respectively and that Boughton Monchelsea ward be renamed Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

Maidstone Town (unparished)

- (a) Allington, Bridge, East, Heath and North wards;
- (b) High Street, Park Wood, Shepway East, Shepway West and South wards.

Rural area (parished)

- (c) Barming, Coxheath, Farleigh, Loose, Marden and Yalding wards;
- (d) Boughton Monchelsea, Headcorn, Langley, Leeds, Sutton Valence and Staplehurst wards;
- (e) Bearsted, Boxley, Detling, Harrietsham & Lenham, Hollingbourne and Thurnham wards.

51 Details of our final 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.

Maidstone Town

Allington, Bridge, East, Heath and North wards

52 These five wards are situated in the north and west of the town of Maidstone and are each represented by three councillors. Under the existing council size of 55 members the number of electors per councillor in Allington and Bridge wards is 1 per cent below the borough average and 9 per cent more (12 per cent and 8 per cent more by 2005) respectively. In East, Heath and North wards the number of electors per councillor is 2 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively (2 per cent fewer, 9 per cent more and 6 per cent fewer by 2005).

53 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed minor amendments to the boundaries of Allington, Bridge and Heath wards. It argued that “most of the boundaries should go along distinctive features” and thus proposed dividing the existing Allington ward into a two-member Allington North ward and a two-member Allington South ward. The Council proposed an amended two-member Bridge ward comprising the area to the south of Buckland Hill and Somerfield Road with a small alteration to the existing south-west boundary of the ward.

54 The Council also proposed dividing Heath ward into a two-member North ward and a two-member South ward using Tonbridge Road as a boundary. The Council considered only minor amendments were necessary to the existing East ward and proposed incorporating the Woodlands Estate, currently in Boxley parish, to improve the variance of its proposed Boxley ward.

55 Under the Council’s scheme for a 55-member council the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Allington North and Allington South wards would be 1 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer the borough average respectively (3 per cent more and 5 per cent more by 2005). In Bridge and East wards the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent fewer and 8 per cent more the borough average respectively (4 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Heath North, Heath South and North wards would be 25 per cent fewer, 7 per cent fewer and 5 per cent fewer the borough average respectively (2 per cent fewer, 10 per cent fewer and 6 per cent fewer respectively by 2005).

56 The Conservatives proposed a three-member Allington ward similar to the existing ward but proposed transferring Buckland Lane and Little Buckland Avenue to its proposed Bridge ward. They proposed a two-member Bridge ward comprising the area south of its proposed Allington ward to Tonbridge Road. They proposed that the area to the south of Tonbridge Road form a new three-member Fant ward and that the area to the north of Tonbridge Road form a new two-member Heath ward. The Conservatives put forward three two-member wards to comprise the existing North and East wards. They proposed a two-member Ringlestone ward incorporating the area bounded by the River Medway, Hilary Road and Boxley Road up to the prison. Their proposed two-member North ward would consist of the area to the east of this boundary to Sittingbourne Road, Hatherall Road, Park Avenue, Heathfield Road and along Boxley Road to the M20. The Conservatives proposed a two-member East ward comprising the area to the east of this boundary to Vinters Park.

57 Under the Conservatives' 55-member scheme the number of electors per councillor in their proposed Allington, Bridge, East wards would be 4 per cent below, 7 per cent below and 1 per cent more than the borough average respectively (5 per cent more, 5 per cent more and 3 per cent fewer by 2005). In Fant, Heath, North and Ringlestone wards the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent fewer, 19 per cent fewer, 1 per cent more and 3 per cent more than the borough average respectively (5 per cent fewer, equal to the average, 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2005).

58 Having considered the representations received at Stage One we proposed basing our draft recommendations on the Conservatives' scheme for Allington, Bridge, Fant and Heath wards, with some minor modifications to improve electoral equality in Allington ward and to rectify minor anomalies in its proposed Bridge and Heath wards. We also proposed adopting the Borough Council's proposed warding arrangements for East and North wards. On balance we considered that the Conservatives' scheme represented a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in Allington, Bridge, Fant and Heath wards. In particular, we considered that the Conservatives' scheme utilised more easily identifiable boundaries between these wards. We considered alternative boundaries between East and North wards to create a more identifiable boundary between the wards. However, we were of the opinion that the Borough Council's proposals accurately reflected the identity of this area while providing reasonable levels of electoral equality. We noted the Conservatives' proposal to create three wards for this area but were not persuaded that we should alter the existing boundary between North and East wards.

59 In view of the under-representation that would result in the Conservatives' proposed Allington ward, we proposed amending the southern boundary to include the properties on Buckland Avenue, Little Buckland Lane, Palmar Road and Grace Avenue in our proposed Bridge ward. In order to improve electoral equality in our proposed Heath ward, we also proposed including all the properties on Bower Mount Road, Melford Drive, Malling Terrace and those on Queens Road up to Shaftesbury Drive. We noted that the proposed new developments by Oakwood Hospital would link these properties.

60 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Allington, Bridge and East ward would be 9 per cent fewer, 1 per cent more and 8 per cent more than the borough average respectively (4 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more by 2005). In Fant, Heath and North wards the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent fewer, 21 per cent fewer and 5 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively (3 per cent fewer, 5 per cent fewer and 6 per cent fewer by 2005).

61 At Stage Three the Borough Council stated that it did not wish to comment on the Commission's Stage Three proposals but left it to individual political groups to make their own submissions. A local councillor and a local resident expressed support for our proposed Fant and Bridge wards. In the light of the representations received we are content to adopt our draft recommendations as final, without modification. The electoral variances would be as our draft recommendations. Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map in the back of this report.

High Street, Park Wood, Shepway East, Shepway West and South wards

62 These five wards are situated in the centre, south and east of the town of Maidstone and are each represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in High Street and Park Wood wards is 20 per cent fewer and 21 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively (22 per cent fewer and 19 per cent fewer by 2005). In Shepway East and Shepway West wards the number of electors per councillor is 27 per cent and 25 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively (31 per cent and 29 per cent fewer in 2005). In South ward (including the parish of Tovil) the number of electors per councillor is 15 per cent more than the borough average (24 per cent more by 2005).

63 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed minor amendments to the boundaries of these wards. It proposed a new two-member Tovil ward, comprising Tovil parish with the addition of some properties from the existing High Street ward. It also proposed a two-member South ward, comprising the existing South ward less the new Tovil ward but with the addition of some properties from High Street ward. The Council also proposed a minor amendment to the existing High Street ward, proposing that part be transferred to its proposed Tovil ward.

64 The Borough Council proposed a minor modification to the existing Shepway East ward, suggesting that the properties on Orchard Road be transferred to its proposed Detling & Thurnham ward, and that those on Ashford Road be transferred to its proposed Boxley ward. It proposed amending the northern boundary of Shepway West ward to include West Park Road, York Road and The Spinney in High Street ward and proposed amending the southern boundary of the existing Park Wood ward to transfer new developments on Langley Park Farm West, Pested Bars Road, and Furfield Quarry from Boughton Monchelsea parish. The Council argued that it would be more appropriate for these properties to be included in an urban ward. Consequently, parish warding would be required of both Boughton Monchelsea and Otham parishes.

65 Under the Borough Council's 55-member scheme the number of electors per councillor in its proposed High Street, Park Wood and Shepway East wards would be 12 per cent more, 21 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively (8 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer by 2005). In Shepway West, South and Tovil wards the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 10 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively (3 per cent more, 5 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer by 2005).

66 The Conservatives proposed no change to the existing warding arrangements for Shepway East and Shepway West wards, other than to transfer numbers 191– 239 Sutton Road from Park Wood ward to Shepway East ward. They also proposed including the new development on Pested Bars Road currently in Boughton Monchelsea parish, in Park Wood ward. The Conservatives' only proposed amendment to the existing South and High Street wards was a slight boundary amendment between the two.

67 Under the Conservatives' 55-member scheme the number of electors per councillor in their proposed High Street and Park Wood wards would be 4 per cent fewer and 21 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively (equal to the average and 2 per cent fewer by 2005). In Shepway

East, Shepway West and South wards the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent more, 12 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively (4 per cent more, 6 per cent more and 3 per cent more by 2005).

68 Councillor Luxton argued that the Borough Council's proposed Tovil ward should be named South West ward, stating that although Tovil parish forms a major part of the ward, the name South West would "better reflect the total identity of the ward". He also suggested that the north-western boundary of this ward should run along the eastern side of Eccleston Road and that numbers 2–44 Tovil Road should be transferred from High Street ward to the proposed Tovil ward. He stated that it is proposed to build a community centre in Eccleston Road and "it seems only logical that it should be in the ward that it serves". A resident proposed that the northern boundary of Park Wood ward should follow the centre of Sutton Road "to keep natural communities together", while further stating that the new development at Pested Bars Road should be included in the proposed Park Wood ward.

69 We noted the general consensus for minimal or no changes to these wards but proposed some minor modifications to the schemes received at Stage One in order to improve community interest and identity and to secure more easily identifiable boundaries between the wards. We proposed that the boundary between High Street and South wards should follow the northern boundary of Tovil parish and then run along the centre of Armstrong Road. Having considered the representations received, we remained of the view that this would be the most easily identifiable boundary between the two wards which would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality without adversely affecting community identity. We noted the comments of Councillor Luxton but were content that the existing name South ward would accurately reflect the identity of the ward.

70 We proposed that the boundary between Shepway East and Shepway West wards should follow the middle of Oxford Road, Worcester Road and Leicester Road to Sutton Road. Having visited the area, we considered that this would unite the properties around the Northumberland Road shops and recreation area, thus reinforcing the identity of the local community. We proposed adopting the Conservatives' proposals for the western boundary of Shepway West ward, as it uses good boundaries and retains communities within a single ward. As a consequence of the new boundaries between Shepway East and Shepway West wards, we proposed that Mote Park be transferred to the proposed Shepway West ward. We proposed incorporating the area of Park Wood ward to the north of Sutton Road in the new Shepway East ward to improve electoral equality. We also considered that Sutton Road would represent a strong boundary between Shepway East and Shepway West wards and our proposed Park Wood ward. We were of the view that the Borough Council's and Conservatives' proposal to transfer the new developments on Pested Bars Road, Langley Park Farm West and Furfield Quarry from Boughton Monchelsea parish to the urban Park Wood ward would reflect the more urban identity of the ward and adopted this as part of our draft recommendations. In order to further improve community identity in the area while creating a clear boundary, we also proposed that the northern boundary of Park Wood ward, should follow the centre of Sutton Road and then the centre of Gore Court Road. Consequently, the properties on the northern side of Sutton Road, currently in Park Wood ward, would be transferred to Shepway East and Shepway West wards.

71 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed High Street and Park Wood wards would be 2 per cent fewer and 33 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively (4 per cent fewer and 6 per cent fewer by 2005). In Shepway East and Shepway West the number of electors per councillor would be 12 per cent more and 6 per cent more than the borough average respectively (7 per cent and 1 per cent more by 2005). In South ward (including the parish of Tovil) the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent fewer than the borough average (5 per cent more by 2005).

72 At Stage Three the Borough Council stated that it did not wish to comment on the Commission's draft recommendations but left it to individual political groups to make their own submissions. The Conservatives, the Labour Party, a councillor and a local resident suggested amending the boundary between our proposed Shepway East and Shepway West wards. The Conservatives suggested reverting to the existing boundary between Shepway East and Shepway West with Shepway West being served by one less councillor than at present and becoming a two-member ward. The Labour Party proposed that the boundary between the proposed Shepway East and West wards be amended to run along Northumberland Road. They argued that this would unite the whole of the existing Senacre Estate within the proposed Shepway East ward. They also argued that the areas to the north and south of Northumberland Road are separate communities and that Northumberland Road is the "main road running through the estate" and therefore a natural boundary. A local councillor and a local resident raised similar objections to our proposed Shepway East and Shepway West wards and proposed that the boundary between the two wards be amended to run along Northumberland Road. The local resident also proposed that Shepway East and West wards should be renamed Willington and Mote Park respectively to reflect community identity in the area. Councillor Luxton objected to our proposed High Street ward. He argued that the Coombe Farm estate should not be included in High Street Ward and should remain in South Ward and that the boundary between South Ward and High Street ward should run on the town side of Ecclestone Road to include future community developments related to Tovil Parish in the South ward. Councillor Luxton also reiterated his Stage One proposal that South ward should be named South West ward, arguing that this would "better reflect the total identity of the ward".

73 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. We consider that the Labour Party's proposals have merit in that they utilize a clearly identifiable boundary in the Northumberland Road and reflect community identity. We accept the Labour Party's argument that the areas to the north and south of the Northumberland Road are distinct communities. Consequently we propose that Shepway East and Shepway West wards be renamed Shepway South and North wards respectively. We also propose amending the boundary between the two wards so that it runs along Northumberland Road. Their proposals provide for good electoral equality and we are content to adopt their proposals as part of our final recommendations. We have noted the arguments of the local councillor regarding the boundary between High Street ward and South Ward. However we do not consider that the worse levels of electoral equality that would result in High Street ward are warranted. We also note that this proposal would not utilize the clearly identifiable boundary of the parish boundary.

74 Under our final recommendations for a 55-member council the number of electors per councillor in our proposed High Street, Park Wood would be 2 per cent and 33 per cent fewer

respectively (4 per cent and 6 per cent fewer by 2005) In our proposed South ward the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent fewer than the borough average (5 per cent more by 2005). Shepway North and Shepway South wards would be 9 per cent more and 8 per cent more than the borough average respectively (3 per cent more and 4 per cent more by 2005). Details of our final recommendations are set out in figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map in the back of this report.

Rural Area

Barming, Coxheath, Farleigh, Loose, Marden and Yalding wards

75 These wards are situated in the west and south west of the borough. Barming ward (comprising the parishes of Barming and Teston), Farleigh ward (comprising the parishes of East Farleigh and West Farleigh), Loose ward (comprising the parish of Loose) and Yalding ward (comprising the parishes of Nettleshead, Yalding and Collier Street) are each represented by a single councillor. Coxheath ward (comprising the parish of Coxheath) and Marden ward (comprising the parishes of Marden, Hunton and Linton) wards are both represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements the number of electors per councillor in Barming, Coxheath, Farleigh, Loose, Marden and Yalding wards is 4 per cent fewer, 22 per cent fewer, 23 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer, 3 per cent fewer and 56 per cent more than the borough average respectively (6 per cent fewer, 22 per cent fewer, 26 per cent fewer, 8 per cent fewer, 7 per cent fewer and 49 per cent more respectively by 2005).

76 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed no change to the existing Barming and Loose wards. In order to improve electoral equality in the existing Farleigh and Yalding wards, it proposed combining Farleigh ward with Yalding and Nettleshead parishes to form a new two-member Yalding & Farleigh ward. It also proposed combining the parishes of Coxheath and Hunton to form a two-member Coxheath & Hunton ward. Although the Council acknowledged that Coxheath parish could join with Linton parish to form a two-member ward, it reasoned that this would result in a ward variance in excess of 10 per cent whereas their proposal would provide a better level of electoral equality. Consequently, it proposed that the parishes of Linton, Collier Street and Marden be combined to form a two-member Marden ward.

77 The Conservatives proposed the same arrangement for these wards. They supported their proposals in this area by stating that these arrangements would “improve voter ratio” but also argued that their proposed Marden ward would “combine identifiable communities”.

78 Marden Parish Council stated that its preference was for Linton parish to join Coxheath parish in a two-member ward and for Hunton parish to remain in a ward with Marden parish and be joined by Collier Street. It argued that “these parishes are all adjacent to each other in the rural area and have many similarities”. Barming Parish Council stated that it had no comments to make at this stage.

79 In view of the general consensus in this area, we endorsed the proposals of the Borough Council and the Conservatives in their entirety. We noted the comment of Marden Parish Council

in favour of a two-member Linton & Coxheath ward but were of the opinion that, the majority view was that Coxheath should be combined in a ward with Hunton parish.

80 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council there would be improved electoral equality with the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Barming, Coxheath & Hunton, Loose, Marden and Yalding & Farleigh wards being 4 per cent fewer, 10 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer, 1 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more than the borough average respectively (6 per cent fewer, 10 per cent fewer, 8 per cent fewer, 6 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer respectively by 2005).

81 At Stage Three the Borough Council stated that it did not wish to comment on the Commission's draft recommendations but left it to individual political groups to make their own submissions. We received opposition to our draft recommendations in this area from the Maidstone & Weald Liberal Democrats and the Maidstone Rural West Liberal Democrats, East Farleigh Parish Council, Marden Parish Council, a Councillor Williams and a local resident. The Liberal Democrats, East Farleigh Parish Council and Councillor Williams all objected to our proposed three two-member wards of Yalding & Farleigh (comprising the parishes of Yalding, Nettlestead, East Farleigh and West Farleigh), Coxheath & Hunton (comprising the parish of Coxheath and Hunton) and Marden (comprising the parishes of Marden, Linton and Collier Street). They argued that the proposed warding arrangements did not reflect community identity in this part of the borough and that East Farleigh and West Farleigh parishes have nothing in common with Yalding parish. East Farleigh Parish Council stated that "we are totally against such a move because the two parishes (East Farleigh and Yalding) are so completely different and [this] would produce a large unwieldy ward". Councillor Williams also stated that "the parishes of Yalding and Nettlestead have little in common with East and West Farleigh". The Liberals Democrats and Councillor Williams suggested alternative warding arrangements involving two three-member wards, the first comprising the parishes of Coxheath, East Farleigh, West Farleigh, Linton and Hunton and the second comprising the parishes of Marden, Collier Street, Yalding and Nettlestead. Both the Liberals and Councillor Williams argued that their proposed alternative warding arrangement reflected established community ties in the area the fact that Coxheath parish serves as focal point for the surrounding parishes. The Liberal Democrats also stated that "as well as providing lesser deviations, the parochial parishes for Coxheath, Hunton, Linton and East Farleigh and West Farleigh are already managed as a unit". Marden Parish Council reiterated their Stage One objection to our proposed warding arrangements, stating that they wished to be warded with Collier Street and Hunton parishes rather than Collier Street and Linton parishes. A local resident suggested a minor amendment to the boundary between the proposed Yalding & Farleigh and Marden wards.

82 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period and have been convinced that the alternative warding arrangements for the rural south-west of the borough proposed by the Liberal Democrats and Councillor Williams would combine parishes with similar community interests and identities in the same borough wards, while providing good levels of electoral equality in the two proposed wards. Therefore, we are content to adopt their alternative scheme as part of our final recommendations. We propose retaining the existing ward name of Coxheath & Hunton for the ward (comprising the parishes of Coxheath, Hunton, Linton and East and West Farleigh) and naming the ward containing the parishes of Marden, Collier

Street, Yalding and Nettlestead, Marden ward in order to reflect the balance of population in the borough ward. We have noted Marden Parish Council's proposal that Coxheath parish should be combined with Linton parish rather than Hunton parish. However, we have not been convinced that there would be local support for such a proposal and therefore propose adopting the Liberal Democrats proposed warding arrangements for Marden ward as final. Under our final recommendations for a 55 member council, the number of electors per councillor in Barming ward (comprising the parishes of Barming and Teston), Coxheath & Hunton ward (comprising the parishes of Coxheath, East Farleigh, West Farleigh, Linton and Hunton), Loose ward (comprising the parish of Loose) and Marden ward (comprising the parishes of Marden, Collier Street, Yalding and Nettlestead) would be 4 per cent fewer, 7 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more than the borough average respectively (6 per cent fewer, 8 per cent fewer, 8 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer in 2005). Details of our final recommendations are set out in figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map in the back of this report

Boughton Monchelsea, Headcorn, Langley, Leeds, Sutton Valence and Staplehurst wards

83 These six wards are situated in the centre and south of the borough and are each represented by a single councillor, except for Headcorn and Staplehurst wards which are both currently represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Boughton Monchelsea ward (comprising the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton), Headcorn ward (comprising the parishes of Headcorn, Boughton Malherbe and Ulcombe), Langley ward (comprising the parishes of Langley, Otham and Downswood), Leeds ward (comprising the parishes of Leeds and Broomfield & Kingswood), Staplehurst ward (comprising the parish of Staplehurst) and Sutton Valence ward (comprising the parishes of Sutton Valence and East Sutton) is 7 per cent more, 6 per cent fewer, 58 per cent more, 5 per cent fewer, 29 per cent fewer and 14 per cent more than the borough average respectively (40 per cent more, 10 per cent fewer, 58 per cent more, 9 per cent fewer, 31 per cent fewer and 13 per cent fewer than the borough average respectively by 2005).

84 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed no change to the existing Leeds and Staplehurst wards. Although it acknowledged that this would leave Staplehurst ward with a variance of 13 per cent above the borough average by 2005, it supported retaining its existing warding arrangements stating that "it is not possible to vary the boundaries". The Council argued that its geographical location at the edge of the borough meant that alternative warding arrangements would adversely affect electoral equality and community identity in surrounding wards.

85 In order to account for the housing developments on Pested Bars Road, Langley Park Farm West and Furfield Quarry in Boughton Monchelsea parish, the Borough Council proposed that this area should be transferred to Park Wood ward. The Council stated that "it would be more appropriate that these were included as part of the urban area rather than the existing rural area". In order to address the current level of under-representation in Langley ward, the Council proposed combining Sutton Valence parish of Headcorn ward with Langley parish of Langley ward to form a new single-member Langley & Sutton Valence ward. As a consequence of its proposals in this area, the Council proposed that the parishes of Boughton Malherbe, East Sutton,

Headcorn and Ulcombe comprise the new two-member Headcorn ward and that the parishes of Downswood and Otham form a new single-member ward. The Conservatives proposed the same warding arrangements as the Borough Council in this area.

86 Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council proposed that the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton remain as a single-member ward and contended that the “possibility” of a merger with Sutton Valence parish is “unnecessary and would create a need for two Council members”. It suggested that the Commission consider a new urban ward comprising the Park Wood and Langley wards “in view of the large housing developments that are in the pipeline”. Ulcombe Parish Council stated its support for the proposal that the parish remain in Headcorn ward.

87 Having carefully considered all the representations received regarding this part of the rural area, we noted that there was strong local support for the Borough Council’s and Conservatives’ scheme. We noted that the scheme provided a good balance between achieving electoral equality, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and providing effective and convenient local government and therefore adopted it in its entirety as part of our draft recommendations. We concluded that a combined urban Park Wood and Langley ward would contain a greater number of electors than could be represented by three councillors and would lead to a consequent deterioration in electoral equality in the area as a whole, as proposed by Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council.

88 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council Boughton Monchelsea ward (comprising the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton), Downswood & Otham ward (comprising the parishes of Downswood and Otham), Headcorn ward (comprising the parishes of Headcorn, Ulcombe and Boughton Malherbe and East Sutton), Langley & Sutton Valence ward (comprising the parishes of Langley and Sutton Valence), Leeds ward (comprising the parishes of Leeds and Broomfield & Kingswood) and Staplehurst ward (comprising the parish of Staplehurst) would have 6 per cent more, 9 per cent more, equal to the average, 9 per cent more, 5 per cent fewer and 14 per cent more electors than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more, 10 per cent more, 5 per cent fewer, 4 per cent more, 9 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more respectively by 2005).

89 At Stage Three the Borough Council stated that it did not wish to comment on the Commission’s draft recommendations proposals but left it to individual political groups to make their own submissions. Chart Sutton Parish Council and Councillor Fitzgerald both proposed that the proposed Boughton Monchelsea ward be renamed Chart Sutton & Boughton Monchelsea ward. They argued that this name change was necessary with the creation of a borough ward consisting of Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton parishes.

90 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three regarding this area. We note Chart Sutton Parish Council’s proposal that Boughton Monchelsea ward be renamed Chart Sutton & Boughton Monchelsea ward to reflect the constituent parishes of the ward. However we consider that, rather than Chart Sutton & Boughton Monchelsea, the ward should be renamed Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward, to reflect the balance of population in the borough ward. Otherwise we are confirming our draft recommendations as final, without

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

Bearsted, Boxley, Detling, Harrietsham & Lenham, Hollingbourne and Thurnham Wards

91 These wards are situated in the centre, north and east of the borough. Boxley ward (comprising the parish of Boxley), Detling ward (comprising the parishes of Bredhurst, Detling and Stockbury), Hollingbourne ward (comprising the parishes of Bicknor, Frinsted, Hollingbourne, Hucking and Wormshill) and Thurnham ward (comprising the parish of Thurnham and part of the Thurnham parish ward of Bearsted Parish) are each represented by a single councillor. Bearsted ward (comprising the parish ward of Bearsted) and Harrietsham & Lenham ward (comprising the parishes of Harrietsham, Lenham, Otterden and Wichling) are represented by three and two councillors respectively. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Bearsted, Boxley, Detling, Harrietsham & Lenham, Hollingbourne and Thurnham wards is 13 per cent fewer, 265 per cent more, 22 per cent fewer, 9 per cent more, 40 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more than the borough average respectively (17 per cent fewer, 248 per cent more, 24 per cent fewer, 7 per cent more, 42 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more by 2005 respectively).

92 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed that Bearsted borough ward should be coterminous with the parish boundary. In view of the fact that the existing Boxley ward is too large to be represented by three councillors, the Council proposed transferring the Woodlands Estate from Boxley ward to East ward. The Council also acknowledged that the parishes of Detling and Thurnham could not form a ward without the inclusion of some of the existing Boxley ward. It therefore proposed transferring an area east of Weaving Street in Boxley parish to a new single-member Detling & Thurnham ward. It argued that this is also the proposed parish boundary amendment under consideration as part of a local Parish Review. In order to reduce the number of electors in its proposed Detling & Thurnham ward, the Council also proposed transferring Bredhurst parish from Detling ward to the new Boxley ward and Stockbury parish from the existing Detling ward to its proposed North Downs ward.

93 The Borough Council proposed a new single-member North Downs ward comprising the parishes of Bicknor, Frinsted, Hollingbourne, Hucking, Otterden, Stockbury, Wichling and Wormshill. Although conceding that this would form a geographically long ward, the Council argued that the parishes on the North Downs have “similar problems” and “therefore do provide a relevant mix”. As a consequence of this proposal, the Council proposed that the parishes of Harrietsham and Lenham comprise a new two-member Harrietsham & Lenham ward because of their “historical association”. The Conservatives recommended the same warding arrangements for this area.

94 Boxley Parish Council argued that the current level of under-representation in Boxley ward could be resolved by transferring one councillor each from High Street and Shepway West wards to this ward. It justified its proposal by stating that no alterations would be required to existing ward boundaries. Bearsted Parish Council supported the Borough Council’s proposal to align its

ward boundary with the parish boundary. County Councillor Lockhart, was perturbed that Boxley Parish Council could lose the management of Vinters Park as a result of the review of Maidstone.

95 In view of the general consensus in support of the Council's and Conservatives' proposals for these wards we adopted them as our draft recommendations without amendment. We considered that the proposals would result in better overall electoral equality and did not consider that they would adversely affect the identities and interests of local communities. We noted Boxley Parish Council's proposals for Boxley ward but considered that the Borough Council's and the Conservatives' proposals would result in better levels of electoral equality. We recognised that the Grove Green area of Boxley parish is an urban overspill with little in common with the remainder of Boxley, Detling or Thurnham parishes. We considered several alternative warding patterns, including the creation of a two-member Grove Green ward and involving combinations of the remainder of Boxley parish with Detling and Thurnham parishes, but were unable to arrive at an arrangement which would not be detrimental to the levels of electoral equality.

96 Under our draft recommendations, Bearsted ward, (comprising the Bearstead parish ward of Bearstead parish and the Thurnham parish ward of Bearstead parish), Boxley ward, (comprising the Boxley North and Boxley South parish wards of Boxley parish and the parishes of Bredhurst), Detling & Thurnham ward (comprising the Boxley South East parish ward of Boxley parish, the parish of Detling and the parish of Thurnham), Harrietsham & Lenham ward (comprising the parishes of Harrietsham and Lenham) and North Downs ward, (comprising the parishes of Hollingbourne, Hucking, Bicknor, Wormshill, Frinsted, Stockbury Wichling and Otterden) would have 10 per cent more, 11 per cent more, 12 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 1 per cent more electors than the borough average respectively (6 per cent more, 5 per cent more, 8 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 3 per cent fewer by 2005).

97 At Stage Three the Borough Council stated that it did not wish to comment on the Commission's draft recommendations proposals but left it to individual political groups to make their own submissions.

98 The Conservatives endorsed the comments made by Councillor Horne to the Borough Council regarding the proposed Thurnham & Detling ward. They supported his assertion that the boundary between the proposed Thurnham & Detling and Boxley wards should run along the middle of Weaving Street and down to the railway line.

99 Boxley Parish Council supported our recommendation for a three-member Boxley ward but objected to our proposals to divide parts of Boxley parish between different borough wards. It argued that the areas that we propose warding identify more with Boxley ward than the wards in which we proposed placing them in. It stated that the residents of "Boxley South East Parish Ward are clearly part of the community of Grove Green." and went on to further state that the "recommendation to allocate the homes in this area to Detling and Thurnham Ward would, in view of this council, create unnecessary confusion amongst the electorate". It also argued that the residents of the proposed Boxley Woodlands Parish ward do not feel an affinity with the proposed East Ward.

100 Detling and Stockbury parish councils objected to our proposed North Downs and Detling & Thurnham wards. They argued that Stockbury parish should be warded with Detling & Thurnham rather than being included in North Downs ward, given that Stockbury has community links with Detling & Thurnham and nothing in common with the rest of the proposed North Downs ward. Stockbury Parish Council stated that “to sever ties with Detling in order to justify electoral figures would cause inestimable damage to this rural community”. Detling Parish Council stated that “it would be a logical move to place Stockbury, Detling and Thurnham Parishes in one ward as they all share common local interests”.

101 Councillor Simpson objected to our proposed North Downs and Detling & Thurnham wards, arguing that Stockbury should be warded with Detling & Thurnham rather than being placed in the North Downs ward.

102 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three regarding this area. We note the objections received to our proposed Detling & Thurnham and North Downs wards and the alternative proposal to incorporate Stockbury parish in Detling & Thurnham ward. While we recognise that there are community links between Detling, Thurnham and Stockbury parishes, warding Stockbury with Detling & Thurnham would result in both the Thurnham & Detling ward and North Downs wards having electoral variances of over 20 per cent above the borough average. We have not therefore been persuaded to adopt this proposal as part of our final recommendations. We also note the objections received regarding the proposed boundary between Boxley and Thurnham & Detling wards. However, using Weaving Street as an alternative boundary would result in Detling & Thurnham ward having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent above the borough average and therefore we have not been persuaded to endorse this proposal. In neither case do we consider that these levels of electoral inequality would be justified in the light of the alternative warding arrangements that we had put forward as part of our draft recommendations. We also note the objections received regarding the proposed Boxley ward. We considered alternative warding arrangements at Stage One and we remain of the view that our draft recommendations offer the best balance between electoral equality and statutory criteria in this area. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations without amendment. Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map in the back of this report

Electoral Cycle

103 We received two representations regarding the Borough Council’s electoral cycle. The Borough Council itself stated that “it did not consider the matter of the electoral cycle in detail but has generally been satisfied with the current system of election by thirds”. A resident supported frequent elections, contending that “an election each year keeps the council on its toes”.

104 In the light of these representations we proposed no change to the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds in our draft recommendations report.

105 At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we confirm our draft recommendation for retaining the existing electoral cycle of elections by thirds as final.

Conclusions

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

- there should be 26 wards rather than 27 as proposed in our draft recommendations;
- Shepway East and Shepway West wards should be renamed Shepway South and North respectively;
- the boundary between our proposed Shepway North and South wards should be amended;
- the creation of a three-member Coxheath & Hunton, and a three-member Marden ward;
- and the boundaries of the proposed Coxheath & Hunton, Marden and Yalding & Farleigh should be amended.

107 We conclude that, in Maidstone:

- the present council size of 55 should be retained;
- there should be 26 wards, two fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Borough Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

108 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2000 and 2005 electorate figures.

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	55	55	55	55
Number of wards	28	26	28	26
Average number of electors per councillor	1,975	1,975	2,092	2,092
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	16	5	17	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	11	2	13	0

109 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 16 to five with two wards varying initially by more than 20 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2005, with only one ward, Staplehurst, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, at 13 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation
 Maidstone Borough Council should comprise 55 councillors serving 26 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in the large map inside the back cover. The Borough Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish Council Electoral Arrangements

110 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable 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, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Boughton Monchelsea and Boxley parishes to reflect the proposed borough wards.

111 The parish of Boughton Monchelsea is currently served by nine parish councillors representing one ward. At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed an increase in the number of parish councillors from nine to 15 to reflect the new housing developments in the north of the parish. Consequently, it proposed creating two new parish wards. It proposed a new Boughton Monchelsea North parish ward to be included in the Park Wood borough ward, with this ward represented by four parish councillors. It proposed that the remainder of Boughton Monchelsea parish be named Boughton Monchelsea South parish ward and be represented by 11 parish councillors. We were content to endorse the creation of these parish wards and the increase and allocation of parish councillors as part of our draft recommendations.

112 We received no comments regarding this proposal at Stage Three. In the light of the confirmation of our proposed borough wards in the area, we are confirming our draft recommendations for warding Boughton Monchelsea parish as final.

Final Recommendation
Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, an increase of six, representing two wards: Boughton Monchelsea North parish ward (returning four councillors) and Boughton Monchelsea South parish ward (returning 11 parish councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

113 The parish of Boxley is currently served by 15 councillors serving two wards: Boxley North (returning six councillors) and Boxley South (returning nine councillors). The Borough Council proposed creating two new parish wards, a total of four parish wards, to reflect the new ward changes. It proposed a new parish ward of Boxley Woodlands to be included in the proposed East borough ward, recommending that this ward be served by a single councillor. It also proposed creating a Boxley South East parish ward to be included in the proposed Detling & Thurnham borough ward, recommending that this ward be served by a single councillor. Consequently, it recommended that Boxley North parish ward continue to be served by six councillors and that Boxley South parish ward be served by seven councillors and that they form part of the proposed Boxley borough ward. We were content that this was a reasonable distribution of councillors, and we therefore adopted the Borough Council’s proposals as part of our draft recommendations.

114 At Stage Three we received opposition to our proposals to ward Boxley parish from Boxley Parish Council. It argued that the parish should not be warded and that all the parish should remain within one borough ward. It stated that the electors of two areas that we had proposed warding as part of our draft recommendations feel an affinity with Boxley parish. However, in the light of the resulting levels of electoral inequality we are unable to retain the parish within a single borough ward. We are confirming our proposed borough wards in the area and, consequently confirm our draft recommendations for warding Boxley parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Boxley Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Boxley North, (returning six councillors) Boxley South (returning seven councillors) Boxley South East (returning a single councillor) and Boxley Woodlands (returning a single councillor). The boundary between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

115 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the borough, and we are confirming this as final.

Final Recommendation

Parish council elections should continue to take place every four years and should be held at the same time as elections for the borough ward of which they are part.

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Maidstone

6 NEXT STEPS

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

117 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 20 June 2001.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Maidstone Borough Council

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of only five wards, where our draft proposals are set out below. The only other change from draft to final recommendations, which is not included in Figures A1 and A2, is that we propose that Boughton Monchelsea ward be renamed Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward.

Figure A1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Coxheath & Hunton	Coxheath ward (the parish of Coxheath); Marden ward (part – the parish of Hunton)
Marden	Marden ward (part – the parishes of Marden and Linton); Yalding ward (part – the parish of Collier Street)
Shepway East*	Shepway East ward (part); Park Wood ward (part)
Shepway West*	Shepway West ward; Shepway East ward (part); Park Wood ward (part)
Yalding & Farleigh	Yalding ward (part – the parishes of Yalding and Nettleshead); Farleigh ward (the parishes of East and West Farleigh)

*Notes: 1 Maidstone is largely unparished and comprises 11 wards two of which are indicated by an * above.*

Figure B2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: 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 %
Coxheath & Hunton	2	3,566	1,783	-10	3,785	1,893	-10
Marden	2	3,896	1,948	-1	3,931	1,966	-6
Shepway East	2	4,433	2,217	12	4,467	2,234	7
Shepway West	3	6,295	2,098	6	6,333	2,111	1
Yalding & Farleigh	2	4,509	2,030	3	4,113	2,057	-2

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Non-Departmental Public Bodies, such as the Local Government Commission, are encouraged to follow the Code.

The Code of Practice applies to consultation documents published after 1 January 2001, which should reproduce the criteria, give explanations of any departures, and confirm that the criteria have otherwise been followed.

Table C1: Commission compliance with Code criteria

Criteria	Compliance/departure
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage	The Commission complies with this requirement
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose	The Commission complies with this requirement
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain	The Commission complies with this requirement
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals	The Commission complies with this requirement
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation	The Commission consults on draft recommendations for a minimum of eight weeks, but may extend the period if consultations take place over holiday periods
Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken	The Commission complies with this requirement
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated	The Commission complies with this requirement

