

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Gravesham 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 councils in the district.

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

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Gravesham 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 Gravesham:

- **in 10 of the 19 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and four 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 10 wards and by more than 20 per cent in four wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 133–134) are that:

- **Gravesham Borough Council should have 44 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 17 wards, instead of 19 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of two, and one ward should retain its existing boundaries;**
- **elections of the whole council 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 16 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 wards expected to vary by no 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:

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parish of Meopham;**

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	Central	3	Central ward; Riverside ward (part); Whitehill ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
2	Chalk	1	Chalk ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
3	Coldharbour	2	Coldharbour ward (part); Northfleet East ward (part); Woodlands ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
4	Higham	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Higham ward – the parish of Higham)	Map 2
5	Istead & Meopham North	3	Istead ward; Meopham North ward (part – the proposed parish ward of Nurstead & Hook Green)	Maps 2 and A2
6	Meopham South & Vigo	3	Meopham North ward (part – the proposed parish ward Camer & Meopham Green); Meopham South ward (the proposed Culverstone & Harvel parish ward of Meopham parish and the parish of Vigo)	Maps 2, A2 and A3
7	Northfleet North	3	Northfleet East ward (part); Northfleet West ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
8	Northfleet South	3	Coldharbour ward (part); Northfleet East ward (part); Northfleet West ward (part); Pelham ward (part); Woodlands ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
9	Painters Ash	3	Coldharbour ward (part); Painters Ash ward	Map 2 and large map
10	Pelham	3	Northfleet East ward (part); Pelham ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
11	Riverside	3	Chalk ward (part); Riverside ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
12	Riverview	2	Riverview ward (part); Westcourt ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
13	Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown	2	Cobham & Luddesdown ward (the parishes of Cobham and Luddesdown); Shorne ward (the parish of Shorne)	Map 2 and large map
14	Singlewell	2	Riverview ward (part); Singlewell ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
15	Westcourt	3	Riverview ward (part); Westcourt ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
16	Whitehill	3	Singlewell ward (part); Whitehill ward (part)	Map 2 and large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
17	Woodlands	3	Coldharbour ward (part); Woodlands ward (part)	Map 2 and large map

Notes: 1 Gravesend, Northfleet and Istead in the northern and western parts of the borough are unparished.

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

3 We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Gravesham

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 Central	3	4,552	1,517	-5	4,807	1,602	-1
2 Chalk	1	1,786	1,786	12	1,649	1,649	2
3 Coldharbour	2	3,455	1,728	8	3,302	1,651	2
4 Higham	2	3,212	1,606	1	3,233	1,617	0
5 Istead & Meopham North	3	4,960	1,653	3	4,882	1,627	0
6 Meopham South & Vigo	3	4,833	1,611	1	4,982	1,661	3
7 Northfleet North	3	4,381	1,460	-9	4,856	1,619	0
8 Northfleet South	3	4,647	1,549	-3	5,003	1,668	3
9 Painters Ash	3	4,645	1,548	-3	4,612	1,537	-5
10 Pelham	3	4,639	1,546	-3	4,979	1,660	2
11 Riverside	3	4,314	1,438	-10	4,996	1,665	3
12 Riverview	2	3,414	1,707	7	3,241	1,621	0
13 Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown	2	3,247	1,624	2	3,250	1,625	0
14 Singlewell	2	3,474	1,737	9	3,183	1,592	-2
15 Westcourt	3	5,000	1,667	4	4,696	1,565	-3
16 Whitehill	3	5,149	1,716	7	4,888	1,629	1
17 Woodlands	3	4,604	1,535	-4	4,706	1,569	-3
Totals	44	70,312	-	-	71,256	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,598	-	-	1,620	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Gravesham 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 draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Gravesham 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 Gravesham. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in March 1977 (Report No. 221). 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 C).

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

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equality of representation across the district as a whole. 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 Gravesham Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Kent County Council, Kent Police Authority, the local authority associations, Kent Association of Parish Councils, parish councils in the borough, the Member 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.

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 Gravesham is situated in north-west Kent on the south bank of the River Thames and is bounded by the districts of Dartford, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling to the west, south-west and south respectively, and by Medway unitary authority to the east. Gravesham is quite diverse in character, extending from the industrial and commercial areas in the more urban areas of Northfleet and Gravesend in the north of the borough, through to the quiet countryside of the more rural area in the south, including a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

17 The borough contains six parishes, although the principal residential settlements of Gravesend and Northfleet are unparished and comprise around 80 per cent of the borough's electorate. The remainder is dispersed amongst a number of smaller, more rural settlements in the southern and eastern parts of the borough, including Meopham, Cobham, Istead, Shorne and Higham. Gravesham's transport links include the main London to Dover trunk road (the A2), the North Kent railway and the passenger ferry to Tilbury in Essex. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link is currently being built through the borough, parallel to the A2, with a new international and domestic passenger station proposed for Ebbsfleet on the western edge of the borough.

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 70,312 (February 2000). The Council presently has 44 members who are elected from 19 wards, 13 of which are relatively urban in Gravesend and Northfleet and the remainder of which are predominantly rural. Nine of the wards are each represented by three councillors, seven are each represented by two councillors and three are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

20 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Gravesham borough, with around 2 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increase has been in Painters Ash ward.

21 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,598 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,620 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 10 of the 19 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average and in four wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Shorne ward where the councillor represents 28 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Gravesham

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 Central	2	3,539	1,770	11	3,838	1,919	18
2 Chalk	1	2,035	2,035	27	2,180	2,180	35
3 Cobham & Luddesdown	1	1,209	1,209	-24	1,231	1,231	-24
4 Coldharbour	2	3,066	1,533	-4	2,884	1,442	-11
5 Higham	2	3,212	1,606	1	3,233	1,617	0
6 Istead	2	2,925	1,463	-8	2,856	1,428	-12
7 Meopham North	2	3,539	1,770	11	3,528	1,764	9
8 Meopham South	2	3,329	1,665	4	3,480	1,740	7
9 Northfleet East	3	4,538	1,513	-5	5,130	1,710	6
10 Northfleet West	3	4,499	1,500	-6	4,643	1,548	-4
11 Painters Ash	2	4,045	2,023	27	4,048	2,024	25
12 Pelham	3	4,798	1,599	0	5,192	1,731	7
13 Riverside	3	4,065	1,355	-15	4,465	1,488	-8
14 Riverview	3	4,829	1,610	1	4,585	1,528	-6
15 Shorne	1	2,038	2,038	28	2,019	2,019	25
16 Singlewell	3	4,250	1,417	-11	3,867	1,289	-20
17 Westcourt	3	4,146	1,382	-14	3,884	1,295	-20
18 Whitehill	3	4,825	1,608	1	4,641	1,547	-4
19 Woodlands	3	5,425	1,808	13	5,561	1,854	14
Totals	44	70,312	-	-	71,265	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,598	-	-	1,620	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Gravesham 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 Cobham & Luddesdown ward are relatively over-represented by 24 per cent, while electors in Shorne ward are relatively under-represented by 28 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 Gravesham Borough Council and its constituent parish 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 19 representations during Stage One, including four borough-wide schemes submitted by the Officers of Gravesham Borough Council, the Conservative Group on the Council, Gravesham Constituency Labour Party and the Gravesham Liberal Democrats, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the Borough Council and the Commission.

Gravesham Borough Council Officers

24 The Council Officers proposed a council of 44 members, the same as at present, serving 18 wards compared to the existing 19. They proposed retaining a mix of single-, two- and three-member wards across the borough, allocating 34 councillors overall for the urban area (comprising Gravesend and Northfleet) and 10 councillors for the remaining more rural area, the same as under the current arrangements. The Council Officers put forward changes to all but one of the existing wards and proposed six new ward names.

25 The Council Officers' submission stated that the main principles adopted in the formulation of their scheme were that current wards and polling districts should be used as the building blocks of the proposals "where practicable", that "significant features such as trunk roads [and] railway lines" should be used as ward boundaries where possible and that "dissimilar communities" should not be grouped together. They also proposed retaining the present system of whole council elections every four years, arguing that they "are both efficient and effective".

26 Overall their scheme would improve the present level of electoral equality. Although two wards would initially vary by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, no ward would vary by more than 5 per cent by 2005. The Council Officers' submission also included an appendix containing comments from councillors. Their proposal is summarised at Appendix B.

The Conservative Group on the Council

27 The Conservative Group on the Council (the Conservative Group) also proposed a council of 44 members, representing a mix of single-, two- and three-member wards. It also proposed that the urban area (Gravesend and Northfleet) should be represented by 34 councillors and that the rural area be represented by 10 councillors overall. It contended that the three existing two-member wards in the Istead/Meopham area should be retained, but also submitted proposals for three modified two-member wards (which would secure better electoral equality) as an alternative. The Conservative Group proposed seven new ward names.

28 Under the Conservative Group's preferred scheme, four wards would initially vary by more than 10 per cent from the borough average. By 2005, only one ward would vary by more than 10 per cent, with the worst level of electoral imbalance being in Istead ward which would vary by 12 per cent.

Gravesham Constituency Labour Party

29 Gravesham Constituency Labour Party (the Labour Party) proposed retaining the current council size of 44 members, putting forward a scheme based on a mix of single-, two- and three-member wards. It proposed that the urban area (Gravesend and Northfleet) should be represented by 34 councillors and that the rural area be represented by 10 councillors overall. It proposed changes to all but one of the existing wards and put forward three new ward names. Under the Labour Party's scheme, the worst electoral imbalance by 2005 would be in its proposed Chalk ward, which would vary by 10 per cent.

Gravesham Liberal Democrats

30 Gravesham Liberal Democrats (the Liberal Democrats) also proposed retaining a 44-member council size, basing their scheme on two- and three-member wards. They only submitted detailed modifications to 10 of the existing wards, proposing to retain nine wards unchanged. Under their scheme six wards would vary initially by more than 10 per cent, with one ward, Singlewell, varying by 22 per cent. By 2005, three wards would vary by more than 10 per cent, with the worst electoral variance being in their proposed Westcourt ward, which would vary by 20 per cent.

Parish Councils

31 We received representations from the Gravesham Area Committee of the Kent Association of Parish Councils and four parish councils. The Gravesham Area Committee of the Kent Association of Parish Councils opposed any reduction in the representation of the rural area and opposed any grouping of rural areas with urban areas. It was of the view that any reduction in the number of borough councillors, and hence an increase in the councillor:elector ratio, would add to the workload of councillors and result in a weakening of representation, particularly in rural areas.

32 Luddesdown Parish Council opposed any reduction in the number of councillors representing the rural area. It supported the Council Officers' proposal to combine the current Cobham & Luddesdown and Shorne wards into a new two-member ward, contending that the parishes concerned "have similar interests". However, Cobham Parish Council stated that it would prefer to retain the current arrangements unchanged, as it believed that they "operate very effectively".

33 Meopham Parish Council opposed the proposal to include the northern part of the parish in a ward with Istead, arguing that the two current Meopham wards should not be eroded to offset the over-representation in Istead ward. It proposed that Meopham parish should form a three-member ward, that Vigo parish should form a single-member ward and that Istead could be linked with part of Northfleet to the north of the A2. It also proposed that the three parish wards within Meopham should be renamed Nurstead & Hook Green, Camer & Meopham Green and

Culverstone & Harvel to “reflect the character of the parish”. Vigo Parish Council proposed that the existing arrangements in its area be retained. It noted that although the electorate of Vigo parish was large enough to be represented by a single councillor, it would prefer to be part of a larger two- or three-member ward. It also opposed the inclusion of the northern part of Meopham parish in a ward with Istead.

Other Representations

34 We received a further ten representations from Kent County Council, a county councillor, a district councillor, a residents’ association, the deputy-chairperson of the residents’ association and five local residents. Kent County Council contended that the proposals for revised wards in the borough would have a consequential effect on the review of County Council electoral divisions in the future. County Councillor Gibson was of the view that the existing Cobham & Luddesdown ward could not be “sensibly” enlarged by being joined with neighbouring villages “to make up the numbers”, arguing that the current ward “consists of the largest geographical area of any ward in the Borough”. He also commented that any proposal to include the western part of Shorne parish in a ward with part of Riverview Park would be “met with substantial opposition”.

35 District Councillor Christie submitted comments relating to the Painters Ash and Coldharbour wards and the Northfleet area in general, opposing any revised wards which would merge part of Northfleet with Gravesend.

36 Chalk Residents’ Association, the Deputy Chairperson of Chalk Residents’ Association and three local residents all opposed the proposal to include the Hoplands Estate within a revised Riverside ward, arguing that it has a greater affinity with Chalk ward. The Residents’ Association also submitted 76 pro forma letters from residents of the Hoplands Estate opposing such a proposal.

37 A former Member of Parliament for Gravesham (Mr Jacques Arnold) also opposed the inclusion of the Hoplands Estate in a revised Riverside ward, proposing that the existing Chalk ward could be enlarged to become a two-member ward by including areas to the south of Rochester Road and around Thong Lane. He also noted that in the south of the borough, the area including Istead Rise and the parishes of Meopham and Vigo, “all of which are perceived to be rural”, would be entitled to six borough councillors overall. However, he contended that residents of Meopham would object to the ward being divided and part being included with Istead Rise. He also argued that the Council Officers’ proposed Whitehill and Singlewell wards would divide the Kings Farm Estate.

38 A local resident also opposed the proposal to join Istead ward with part of Meopham North ward, arguing that Meopham is parished and that local residents pay a parish precept for local amenities, whereas Istead Rise is unparished and has “an urban level of service”. She also argued that Shorne ward is currently divided from Cobham & Luddesdown ward by the A2 trunk road and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (currently under construction).

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

39 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Gravesham 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”.

40 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.

41 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.

42 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

43 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an overall increase in the electorate of around 1 per cent from 70,312 to 71,265 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Northfleet East ward, although a significant amount is also expected in the wards of Riverside, Central and Pelham in the northern part of the urban area of the borough. However, these increases in electorate, mainly as a consequence of new housing development, will be largely offset by static or declining electorate elsewhere in the borough, most notably in the wards of Singlewell and Westcourt in the southern and western parts of the urban area. 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.

44 In its Stage One submission the Labour Party queried why there was a forecast reduction in the number of electors in some wards of the borough. However, we accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the Borough Council’s figures

and its methodology for preparing its electorate projections, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

45 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.

46 Gravesham Borough Council presently has 44 members. The Council Officers' submission stated that in the formulation of their proposals one of the main principles was to retain the current council size. They therefore proposed a council of 44 members, based on a mix of single-, two- and three-member wards, the same as at present. The Conservative Group, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats all submitted proposed electoral schemes based on a council size of 44 members.

47 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 44 members.

Electoral Arrangements

48 We have carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the borough-wide schemes from the Council Officers, the Conservative Group, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats. We have noted that there is consensus between all four schemes regarding the retention of a 44 member council, as outlined earlier, and that there is broad agreement regarding the retention of a mixed pattern of single-, two- and three-member wards across the borough.

49 We have noted the general agreement between the Council Officers, the Conservative Group and the Labour Party that the more rural area of the borough should not be combined in wards with the more urban area, and the specific agreement that the western part of Shorne parish (known locally as Shorne West) should not be included in the Riverview or Singlewell wards. However, we have also considered the alternative proposal, as put forward by the Liberal Democrats, that the majority of Shorne West should be included within Riverview ward and that Marling Way and Davy's Place should be included in Singlewell ward (with the remainder of Shorne parish being combined with Chalk ward).

50 We have noted that if the Shorne West area were included in revised Riverview and Singlewell wards, the urban area (ie the unparished area to the north of the A2 trunk road and to the west of Shorne parish) would be entitled to 34.3 councillors overall initially (34.4 councillors by 2005) and the rural area would be entitled 9.7 councillors (9.6 councillors by 2005). However, if the current Shorne ward's western boundary were retained, a much better balance of representation between the urban and rural areas of the borough would be secured. Under a 44 member council the urban area would be entitled to 33.8 councillors initially (33.9 councillors by 2005) and the rural area would be entitled 10.2 councillors initially (10.1 councillors by 2005).

Therefore in view of the improvement to the balance of representation between the urban and rural areas of the borough, and in order to facilitate a good electoral scheme across the borough as a whole, we propose endorsing the proposal put forward by the Council Officers, the Conservative Group and the Labour Party that Shorne parish should not be divided and that Shorne West should not be included in wards in the urban area.

51 We have considered the overall level of electoral equality secured under all the borough-wide schemes submitted. While we acknowledge the good level of electoral equality that would be secured under the Conservative Group's and the Labour Party's schemes, we have noted that the best overall level of electoral equality would be secured under the Council Officers' scheme. Furthermore, we have noted that the Council Officers' scheme has similarities with, and incorporates different aspects of, all three of the other borough-wide schemes that have been submitted.

52 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council Officers' proposals we have concluded that we should generally base our recommendations on their scheme. We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. However, in order to secure slightly more identifiable boundaries (therefore providing for more effective and convenient local government) and a better reflection of community identities, while securing electoral equality, we have decided to move away from the Council Officers' proposals in five areas. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Higham, Shorne and Cobham & Luddesdown wards;
- (b) Istead, Meopham North and Meopham South wards;
- (c) Chalk, Riverside and Central wards;
- (d) Westcourt, Riverview, Singlewell and Whitehill wards;
- (e) Pelham and Woodlands wards;
- (f) Northfleet East, Northfleet West, Painters Ash and Coldharbour wards.

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

Higham, Shorne and Cobham & Luddesdown wards

54 These three wards cover the north-eastern and eastern parts of the rural area in the east of the borough. The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Higham ward (comprising the parish of Higham) is 1 per cent above the borough average (equal to the average by 2005). The single-member Shorne ward (comprising the parish of Shorne) is currently the most under-represented ward in the borough with an electoral variance of 28 per cent (25 per cent by 2005). The single-member Cobham & Luddesdown ward (comprising the parishes of the same name) is currently the most over-represented ward in the borough with an electoral variance of 24 per cent both currently and in 2005.

55 At Stage One the Council Officers proposed retaining the existing two-member Higham ward unchanged, given the good level of electoral equality that would be secured under a council of

44 members, both initially and in 2005. However, in order to address the under-representation in Shorne ward and the over-representation in Cobham & Luddesdown ward, the Council Officers proposed combining the two wards to create a new two-member Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown ward. It argued that the “two existing wards have similar characteristics and communities being rural in nature with small villages”. The number of electors per councillor in the Council Officers’ proposed Higham and Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown wards would be 1 per cent above and 2 per cent above the borough average initially (both equal to the average by 2005).

56 The Labour Party supported the retention of the existing two-member Higham ward, arguing that Higham “is an easily identified community which is contained within the village and parish of Higham”. It also acknowledged the electoral imbalances that currently exist in the Shorne and Cobham & Luddesdown wards, also proposing that the two wards be merged to create a new two-member ward. The Labour Party argued that its proposal was based on the “clear joint rural nature of [the two wards]”. It stated that it had considered including the area referred to locally as Shorne West (ie the western part of Shorne parish) in a ward with Riverview Park but had concluded that the consequent electoral imbalance between the parished/rural area and the urban area would be “unacceptable”. Furthermore, it contended that the residents of Shorne West are “very attached to being in Shorne ward”.

57 The Conservative Group also proposed retaining the two-member Higham ward and supported the Council Officers’ proposal for the creation a new two-member Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown ward.

58 The Liberal Democrats supported the retention of the current two-member Higham ward, but proposed that Shorne West should be split and transferred into Riverview and Singlewell ward, as “these houses would be better suited geographically”, with the remainder of Shorne ward being joined with Chalk ward to create a new two-member ward. They further proposed that Cobham & Luddesdown ward should be joined with Meopham North ward to create a new three-member ward in order to “give a balance of representation whilst maintaining the local community identities”. The number of electors per councillor in the Liberal Democrats’ proposed Riverview, Chalk & Shorne and Cobham, Luddesdown & Meopham North wards would be 13 per cent above, 3 per cent above and 1 per cent below the borough average respectively (7 per cent above, 5 per cent above and 2 per cent below by 2005).

59 The Kent Association of Parish Councils (Gravesham Area Committee) opposed any grouping of rural and urban areas, contending that each have different physical characteristics and amenities. Luddesdown Parish Council supported the Council Officers’ proposal to combine the current Cobham & Luddesdown and Shorne wards into a new two-member ward, contending that the parishes concerned “have similar interests”. However, Cobham Parish Council stated that it would prefer to retain the current arrangements unchanged as it believed that they “operate very effectively”. Vigo Parish Council stated that it had noted the proposal to group Luddesdown parish with Cobham parish, but suggested that “on the principle of similar areas being grouped together”, Luddesdown parish could be linked with the southern part of Meopham parish (Harvel and Culverstone) and Vigo parish.

60 County Councillor Gibson commented that any proposal to include the western part of Shorne parish in a ward with part of Riverview Park would be “met with substantial opposition”. He also noted that the existing Cobham & Luddesdown ward is over-represented but was of the view that it could not be sensibly joined with neighbouring villages “to make up the numbers”, arguing that the current ward “consists of the largest geographical area of any ward in the Borough”. A local resident contended that Shorne ward is currently divided from Cobham & Luddesdown ward by the A2 trunk road and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (currently under construction), and that a ward “with such a significant division through it seems difficult to justify”.

61 We have carefully considered all the representations received during Stage One. In view of the local support for the retention of the current two-member Higham ward, and given the excellent electoral equality and identifiable boundaries that would be secured, we propose retaining unchanged, the existing two-member Higham ward.

62 We have considered the Council Officers’ proposed Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown ward and noted the support it has received from the Labour Party, the Conservative Group and Luddesdown Parish Council. We have also considered the alternative proposals put forward by the Liberal Democrats. However, as discussed earlier, we have not been persuaded that the inclusion of Shorne West within the Riverview/Singlewell wards, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats, would facilitate a good electoral scheme across the borough as a whole. We are of the view that we cannot consider any area in isolation and must have a view to the electoral arrangements for the whole borough. We therefore agree that the retention of Shorne West within a ward with the remainder of the parish would secure the best balance of representation between the urban and rural areas of the borough and facilitate a good electoral scheme across the borough as a whole.

63 We have also noted the comments made regarding the A2 trunk road dividing the proposed Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown ward and the fact that the proposed ward would cover a fairly large geographical area. However, we have noted that access between the parishes of Shorne and Cobham can be gained via Thong Lane and Brewers Road, both of which cross the A2, and we are of the view that given the very good electoral equality, identifiable boundaries and better reflection of community identities that would be secured, and in view of the support from the majority of local interested parties, we should adopt the Council Officers’ proposed Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown ward as part of our draft recommendations, as shown on Map 2. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Higham and Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown wards would be 1 per cent above and 2 per cent above the borough average initially (both equal to the average by 2005). We would welcome all views on our draft proposals for this area during Stage Three.

Istead, Meopham North and Meopham South wards

64 These three wards cover the western part of the rural area in the south-western part of the borough. The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Meopham South ward (comprising the Priesthood parish ward of Meopham parish and the parish of Vigo) is currently 4 per cent above the borough average (7 per cent above by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Meopham North ward (comprising the parish wards of Church and

Nurstead from Meopham parish) is 11 per cent above the borough average (9 per cent above by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Istead ward (which covers the area to the north of Meopham parish, to the east of Cobham parish and to the south of the A2 trunk road) is 8 per cent below the borough average (12 per cent below by 2005).

65 At Stage One, in order to address the notable over-representation that currently exists in Istead ward, which is forecast to worsen by 2005, the Council Officers proposed a new three-member Istead & Meopham North ward. This ward would comprise the existing Istead ward and the northern part of Meopham North ward. The proposed ward's southern boundary would follow the centre of Camer Road, Green Lane, Wrotham Road and Huntingfield Road, then follow the southern boundaries of the properties on the south-western corner of Strand Close, the northern and western boundaries of properties on the western side of Evenden Road before following the centre of Longfield Road to the borough boundary.

66 In order to address the under-representation in the existing Meopham North and Meopham South wards, the Council Officers proposed combining the remainder of Meopham North ward with the existing Meopham South ward to form a new three-member Meopham South & Vigo ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council Officers' proposed three-member Istead & Meopham North and Meopham South & Vigo wards would be 3 per cent above and 1 per cent above the borough average initially (equal to the average and 3 per cent above by 2005). As a consequence of its proposed borough warding arrangements, the Council Officers proposed new names for the parish wards in Meopham parish: Nurstead & Hook Green, Camer & Meopham Green and Culverstone & Harvel.

67 The Labour Party argued that Istead Rise is a "recognisable community", but acknowledged that the current Istead ward is over-represented. It was of the view that the A2 trunk road formed a significant barrier between Istead and Northfleet, arguing that "it would not make sense to combine Istead with the rest of Northfleet". It therefore supported the Council Officers' proposals for two three-member wards in this area.

68 The Conservative Group proposed retaining unchanged the existing two-member wards of Istead, Meopham North and Meopham South on the grounds of community identity, arguing that Istead Rise "is a very separate community" sharing few community ties with Meopham and having "no affinity with urban Northfleet". However, it acknowledged that maintaining the status quo in this area would retain a significant level of electoral imbalance, and therefore proposed an alternative scheme for this area which would secure better electoral equality. It proposed that the existing Istead ward should be combined with an area in the north of Meopham parish (as suggested by the Council Officers and the Labour Party), but under its proposals fewer electors from Meopham parish would be transferred into the revised ward, which would be represented by two councillors rather than three. Its proposed two-member Istead & Nurstead ward would comprise the existing Istead ward together with an area around Meopham railway station to the north of New Road from Meopham North ward.

69 As a consequence of its proposed Istead & Nurstead ward, the Conservative Group proposed a new two-member Meopham ward, comprising the remainder of the existing Meopham North ward and an area to the north of South Street and around Wrotham Road from Meopham South ward. It also proposed a new two-member Culverstone, Harvel & Vigo ward, comprising the

remainder of Meopham South ward. Under the Conservative Group's alternative proposals, the number of electors per councillor in its two-member Istead & Nurstead, Meopham and Culverstone, Harvel & Vigo wards would be 4 per cent above, 3 per cent above and equal to the borough average initially (equal to, 1 per cent above and 3 per cent above the borough average by 2005).

70 The Liberal Democrats supported the Conservative Group's original proposal that the two existing two-member wards of Istead and Meopham South remain unchanged. They also suggested combining the existing Meopham North and Cobham & Luddesdown wards to form a new three-member ward, as detailed earlier.

71 The Kent Association of Parish Councils (Gravesham Area Committee) opposed any grouping of rural and urban areas. Meopham Parish Council opposed "the attachment of any part of [its] electorate to Istead Rise". It proposed that the parishes of Meopham and Vigo continue to be represented by four councillors overall, suggesting that Meopham parish form a three-member ward and that Vigo parish form a single-member ward. It argued that the significant over-representation in the existing Istead ward could be addressed by linking Istead Rise with a part of Northfleet. It argued that "the physical barrier of the A2 is less significant than the swathe of Green Belt between Istead Rise and Nurstead [the northern part of Meopham]". It also proposed that the three parish wards in Meopham parish be renamed Nurstead & Hook Green, Camer & Meopham Green and Culverstone & Harvel.

72 Vigo Parish Council also opposed any proposals to join part of Meopham with the unparished Istead Rise. It argued that the current warding pattern in Meopham and Vigo accurately reflected local communities. It noted that Vigo parish was large enough to become a single-member ward in its own right, but argued that it would rather be placed in a two or three-member ward. As detailed earlier, it also stated that Luddesdown parish could be combined with the existing Meopham South ward.

73 Jacques Arnold (a former MP for Gravesham) noted that this area was entitled to six councillors overall, but suggested that the local communities would prefer to retain the status quo. A local resident argued that Istead Rise and parts of Meopham North should not be placed in the same ward because they are "separated by open countryside and are two disparate settlements with little in common".

74 Having carefully considered all the representations received regarding this part of the rural area, we have noted that there is significant local support in favour of retaining the status quo and notable opposition to the proposal to merge Istead Rise with part of Meopham parish. However, we are of the view that the level of electoral imbalance that would result if the current arrangements were retained unchanged would be incompatible with the aim of electoral equality. We are therefore of the view that the current ward boundaries will need to be modified in order to secure improved electoral equality.

75 We have noted that a number of respondents proposed that, if the current arrangements have to change, Istead Rise should be linked to the northern part of Meopham parish rather than be joined with part of Northfleet. Officers from the Commission having visited the area, we agree

that this would be the most appropriate solution, as we are of the view that Istead Rise is more rural in outlook than Northfleet and is easily linked to Meopham parish by the A227 main road.

76 With regard to the specific proposals for this area, we have noted that there is consensus between the Council Officers and the Labour Party that it should be represented by two three-member wards and that a larger part of the northern part of Meopham parish should be included in a borough ward with Istead Rise. However, we have also noted that the Conservative Group put forward proposals for three two-member wards in this area which would secure a similar level of electoral equality. In view of the similar levels of electoral equality that would be secured under each of the proposals we have further considered which proposals, in our opinion, would secure the best balance between achieving good electoral equality, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and providing effective and convenient local government.

77 We have noted that both proposals would result in consequential parish warding of Meopham parish. Having considered the proposed boundaries of each of the proposed wards, and having considered the consequent distribution of parish councillors that would result, we are of the view that the Council Officers' proposals would provide for more effective and convenient local government, in that they would secure slightly more identifiable boundaries than the Conservative Group's, and the parish councillor:elector ratio in the consequent parish wards would be more equally balanced. We are therefore proposing to adopt the Council Officers' proposed three-member Istead & Meopham North and Meopham South & Vigo wards, as shown on Maps A2 and A3, as part of our draft recommendations. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Istead & Meopham North and Meopham South & Vigo wards would be 3 per cent above and 1 per cent above the borough average initially (equal to and 3 per cent above the borough average by 2005). Consequent proposals in respect of the electoral arrangements of Meopham parish are outlined at the end of this chapter.

Chalk, Riverside and Central wards

78 These three wards are situated in the north-eastern part of the urban area of the borough, to the east of Windmill Street and to the north of Old Road East and the A226 Rochester Road. The single-member Chalk ward is currently under-represented by 27 per cent. By 2005, this under-representation is forecast to worsen as a result of housing development, and Chalk ward is expected to be the most under-represented ward in the borough with an electoral variance of 35 per cent. The number of electors per councillor in the three-member Riverside ward and the two-member Central ward is 15 per cent below and 11 per cent above the borough average (8 per cent below and 18 per cent above by 2005).

79 At Stage One, in order to address the significant under-representation that currently exists in the single-member Chalk ward, which is forecast to worsen by 2005, the Council Officers proposed modifying its western boundary. They proposed transferring the north-western part of the ward, an area including the Hoplands Estate and the western part of Westcourt Marshes, into a revised three-member Riverside ward, maintaining Rochester Road as the ward's southern boundary. They also put forward a revised Riverside ward, comprising the majority of the existing ward, less an area to the west of Queen Street in the western part of the ward. The Council Officers also proposed an enlarged Central ward, to be represented by three councillors. The revised ward would comprise the majority of the current ward (less an area in the north-western

corner to the north of the railway line and to the west of Parrock Street), and the north-eastern and north-western parts of the existing Whitehill ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council Officers' revised single-member Chalk, three-member Riverside and three-member Central wards would be 12 per cent above, 11 per cent below and 3 per cent below the borough average initially (2 per cent above, equal to the average and 1 per cent above by 2005).

80 The Labour Party also acknowledged the under-representation that currently exists in Chalk ward and agreed with the Council Officers that its western boundary should be modified to include the Hoplands Estate in a revised Riverside ward. It further proposed transferring properties on the northern side of Rochester Road into a revised Westcourt ward. The Labour Party also put forward a revised three-member Riverside ward, comprising the majority of the existing ward, less the area to the south of Rochester Road, which would be transferred into Westcourt ward, and an area from the northern part of Central ward (to the north-east of Parrock Street). As a consequence of its revised Riverside ward, the Labour Party proposed a revised two-member Central ward, comprising the remainder of the existing ward plus an area to the east of Wrotham Road from the current Pelham ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Labour Party's proposed single-member Chalk, three-member Riverside and two-member Central wards would be 2 per cent above, 6 per cent below and equal to the borough average respectively (10 per cent above, 1 per cent above and 6 per cent above by 2005).

81 In order to address the under-representation in Chalk ward the Conservative Group proposed that the ward should be enlarged and be represented by two councillors rather than the current one. It argued that the inclusion of the Hoplands Estate in Riverside ward would be met with "strong opposition from local residents". As an alternative, it proposed that the existing ward's southern boundary should be moved southwards to include an area to the north of Bourne Road and to the east of Cruden Road, and the Cervia Way development from the northern and eastern parts of Westcourt ward.

82 The Conservative Group also proposed extending the current Riverside ward westwards, to include an area to the east of Bath Street/Darnley Road, from the north-eastern part of Pelham ward, and the north-western corner of Central ward, in order to improve electoral equality. The Conservative Group supported the Council Officers' proposal to move Central ward's southern boundary further southwards to create a new three-member ward. However, it proposed that The Curlews and The Sandpipers should remain within the revised Whitehill ward as both cul-de-sacs are accessed via Hillside Avenue and would be otherwise 'cut-off' from the remainder of the ward. The Conservative Group also proposed that the revised ward should be named Parrock ward as the Parrock area would be "the central feature of the new ward". The number of electors per councillor in the Conservative Group's proposed two-member Chalk, three-member Riverside and three-member Parrock wards would be 1 per cent below, 8 per cent below and 5 per cent below respectively (2 per cent above, 1 per cent below and 2 per cent below by 2005).

83 The Liberal Democrats proposed that Chalk ward should be joined with the northern and eastern part of Shorne ward to create a new two-member Chalk & Shorne ward in order to secure improved electoral equality. They also proposed retaining the existing three-member Riverside and two-member Central wards unchanged. The number of electors per councillor in the Liberal

Democrats' proposed Chalk & Shorne, Riverside and Central wards would be 3 per cent above, 15 per cent below and 11 per cent above the borough average respectively (5 per cent above, 8 per cent below and 18 per cent above by 2005).

84 Chalk Residents' Association opposed the Council Officers' proposal to include the Hoplands Estate in a revised Riverside ward, arguing that the residents of the Hoplands Estate "have a greater affinity with the residents of Chalk". It stated that the Council Officers' proposed boundary would include a proposed housing development site in the Riverside ward, but suggested that if the existing boundary were retained the consequent increase in electorate could be included in Chalk ward which could then be represented by two councillors. It also submitted 76 pro forma letters from local residents of the Hoplands Estate opposing the Council Officers' proposal.

85 The Deputy Chairperson of the Chalk Residents' Association also opposed the proposal to include the Hoplands Estate in a revised Riverside ward, arguing that "the two communities are almost diametrically opposed". He commented on the possible future use of the Westcourt Marshes area and was of the view that the Council Officers' proposed boundary would encourage housing development "at the expense of the natural environment", contending that the area should be considered Green Belt land.

86 The former Member of Parliament for Gravesham argued that the Hoplands Estate should remain within Chalk ward as residents have "no common identity" with the Northcourt Estate (in Riverside ward). He supported the proposal that Chalk ward could become a two-member ward by extending it southwards to include roads to the south of Rochester Road and around Thong Lane. Three local residents also opposed the inclusion of the Hoplands Estate in a revised Riverside ward.

87 We have carefully considered all of the representations received during Stage One and have noted that the main point of contention in this area relates to the representation of the Chalk village area. While we acknowledge that there is local opposition to the inclusion of the Hoplands Estate in Riverside ward, we have not been persuaded that the alternative proposals submitted would provide for a better reflection of the identities and interests of local communities or secure more identifiable boundaries (therefore providing for more effective and convenient local government) than the Council Officers' scheme in this area. While the Conservative Group's proposal would secure good electoral equality and retain the Hoplands Estate within Chalk ward, it would split the Westcourt community between two wards. Furthermore, as outlined earlier in this chapter, the Liberal Democrats proposal to join Chalk ward with the northern and eastern parts of Shorne ward would not, in our view, better reflect local community identities or facilitate a good electoral scheme across the borough as a whole.

88 We have noted the agreement between the Council Officers and the Labour Party that in order to secure the best balance between securing good electoral equality and reflecting the identities and interest of local communities, Chalk ward should continue to be a single-member ward and that the Hoplands Estate and the western part of Westcourt Marshes should be transferred into a revised Riverside ward, in order to address the forecast increase in electorate in this area. In addition, we are of the view that the retention of the identifiable Rochester Road as the ward's southern boundary would provide for effective and convenient local government.

We are therefore proposing to adopt the Council Officers' proposed single-member Chalk ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, as part of our draft recommendations. The number of electors per councillor in the revised single-member Chalk ward would be 12 per cent above the borough average initially (2 per cent above by 2005).

89 Given the good electoral equality and reflection of local community identities that would be secured in the Council Officers' proposed Riverside ward, we are proposing to adopt it as part of our draft proposals, albeit with minor boundary modifications. In order to facilitate the creation of a multi-member ward pattern in the western part of the borough, we propose retaining the current Riverside ward's western boundary along the centre of the High Street. To ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail, we are also proposing a minor modification to the southern boundary of Riverside ward (to the north of St John's RC Primary School) which would not affect any electors. Under our proposals the number of electors per councillor in the revised three-member Riverside ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be 10 per cent below the borough average initially, improving to 3 per cent above the borough average by 2005 as a result of housing development.

90 Given that the current Central ward is notably under-represented we agree with the Labour Party's assertion that in order to secure good electoral equality the current two-member ward needs either to reduce in size or to increase in size and become a three-member ward. We have considered all the proposals put forward for this area during Stage One; however, we are of the opinion that the Liberal Democrats' proposal to retain the existing two-member ward unchanged would result in an unacceptable level of electoral imbalance. We are also of the view that, although the Labour Party's proposal for a modified two-member Central ward would secure reasonable electoral equality, it would not secure as easily identifiable boundaries or as good a level of electoral equality (particularly by 2005) as the Council Officers' proposal for an enlarged three-member Central ward, which was broadly supported by the Conservative Group. We are therefore proposing to adopt the Council Officers' revised Central ward, but with the minor modification put forward by the Conservative Group, which would retain The Curlews and The Sandpipers in Whitehill ward. Furthermore, in order to facilitate the creation of a multi-member ward pattern in the western part of the borough, we also propose retaining the current Central ward's north-eastern boundary along Windmill Street and King Street. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed three-member Central ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be 5 per cent below the borough average initially (1 per cent below by 2005).

91 We have noted the Conservative Group's proposal that the revised Central ward should be named Parrock ward. However, as there is only limited support for this revised name we are proposing to retain the current ward name of Central as part of our draft recommendations. We would very much welcome views on all aspects of our proposals for this area during Stage Three.

Westcourt, Riverview, Singlewell and Whitehill wards

92 The four wards are situated in the south-eastern part of the urban area of the borough, to the south of Old Road East and Rochester Road and to the east of Central Avenue/Cedar Avenue. The number of electors per councillor in the three-member Westcourt and Riverview wards is 14 per cent below and 1 per cent above the borough average (20 per cent below and 6 per cent below

the average by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in the three-member wards of Singlewell and Whitehill is 11 per cent below and 1 per cent above the borough average (20 per cent below and 4 per cent below the average by 2005).

93 In order to address the general over-representation that would exist in this area by 2005 and to secure improved electoral equality, while reflecting the identities and interests of local communities, and as a consequence of their proposal to retain the Rochester Road as an identifiable ward boundary, the Council Officers proposed modifying the southern boundary of the current three-member Westcourt ward to include the area to the north-east of St Hilda's Way and to the north of St Francis Avenue, and Cimba Wood, from Riverview ward. The Council Officers also put forward a revised Riverview ward, to be represented by two councillors rather than the current three, proposing that the area to the south of St Hilda's Way and St Francis Avenue should be transferred into a revised Singlewell ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council Officers' proposed three-member Westcourt and two-member Riverview wards would be 4 per cent above and 7 per cent above the borough average initially (4 per cent below and equal to the average by 2005).

94 As a consequence of their proposed Central ward, the Council Officers put forward a revised three-member Whitehill ward, proposing to include the northern part of Singlewell ward (an area to the north of Dunkirk Close) in the revised ward in order to secure good electoral equality. They further proposed that the remainder of the current Singlewell ward, together with the area transferred from Riverview ward, should form a revised Singlewell ward, to be represented by two councillors rather than the current three. The number of electors per councillor in the Council Officers' proposed three-member Whitehill and two-member Singlewell wards would be 5 per cent above and 9 per cent above the borough average initially (2 per cent below the average in both wards by 2005).

95 As a consequence of its proposals to the north of this area, and in order to secure reasonable electoral equality, the Labour Party proposed a revised three-member Westcourt ward, comprising the current ward, properties from the northern side of Rochester Road from Chalk ward and polling district H from Riverside ward. It also proposed retaining the current three-member Riverview ward unchanged, arguing that "this would minimise confusion in the eyes of the electorate and prevent unnecessary change". The number of electors per councillor in the Labour Party's revised Westcourt and Riverview wards would be equal to and 1 per cent above the borough average initially (7 per cent below and 6 per cent below by 2005).

96 The Labour Party put forward a slightly revised Whitehill ward, proposing that the northern side of Gloucester Road in the south of the ward be transferred into a revised Singlewell ward. In order to secure improved electoral equality in Singlewell ward, the Labour Party further proposed modifying the existing ward's western boundary to include the south-eastern part of Woodlands ward (including the area around Goodwood Crescent and the area to the south of King's Drive and to the east of Windsor Road). The number of electors per councillor in the Labour Party's revised three-member Whitehill and Singlewell wards would be equal to and 1 per cent above the borough average initially (4 per cent below and 8 per cent below by 2005).

97 As a consequence of its proposal to include the eastern part of the current Westcourt ward in a revised Chalk ward, the Conservative Group proposed that the remainder of the ward, together with an area from the north-western part of Riverview ward (to the north-east of St Hilda's Way and to the north of St Francis Avenue), should form a revised Westcourt ward, to be represented by two councillors. Like the Council Officers, the Conservative Group also put forward a revised Riverview ward, to be represented by two councillors rather than the current three and also proposed that the area to the south of St Hilda's Way and St Francis Avenue should be transferred into a revised Singlewell ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Conservative Group's proposed two-member Westcourt and Riverview wards would be 14 per cent above the borough average in both wards initially (4 per cent above and 7 per cent above the borough average respectively by 2005).

98 The Conservative Group also proposed a modified Whitehill ward, as a consequence of its proposed Parrock ward, which would be represented by two councillors rather than the current three. In addition to transferring the northern part of the current ward into a new Parrock ward (as detailed earlier), it proposed transferring an area to the south of Jellicoe Avenue into a revised Singlewell ward. It also proposed including an area around Ivy Close from the northern part of Singlewell ward in the revised Whitehill ward. The Conservative Group's revised three-member Singlewell ward would comprise the remainder of the current ward, in addition to the areas transferred from Whitehill and Riverview wards (as detailed earlier). It argued that its proposals would result in almost all of the King's Farm Estate being included within the revised Singlewell ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Conservative Group's revised two-member Whitehill and three-member Singlewell wards would be 7 per cent above and 9 per cent above the borough average initially (1 per cent above and 1 per cent below by 2005).

99 The Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the current three-member Westcourt ward unchanged. They also proposed a revised three-member Riverview ward which would comprise all of the current ward and the area around Astra Drive from Shorne West. The number of electors per councillor in the Liberal Democrats' proposed three-member Westcourt and Riverview wards would be 14 per cent below and 13 per cent above the borough average initially (20 per cent below and 7 per cent above by 2005). In order to secure improved electoral equality in both the existing Whitehill and Singlewell wards, the Liberal Democrats proposed modifying the boundary between the two wards to include the area to the south of Hawkins Avenue/Christianfields Avenue/Whitehill Lane in a revised two-member Singlewell ward, which would also include Marling Way and Davy's Place from Shorne West. The number of electors per councillor in the Liberal Democrats' revised three-member Whitehill and two-member Singlewell wards would be 12 per cent above and 22 per cent above the borough average initially (7 per cent above and 9 per cent above by 2005).

100 The former Member of Parliament for Gravesham contended that the Council Officers' proposals would divide the King's Farm Estate between two wards. He suggested that if the northern boundary of Singlewell ward were to be moved northwards and be represented by three councillors "virtually the whole of the King's Farm Estate could be accommodated in one ward". However, he did not submit a detailed proposal. He further contended that, consequently, Whitehill ward should become a two-member ward which would be "more homogenous".

101 We have carefully considered all of the representations received regarding this area. As outlined earlier in this report, in the eastern part of this area, we have not been persuaded that the Liberal Democrats' proposal to incorporate the Shorne West area into the Riverview and Singlewell wards would facilitate the creation of a good electoral scheme across the borough as a whole. We are also aware that there is notable local opposition to the inclusion of the more rural and parished areas of the borough in wards within the urban area. In addition, we do not believe that the Conservative's proposed Westcourt ward would provide a better reflection of local communities, as it would split the Westcourt Estate between two wards. We are also of the view that retaining the Rochester Road as Westcourt ward's northern boundary would provide for a more identifiable boundary, thus securing more effective and convenient local government.

102 In view of the better overall electoral equality, the better reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and the more identifiable boundaries that would be secured, we are proposing to adopt the Council Officers' proposals in this area, albeit with three minor boundary modifications.

103 We propose adopting the Council Officers' revised three-member Westcourt and two-member Riverview wards as our draft recommendations. However, we are proposing two minor modifications in order to secure slightly better boundaries and better reflect local communities. Given that access to the Riverview schools is gained via Cimba Wood, we agree with the Conservative Group that the road should be included in Riverview ward. As a consequence, in order to secure reasonable electoral equality and a slightly more identifiable boundary, we propose transferring Beltana Drive and the eastern end of Cerne Road into Westcourt ward. In order to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail, we are also proposing a minor modification to the boundary between Westcourt and Riverview wards, (to the north of Cascades Leisure Centre), but this does not affect any electors. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed three-member Westcourt and two-member Riverview wards, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be 4 per cent above and 7 per cent above the borough average initially (3 per cent below and 2 per cent below by 2005).

104 We have also considered all the proposals put forward at Stage One for the western part of this area. As a consequence of our proposed Central ward, and given that we are of the view that the Council Officers' proposals would provide for the best balance between securing electoral equality, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and providing for effective and convenient local government, we propose adopting the Council Officers' proposed Whitehill and Singlewell wards as part of our draft recommendations (albeit with one minor boundary modification, detailed in paragraph 90 above, which would include The Sandpipers and The Curlews within Whitehill ward). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed three-member Whitehill and two-member Singlewell wards, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be 7 per cent above and 9 per cent above the borough average initially (1 per cent above and 2 per cent below by 2005).

105 We have noted that a number of respondents proposed that the current Singlewell ward should be extended northwards and be represented by three councillors overall, in order to include the King's Farm Estate in one ward. However, we have noted that there is no agreement as to where the northern boundary of the King's Farm Estate should be placed and only limited evidence has been put forward to support each of the different proposals. Therefore, we would

very much welcome views on this aspect of our proposals, and all our draft recommendations for this area, during Stage Three.

Pelham and Woodlands wards

106 The three-member Pelham and Woodlands wards are situated in the centre of the urban area, to the west of the High Street/Windmill Street/Central Avenue/Cedar Avenue. The number of electors per councillor in Pelham ward is currently equal to the average for the borough (7 per cent above the average in 2005). Woodlands ward is currently under-represented by 13 per cent (14 per cent by 2005).

107 At Stage One the Council Officers proposed a new single-member Gravesend Town Centre ward to incorporate “several areas of significant new residential development along the river front and in the town centre”. The new ward would comprise that part of the current Pelham ward to the north of the railway line, the north-western corner of Central ward and the western part of Riverside ward (as detailed earlier in paragraph 79) and an area to the east of Fountain Walk from Northfleet East ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council Officers’ proposed single-member Gravesend Town Centre ward would be 7 per cent below the borough average initially (3 per cent below by 2005).

108 The Council Officers also proposed a revised three-member Pelham ward comprising the remainder of the current ward, the Campbell Road pit area from Northfleet East ward and polling district L from Woodlands ward (the area to the west of Dashwood Road). As a consequence, they proposed that the remainder of Woodlands ward should form a revised three-member ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council Officers’ revised three-member Pelham and Woodlands wards would be 5 per cent below and 4 per cent below the borough average initially (3 per cent above and 3 per cent below by 2005).

109 In order to address the projected under-representation of the existing Pelham ward by 2005, the Labour Party proposed transferring an area to the east of Wrotham Road into a revised Central ward (as detailed earlier). It also proposed a revised Woodlands ward, comprising the majority of the current ward (less the area in the south-east of the ward which it proposed including in a revised Singlewell ward, as detailed earlier), and Farm Croft and The Downage from Coldharbour ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Labour Party’s proposed three-member Pelham and Woodlands wards would be 7 per cent below and 4 per cent above the borough average initially (equal to and 5 per cent above the average by 2005).

110 The Conservative Group put forward a revised three-member Pelham ward. It proposed that the area to the east of Bath Street/Darnley Road should be transferred into a revised Riverside ward; that the area to the south of Lennox Road and to the west of Pelham Road should be transferred into a new Perry Street ward (to be discussed later) and that the northern part of Northfleet East ward (to the north of London Road) should be included in the revised Pelham ward. The Conservative Group also put forward a revised three-member Woodlands ward comprising the majority of the existing ward, less that area of polling district L to the west of the cemetery, and Farm Croft and The Downage from Coldharbour ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Conservative Group’s revised three-member Pelham and Woodlands wards

would be 7 per cent below and 1 per cent below the borough average (both equal to the average by 2005).

111 The Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the existing three-member Pelham ward unchanged. They also proposed a revised three-member Woodlands ward (comprising the majority of the current ward less polling district L) which was the same as that put forward by the Council Officers. The number of electors per councillor in the Liberal Democrats' proposed Pelham and Woodlands wards would be equal to and 4 per cent below the borough average initially (7 per cent above and 3 per cent below by 2005).

112 We have considered all of the representations received and have noted that there is little support for a single-member ward in this area, as proposed by the Council Officers. Given the local support for the retention of two three-member wards in this area, from the Labour Party, the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats, we are proposing only minor boundary modifications to the existing Pelham and Woodlands wards, which would secure improved electoral equality and more identifiable boundaries, while reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and providing for a good electoral scheme in the remainder of the western part of the urban area.

113 We propose basing our revised Pelham ward on the Council Officers' Gravesend Town Centre ward. However, we propose extending the ward further southwards, as put forward by the Labour Party, the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats, in order to secure a better reflection of local community identities. Our revised three-member Pelham ward would include the area to the east of Fountain Walk from Northfleet East ward, as proposed by the Council Officers and broadly supported by the Conservative Group. As a consequence of our proposed Riverside and Central wards, we propose retaining the current ward's eastern boundary, but we are putting forward a more identifiable south-western boundary in order to provide for more effective and convenient local government. At present, the ward's south-western boundary divides Havelock Road between two wards, cutting between properties on Havelock Road and subsequently Old Road West. Therefore, in order to provide for a more logical boundary, and to facilitate the retention of a three-member Pelham ward and to secure good electoral equality, we propose transferring the area to the south of Lennox Road and to the west of Pelham Road (comprising Campbell Road, Granville Road, Havelock Road and the northern side of Old Road West) into a new Northfleet South ward as suggested by the Conservative Group. The number of electors per councillor in our revised three-member Pelham ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be 3 per cent below the borough average initially (2 per cent above by 2005).

114 In view of the improved electoral equality and more identifiable boundaries that would be secured under the revised Woodlands ward put forward by the Council Officers and Liberal Democrats, which was broadly supported by the Conservative Group, we propose adopting it as part of our draft recommendations, albeit with two minor modifications in order to address two minor boundary anomalies which would not affect any electors. We propose that the revised ward's south-western boundary should follow the centre of Coldharbour Road, along the eastern boundary of the Hospice and the properties on the south-eastern side of Marks Square until it reaches the existing boundary on the eastern edge of Lanes Avenue. We are also proposing that the service station situated to the south-west of the intersection between Wrotham Road and the

A2 trunk road should also be included in Woodlands ward. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Woodlands ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be 4 per cent below the borough average initially (3 per cent below by 2005). We would very much welcome views on our proposals for this area during Stage Three.

Northfleet East, Northfleet West, Painters Ash and Coldharbour wards

115 These four wards cover the remainder of the urban area in the north-eastern part of the borough. The number of electors per councillor in the three-member Northfleet East ward is currently 5 per cent below the average. However, by 2005, the number of electors per councillor in Northfleet East ward is forecast to be 6 per cent above the average for the borough as a result of housing development. The number of electors per councillor in the three-member Northfleet West ward is 6 per cent below the borough average (4 per cent below by 2005). The two-member Painters Ash ward is significantly under-represented at present with an electoral variance of 27 per cent (25 per cent by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Coldharbour ward is 4 per cent below the borough average (11 per cent below by 2005).

116 In their Stage One submission the Council Officers proposed a new three-member Northfleet North ward, comprising the area to the north of the railway line from Northfleet West ward and the area to the north of the railway line from Northfleet East ward, less the area transferred into their Gravesend Town Centre ward. They also proposed a new three-member Northfleet South ward comprising the remainder of Northfleet West ward, the remainder of Northfleet East ward (less Campbell Road pit) and the north-western part of Coldharbour ward, to the west of Snelling Avenue. The number of electors per councillor in the Council Officers' proposed Northfleet North and Northfleet South wards would be 9 per cent below and 1 per cent above the borough average initially (equal to and 5 per cent above by 2005).

117 In order to address the under-representation of the current Painters Ash ward, the Council Officers proposed transferring a number of roads to the south of Gibson Close and to the east of Hillary Avenue/Greendale Walk/Wrens Croft/Nash Croft into a revised Coldharbour ward. As a consequence, their revised Coldharbour ward would comprise the south-eastern part of Painters Ash ward and the remainder of the current Coldharbour ward (less the area transferred into Northfleet South ward). The number of electors per councillor in the Council Officers' proposed two-member Painters Ash and Coldharbour wards would be 1 per cent above and 5 per cent above the borough average initially (1 per cent below and 2 per cent below by 2005).

118 The Labour Party put forward only minor modifications to the existing Northfleet West and Northfleet East wards, arguing that "residents have become accustomed to this [east/west] division". It contended that it had sought to make "the least change necessary", proposing that the eastern half of Vale Road in Northfleet East ward and the area to the north of Earl Road in Coldharbour ward be transferred into Northfleet West ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Labour Party's revised three-member Northfleet West and Northfleet East wards would be 3 per cent below and 7 per cent below the borough average initially (2 per cent below and 4 per cent above by 2005).

119 In order to address the under-representation in the current Painters Ash ward, the Labour Party proposed transferring the area to the north of Tennyson Walk/Holm Road into a revised Coldharbour ward. It contended that its proposal “would make practical geographical sense”, opposing the Council Officers’ proposal which, it believed, would “remove electors from the centre of the original Painters Ash Estate”. As a consequence of this proposal, the Labour Party put forward a revised Coldharbour ward comprising the northern part of Painters Ash ward and the majority of the existing Coldharbour ward, less the areas it proposed transferring into its proposed Woodlands and Northfleet West wards (as detailed earlier). The number of electors per councillor in the Labour Party’s proposed two-member Painters Ash and Coldharbour wards would be 6 per cent above and 11 per cent above the borough average initially (5 per cent above and 4 per cent above by 2005).

120 The Conservative Group proposed a new three-member Northfleet North ward, to the north of the railway line, which was almost the same as that put forward by the Council Officers. However, it proposed transferring a slightly larger part of the current Northfleet East ward into a revised Pelham ward (as detailed earlier). The number of electors per councillor in the Conservative Group’s proposed Northfleet North ward would be 12 per cent below the borough average initially (4 per cent below by 2005).

121 To the south of the railway line, the Conservative Group proposed two new wards. It put forward a new three-member Perry Street ward (based on the areas surrounding Perry Street), comprising the remainder of Northfleet East ward, the south-western corner of Pelham ward, the majority of polling district L from Woodlands ward and the area to the north-west of Snelling Road from Coldharbour ward. It also proposed a new Wombwell ward (based on the areas around Wombwell Park) comprising the remainder of Northfleet West ward and two areas from the northern and western parts of the current Painters Ash ward, to the north of Tennyson Walk/Holm Road and to the west of Painters Ash Road. The number of electors per councillor in the Conservative Group’s proposed three-member Perry Street and two-member Wombwell wards would be 3 per cent below and 9 per cent below the borough average initially (3 per cent below and 2 per cent below by 2005).

122 As a consequence of its proposed Perry Street and Wombwell wards the Conservative Group proposed a new two-member New House ward, comprising the remainder of the current Coldharbour ward, less the area to the south of Coldharbour Road, together with an area to the north of Landseer Avenue and around Hillary Road from the centre of Painters Ash ward. It further proposed a new single-member Watling ward comprising the remainder of Painters Ash ward (the area to the south of Landseer Road and around Mulberry Road) and the area to the south of Coldharbour Road from Coldharbour ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Conservative Group’s proposed two-member New House ward and single-member Watling ward would be 5 per cent above and 6 per cent above the borough average initially (2 per cent below and 4 per cent below by 2005).

123 The Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the existing three-member Northfleet East and Northfleet West wards unchanged. They also proposed a revised Coldharbour ward comprising the majority of the current ward, less the area to the south of Coldharbour Road, together with polling district L from the north-western part of the current Woodlands ward. In order to address the under-representation in Painters Ash ward, the Liberal Democrats proposed that the ward

should be enlarged, to include that part of Coldharbour ward to the south of Coldharbour Road, and be represented by three councillors rather than the current two. The number of electors per councillor in the Liberal Democrats' proposed two-member Coldharbour and three-member Painters Ash wards would be 3 per cent above and 3 per cent below the borough average initially (2 per cent below and 5 per cent below by 2005).

124 Borough Councillor Christie submitted a number of comments regarding the Council Officers' proposals for revised Painters Ash and Coldharbour wards. She contended that the area that the Council Officers proposed transferring out of Painters Ash ward is "at the centre of the ward both physically and in community terms". She also noted a number of slight boundary anomalies contained in the Council Officers' consultation scheme (which have subsequently been taken into account in their final submission to the Commission). She also stated that she did not support any revised wards which would merge part of Northfleet with Gravesend. The former Member of Parliament for Gravesham also noted a number of slight anomalies in the Council Officers' scheme in the Painters Ash and Coldharbour areas.

125 Having carefully considered all the representations received regarding this area, we have noted that there is little agreement between the four main ward schemes submitted. We have noted that the Council Officers and the Conservative Group both propose that the railway line should form an east/west boundary between the two Northfleet wards, but that the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats propose retaining the current boundary between the two wards which runs north/south. However, in view of the fact that the Council Officers' proposed Northfleet North ward would secure excellent electoral equality, and given that, in our view, the use of the railway line as the ward's southern boundary would provide for a more identifiable boundary, thus providing for more effective and convenient local government, we propose adopting the Council Officers' proposed three-member Northfleet North ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, as part of our draft recommendations.

126 As a consequence of our decision to use the railway line as the southern ward boundary of Northfleet North ward and as a knock-on effect of our proposed Pelham and Woodlands ward to the east of this area (as detailed earlier), it is not possible to adopt in full any of the wards to the south of the railway line submitted by the Council Officers, the Labour Party or the Liberal Democrats. We have considered the Conservative Group's proposed Perry Street ward and acknowledge that this ward would secure good electoral equality. However, having considered the comments and proposals received from other respondents for the whole of the western part of the urban area, we are of the view that the Conservative Group's proposed Perry Street ward would not facilitate the creation of a good electoral scheme elsewhere in this part of the borough. We are of the view that any boundary amendments that would need to be made to wards to the south-west and south-east of its proposed ward would result in a poor reflection of local communities in the Painters Ash and Coldharbour areas. Indeed, we are of the view that the remainder of the Conservative Group's proposals in this area would result in the splitting of the Painters Ash area between three wards, which would not adequately reflect the identities and interests of local communities.

127 Therefore, in the light of all the different proposals submitted for this area, we propose putting forward for consultation three wards of our own. We propose a new three-member Northfleet South ward which would incorporate aspects of all four of the ward schemes

submitted. We have noted the agreement between the Council Officers, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats that the boundary between the current Northfleet West and Painters Ash ward (which follows the centre of Hall Road) should be retained and we agree that this is an identifiable boundary. Our proposed Northfleet South ward would therefore comprise the southern part of Northfleet West ward, the areas to north-west of Earl Road/Perry Street from Coldharbour and Northfleet East wards, part of polling district L from Woodlands ward (to the north of the centre of Salisbury Road and to the west of Cecil Road) and the south-western part of Pelham ward around Campbell Road (as detailed earlier in this report). We are of the view that our proposal would secure the best balance currently available between securing electoral equality and reflecting local communities. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Northfleet South ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be 3 per cent below the borough average initially (3 per cent above by 2005).

128 As the current Painters Ash ward is significantly under-represented at present it is necessary to modify the ward's existing boundary in order to secure good electoral equality. Given that we are proposing to retain the current ward's north-western boundary along Hall Road, and in view of the consensus of support from all respondents that the A2 trunk road should be retained as the ward's southern boundary, the options for change to this ward are limited. We can either retain a two-member ward in this area by transferring part of the north-eastern or eastern part of the current Painters Ash ward into a revised Coldharbour ward (as suggested by the Council Officers, the Labour Party and the Conservative Group) or, alternatively, the ward could be expanded eastwards and become a three-member ward (as suggested by the Liberal Democrats).

129 We have considered the alternative proposals put forward and we are of the view that, given the lack of consensus as to how the current Painters Ash ward should be divided in order to retain a two-member ward, the ward should be enlarged and be represented by three councillors. We therefore propose adopting the Liberal Democrats' proposed Painters Ash ward. We are of the view that the proposed ward's north-eastern boundary would be more identifiable as it would follow the centre of the whole length of Coldharbour Road, and it would secure the best balance between reflecting local community identities and securing reasonable electoral equality. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed three-member Painters Ash ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be 3 per cent below the borough average initially (5 per cent below by 2005).

130 As a consequence of our proposed Painters Ash ward, Coldharbour ward would be a two-member ward, comprising the remainder of the current ward (less the area to the north-east of Earl Road transferred into our proposed Northfleet South ward), the south-eastern part of the current Northfleet East ward to the south of Perry Street and part of polling district L from Woodlands ward (the southern side of Salisbury Road and the area to the east of Cecil Road). We are of the view that our proposed ward boundaries of Coldharbour Road and Earl Road/Perry Street would be more identifiable than the alternative proposals put forward at Stage One, and would therefore provide for more effective and convenient local government, while also securing good electoral equality. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed two-member Coldharbour ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be 8 per cent above the borough average initially (2 per cent above by 2005). We would welcome views on our proposals for this area during Stage Three.

Electoral Cycle

131 We received one representation regarding the Borough Council’s electoral cycle. The Council Officers proposed that the current system of whole council elections every four years should be retained, stating that they believed them to be “both efficient and effective”.

132 We have considered carefully all representations. At present, there appears to be no support for change to the present electoral cycle and we therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle of whole-council elections for the Borough Council.

Conclusions

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

- a council of 44 members should be retained;
- there should be 17 wards;
- the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of two wards;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

134 Our draft recommendations would involve modifications to all but one of the existing wards in Gravesham borough. As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Council Officers’ proposals, but propose departing from them in the following areas:

- in the eastern part of Gravesend we propose slightly modifying the boundaries between the Council Officers’ proposed Westcourt and Riverview wards and their proposed Whitehill and Central wards;
- in the northern part of Gravesend we propose retaining unchanged the existing north-western boundary of Central ward and the existing western boundary of Riverside ward;
- in Northfleet we propose basing our recommendations on the Council Officers’ and the Liberal Democrats’ proposals, with our own modifications in the central and northern areas which incorporate aspects of both the Conservative Group’s and the Labour Party’s schemes;
- throughout the borough, we have made minor adjustments to the boundaries to tie them to ground detail.

135 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 Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	44	44	44	44
Number of wards	19	17	19	17
Average number of electors per councillor	1,598	1,598	1,620	1,620
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	10	1	10	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	4	0	4	0

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

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

Parish Council Electoral Arrangements

137 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 parish of Meopham to reflect the proposed borough wards.

138 The parish of Meopham is currently served by 11 councillors representing three wards: Nurstead (returning four councillors), Church (returning four councillors) and Priesthood (returning three councillors). In order to facilitate their proposals for borough warding in this area,

the Council Officers proposed that the boundary between the existing Nurstead and Church parish wards be modified. They proposed that the revised Nurstead parish ward (that part of the parish to be included in Istead & Meopham North borough ward) should be renamed Nurstead & Hook Green, and that the remainder of the existing Church parish ward should be renamed Camer & Meopham Green. They further proposed that the existing Priesthood parish ward should be renamed Culverstone & Harvel. The Council Officers did not, however, propose redistributing the number of parish councillors representing each revised parish ward to reflect the change in the number of electors within each ward.

139 The Conservative Group submitted proposals for revised borough warding in this area which would have a consequential effect on the electoral arrangements for Meopham parish. Its proposals would divide Meopham parish into three revised wards (as detailed earlier in paragraphs 68–69). Meopham Parish Council supported the proposed parish ward names of Nurstead & Hook Green, Camer & Meopham Green and Culverstone & Harvel.

140 Given that we are adopting the Council Officers’ proposed borough warding in the Meopham parish area (as shown on Maps A2 and A3), we also propose adopting their consequent parish warding. In view of the support from Meopham Parish Council, we also propose adopting the Council Officers’ proposed parish ward names. We have not received any representations regarding the distribution of parish councillors within the parish, but, in order to secure the best balance of representation between parish wards, we propose for consultation purposes that the proposed Nurstead & Hook Green parish ward should be represented by four councillors, that the proposed Camer & Meopham Green parish ward should be represented by three councillors and that the proposed Culverstone and Harvel parish ward should be represented by four councillors. We would very much welcome views on our proposals, particularly from the Borough Council and Meopham Parish Council, during Stage Three.

Draft Recommendation
Meopham Parish Council should comprise 11 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Nurstead & Hook Green (returning four councillors), Camer & Meopham Green (returning three councillors) and Culverstone & Harvel (returning four councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Maps A2 and A3 in Appendix A.

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

Draft Recommendation

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

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

5 NEXT STEPS

143 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.

144 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
Gravesham 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

145 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

Draft Recommendations for Gravesham: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Gravesham area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in Maps A2 and A3 and the large map at the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed boundary between the district wards of Istead & Meopham North and Meopham South & Vigo.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed boundary between the parish wards of Camer & Meopham Green and Culverstone & Harvel in Meopham parish.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Gravesend and Northfleet.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Gravesham: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed boundary between Istead & Meopham North and Meopham South & Vigo wards

Map A3: Proposed boundary between the parish wards of Camer & Meopham Green and Culverstone & Harvel in Meopham parish

APPENDIX B

Gravesham Borough Council Officers’ Proposed Electoral Arrangements

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

Figure B1: Gravesham Borough Council Officers’ Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Central	Central ward (part); Whitehill ward (part)
Coldharbour	Coldharbour ward (part); Painters Ash ward (part)
Gravesend Town Centre	Central ward (part); Northfleet East ward (part); Pelham ward (part); Riverside ward (part)
Northfleet South	Coldharbour ward (part); Northfleet East (part); Northfleet West (part)
Painters Ash	Painters Ash ward (part)
Pelham	Northfleet East ward (part); Pelham ward (part); Woodlands ward (part)
Riverside	Chalk ward (part); Riverside ward (part)
Riverview	Riverview ward (part)
Westcourt	Riverview ward (part); Westcourt ward (part)
Whitehill	Singlewell ward (part); Whitehill ward (part)

Figure B2: Gravesham 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 %
Central	3	4,666	1,555	-3	4,917	1,639	1
Coldharbour	2	3,340	1,670	5	3,189	1,595	-2
Gravesend Town Centre	1	1,494	1,494	-7	1,569	1,569	-3
Northfleet South	3	4,841	1,614	1	5,080	1,693	5
Painters Ash	2	3,220	1,610	1	3,223	1,612	-1
Pelham	3	4,544	1,515	-5	5,014	1,671	3
Riverside	3	4,281	1,427	-11	4,835	1,612	0
Riverview	2	3,428	1,714	7	3,255	1,628	0
Westcourt	3	4,986	1,662	4	4,682	1,561	-4
Whitehill	3	5,015	1,672	5	4,760	1,587	-2

Source: Electorate figures are based on Gravesham Borough Council 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.

APPENDIX C

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.