

Final recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements  
for Harlow in Essex

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

*November 2000*

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Harlow in Essex.

Members of the Commission are:

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Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)  
Peter Brokenshire  
Kru Desai  
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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Harlow is inserted inside the back cover of the report.





## Local Government Commission for England

28 November 2000

Dear Secretary of State

On 30 November 1999 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Harlow under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in June 2000 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraphs 66-67) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Harlow.

We recommend that Harlow District Council should be served by 33 councillors representing 11 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

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

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Grant'.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT  
Chairman



## SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Harlow on 30 November 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 20 June 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

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

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 66-67) are that:

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

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

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

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 8 January 2001.

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

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

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

*Notes: 1 The whole of Harlow district is unparished.*

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Harlow:

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

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Harlow District Council.

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

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the 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 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.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/00 PER programme, including the Essex districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State's intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Orders under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in the two-tier district areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 30 November 1999, when we wrote to Harlow District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Essex County Council, Essex Police Authority, the local authority associations, Essex Association of Local Councils, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the eastern region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 28 February 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 20 June 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Harlow in Essex*, and ended on 4 September 2000. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

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

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

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

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

*Map 1: Existing Wards in Harlow*

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

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

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Harlow District Council

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1999, electors in Brays Grove ward were relatively over-represented by 32 per cent, while electors in Potter Street ward were significantly under-represented by 73 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



### 3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received three representations, including a district-wide scheme from Harlow District Council, and representations from Mr Bill Rammell, Member of Parliament for Harlow, and a local resident. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Harlow in Essex*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based entirely on the District Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of three-member wards throughout the district. We proposed that:

- Harlow District Council should be served by 33 councillors, compared with the current 42, representing 11 wards, five less than at present;
- the boundaries of all the existing wards should be modified.

**Draft Recommendation**

Harlow District Council should comprise 33 councillors, serving 11 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in nine of the 11 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2004.



## 4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

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

### **Harlow District Council**

22 The District Council supported our decision to adopt its proposals as our draft recommendations, but proposed three minor boundary amendments affecting no electors which “would be sensible for administrative purposes”. The Council also outlined a case for renaming Great Parndon North and Great Parndon South wards as Great Parndon and Kingsmoor and Summers wards respectively, arguing that this would avoid confusion among voters during elections. However, the Council stated that it had been unable to achieve unanimous support for these proposals.

### **Harlow Constituency Conservative Association**

23 Harlow Constituency Conservative Association expressed general support for our draft recommendations, but proposed changing the electoral cycle from thirds to whole council arguing that elections by thirds made it “difficult to set out and achieve long term strategies”, and that the process “fails to provide a clear result for the electorate”.

### **Harlow District Council Liberal Democrat Group**

24 The Liberal Democrat Group on the District Council expressed support for our draft recommendations, specifically that Harlow should be divided into 11 wards, represented by 33 councillors and continue to have election by thirds.

### **Other Representations**

25 A further five representations were received in response to our draft recommendations. A local resident proposed an alternative borough-wide scheme involving a uniform pattern of 10 three-member wards and four local residents wrote in supporting a change in the electoral cycle from thirds to whole council.



## 5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

28 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.

29 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates.

### **Electorate Forecasts**

30 At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 5 per cent from 58,576 to 61,781 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the growth to be in Potter Street ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Old Harlow ward. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

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

## **Council Size**

32 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 carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

33 Harlow District Council is at present served by 42 councillors. At Stage One the District Council unanimously proposed a significant reduction in council size from 42 to 33. It stated that a significant reduction in council size would provide an opportunity "to ensure that sufficient benefit is gained in moving away from the traditional committee-based administration to adequately provide for a streamlined executive and scrutiny approach and to further develop the council's decentralisation and democratisation agenda focused on the ward members' role working in partnership with their constituents".

34 In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received and concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 33 members.

35 During Stage Three we received three submissions regarding council size. The Liberal Democrats specifically supported our draft recommendations for a council size of 33 while a local resident expressed general support for a reduction in council size. The only alternative to our proposed council size of 33 was put forward by a local resident who proposed a 30-member council, representing 10 three-member wards across the district. However, this proposal was a complete departure from our draft recommendations and there was no evidence of local consultation. Accordingly, given the general support for our draft recommendations, and the achievement of improved electoral equality while reflecting the statutory criteria under the proposed council size, we are confirming a council size of 33 as final.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

36 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, in particular the district-wide scheme from the District Council. From these representations, some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

37 The Council's proposals were for a reduction in council size from 42 to 33. The proposals resulted in improved levels of electoral equality, with the number of wards where the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10 per cent from the borough average reducing from 12 to two. This level of electoral equality would improve further over the next five years, with all the proposed wards varying by no more than 10 per cent in 2004.

38 We recognised that the District Council's proposals improved electoral equality compared to the existing arrangements and provided for a ward pattern which as much as possible respected the individual neighbourhoods in Harlow. It therefore achieved good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. In the light of this and the degree of consensus over the

Council’s proposals we concluded that we should adopt the District Council’s scheme as our draft recommendations without amendment.

39 In the light of the responses to our draft recommendations report we propose that our draft recommendations should be substantially endorsed. While a local resident submitted an alternative scheme we consider that it provides for poor electoral equality and shows no evidence of local consultation. We have therefore not examined those proposals at a more detailed level in the following text.

40 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

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

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

**Great Parndon, Katherines with Sumners, Kingsmoor and Stewards wards;**

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

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

its eastern boundary Riddings Lane, Tysea Road and the footpath running behind Latton Green Primary School. Under the Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average in Great Parndon North ward (4 per cent below in 2004), 8 per cent above in Great Parndon South ward (2 per cent above in 2004) and 2 per cent above in Staple Tye ward (3 per cent below in 2004).

44 In our draft recommendations report we carefully considered the District Council's proposals for these wards, noting in particular the good levels of electoral equality achieved, together with the clearly identifiable boundaries which were utilised. We judged that the Council's scheme for this area represented a good balance between the need to seek improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore included the District Council's proposals for Great Parndon North, Great Parndon South and Staple Tye wards without modification as part of our draft recommendations.

45 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations subject to a minor boundary amendment between Great Parndon North ward and Little Parndon & Hare Street ward so that Gemini House is transferred into Little Parndon & Hare Street ward. The Council also outlined the arguments for renaming Great Parndon North and Great Parndon South wards as Great Parndon and Sumners & Kingsmoor wards, stating that this would avoid confusion among voters during elections. However, the Council stated that it had been unable to achieve unanimous support for these proposals.

46 In their response to our draft recommendations the Liberal Democrats proposed renaming Staple Tye ward as Stewards ward, arguing that the eastern half of Staple Tye ward "bears little relationship to the Staple Tye" and that the existing Stewards ward forms the centre of the new ward. We received no further submissions in relation to this area except for the scheme submitted by a local resident which was discussed previously.

47 In considering the responses received we have noted the general support for our draft recommendations, together with the Council's proposed boundary amendment. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for the ward boundaries in this area, subject to the amendment, as final.

48 Additionally, while we recognise that the Council failed to reach a unanimous decision on the name changes for Great Parndon North and Great Parndon South wards, we consider the proposed name changes provide a better reflection of the areas covered and would avoid any confusion among the electorate. We have not, however, been persuaded that the Liberal Democrats' proposal to rename Staple Tye ward as Stewards ward would be a more accurate reflection of that area, and note there was no supporting evidence for this proposal. We therefore propose renaming Great Parndon North and Great Parndon South wards as Great Parndon and Sumners & Kingsmoor wards respectively.

49 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average in Great Parndon ward (4 per cent below in 2004), 8 per cent above in Sumners & Kingsmoor ward (2 per cent above in 2004) and 2 per cent above in Staple Tye ward (3 per cent below in 2004).

## **Hare Street & Town Centre, Little Parndon and Passmores wards**

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

51 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the whole of the existing Little Parndon ward with that part of Hare Street & Town Centre ward furthest from the town centre to form a new three-member Little Parndon & Hare Street ward. The boundaries of this ward would be formed by the existing boundaries of Little Parndon ward in the north, east and west. The southern boundary of the ward would be formed by the eastern edge of Collins Meadow Playing Field, the edges of Hare Street County Junior and Infants Schools playing fields, Haydens Road and Fourth Avenue. The Council proposed a second three-member Toddbrook ward focused on the town centre. The ward would include the area of planned town centre development; the whole of the existing Passmores ward; Appleton Close, Miles Close, Northbrooks, Sharpecroft and Toddbrook from the existing Hare Street & Town Centre ward; and Stony Wood, Bushey Croft and Westfield from the existing Tye Green ward. The northern boundary of this ward would be formed by the southern boundary of the proposed Little Parndon & Hare Street ward, as detailed above, and Second Avenue. To the west the ward would border the proposed Great Parndon North ward, its southern boundary would be Southern Way and its eastern boundary would be formed by the brook running north to south behind Hook Field and Rushes Mead, the eastern edge of Bushey Croft, Tendring Road, the cycle track running north to Toddbrook and then Tripton Road as far as the Mansion Road roundabout. Under the Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Little Parndon & Hare Street ward (3 per cent below in 2004) and 3 per cent below in Toddbrook ward (2 per cent above in 2004).

52 In our draft recommendations report, we concluded that the proposals put forward by the District Council for these areas secured a substantially improved level of electoral equality without having an adverse effect on local community ties. Furthermore, the District Council argued that it "seems logical and democratically equitable to link the residential areas nearest to the Town Centre (in the present Hare Street district) to the new residences in the Town Centre". We therefore adopted the District Council's proposals for the new wards of Little Parndon & Hare Street and Toddbrook as part of our draft recommendations.

53 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations, but proposed one minor amendment to the boundary between Little Parndon & Hare Street ward, as detailed above. No further representations were received commenting on our draft recommendations for this area. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final subject to the Council's proposed amendment. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Little Parndon & Hare Street ward (3 per cent below in 2004) and 3 per cent below in Toddbrook ward (2 per cent above in 2004).

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

54 These five wards cover the north and west of the district and contain some of the most well-established communities in the district. Mark Hall North, Netteswell East and Netteswell West wards are each currently represented by two councillors, while Mark Hall South and Old Harlow wards each return three councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 25 per cent below the district average in Mark Hall North ward (29 per cent below in 2004), 13 per cent below in Mark Hall South ward (18 per cent below in 2004), 3 per cent below in Netteswell East ward (8 per cent below in 2004), 13 per cent below in Netteswell West ward (15 per cent below in 2004) and 13 per cent above in Old Harlow ward (26 per cent above in 2004).

55 At Stage One, the District Council proposed reconfiguring these five wards into three three-member wards. The Council proposed a new Netteswell ward, which included Netteswell East and Netteswell West wards in their entirety, together with the addition of Altham Grove from the existing Mark Hall North ward. The Council argued that the new ward resulted in very good electoral equality and that the inclusion of Altham Grove was justified both in terms of community identity and in order to provide a strong eastern boundary (Howard Way). In the Mark Hall area the Council proposed a new Mark Hall ward, comprising the existing Mark Hall South ward (less the New Hall Farm development, The Gardiners and the areas to the east of the A414, detailed later) and the existing Mark Hall North ward (less Altham Grove, as detailed above). The boundaries of the new ward would be formed by the A414, Howard Way, Second Avenue and the district boundary. The District Council also proposed that the existing Old Harlow ward be extended in the south-west to include Mark Hall Sports Ground, Mark Hall Comprehensive School and the laboratories in the area to the east of the A414 from Mark Hall South ward, thereby using the A414 as a clear boundary; and in the south to include the New Hall Farm development, currently in Potter Street ward. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Netteswell ward (1 per cent below in 2004), 3 per cent below in Mark Hall ward (8 per cent below in 2004) and 11 per cent below in Old Harlow ward (1 per cent below in 2004).

56 In our draft recommendations, we concluded the District Council's proposals for this area, provided a highly satisfactory ward configuration, which achieves good electoral equality and uses clear, identifiable boundaries, having regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore adopted the Council's proposals for this area without modification as part of our draft recommendations.

57 At Stage Three the District Council expressed general support for our draft recommendations, subject to amending the boundary between Netteswell and Mark Hall wards in order that the southern part of this boundary follows the road, which would not affect any electors. We received no further submissions commenting on our draft recommendations. We consider the District Council's proposed minor boundary amendment provides for a more clearly defined boundary and are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final in this area, subject to this amendment. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Netteswell ward (1 per cent below in 2004), 3 per cent below in Mark Hall ward (8 per cent below in 2004) and 11 per cent below in Old Harlow ward (1 per cent below in 2004).

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

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

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

60 In the rest of the area the District Council proposed creating two further three-member wards. The remainder of the existing Potter Street ward (polling district T) would be combined with part of the existing Latton Bush ward (polling district H) in a new Harlow Common ward, as all the communities it encompasses border on the Common. The southern boundary of this ward would be formed by the district boundary, the northern boundary with the proposed Church Langley ward would be the polling district boundary and the eastern boundary would be the M11. The western boundary with the proposed Bush Fair ward would follow the existing boundary (the A414 and Southern Way), then run south along Trotters Road, Tysea Road and Ridings Lane, west around the edge of Pear Tree Mead and Little Pynchons, then around the edges of Latton Green Primary School, as detailed above. Additionally, the Council proposed a new Bush Fair ward, comprising the existing Brays Grove ward, Pear Tree Mead and Little Pynchons from the existing Latton Bush ward, as mentioned above, and the remainder of the existing Tye Green ward, not included in Toddbrook ward, discussed earlier. Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in both Harlow Common and Bush Fair wards would be 8 per cent above the district average (3 per cent above in both in 2004) and 16 per cent below in Church Langley ward (10 per cent above in 2004).

61 In our draft recommendations report, having carefully considered the District Council's scheme for this area, we noted that the Council provided evidence of a clear separation of Church Langley from surrounding neighbourhoods in terms of community identities and interests. Moreover, we noted that the substantial growth in the Church Langley area means that under the

Council's proposals it would be expected to move from a position of over-representation (15 per cent) to one of slight under-representation (10 per cent). The Council stated that all the proposed development in Church Langley is expected to be completed within five years and therefore the predicted variance in Church Langley for 2004 is not expected to worsen further. Additionally, the achievement of any significantly improved electoral equality in this area would be at the cost of imbalances elsewhere in the district. In the light of this, and the good balance achieved between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in the whole of the borough, we were content to put forward the District Council's proposals unchanged for these three wards as part of our draft recommendations.

62 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations, subject to amending the boundary between Church Langley and Harlow Common wards transferring Church Langley Green into Church Langley ward to better reflect community identity. This change would not affect any electors. We received no further submissions commenting on our draft recommendations in this area.

63 In light of this we propose confirming our draft recommendations as final subject to adopting the Council's modifications to the boundary between Church Langley and Harlow Common wards, which we consider provides for a more clearly defined boundary. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in both Harlow Common and Bush Fair wards would be 8 per cent above the district average (3 per cent above in both in 2004) and 16 per cent below in Church Langley ward (10 per cent above in 2004).

## **Electoral Cycle**

64 At Stage One we received no proposals in relation to the electoral cycle of the district. Accordingly, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of elections by thirds.

65 At Stage Three we received five submissions regarding the electoral cycle of the district including a submission from the Harlow Constituency Conservative Association. The Conservatives proposed changing the electoral cycle from thirds to whole council arguing that elections by thirds made it "difficult to set out and achieve long term strategies", and that the process "fails to provide a clear result for the electorate". Four local residents also argued for this change to the electoral cycle, presenting similar arguments to the Conservatives. There is, however, no clear evidence of widespread consultation locally and, given that the Council has supported its current arrangements throughout the review we do not propose any change to the current electoral cycle for Harlow.

## Conclusions

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

- we propose amending the boundaries between Church Langley and Harlow Common wards, Great Parndon North and Little Parndon & Hare Street wards and Mark Hall and Netteswell wards;
- we propose renaming Great Parndon North and Great Parndon South wards as Great Parndon and Summers & Kingsmoor wards respectively.

67 We conclude that, in Harlow:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 42 to 33;
- there should be 11 wards, five fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of all the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

68 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 and 2004 electorate figures.

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

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

69 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 12 to two with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2004 with no wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

**Final Recommendation**

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

*Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Harlow*



## 6 NEXT STEPS

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

71 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made before 8 January 2001.

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

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

