

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Wirral

September 2002

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CONTENTS

	page
WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?	5
SUMMARY	7
1 INTRODUCTION	11
2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS	13
3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED	17
4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS	19
5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?	37
APPENDIX	
A Draft recommendations for Wirral: Detailed mapping	39
B Code of Practice on Written Consultation	41

WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to The Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No. 3692). The Order also transferred to The Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE
Robin Gray
Joan Jones
Ann M Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim 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, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of the electoral arrangements for Wirral on 4 December 2001. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us to complete the work of the LGCE.

- **This report summarises the submissions received during the first stage of the review, and makes draft recommendations for change.**

We found that the current arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Wirral:

- **In 10 of the 22 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the borough and three wards vary by more than 20% from the average;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to continue, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in seven wards and by more than 20% in two wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 103–4) are that:

- **Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council should have 66 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 22 wards, as at present;**
- **the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified.**

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each borough councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- **In 21 of the proposed 22 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% 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% from the average for the borough in 2006.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 3 September 2002. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. 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. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission which will be responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our**

- **final recommendations. It will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 28 October 2002:

**Team Leader
Wirral Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Draft recommendations: summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Large Map reference
1	Bebington	3	Part of Bebington ward; part of Clatterbridge ward; part of Egerton ward.	4 and 5
2	Bidston & St James	3	Part of Bidston ward; part of Birkenhead ward; part of Claughton ward.	2
3	Birkenhead & Lairdside	3	Part of Birkenhead ward; part of Egerton ward; part of Oxtan ward; part of Tranmere ward.	2 and 4
4	Bromborough	3	Part of Bromborough ward; part of Eastham ward; part of Tranmere ward.	5
5	Clatterbridge	3	Part of Bebington ward; part of Clatterbridge ward.	4 and 5
6	Claughton	3	Part of Bidston ward; part of Birkenhead ward; part of Claughton ward; part of Oxtan ward.	2 and 4
7	Eastham	3	Part of Bromborough ward; part of Eastham ward.	5
8	Greasby, Frankby & Irby	3	Part of Royden ward; part of Thurstaston ward; part of Upton ward.	1,2,3 and 4
9	Heswall	3	Part of Heswall ward.	3 and 4
10	Hoylake & Meols	3	Part of Hoylake ward (detached); part of Royden ward.	1,2 and 3
11	Leasowe	3	Part of Leasowe ward; part of Moreton ward; part of Wallasey ward.	2
12	Liscard	3	Part of Liscard ward; part of New Brighton ward; part of Wallasey ward.	2
13	Moreton	3	Part of Moreton ward; part of Upton ward.	1 and 2
14	New Brighton	3	Part of New Brighton ward; part of Wallasey ward.	2
15	Oxtan	3	Part of Birkenhead ward; part of Claughton ward; part of Oxtan ward.	2 and 4
16	Pensby & Thingwall	3	Part of Heswall ward; part of Prenton ward; part of Thurstaston ward.	4
17	Prenton & Egerton	3	Part of Bebington ward; part of Egerton ward; part of Oxtan ward; part of Prenton ward.	4
18	Rock Ferry	3	Part of Bebington ward; part of Egerton ward; part of Tranmere ward.	2,4 and 5
19	Seacombe	3	Part of Birkenhead ward; part of Liscard ward; Seacombe ward.	2
20	Upton	3	Part of Prenton ward; part of Upton ward.	2 and 4
21	Wallasey	3	Part of Leasowe ward; part of New Brighton ward; part of Wallasey ward.	2
22	West Kirby & Thurstaston	3	Part of Heswall ward; part of Hoylake ward (detached); part of Royden ward; part of Thurstaston ward.	1,3 and 4

Notes: 1 The whole borough is unparished.

2 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

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.

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Wirral

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Bebington	3	12,157	4,052	8	11,975	3,992	5
2	Bidston & St James	3	11,807	3,936	4	11,961	3,987	5
3	Birkenhead & Lairdside	3	10,754	3,585	-5	11,743	3,914	3
4	Bromborough	3	11,156	3,719	-1	11,183	3,728	-2
5	Clatterbridge	3	12,518	4,173	11	12,139	4,046	6
6	Claughton	3	10,776	3,592	-5	11,677	3,892	2
7	Eastham	3	11,210	3,737	-1	11,180	3,727	-2
8	Greasby, Frankby & Irby	3	11,799	3,933	4	11,544	3,848	1
9	Heswall	3	11,547	3,849	2	11,164	3,721	-2
10	Hoylake & Meols	3	10,889	3,630	-4	10,770	3,590	-6
11	Leasowe	3	10,453	3,484	-8	11,396	3,799	0
12	Liscard	3	11,715	3,905	4	11,869	3,956	4
13	Moreton	3	11,162	3,721	-1	11,277	3,759	-1
14	New Brighton	3	11,037	3,679	-2	11,151	3,717	-3
15	Oxton	3	11,760	3,920	4	11,855	3,952	4
16	Pensby & Thingwall	3	10,675	3,558	-6	10,346	3,449	-10
17	Prenton & Egerton	3	11,088	3,696	-2	10,990	3,663	-4
18	Rock Ferry	3	10,476	3,492	-7	10,856	3,619	-5
19	Seacombe	3	10,597	3,532	-6	11,605	3,868	1
20	Upton	3	12,529	4,176	11	12,460	4,153	9
21	Wallasey	3	11,954	3,985	6	12,010	4,003	5
22	West Kirby & Thurstaston	3	10,610	3,537	-6	10,506	3,502	-8
	Totals	66	248,669	-	-	251,657	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,768	-	-	3,813	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council's submission.

Note: 1 The 'variance from average' columns show 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.

2 There is a small anomaly in the electorate figures supplied between the total electorate data for 2001 and 2006 shown in Table 2 and Table 4. This is due to rounding.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Wirral, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the five metropolitan boroughs in Merseyside as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. The programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Wirral. Wirral's last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in April 1979 (Report no. 328).

3 In carrying out these metropolitan reviews we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - (c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Wirral was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fifth edition published in October 2001). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 Our task is to make recommendations to The Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

6 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the borough as a whole. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

7 We are not prescriptive on council size. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction or no change, should be supported by evidence and argumentation. Given the stage now reached in the introduction of new political management structures under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, it is important that whatever council size interested parties may propose to us they can demonstrate that their proposals have been fully thought through, and have been developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structure. 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 electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 there is no limit on the number of councillors which can be returned from each metropolitan borough ward. However, the figure must be divisible by three. In practice, all metropolitan borough wards currently return three councillors. Where our recommendation is for multi-member wards, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in

very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

9 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to us
Two	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to The Electoral Commission

10 Stage One began on 4 December 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Merseyside Police, the Local Government Association, Lancashire Association of Parish Councils (including Merseyside), Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, Members of the European Parliament for the North West Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 25 March 2002.

11 At Stage Two all the submissions received during Stage One were considered and we prepared our draft recommendations.

12 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 3 September 2002 and will end on 28 October 2002, involves publishing the draft proposals 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 these draft proposals.**

13 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to modify them, and submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. It will then be for it to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

14 The Wirral Peninsula is bounded by the River Mersey to the east, the River Dee to the west, the Irish Sea to the north and Cheshire to the south. Wirral is further divided by a water inlet in the Birkenhead area to the east of the borough. The M53 runs through the centre of the borough, two main railway lines serve the area and it is further linked to Liverpool by the two Mersey tunnels. The borough is largely urban in the north, east and centre, while the west and the south of the borough are primarily rural. Covering some 15,772 hectares, and with a population of some 327,800, Wirral has a population density of almost 21 persons per hectare. The borough is unparished.

15 The electorate of the borough is 248,668 (February 2001). The Council presently has 66 members who are elected from 22 three-member wards.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 3,768 electors, which the Council forecasts will increase to 3,813 by the year 2006 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 22 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average, three wards by more than 20% and one ward by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Bidston ward where each of the three councillors represents 34% fewer electors than the borough average.

17 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'.

Map 1: Existing wards in Wirral

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Bebington	3	10,842	3,614	-4	10,787	3,596	-6
2	Bidston	3	7,456	2,485	-34	7,801	2,600	-32
3	Birkenhead	3	9,941	3,314	-12	10,915	3,638	-5
4	Bromborough	3	11,076	3,692	-2	11,093	3,698	-3
5	Clatterbridge	3	13,951	4,650	23	13,798	4,599	21
6	Claughton	3	11,150	3,717	-1	12,001	4,000	5
7	Eastham	3	11,271	3,757	0	11,269	3,756	-1
8	Egerton	3	10,792	3,597	-5	10,935	3,645	-4
9	Heswall	3	13,490	4,497	19	13,066	4,355	14
10	Hoylake	3	12,941	4,314	14	12,704	4,235	11
11	Leasowe	3	9,782	3,261	-13	10,453	3,484	-9
12	Liscard	3	11,118	3,706	-2	11,257	3,752	-2
13	Moreton	3	9,985	3,328	-12	10,090	3,363	-12
14	New Brighton	3	11,717	3,906	4	11,687	3,896	2
15	Oxton	3	11,666	3,889	3	11,798	3,933	3
16	Prenton	3	11,617	3,872	3	11,410	3,803	0
17	Royden	3	12,933	4,311	14	12,757	4,252	12
18	Seacombe	3	10,801	3,600	-4	11,406	3,802	0
19	Thurstaston	3	12,743	4,248	13	12,502	4,167	9
20	Tranmere	3	8,754	2,918	-23	9,311	3,104	-19
21	Upton	3	12,352	4,117	9	12,417	4,139	9
22	Wallasey	3	12,290	4,097	9	12,200	4,067	7
	Totals	66	248,668	-	-	251,657	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,768	-	-	3,813	-

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

Note: 1 The 'variance from average' columns show 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 2001, electors in Bidston ward were relatively over-represented by 34%, while electors in Clatterbridge ward were relatively under-represented by 23%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 There is a small anomaly in the electorate figures supplied between the total electorate data for 2001 and 2006 shown in Table 2 and Table 4. This is due to rounding.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

18 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to the LGCE giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.

19 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. The LGCE received 15 representations during Stage One, including three borough-wide schemes from the Council and a borough-wide scheme from Wirral South Labour Party, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the Council.

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

20 At Stage One the Council submitted three schemes, from the Conservative Group, the Labour Group and the Liberal Democrats. Consensus was reached by the Council on retaining the current council size of 66. However, although the three schemes were similar in some areas, other areas in the schemes shared no similarities. All three schemes provided for significantly improved levels of electoral equality with no wards varying by more than 9% from the borough average by 2006.

Local constituency parties

21 Wirral South Labour Party submitted a borough-wide scheme based on a reduction in council size from 66 to 60 members. It stated that 'our approach to this exercise has been to attempt to retain communities within ward boundaries and in some cases we believe that we have gone some way to bring them together where development in the past twenty years or so has produced separation'. This scheme provided for improved levels of electoral equality with no wards varying by more than 11% from the borough average by 2006.

22 Wirral West Labour Party proposed that the five wards in its Parliamentary constituency remain unchanged and that the other three Parliamentary constituencies in Wirral be amended to comprise five wards each, resulting in a council size of 60.

Other representations

23 Representations were also received from 10 local residents. One local resident supported a council size of 60 members, having first proposed that the existing wards be retained, with adjustments made to the number of councillors in each ward in order to retain existing communities. He also objected to the Council's consultation exercise. A local resident proposed an alternative Moreton ward. One local resident proposed that the Meols area remain with Hoylake and West Kirby rather than be transferred to Moreton ward, taking into account the current Parliamentary constituencies. He also proposed that recommendations should be based on the number of residents in a ward rather than registered electors, and considered that single-member wards would be more appropriate for Wirral. He stated that the Hoylake Branch of the Labour Party 'wished to be associated with opinions and statements of my submission and desired that they be received as their submission also'. Another local resident contended that the greenbelt area between Meols and Moreton separates the two areas and is a natural boundary, and considered that linking the two areas would cause problems as they have different educational systems.

24 One local resident considered that Thurstaston, Irby and Pensby are separated from the remainder of Thurstaston ward by the Common, and have more affinity with Heswall, as does Thingwall, which is currently in Prenton ward. He also proposed single or two-member

wards with the intention of increasing voter turnout. A local resident objected to any proposal to transfer King Street from Liscard ward. He also objected to the fact that it is possible for councillors to live outside the area they represent, and commented on the selection of candidates. Another local resident of Liscard ward objected to the fact that, prior to the May 2002 local election, none of his local councillors lived in Liscard ward. He also considered that Liscard should have fewer councillors than three, as at present.

25 A local resident of Clatterbridge ward commented on the external boundaries of Wirral, and suggested a structural review of the area. Another local resident proposed single-member wards in Wirral, contending that this would enable better targeting of regeneration funds. Finally, another local resident proposed annual elections, with councillors serving for three years, contending that this would be less confusing for electors.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

26 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Wirral and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors and ward names. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

27 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Wirral is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended): the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'.

28 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

29 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in 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.

30 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim 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 make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate forecasts

31 Since 1975 there has been a decrease of approximately 3% in the electorate of Wirral borough. The Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 1% from 248,668 to 251,657 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Birkenhead and Claughton wards. However, a number of wards, particularly in Heswall, Hoylake, Prenton and Thurstaston wards, would see a slight decline in electorate. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council 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 Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

32 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the Council's figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council size

33 Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council presently has 66 members. As detailed earlier,

consensus was reached between the Conservative Group, the Labour Group and the Liberal Democrats on the issue of council size with all three groups supporting the retention of the existing council size of 66. The Council argued that 'the experience of the existing system has shown that a reduction in the number of councillors will not allow for the residents of Wirral to be sufficiently represented. A 22 ward Council will enable sufficient members of the Authority to serve on the Executive, with a reasonable amount of members involved in scrutiny, and importantly, local Councillors being involved in the eight Area Forums and Ward Roadshows which allows for governance to become closer to the electorate'. Furthermore, it argued that 'it is not recommended that any increase in Council size be made, despite the marginal increase in overall population and the enhancement of the local leadership role. Nor is any ... reduction proposed as this may have a deleterious effect on the ability of members to adequately represent the local population. Taking all things into account, it is suggested that 66 is the most suitable size for Wirral, in the context of the new political management structures'. The Council also provided details of all the forums and external organisations which its councillors are involved in.

34 Wirral South Labour Party proposed a reduction in council size from 66 to 60. It stated that 'our belief is that a reduction in the number, particularly relating to the new cabinet system of governance, is desirable, and having regard for the principle of Best Value'. It also stated that 'we could not find a suitable division which met the criteria of community, and equality on the basis of 22 wards' and that 'we believe the system we have proposed based on 20 wards is sustainable and meets the criteria we have stated'.

35 Wirral West Labour Party and a local resident both supported a reduction in council size to 60 members.

36 We have carefully considered the representations received regarding council size. We note that all three main political parties on the Council supported the retention of the current council size of 66, and that the Council provided evidence of how it currently operates and how it expects to operate in the future, based upon its chosen model of governance. It also provided examples of the number of forums and partnerships which its members are involved in, and had considered whether these systems could still operate if the size of the council was either reduced or increased.

37 We also note that Wirral South Labour Party's proposed council size of 60 members has received support from Wirral West Labour Party and a local resident. However, we do not consider that Wirral South Labour Party has provided sufficient evidence upon which to base a scheme for 60 councillors, given its own admissions that it did not feel 'adequately competent to set an optimum number'. No evidence of how the Council would operate on a reduced council size was provided. Furthermore, Wirral West Labour Party's support for a 60-member council is based upon its desire to have all four Parliamentary constituencies in Wirral comprising five wards each. As stated in our *Guidance*, we take no account of Parliamentary constituency boundaries in recommending new patterns of ward boundaries. In practice, the new ward boundaries which are implemented following a PER are taken into account by the (Parliamentary) Boundary Commission in its reviews of Parliamentary constituencies.

38 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 66 members.

Electoral arrangements

39 We have noted that during our consultation period, we received submissions from Wirral West Labour Party and a number of local residents making proposals that we are unable to address as part of this review. Wirral West Labour Party made proposals based on retaining

the Wirral West Parliamentary constituency, although provided no specific details. However, as detailed above, we do not take into account Parliamentary constituency boundaries when carrying out periodic electoral reviews. One local resident proposed a review of the external boundaries of Wirral. The Boundary Committee could only undertake such a review if the Secretary of State were to request The Electoral Commission to provide advice on such matters and it then directed us to do so. A number of residents proposed single or two-member wards in Wirral, while another resident proposed that the existing wards should be retained, with the number of councillors adjusted to take into account the number of electors. However, as detailed earlier, the number of councillors who can be returned or elected from each metropolitan borough ward must be divisible by three.

40 A local resident proposed that recommendations should be based on the number of residents in a ward rather than registered electors. However, Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act requires us to have regard to the current electorate, defined as that contained in the electoral register in place at the time a review is commenced. Another local resident proposed an alternative electoral cycle to the current system of elections by thirds. However, metropolitan districts must have elections by thirds, and the responsibility for any such change rests with the Secretary of State. Finally, several local residents commented on the selection of candidates and the fact that local councillors do not have to live in the ward that they represent. These issues do not fall within the remit of a periodic electoral review.

41 In formulating the draft recommendations, we have also noted that the borough contains some significant geographical features, including the M53, the Bidston/Wrexham railway line, the Rock Ferry/Chester railway line, the Wirral Line and the Birkenhead Dock system. There is also a significant rural area in the west and south of the borough, providing further geographical constraints. The Liberal Democrats proposed utilising the entire length of the M53 as a boundary, while the Conservative and Labour groups proposed breaching it in part in the south. The Conservative and Labour groups proposed utilising the Bidston/Wrexham railway line as a boundary in the south of the borough, while breaching it further north, while the Liberal Democrats also proposed breaching it in the south. Each of the three schemes forwarded by the Council breached the Rock Ferry/Chester railway line around the Birkenhead area, while proposing that it form a boundary in the south of the borough. Furthermore, they each crossed the Wirral line in the north and west of the borough. The Labour Group proposed utilising the Upton By-Pass as a boundary, while the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats both breached it to some degree. Only the Birkenhead Dock system was accepted as a significant boundary by all three schemes. Furthermore, while Wirral is unparished, there are several settlements in the south containing discrete communities.

42 Given these geographical constraints, we acknowledge that these topographical features must be breached to some extent in order to achieve good electoral equality under a uniform pattern of three-member wards. At the same time any scheme must achieve the other statutory criteria of convenient and effective local government and reflecting the identities and interests of local communities. Therefore we have attempted to formulate a scheme which utilises these strong boundaries where possible, and where this is not possible, we have tried to ensure that there are suitable crossing points that unite the communities either side of the boundary. This is particularly pertinent in the south and centre of the borough in relation to the two railway lines and the M53.

43 We have carefully considered each of the borough-wide schemes we received from the Council and from Wirral South Labour Party. Having proposed retaining a council size of 66, our capacity to endorse Wirral South Labour Party's proposals based on a 60-member scheme is limited. We recognise that the scheme did achieve an improvement in electoral equality but, as discussed earlier, we have not been persuaded that sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate how the Council would operate on a reduced council size.

44 We have considered each of the schemes submitted by the Council. We note that, to some degree, each of the three parties has attempted to develop schemes which will fit in with the current Parliamentary constituency boundaries as much as possible, although the Conservative Group is the most explicit in its approach. As detailed earlier, we do not account of Parliamentary constituency boundaries in recommending new patterns of ward boundaries. However, we consider that this issue alone is not sufficient to dismiss any of the three schemes, given that they all have some merit. Therefore we have examined each scheme in detail with regard to our statutory criteria.

45 Each scheme provides for improved levels of electoral equality, and on the whole, utilises strong boundaries. However, we do not consider that any one scheme in its entirety facilitates a scheme for Wirral that best meets the statutory criteria. We therefore propose basing our draft recommendations mainly on the Labour Group's scheme (which features some broad similarities with the Conservative Group's scheme) with part of the Liberal Democrats' scheme, together with some of our own proposals. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Liscard, New Brighton, Seacombe and Wallasey wards;
- (b) Leasowe, Moreton, Prenton and Upton wards;
- (c) Hoylake, Royden and Thurstaston wards;
- (d) Bidston, Birkenhead, Claughton and Oxtton wards;
- (e) Bebington, Clatterbridge and Heswall wards;
- (f) Bromborough, Eastham, Egerton and Tranmere wards.

46 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Liscard, New Brighton, Seacombe and Wallasey wards

47 These four wards are situated in the north-east of the borough. Wallasey and New Brighton wards are bounded by the Irish Sea to the north, New Brighton, Liscard and Seacombe wards are bounded by the River Mersey to the east and Seacombe ward is bounded by the Birkenhead Docks System to the south. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor is 2% below the borough average in Liscard ward, both in 2001 and by 2006, 4% above in New Brighton ward (2% above by 2006), 4% below in Seacombe ward (equal to the average by 2006) and 9% above in Wallasey ward (7% above by 2006).

48 At Stage One the Conservative Group proposed retaining the existing New Brighton ward, while proposing minimal change to the boundaries of the other three wards. It proposed that part of the existing Wallasey ward (the area broadly to the rear of properties on Winchester Drive, Tancred Road, Burns Avenue and Massey Park in the south-east of the ward) be transferred to its proposed Liscard ward. Its proposed Liscard ward would be further modified, to transfer the area broadly to the south of Union Street and the area south of the Kingsway Tunnel Approach Road to its proposed Seacombe ward. The southern boundary of its proposed Seacombe ward, the Birkenhead Dock system, would remain unchanged. The Conservative Group argued that its proposals would reunite the community of Poulton in its proposed Seacombe ward and ensure that Liscard Town Centre is contained within Liscard ward.

49 The Labour Group proposed broadly retaining the existing Wallasey ward, other than transferring the area broadly to the south of Oldershaw School, to the east of Massey Park and to the south of Burns Avenue to its proposed Liscard ward. The area broadly to the south of the cemetery and Longland Road would also be transferred to its proposed Liscard ward from the existing New Brighton ward with the remainder of the existing boundaries of

New Brighton ward remaining unchanged. The southern boundary of its proposed Liscard ward would remain unchanged, other than the area broadly to the south of Union Street and Kinglake Road being transferred to its proposed Seacombe ward, which, other than this transfer, would retain its existing boundaries.

50 The Liberal Democrats proposed amendments to each of these four wards “to improve the electoral balance and utilise better natural boundaries”. They proposed amending the western boundary of the existing Wallasey ward so that it continued along the A554 and then west along Green Lane in order to tie the boundary to firm ground detail. They then proposed that the ward’s north-eastern boundary follow the centre of King’s Parade to the coastline. They also proposed a minor modification around Warren Drive in the north of the ward to avoid splitting the road. Further south, the area to the south of Stoneby Drive and to the east of Elleray Park School would be transferred to their revised New Brighton ward. Furthermore, the area broadly to the rear of properties on Winchester Drive, Tancred Road, Burns Avenue and Massey Park in the south-east of the ward would be transferred to their proposed Liscard ward, while the area broadly to the north of Hillside Road and west of Breck Road would be transferred from the existing Liscard ward to their proposed Wallasey ward.

51 The Liberal Democrats’ proposed New Brighton ward would reflect those amendments to their proposed Wallasey ward and would be further modified to transfer the south-western part of the ward (the area broadly to the south of Oldershaw School and Longland Road) to their proposed Liscard ward. The southern boundary of their proposed Liscard ward would remain unchanged, other than the area south of the Kingsway Tunnel Approach Road being transferred to their proposed Seacombe ward. Their proposed Seacombe ward would otherwise remain unchanged.

52 A local resident objected to any proposal that would transfer King Street from Liscard ward.

53 We have carefully considered the representations received. We note that there were broad similarities between the three schemes submitted by the Council for these four wards. Consequently, we have based our proposals for the four wards in this area upon strong boundaries, community identities and good electoral equality. We propose adopting the Labour Group’s revised Wallasey ward, with two amendments derived from the Liberal Democrats’ proposals. We propose that the western boundary of our proposed Wallasey ward should continue along the A554 and then west along Green Lane in order to tie the boundary to firm ground detail. In the north-east of the ward, we propose utilising the Liberal Democrats’ proposed boundary around the Warren Drive area to avoid splitting the road. We also propose adopting the Labour Group’s revised New Brighton ward, other than the boundary amendment around Warren Drive, as detailed above. We propose adopting the Labour Group’s proposed Liscard ward, but again propose utilising part of the Liberal Democrats’ proposal for this ward, so that the south-western boundary follows the centre of the Kingsway Tunnel Approach Road until rejoining the existing boundary. We then propose adopting the Liberal Democrats’ proposed Liscard ward in full. This proposal retains King Street in Liscard ward, as proposed by a local resident.

54 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillors would be 4% above the borough average in Liscard ward, both in 2001 and by 2006, 2% below in New Brighton ward (3% below by 2006), 6% below in Seacombe ward (1% above by 2006) and 6% above in Wallasey ward (5% above by 2006). Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

Leasowe, Moreton, Prenton and Upton wards

55 These four wards are situated in the north and centre of the borough. Leasowe and Moreton wards are bounded by the Irish Sea to the north while Upton ward is bounded to the

east by the M53. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor is 13% below the borough average in Leasowe ward (9% below by 2006), 12% below in Moreton ward, both in 2001 and by 2006, 3% above in Prenton ward (equal to the average by 2006) and 9% above in Upton ward, both in 2001 and by 2006.

56 At Stage One the Conservative Group proposed extending the existing Leasowe ward south-westwards so that the boundary followed the centre of Pasture Road and Upton Road as far as its southern boundary, which would be formed by the M53. This ward would be renamed Moreton East & Leasowe ward. It proposed that the existing Moreton ward should be extended southwards to incorporate the whole of the Saughall Massie area from the existing Upton ward, utilising Arrowe Brook as its southern boundary. The majority of Moreton ward's existing western boundary would be retained, other than north of the railway line, where the Conservative Group proposed transferring the properties to the west of Park Lane to its proposed Hoylake ward, as discussed below. This ward would be renamed Moreton West & Saughall Massie ward.

57 The Conservative Group proposed a modified Upton ward which would reflect the boundary amendments in the north as a consequence of its proposed Moreton East & Leasowe and Moreton West & Saughall Massie wards. Its western boundary would follow the Upton by-pass as far as the roundabout with the B5139, where it would then rejoin the existing western boundary. The south of the ward would be extended southwards to include the area broadly to the east of Woodland Road and Church Lane from the existing Prenton ward. The M53 would be retained as the ward's eastern boundary, and the ward would retain its existing name. The Conservative Group stated that 'we propose that there should be an Upton ward constrained by the mid-Wirral motorway, the Moreton Spur, Woodchurch Road and the western sections of the Upton by-pass'. However, it further stated that 'this would leave an oversized ward', so it proposed splitting the Woodchurch estate between its proposed Upton and Barnston wards. Its proposed Barnston ward would comprise that part of the existing Prenton ward to the west of the M53 and less the area to be transferred to its proposed Upton ward, along with the settlements of Pensby, from the existing Thurstaston ward, and Barnston from the existing Heswall ward, in addition to the properties broadly to the north of Irby Road, also from the existing Heswall ward.

58 Finally in this area the Conservative Group proposed a modified Prenton ward. It proposed that the M53 should form its western boundary while Waterpark Road would form the majority of its northern boundary, transferring the area to the north of this road to its proposed Oxtan ward, as described below. The existing ward would be extended north-eastwards and eastwards to incorporate a significant part of the existing Egerton ward, broadly to the south of Elmswood Road and broadly to the west of Greenway Road and Bebington Road. Its southern boundary would be broadly retained, although the area to the north of Marsh Lane and Broadway and to the west of King's Road would be transferred to its proposed Prenton ward from the existing Bebington ward.

59 The Labour Group proposed extending the existing Leasowe ward south-westwards so that the boundary followed the centre of Pasture Road and Upton Road as far as the southern boundary which would be formed by the M53. It proposed that the existing Moreton ward should be extended southwards to incorporate the Saughall Massie area from the existing Upton ward, utilising Arrowe Brook as its southern boundary. It stated that 'residents in Saughall Massie relate as well to Moreton as they did to Upton, and the two townships sit quite comfortably together'. It proposed broadly retaining the western boundary of the existing Moreton ward, although following the rear of properties for most of the boundary, rather than field edges. This ward would be renamed Moreton & Saughall Massie ward. It proposed a modified Upton ward which would be bounded by the M53 to the north and east, Woodchurch Road to the south and Arrowe Park Road and the Upton by-pass to the west. The Labour Group acknowledged that, with a variance of 11%, improving to 9% by 2006, this ward would be relatively under-represented for an urban area. However, it stated that 'we

believe a case should be made for keeping it at this size rather than crossing a major road and artificially splitting the Woodchurch community’.

60 Finally in this area, the Labour Group proposed dividing the existing Prenton ward between a further three new wards. It proposed that the M53 should form the western boundary of its proposed Prenton & Egerton ward while its northern boundary should be broadly retained, other than extending along Singleton Avenue and North Road in order to take in a significant part of the existing Egerton ward. Its eastern boundary would follow the centre of Greenway Road, Bebington Road, Bedford Drive, The Wiend and Thornton Road. Its southern boundary would be broadly retained, although the area to the north of Lever Causeway and to the west of Mount Road would be transferred to its proposed Prenton & Egerton ward from the existing Bebington ward. The settlement of Thingwall would be transferred to its proposed Pensby & Thingwall ward, along with the settlement of Pensby from the existing Thurstaston ward and the northern part of the existing Heswall ward (that part broadly to the north of Mere Lane, Irby Road and Daryl Road). The remainder of the existing Prenton ward would form part of its proposed Greasby, Frankby & Irby ward, as discussed in detail later.

61 The Liberal Democrats proposed modifying the eastern boundary of the existing Leasowe ward, as detailed earlier. They also proposed extending this ward south-westwards so that the boundary followed the centre of Pasture Road and Upton Road as far as the southern boundary which would be formed by the M53. They proposed that the existing Moreton ward should be extended southwards to incorporate the Saughall Massie area from the existing Upton ward, utilising Arrowe Brook as its southern boundary. They stated that ‘Saughall Massie is a small community in its own right and has a better relationship with Moreton than with Upton due to the location of the Upton by-pass’. The majority of Moreton ward’s existing western boundary would be retained, other than north of the railway line, where the Liberal Democrats proposed transferring the properties to the west of Park Lane to their proposed Hoylake ward, as discussed later.

62 The Liberal Democrats proposed a modified Upton ward (to be named Upton & Woodchurch ward) which would reflect the transfer to their proposed Moreton ward, as described above. Properties broadly to the south of Surrey Avenue and to the west of Moreton Road, Molyneux Close, Denny Close and Arrowe Park Road would be transferred to their proposed Greasby & Newton ward, as discussed later. The remainder of the existing Upton ward would then be extended southwards to incorporate part of the existing Prenton ward (broadly to the north of Woodchurch Road, to the west of Arrowe Park Road and to the north of Thingwall Road East before the boundary rejoined Prenton ward’s existing western boundary). The M53 would continue to form this ward’s eastern boundary.

63 The Liberal Democrats proposed a modified Prenton ward in order to reunite ‘the natural community of Prenton’. They proposed that the M53 should form its western boundary while its northern boundary should be broadly retained. They proposed that the ward be extended eastwards to incorporate part of the existing Egerton ward, broadly the area to the west of Borough Road, south of Bedford Drive and west of Bebington Road. They also proposed that the ward be extended southwards so that its southern boundary should be formed by Lever Causeway, Broadway and King’s Lane. Finally in this area the Liberal Democrats proposed a new Pensby ward, to be comprised of the settlement of Thingwall from the existing Prenton ward, the settlement of Pensby from the existing Thurstaston ward, the settlement of Barnston from the existing Heswall ward, along with those properties broadly to the north of Whitfield Lane, Florence Avenue and Tower Road North, also from the existing Heswall ward.

64 One local resident proposed an alternative Moreton ward. He proposed that its western boundary be retained and that the railway line form its northern boundary. Its eastern

boundary would be broadly formed of Danger Lane and Chapelhill Road, while its southern boundary would be broadly formed of the A551 to Burrell Drive, following the rear of properties on Jasmine Close, across Oak Avenue at the Childwall Avenue junction, to the rear of Meadowbrook Road and to Hoylake Road. He argued that this would recognise 'the specific and known identity' of Moreton.

65 Two local residents objected to any proposal that would transfer the Meols area, currently in the existing Hoylake ward, into Moreton ward, being concerned that this would transfer the Meols area to another parliamentary constituency. One of the local residents also argued that the greenbelt area between the two communities 'cuts off the two communities, one from the other'.

66 We have carefully considered the representations received, particularly with regard to the Upton area. We note that the schemes proposed by the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats provide for better electoral equality than that proposed by the Labour Group (2% above the borough average, improving to 1% above the borough average by 2006 and 6% above the borough average, improving to 3% above the borough average by 2006 respectively as opposed to 11% above the borough average, improving to 9% above the borough average by 2006). However, we do not consider that splitting the Woodchurch estate (as proposed by the Conservative Group) or breaching the Upton by-pass (as proposed by the Liberal Democrats) would be a good reflection of community identities and interests in this area. The Conservative Group's proposal would result in part of the Woodchurch estate being contained in its proposed Barnston ward, where it would be separated from the remainder of the ward by a large geographical area. Alternatively, the Liberal Democrats' proposal would result in those electors in the north-east of their proposed Greasby & Newton ward being separated from the remainder of the proposed ward by the Upton by-pass.

67 We note that both the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats looked at uniting the Upton and Woodchurch areas but considered that, in the interests of electoral equality, the ward size must be reduced. Although we acknowledge that it has been necessary to breach some geographical barriers within Wirral, we consider that the geographical constraints around the Upton and Woodchurch areas, namely the A5027/Upton by-pass to the west, the A552 to the south and the M53 to the east and north, are such that achieving electoral equality would be to the detriment of community identities and interests, and we have been unable to identify any viable alternatives which would better meet the statutory criteria. We therefore consider the relatively high variance of 9% by 2006 to be justified, and propose adopting the Labour Group's Upton ward in full. We would welcome comments on this proposal at Stage Three.

68 We propose adopting the Liberal Democrats' proposed Leasowe ward in full. We note that each of the three schemes proposed broadly similar Leasowe wards, but consider that the Liberal Democrats' proposal to follow the A54 and Green Lane provides for a stronger boundary. We propose adopting the Labour Group's Prenton & Egerton ward, which facilitates our proposed Upton ward, with one minor amendment. We propose that its south-eastern boundary follow the rear of properties on Raby Grove and The Close to avoid cutting off these culs-de-sac from the remainder of the ward. Finally in this area, we propose basing our proposed Moreton ward on the Liberal Democrats' proposal, other than a minor amendment around the Upton by-pass. Once again we note that there was broad consensus between the three schemes proposed by the Council in this area, but considered that this scheme provided for the stronger boundaries. We have noted the local resident's proposal for a revised Moreton ward, but considered that this would have a significant consequential effect on the remainder of the north-western area. However, the Liberal Democrats' proposal does partially address the local resident's concerns about properties to the north of the railway line having access to the remainder of the ward by transferring them to our proposed Hoylake & Meols ward, as discussed below.

69 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8% below the borough average in Leasowe ward (equal to the average by 2006), 1% below in Moreton ward, both in 2001 and by 2006, 2% below in Prenton & Egerton ward (4% below by 2006) and 11% above in Upton ward (9% above by 2006). Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

Hoylake, Royden and Thurstaston wards

70 These three wards are situated in the west of the borough, with Hoylake and Thurstaston wards being bounded by the River Dee to the west. Hoylake ward is detached as it includes Hilbre Island, which is situated off the ward's western coast in the River Dee. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor is 14% above the borough average in Hoylake ward (11% above by 2006), 14% above in Royden ward (12% above by 2006) and 13% above in Thurstaston ward (9% above by 2006).

71 At Stage One the Conservative Group proposed retaining the eastern boundary of the existing Hoylake ward, other than the amendment with its proposed Moreton West & Saughall Massie ward, as detailed earlier. It also proposed broadly retaining the southern boundary as far as the junction between Black Horse Hill and Hilbre View. Hilbre View, Grange Road and Dee Lane would then form the remainder of its southern boundary. This ward would continue to be named Hoylake ward. It then proposed modifying the existing Royden ward to form part of its proposed West Kirby ward. It would be extended westwards to include part of the existing Hoylake ward, as detailed above. It would then be extended southwards to include a large part of the existing Thurstaston ward. Its eastern boundary would broadly follow Greasby Brook, Mill Hill Road and Telegraph Road until meeting the southern boundary of the existing Thurstaston ward. It then proposed that the remainder of the existing Royden ward form its proposed Greasby & Irby ward, along with the remainder of the existing Thurstaston ward and a small part of the existing Upton ward to the west of the Upton by-pass, north of the junction with the B5139. The Pensby area in the existing Thurstaston ward would form part of its proposed Barnston ward, as described above.

72 The Labour Group proposed broadly retaining the eastern boundary of the existing Hoylake ward, as detailed earlier, while extending the southern boundary further along Saughall Massie Road and to the rear of properties on Gilroy Road and Greenbank Road. From Greenbank Road the boundary would follow the railway line, Wirral Way and Church Road. This ward would be named Hoylake & Meols ward. It then proposed that part of the existing Royden ward, broadly to the west of the brook running along the eastern part of Newton, be joined with that part of the existing Hoylake ward not included in its Hoylake & Meols ward and a large part of the existing Thurstaston ward, broadly to the west of Irby. It also proposed that the northern part of the existing Heswall ward, the area to the north of properties on The Akbar, Greenfield Lane and Oldfield Drive, be transferred to this ward, which would be named West Kirby & Thurstaston ward. It then proposed that the remainder of the existing Royden ward form its proposed Greasby, Frankby & Irby ward, also encompassing the settlement of Irby in the existing Thurstaston ward. This ward would stretch as far to the east to include Arrowe Park Hospital and the Landican area, utilising the M53 and the Bidston/Wrexham railway line as part of its eastern boundary. The remainder of the existing Thurstaston ward, the Pensby area, would be transferred to its proposed Pensby & Thingwall ward, along with the Thingwall area of the existing Prenton ward and part of the existing Heswall ward (the area broadly to the north of Irby Road and Birch Close).

73 The Liberal Democrats proposed broadly retaining the eastern boundary of the existing Hoylake ward, other than the amendment with their proposed Moreton ward, as detailed earlier. They then proposed transferring the north-western part of the existing Royden ward, the area broadly to the north of Saughall Massie Road, Black Horse Hill, Beacon Drive and Lang Lane to their revised Hoylake ward. Additionally, they proposed transferring the southern part of the existing Hoylake ward, the area broadly to the south of Lang Lane,

Grange Road and Riversdale Road to their proposed Thurstaston ward. This revised ward would incorporate the majority of the existing Thurstaston ward, other than transferring the Pensby area to their proposed Pensby ward, as discussed earlier. It would also include part of the existing Royden ward, the area broadly to the south of Grafton Walk, Gleggside, Ennisdale Drive and Covertside. The boundary would then cut across fields until rejoining the existing boundary on Hillbark Road. Finally, they proposed that the northern part of the existing Heswall ward, the area to the north of properties on The Akbar, Greenfield Lane and Oldfield Drive, be transferred to this ward. The remainder of the existing Royden ward would form their proposed Greasby & Newton ward, along with part of the existing Upton ward, as described earlier.

74 As detailed earlier, two local residents objected to any proposal that would transfer the Meols area, currently in the existing Hoylake ward, into Moreton ward. Another local resident contended that Thurstaston, Irby and Pensby were separated from the remainder of the existing Thurstaston ward by the Common, and that they have more affinity with Heswall, as does Thingwall, currently in Prenton ward.

75 We have carefully considered the representations received. We have noted that there are broad similarities between the three schemes submitted by the Council for the existing Hoylake ward, with minor differences in the south of the proposed wards. Officers from the Committee having visited the area, we consider that the Labour Group's proposed Hoylake & Meols ward provides the most appropriate boundaries and a less arbitrary division of the West Kirby and Newton areas. We do, however, propose an amendment in the north-east of the ward to the boundary with our proposed Moreton ward, as detailed earlier. We also propose a minor amendment to the boundary around West Kirby Station, which has a negligible effect on electoral equality. This proposal retains the Meols area with the Hoylake area, as proposed by two local residents.

76 We have also noted the three very different proposals for the existing Royden ward. Officers from the Committee having visited the area, we noted that all three schemes submitted by the Council provide warding arrangements which have good road links. However, we considered that the Labour Group's scheme recognised the separate settlements in this area to a greater extent than the other schemes submitted by the Council, particularly more than the Liberal Democrats' scheme which, as detailed above, provided a somewhat arbitrary boundary in the Newton area in our opinion. However, we did consider that the large geographical area of the Labour Group's proposed Greasby, Frankby & Irby ward should be reduced and we therefore propose amendments in the east of the ward to address this, while making a minor amendment in the Irby Hill area which has a negligible effect on electoral equality. We propose utilising the western boundary of the existing Prenton ward as our proposed Greasby, Frankby & Irby ward's eastern boundary, thus transferring Arrowe Park Hospital and the Landican area to our proposed Pensby & Thingwall ward, which we also propose basing on the Labour Group's proposal. This ward would be amended to include this area from the Labour Group's proposed Greasby, Frankby & Irby ward, along with the settlement of Barnston, currently in Heswall ward. We acknowledge that this ward, with a variance of 10% below the borough average by 2006, is relatively over-represented. However, we consider that the geography of the area has made it difficult for us to propose a ward in this area with a lower level of electoral inequality. This ward contains discrete settlements, and we consider that to enlarge the ward to increase the number of electors by transferring an area from the north would make the ward too geographically large. Alternatively, to transfer more electors from the south would, in our opinion, arbitrarily transfer electors from the Heswall area. We would welcome comments on this proposal at Stage Three.

77 We therefore propose adopting the Labour Group's proposed West Kirby & Thurstaston ward, subject to the minor amendment in the Irby Hill area, as mentioned above. This has the benefit of facilitating our other proposed wards in the area, while at the same time addressing

the concerns raised regarding Thurstaston Common and the surrounding settlements.

78 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 4% above the borough average in Greasby, Frankby & Irby ward (1% above by 2006), 4% below in Hoylake & Meols ward (6% below by 2006), 6% below in Pensby & Thingwall ward (10% below by 2006) and 6% below in West Kirby & Thurstaston ward (8% below by 2006). Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

Bidston, Birkenhead, Claughton and Oxton wards

79 These four wards are situated in the east of the borough. Bidston and Birkenhead wards are bounded to the north by the Birkenhead Dock system, and Birkenhead ward is also bounded by the River Mersey to the east. Bidston, Claughton and Oxton wards are bounded to the west by the M53. Under the existing arrangements the number of electors per councillor is 34% below the borough average in Bidston ward (32% below by 2006), 12% below in Birkenhead ward (5% below by 2006), 1% below in Claughton ward (5% above by 2006) and 3% above in Oxton ward, both in 2001 and by 2006.

80 At Stage One the Conservative Group proposed a Birkenhead ward with significant modifications. It proposed that the area to the west of Duke Street be transferred to its proposed Bidston ward, while proposing that Birkenhead Park and a number of adjoining properties be transferred from the existing Claughton ward to its revised Birkenhead ward. The remainder of the existing Birkenhead ward would then be further extended to include part of the existing Tranmere ward, the area broadly to the north of Elm Road, Downham Road and Union Street. Its revised Bidston ward would be extended to include part of the existing Birkenhead ward, as described above, and part of the existing Claughton ward, the area broadly to the north of Park Road North, Upton Road and the Thermopylae Pass.

81 Consequently, the Conservative Group's proposed Claughton ward would incorporate a significant amount of the existing Oxton ward in order to increase the number of electors in the ward. The area to the north of Townfield Lane, Gerald Road and Shrewsbury Road would be transferred to the Conservative Group's revised Claughton ward. It then proposed that the area to the north of Melford Drive, Prenton Village Road and Waterpark Road should be transferred to its revised Oxton ward from the existing Prenton ward, as described earlier. It stated that 'we believe that the boundaries submitted in respect of Bidston, Birkenhead, Claughton [and] Oxton ... produce a fair equal representation of the electorate with reasonable access to polling stations and general community facilities for the electorate and the boundaries ... can be seen to be logical'.

82 The Labour Group proposed a new Birkenhead & Lairdsideward, transferring the area to the west of Tower Road, Rendel Street and Watson Street from the existing Birkenhead ward to its proposed Bidston & St James ward. It proposed that Birkenhead Park be retained as part of the proposed Birkenhead & Lairdsideward's western boundary, while transferring the area broadly to the west of Westbourne Road and Eastbourne Road to its proposed Claughton ward and the area broadly to the west of Alfred Road to its revised Oxton ward. The remainder of the existing Birkenhead ward would be extended to include part of the existing Oxton ward (the area broadly to the east of Woodchurch Road and to the north of the College off Borough Road), part of the existing Egerton ward (the area to the north of North Road, and also the area broadly to the west of Greenway Road) and part of the existing Tranmere ward (the area broadly to the north of Victoria Park Road, Well Lane, Downham Road, Holborn Square and Green Lane).

83 The Labour Group's proposed Bidston & St James ward would include the majority of the existing Bidston ward, other than a small area south of Norman Street, that part of the existing Birkenhead ward as detailed above, and part of the existing Claughton ward (the

area to the north of the Thermopylae Pass, Upton Road and Upper Flaybrick Road). The Labour Group stated that the Beechwood Estate in the west of the proposed ward 'is a clear community in itself, and does not relate in any way to the lower Noctorum Estate in Cloughton'. The existing Cloughton ward would be extended to include part of the existing Oxton ward (the areas to the north of part of Budworth Road and Kingsmead Road North, as well as a minor amendment to tie the boundary to firm ground detail near the railway line) and part of the existing Birkenhead ward, as detailed above. It also proposed transferring part of the existing Cloughton ward to its revised Oxton ward (the area broadly to the south of Sandy Way, Grosvenor Place, St Andrew's Road and Grange Mount). Its revised Oxton ward would reflect the amendments detailed earlier, and would otherwise broadly retain its western and southern boundaries.

84 The Liberal Democrats proposed a revised Birkenhead ward, transferring the area to the west of Vittoria Street to their proposed Park ward. They also proposed transferring the area to the south of Cloughton Road and to the west of Exmouth Street and Borough Road from the existing Birkenhead ward to their proposed Park ward. The remainder of the existing Birkenhead ward would be extended to include part of the existing Egerton ward (the area broadly to the east of Borough Road and to the north of South Road and Stuart Road) and part of the existing Tranmere ward (the area broadly to the north of Downham Road and Union Street). Their proposed Park ward would include the areas of the existing Birkenhead ward as detailed above. It would also include part of the existing Bidston ward (the area broadly to the south of Lansdowne Road) and a significant part of the existing Cloughton ward (the area broadly to the east of Tollemache Road, Boundary Road and Bidston Road). Finally, it would also include a small part of the existing Oxton ward (the area to the north of Balls Road East).

85 The Liberal Democrats' proposed Bidston & Noctorum ward would broadly encompass the Bidston and Noctorum estates and the properties in between. This would include part of the existing Birkenhead ward (the area broadly to the north of Corporation Road and to the west of Milner Street), the remainder of the existing Bidston ward and the majority of the remainder of the existing Cloughton ward. Finally, their revised Oxton ward would broadly retain its existing boundaries, reflecting the minor amendments detailed above. They stated that 'the boundary with the Cloughton area to the north is largely historical but is equally locally recognised as the end of one community and the beginning of the other'.

86 We have carefully considered the representations received. We note that the three schemes submitted by the Council were very different in the Birkenhead area. Officers from the Committee, having visited the area, considered that the Labour Group's proposed Birkenhead & Lairdsie ward is a better reflection of community identity in this area than the wards proposed by the Conservative Group or the Liberal Democrats. We noted that the areas to the north and east of Birkenhead Park are very different in nature from those to the south and west of the park, and the Labour Group's proposed Birkenhead & Lairdsie ward reflects this. We also noted the differences between the proposals for the existing Bidston ward. While there were some similarities between the Conservative Group's proposed Bidston ward and the Labour Group's proposed Bidston & St James ward, the Liberal Democrats' proposed Bidston & Noctorum ward was quite different as it encompassed the Noctorum estate currently in Cloughton ward. We concur with the Labour Group's view that the Bidston and Noctorum areas are significantly different and do not consider that a ward encompassing both areas would provide for a good reflection of community identity. We therefore propose adopting the Labour Group's proposed Bidston & St James ward, with one minor amendment in the Torwood/Upton Road area. This facilitates our proposal to adopt the Labour Group's proposed Birkenhead ward.

87 Given our recommendation to adopt the Labour Group's proposals as detailed above, we also propose adopting the Labour Group's Cloughton and Oxton wards. We consider that the southern boundary of our proposed Oxton ward, which was proposed by both the Labour

Group and the Liberal Democrats, to be a strong boundary, and more logical than that proposed by the Conservative Group, given the surrounding area. We propose minor amendments to the boundary between the two wards around Kingsmead Road South and also around Grafton Street to improve electoral equality and to provide a more identifiable boundary.

88 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 4% above the borough average in Bidston & St James ward (5% above by 2006), 5% below in Birkenhead & Lairdside ward (3% above by 2006), 5% below in Claughton ward (2% above by 2006) and 4% above in Oxtan ward, both in 2001 and by 2006. Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

Bebington, Clatterbridge and Heswall wards

89 These three wards are situated in the south of the borough. Heswall ward is bounded by the River Dee to the west, Cheshire to the south and the Bidston/Wrexham railway line to the east. Clatterbridge and Bebington wards are both bounded by the Bidston/Wrexham railway line to the west and the Rock Ferry/Chester railway line to the east, and Clatterbridge ward is also bounded by Cheshire to the south. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor is 4% below the borough average in Bebington ward (6% below by 2006), 23% above in Clatterbridge ward (21% above by 2006) and 19% above in Heswall ward (14% above by 2006).

90 At Stage One, the Conservative Group proposed a revised Heswall ward. It proposed retaining the Bidston/Wrexham railway line as its eastern boundary and retaining its north-western boundary. However, it proposed transferring the settlement of Barnston to its proposed Barnston ward, as detailed earlier, along with the properties to the north of Irby Road and to the west of Pensby Road. It proposed broadly retaining the existing Clatterbridge ward (which would involve breaching the M53), other than transferring the Lower Bebington area into its proposed Bebington ward. Its proposed Bebington ward would reflect both this transfer and the transfer to the Conservative Group's proposed Prenton ward, as detailed earlier.

91 The Labour Group proposed a revised Heswall ward, to be named Heswall & Barnston ward, which would retain the Bidston/Wrexham railway line as its eastern boundary. It would broadly retain its north-eastern boundary, other than the transfer of those properties to the east of the northern part of Pensby Road to its proposed Pensby & Thingwall ward. It proposed further transferring part of the existing Heswall ward to its proposed Pensby & Thingwall ward (the area broadly to the north of Mere Lane, Irby Road and Daryl Road) and transferring the north-western part of the existing Heswall ward to its proposed West Kirby & Thurstaston ward. It then proposed a modified Clatterbridge ward, utilising the Bidston/Wrexham railway line as its western boundary and the M53 as its northern boundary as far as Junction 4. This ward would, however, breach the M53 to the south of Junction 4, while retaining the Rock Ferry/Chester railway line as the ward's eastern boundary. Finally, it proposed transferring the Lower Bebington area from the existing Clatterbridge ward to its revised Bebington ward. Its revised Bebington ward would reflect this transfer, and the minor transfer to the Labour Group's proposed Prenton & Egerton ward, as detailed earlier.

92 The Liberal Democrats proposed a new Heswall & Thornton Hough ward which would breach the Bidston/Wrexham railway line and utilise the M53 as its eastern boundary. They proposed transferring the settlement of Barnston and the northern part of Heswall (the area broadly to the north of Whitfield Lane, Florence Avenue and Tower Road North) to their proposed Pensby ward. The area in the north-west of the existing Heswall ward would be transferred to their proposed Thurstaston ward, as detailed earlier. The majority of the remainder of the existing Clatterbridge would form the Liberal Democrats' proposed

Dibbinsdale ward (this ward being bounded to the east by the Rock Ferry/Chester railway line and to the west by the M53), although they too proposed transferring the Lower Bebington area to their proposed Bebington ward. Their proposed Bebington ward would also gain the area broadly to the south of Old Chester Road and Rock Lane from the existing Egerton ward. They also proposed transferring the area broadly to the north of Lever Causeway, Broadway and King's Lane to their proposed Prenton ward from the existing Bebington ward.

93 We have carefully considered the representations received. In particular we have noted the very different schemes submitted by the Council in the Clatterbridge area. Officers from the Committee, having visited the area, noted that there are five crossing points across the M53 in this area while there are only two crossing points across the Bidston/Wrexham railway line in this area. Furthermore, the crossing points on the M53 are geographically spread out while the crossing points on the railway line are situated in close proximity to one another. We therefore consider that proposals to breach the M53 and utilise the two railway lines as eastern and western boundaries would provide a better reflection of communities and more conducive to effective and convenient local government than the arrangements which would result from breaching the railway line, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats. Having already decided to adopt the Labour Group's proposed Pensby & Thingwall ward, with our own modifications, we propose basing our scheme in the south of the area on the Labour Group's Heswall & Barnston ward, with modifications to facilitate our proposals for Pensby & Thingwall ward. However, this ward would retain the name Heswall ward to acknowledge the transfer of the Barnston area to our proposed Pensby & Thingwall ward.

94 Finally in this area we propose adopting the Labour Group's proposed Bebington ward without amendment. We note the broad consensus between the three schemes submitted by the Council that the Lower Bebington area should be transferred to Bebington ward, and also the similar northern boundaries proposed in each scheme. This proposal also facilitates our proposed Clatterbridge ward.

95 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8% above the borough average in Bebington ward (5% above by 2006), 11% above in Clatterbridge ward (6% above by 2006) and 2% above in Heswall ward (2% below by 2006). Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

Bromborough, Eastham, Egerton and Tranmere wards

96 These four wards are situated in the south and east of the borough. Bromborough and Eastham wards are bounded by the Rock Ferry/Chester railway line to the west and the River Mersey to the east. Egerton ward is bounded to the east by the Rock Ferry/Chester railway line, while Tranmere ward straddles the railway line in the north and is bounded by the River Mersey to the east. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor is 2% below the borough average in Bromborough ward (3% below by 2006), equal to the average in Eastham ward (1% below by 2006), 5% below in Egerton ward (4% below by 2006) and 23% below in Tranmere ward (19% below by 2006).

97 At Stage One the Conservative Group proposed modifying the existing Tranmere ward by transferring a significant part of it to its proposed Birkenhead ward, as detailed earlier. It then proposed extending the remainder of the existing Tranmere ward southwards, to cross the Rock Ferry/Chester railway line further south than at present. This would involve the transfer of the area broadly to the east of Greenway Road, Bebington Road and Old Chester Road from the existing Egerton ward to its revised Tranmere ward. The area to the east of Old Chester Road from the existing Bebington ward would also be transferred to its proposed Tranmere ward. The area broadly to the south of Delta Road East would be transferred from the existing Tranmere ward to its revised Bromborough ward. As detailed earlier, a large part

of the existing Egerton ward would be transferred to its proposed Prenton ward. The existing Bromborough and Eastham wards would be broadly retained, other than the minor amendment between its proposed Tranmere and Bromborough wards, as detailed above.

98 The Labour Group proposed that part of the existing Tranmere ward be transferred to its proposed Birkenhead & Lairdside ward, as detailed earlier. It proposed that the remainder of the existing Tranmere ward should form part of its proposed Rock Ferry ward, along with part of the existing Egerton ward (the area broadly to the east of Bebington Road, south of Bedford Drive and east of The Wiend and Thornton Road). The area to the east of Old Chester Road from the existing Bebington ward would also be transferred to its proposed Rock Ferry ward. The boundary between its proposed Rock Ferry ward and its revised Bromborough ward would be broadly the same as the boundary between the existing Tranmere and Bromborough wards. A small part of the existing Egerton ward would be transferred to its proposed Birkenhead & Lairdside ward, as detailed earlier, while the remainder of the existing Egerton ward would be transferred to its proposed Prenton & Egerton ward, also discussed earlier. Its proposed Bromborough and Eastham wards would be broadly retained, other than an amendment around the industrial area to the east of the A41.

99 The Liberal Democrats proposed that part of the existing Tranmere ward be transferred to their proposed Birkenhead ward, as detailed earlier. They proposed that the majority of the remainder of the existing Tranmere ward should form part of their proposed Lairdside ward, along with part of the existing Egerton ward (the area broadly to the south of South Road, to the east of Borough Road, to the north of Bedford Drive, to the east of Bebington Road and to the north of Old Chester Road and Rock Lane). The majority of the remainder of the existing Egerton ward would form part of their revised Prenton ward, as detailed earlier. The south-eastern part of the existing Egerton ward would form part of their revised Bebington ward, as detailed earlier. Their revised Bromborough and Eastham wards would broadly retain their existing boundaries, other than a minor amendment to the boundary between their proposed Lairdside ward and their revised Bromborough ward around The Dell, and an amendment to the boundary between their revised Bromborough and Eastham wards, around the Acre Lane and Cambridge Road area.

100 We have carefully considered the representations received. We note that there was broad consensus between the three schemes submitted by the Council regarding the existing Bromborough and Eastham wards. We therefore propose adopting the wards whose boundaries we consider to be the strongest. We propose adopting the Liberal Democrats' proposed Eastham ward with a minor amendment in the Harrow Grove area and the Conservative Group's proposed Bromborough ward, other than reflecting this minor amendment. We propose adopting the Labour Group's proposed Rock Ferry ward, other than a minor amendment in the Thornton Road area, as this facilitates our proposals in the area.

101 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors would be 1% below the borough average in Bromborough ward (2% below by 2006), 1% below in Eastham ward (2% below by 2006) and 7% below in Rock Ferry ward (5% below by 2006). Our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

Electoral cycle

102 Under section 7(3) of the Local Government Act 1972, all metropolitan boroughs have a system of elections by thirds.

Conclusions

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

- a council of 66 members should be retained;
- there should continue to be 22 wards;
- the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified.

104 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations mainly on the Labour Group's proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following areas:

- we propose our own modifications to the Labour Group's proposed Bidston & St James, Bromborough, Claughton, Greasby, Frankby & Irby, Heswall & Barnston, Oxtan, Pensby & Thingwall, Prenton & Egerton, Rock Ferry and West Kirby & Thurstaston wards;
- we propose combining elements of the Labour Group's Hoylake & Meols, Liscard, New Brighton and Wallasey wards with the Liberal Democrats' proposals for these areas;
- we propose adopting the Liberal Democrats' proposed Leasowe and Seacombe wards in full, while adopting their Eastham and Moreton wards with minor amendments;
- we propose adopting the Conservative Group's Bromborough ward with a minor amendment.

105 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2001 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2006.

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	66	66	66	66
Number of wards	22	22	22	22
Average number of electors per councillor	3,768	3,768	3,813	3,813
Number of wards with a variance of more than 10% from the average	10	1	7	0
Number of wards with a variance of more than 20% from the average	3	0	2	0

106 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more

than 10% from 10 to one. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

Draft recommendation

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council should comprise 66 councillors serving 22 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and the large maps.

Map 2: Draft recommendations for Wirral

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

107 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Wirral contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 28 October 2002. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

108 Express your views by writing directly to us:

Team Leader
Wirral Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

109 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 Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to The Electoral Commission, which cannot make the Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft recommendations for Wirral: detailed mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Wirral area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on the large maps.

The **large maps** illustrate the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Wirral.

Map A1: Draft recommendations for Wirral: key map

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm>, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table B1: Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria

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