

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Halton

May 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations to the Government on whether there should be changes to local authorities' electoral arrangements.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)
Peter Brokenshire
Kru Desai
Pamela Gordon
Robin Gray
Robert Hughes CBE

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

We are statutorily required to review periodically the electoral arrangements – such as the number of councillors representing electors in each area and the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions – of every principal local authority in England. In broad terms our objective is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, and the number of councillors and ward names. We can also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish councils in the district.

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

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Halton on 5 September 2000.

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

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

- **in four of the 21 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and one ward varies by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in six wards and by more than 20 per cent in three wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 94-95) are that:

- **Halton Borough Council should have 56 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 23 wards, an increase of two;**
- **the boundaries of 20 of the existing wards should be modified, and only one ward should retain its existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 20 of the proposed 23 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to improve further with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 8 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 9 May 2001. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**

- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 2 July 2001:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Appleton	3	Appleton ward; Halton ward (part); Kingsway ward (part); Riverside ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
2	Beechwood	2	Beechwood ward; Palace Fields ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
3	Birchfield	2	Birchfield ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
4	Bowers Brook	3	Farnworth ward (part); Halton ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
5	Broadheath	3	Broadheath ward (part); Ditton ward (part); Riverside ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
6	Castlefields	3	Castlefields ward (part); Halton Brook ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
7	Clincton	2	Broadheath ward (part); Ditton ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
8	Ditton	2	Ditton ward (part); Riverside ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
9	Farnworth	3	Birchfield ward (part); Farnworth ward (part); Halton ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
10	Grange	3	Grange ward; Halton Brook ward (part); Mersey ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
11	Hale	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hale parish)	Map 2
12	Halton Brook	3	Halton Brook ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
13	Halton Lea	3	Palace Fields ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
14	Heath	3	Heath ward (part); Mersey ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
15	Hough Green	2	Hough Green ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
16	Kingsway	3	Broadheath ward (part); Kingsway ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
17	Mersey	3	Castlefields ward (part); Heath ward (part); Mersey ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
18	Norton North	3	Murdishaw ward (part); Norton ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
19	Norton South	3	Brookvale ward; Murdishaw ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
20	Sandymoor	2	Daresbury ward (Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook parishes); Norton ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
21	Upton	2	Birchfield ward (part); Hough Green ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
22	West Bank	1	Riverside ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
23	Windmill Hill	1	Norton ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map

Notes: 1 The wards of Daresbury and Hale are the only parished parts of the borough, covering the parishes of Daresbury, Moore, Preston Brook and Hale.

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

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Halton

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Appleton	3	4,962	1,654	0	4,912	1,637	-2
2 Beechwood	2	3,317	1,659	1	3,286	1,643	-2
3 Birchfield	2	2,027	1,014	-38	3,273	1,637	-2
4 Bowers Brook	3	5,533	1,844	12	5,444	1,815	8
5 Broadheath	3	5,342	1,781	8	5,216	1,739	4
6 Castlefields	3	5,432	1,811	10	5,322	1,774	6
7 Clinton	2	3,399	1,700	3	3,332	1,666	0
8 Ditton	2	3,542	1,771	7	3,512	1,756	5
9 Farnworth	3	4,925	1,642	0	4,868	1,623	-3
10 Grange	3	5,159	1,720	4	5,040	1,680	0
11 Hale	1	1,621	1,621	-2	1,582	1,582	-5
12 Halton Brook	3	5,047	1,682	2	4,944	1,648	-1
13 Halton Lea	3	4,969	1,656	1	4,853	1,618	-3
14 Heath	3	4,907	1,636	-1	4,830	1,610	-4
15 Hough Green	2	3,254	1,627	-1	3,178	1,589	-5
16 Kingsway	3	4,959	1,653	0	4,855	1,618	-3
17 Mersey	3	4,850	1,617	-2	4,786	1,595	-5
18 Norton North	3	4,893	1,631	-1	5,068	1,689	1
19 Norton South	3	5,260	1,753	6	5,185	1,728	3
20 Sandymoor	2	2,351	1,176	-29	3,486	1,743	4
21 Upton	2	3,155	1,578	-4	3,342	1,671	0
22 West Bank	1	1,687	1,687	2	1,649	1,649	-1
23 Windmill Hill	1	1,686	1,686	2	1,717	1,717	3
Totals	56	92,277	-	-	93,680	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,648	-	-	1,673	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Halton on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the new unitary authorities of Halton and Warrington 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 The Cheshire (Boroughs of Halton and Warrington) (Structural Change) Order 1996, created a unitary authority for Halton which came into existence on 1 April 1998. The establishment of the unitary authority was preceded by a Directed Electoral Review (DER), carried out by this Commission following a direction from the Secretary of State dated 2 April 1996. This DER increased the number of councillors serving Halton from 53 to 56, representing 21 wards, an increase of two. However, the DER did not fulfil the Commission's obligation under section 13.2 of the Local Government Act 1992 to undertake a periodic electoral review of Halton.

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

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

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the Borough Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish councils in the borough.

5 We also have regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties*. This sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equality of representation across the borough as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any

imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the general assumption that the existing council size already secures effective and convenient local government in that district but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified: in particular, we do not accept that an increase in a district’s electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a district council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other districts.

9 The review is in four stages (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to the Commission
Two	The Commission’s analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Secretary of State

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, ie in year one, half of the district council would be elected, in year two, half the county council would be elected, and so on. In unitary authority areas the White Paper proposed elections by thirds. 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 and three-member wards in unitary authority areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral wards in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals were taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities’ electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation and our present *Guidance*.

11 Stage One began on 5 September 2000, when we wrote to Halton Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Cheshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils, parish councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the North West Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough

Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 27 November 2000.

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

13 Stage Three began on 9 May 2001 and will end on 2 July 2001. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.***

14 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to move away from them in any areas, and submit final recommendations to the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to make representations to the Secretary of State. It will then be for him to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Secretary of State accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, he will make an Order. The Secretary of State will determine when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

15 The borough of Halton is a densely populated urban area covering the towns of Runcorn and Widnes, which are separated by the River Mersey which runs through the centre of the borough. Widnes, to the north of the Mersey, is a former chemical town which has undergone extensive development, changing its old image. Runcorn, to the south of the Mersey, contains both a New Town and a traditional market town. The borough has excellent transport links with easy access to Liverpool and Manchester Airports, the Port of Liverpool, Manchester Ship Canal and the national motorway network. The population of the borough has fallen slightly over the past decade. In April 1998 Halton Borough Council became a Unitary Authority.

16 The borough contains four parishes; Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook to the east and Hale to the west of the borough. The towns of Runcorn and Widnes are unparished and comprise 51 per cent and 46 per cent of the borough's total electorate respectively.

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'.

18 The electorate of the borough is 92,277 (February 2000). The Council presently has 56 members who are elected from 21 wards, two of which, Daresbury and Hale, are relatively rural in character. Sixteen of the wards are each represented by three councillors, three are each represented by two councillors and two are single-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

19 Since the last electoral review there has been little change to the electorate in Halton, with a marginal decline in electorate across most of the borough, however as a result of new housing developments there have been notable increases in the electorate of Birchfield and Norton wards.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,648 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase only marginally to 1,673 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes since 1996, the number of electors per councillor in four of the 21 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average and one ward varies by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Daresbury ward where the councillor represents 27 per cent fewer electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Halton

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Appleton	3	4,385	1,462	-11	4,338	1,446	-14
2 Beechwood	2	3,037	1,519	-8	3,014	1,507	-10
3 Birchfield	2	3,527	1,764	7	5,024	2,512	50
4 Broadheath	3	4,946	1,649	0	4,841	1,614	-4
5 Brookvale	2	3,535	1,768	7	3,505	1,753	5
6 Castlefields	3	5,006	1,669	1	4,909	1,636	-2
7 Daresbury	1	1,205	1,205	-27	1,258	1,258	-25
8 Ditton	3	5,063	1,688	2	5,014	1,671	0
9 Farnworth	3	5,078	1,693	3	5,017	1,672	0
10 Grange	3	4,963	1,654	0	4,848	1,616	-3
11 Hale	1	1,621	1,621	-2	1,583	1,583	-5
12 Halton	3	4,875	1,625	-1	4,790	1,597	-5
13 Halton Brook	3	5,473	1,824	11	5,364	1,788	7
14 Heath	3	5,322	1,774	8	5,240	1,747	4
15 Hough Green	3	5,414	1,805	10	5,289	1,763	5
16 Kingsway	3	4,944	1,648	0	4,842	1,614	-4
17 Mersey	3	4,631	1,544	-6	4,577	1,526	-9
18 Murdishaw	3	4,203	1,401	-15	4,231	1,410	-16
19 Norton	3	5,247	1,749	6	6,409	2,136	28
20 Palace Fields	3	5,249	1,750	6	5,130	1,710	2
21 Riverside	3	4,553	1,518	-8	4,457	1,486	-11
Totals	56	92,277	-	-	93,680	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,648	-	-	1,673	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Daresbury ward were relatively over-represented by 27 per cent, while electors in Halton Brook ward were relatively under-represented by 11 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

21 At the start of the review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Halton Borough Council and its constituent parish councils.

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

Halton Borough Council

23 The Borough Council proposed a council of 56 members serving 21 wards, as at present. The Council proposed changes to 13 of the existing 21 wards. It proposed 16 three-member wards, three two-member wards and two single-member wards. In Widnes it proposed that Birchfield ward should return three councillors, an increase of one, and that the boundary of Appleton ward be modified and the ward then return two councillors, a decrease of one. In Runcorn the Council proposed the creation of a single-member Windmill Hill ward; this proposal would result in modifications being proposed for the existing Brookvale, Daresbury, Murdishaw and Norton wards. It proposed only minor amendments in the remainder of Runcorn. The Council stated that it wished to retain elections by thirds. The Council's proposals are summarised at Appendix A.

Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations

24 The Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations ('the Conservatives') proposed the retention of a 56-member council serving 21 wards. In Widnes the Conservatives proposed modifications to all wards with the exception of Hale and Hough Green wards. They stated that they felt, especially in Widnes, that "the council's plan does not go far enough to address the considerable [existing] anomalies". In Runcorn they generally supported the Council's proposals, however they put forward their own arrangements for Sandymoor and Windmill Hill wards as well as proposing several new ward names. They supported the retention of the present system of elections by thirds. The Conservatives' proposals are summarised at Appendix A.

Runcorn Labour Councillors Group

25 The Runcorn Labour Councillors Group put forward radical changes to the existing electoral arrangements in Halton. It proposed a council size of 15, a reduction of 41, representing 15 single-member wards. The Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's submission outlined an alternative internal structure for the Council, in the light of the "Local Government Modernisation Agenda", the "Best Value regime" and "Social Inclusion Units". The Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's proposals are summarised at Appendix A.

Parish Councils

26 We received two representations from parish councils. Preston Brook Parish Council stated that “the three rural parishes... namely Moore, Daresbury and Preston Brook should all be part of the same ward... and should not be grouped with other urban wards”. It stated that “an adverse imbalance... would be preferable to being grouped with urban areas”. However, later in Stage One we received a joint submission from the parish councils of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook, proposing that Daresbury should continue to be a single-member ward. It proposed transferring electors from the existing Norton ward to provide electoral equality in Daresbury ward.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

27 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Halton is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

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

29 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.

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

Electorate Forecasts

31 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting a slight increase in the electorate of around 1.5 per cent from 92,277 to 93,680 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Birchfield ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Norton ward. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

32 The Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations’ proposals provided marginally different total electorates for the borough by 2005. The Conservatives stated that “plans are in progress... to build a further 704 houses, with an estimated 1,408 electors in Farnworth”. The Conservatives did not outline any further opposition to the Borough Council’s electorate forecasts for individual wards. When considering the Conservatives proposals we have used the descriptions of their proposed wards and calculated the variances of these wards by using the electorate data received from Halton Borough Council.

33 Runcorn Labour Councillors Group estimated that the total electorate of the borough in 2005 would be 93,796, 116 electors more than stated by the Borough Council. The majority of these 116 electors can be accounted for by minor single-figure differences in the electorate forecasts of individual polling districts, however in polling district SB, part of Norton ward, the Runcorn Labour Councillors Group estimated that there will be a further 66 electors by 2005, in addition to the Borough Council's estimate.

34 We have considered carefully the alternative electorate projections submitted to us during Stage One. We requested further information from the Borough Council on the Conservatives' electorate forecast for Farnworth ward. It stated that "there are no proposals to build a further 704 houses within Farnworth ward". We noted Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's projected electorate for 2005, however due to the lack of any supporting argumentation for an increase in the projected electorate for 2005, we have not been persuaded by the evidence presently available that the Borough Council's electorate forecasts are incorrect.

35 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and having given consideration to all sets of figures received, are content that the Borough Council's figures represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We would welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

Council Size

36 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

37 Halton Borough Council presently has 56 members and it stated that the current council size should be retained, a proposal which was supported by the Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations.

38 The Runcorn Labour Councillors Group proposed a council size of 15, a reduction of 41 members. It based its proposal on a move to new internal management structure, taking the PER as an opportunity to propose radical change to the current system. It outlined a "new and accountable structure" for the council with a leader, a ceremonial mayor, five portfolio members and eight councillors serving local forums, and stated that these 15 positions should be filled by full-time councillors. It commented that those councillors in non-executive positions following the 'Modernisation Agenda' "feel they no longer have a role to play" and that currently "there is non or poor attendance by a large percentage of the 56 elected councillors on committees, working groups and panels" and consequently that "15 councillors full time is better value than 56 part time". The Runcorn Labour Councillors Group stated that "the advantages which could be gained [under its proposals] far outweigh the administrative inconveniences and would bring about measurable benefits to the borough and its people".

39 The Commission was impressed by the innovative approach of the Group and the obvious amount of thought and time that has been taken. However, the proposals are based on changes in the organisation of local government which we cannot address or impose ourselves, namely a move to full-time councillors and a completely new internal management structure which does

not have the widespread support of the council itself. We can consider the Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's proposal to reduce the council size to 15 members but we would have to assume that these councillors would continue to be part-time. Consequently we have not been provided with any evidence that 15 "part-time" councillors would provide effective and convenient local government in Halton.

40 As already explained, the Commission's starting point in a PER is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government. For such a radical reduction in council size as that proposed by the Runcorn Labour Councillors Group, the Commission would expect some form of cross-party consensus as well as extensive consultation with local people. We have noted that the Borough Council conducted public consultation on its 56-member scheme, and that it would command the support of the Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations. The Commission is consequently not convinced that a decrease in council size to 15 members is justified within the remit of this review. However we would welcome the comments of local people on the proposal to reduce the number of councillors currently serving Halton Borough Council.

41 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 56 members.

Electoral Arrangements

42 We have considered carefully all the representations received for Halton and have decided to recommend a council size of 56, as outlined earlier in the chapter. Consequently we have been unable to make detailed comparisons with the ward boundaries proposed under the Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's 15-member scheme, as the different elector:councillor ratio means that the size and configuration of the wards vary substantially. It is important to note that (based on the 2000 electorate) under a council size of 56, the number of electors per councillor would be 1,648, while under a council size of 15, the number of electors per councillor would be 6,152, a difference of approximately 4,500 electors. Therefore, having concluded that a 56-member council should be retained, we have not adopted any of the Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's proposed wards.

43 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council's proposals for Runcorn, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we have concluded that we should base our recommendations in Runcorn, on the Borough Council's scheme. We consider that its proposals would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. However, to improve electoral equality further and having regard to local community identities and interests in Runcorn, we have decided to move away from the Borough Council's proposals in Norton North and Windmill Hill wards; and in Heath and Mersey wards.

44 In Widnes we propose departing from the Borough Council's proposals, and subsequently the existing arrangements, in the majority of the town, as proposed by the Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations. We consider that with the evidence available to us, particularly

the 2005 projected electorate figures, it is now possible for us to provide a more cohesive configuration of wards in Widnes. We have noted that during the DER carried out in 1996 there was very little change to the existing boundaries as any alternative proposals would not have provided suitable levels of electoral equality.

45 For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Brookvale, Daresbury, Murdishaw and Norton wards;
- (b) Beechwood, Castlefields, Halton Brook and Palace Fields wards;
- (c) Grange, Heath and Mersey wards;
- (d) Appleton, Halton, Kingsway and Riverside wards;
- (e) Broadheath, Ditton and Hale wards;
- (f) Birchfield, Farnworth and Hough Green wards.

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

Brookvale, Daresbury, Murdishaw and Norton wards

47 These four wards are situated to the south of the River Mersey, in the south-east of the borough. Daresbury ward comprises the parishes of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook as well as a small unparished area; Brookvale, Murdishaw and Norton wards are situated to the east of Runcorn town centre. Daresbury is currently a single-member ward, Brookvale returns two councillors and Murdishaw and Norton are both three-member wards. The wards of Brookvale and Norton currently have councillor:elector ratios 7 per cent and 6 per cent above the borough average respectively (5 per cent and 28 per cent by 2005). Daresbury and Murdishaw wards have councillor:elector ratios 27 per cent and 15 per cent below the borough average respectively (25 per cent and 16 per cent by 2005).

48 Halton Borough Council proposed a new warding pattern across this area. It proposed the creation of a single-member Windmill Hill ward, bordered to the south and east by the Bridgewater Canal, to the north by Woodridge and to the west by Norton Priory County Comprehensive School; the electors who would be situated in the proposed Windmill Hill ward are currently in Norton ward. The Council proposed a new two-member Sandymoor ward comprising the existing Daresbury ward and that part of Norton ward to the north and west of Bridgewater Canal; it stated that this proposal would provide “sufficient electorate for a two-member ward with a similar community identity”. The Borough Council proposed that the remainder of Norton ward and the existing Brookvale and Murdishaw wards should form two three-member wards, Norton North and Norton South. It proposed that Norton North ward should comprise the remainder of Norton ward and that part of Murdishaw ward west of the Busway and south of Murdishaw Avenue. Norton South ward would comprise the remainder of Murdishaw ward and Brookvale ward. We have noted that the Borough Council’s proposed Sandymoor ward would initially have a relatively high electoral variance. However, this ward is planned to have substantial residential development, resulting in improved levels of electoral equality by 2005.

49 Under the Borough Council's proposals the wards of Sandymoor and Windmill Hill would have councillor:elector ratios 29 per cent and 11 per cent below the borough average respectively (4 per cent above and 11 per cent below by 2005). The wards of Norton North and Norton South would have councillor:elector ratios 4 per cent and 6 per cent above the borough average respectively (5 per cent and 3 per cent by 2005).

50 Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations supported the Borough Council's proposal to create a single-member Windmill Hill ward, however they proposed three different options all similar to the Borough Council's proposed ward. Under Option One Windmill Hill ward would cover that part of the existing Norton ward, north of Norton Lane (excluding Broadfields) and west of Sandy Moor Lane, the Bridgewater Canal and Norton Village; Option Two would comprise broadly the same area with the area north of the Bridgewater Canal being included in Sandymoor ward instead; finally Option Three would comprise the same area as Option One with the exception of the electors of Hornbeam Close, Nortonwood Lane and Whitebeam Close who would be included in Norton North ward.

51 These three options for Windmill Hill ward would have knock-on effects for the Conservatives' proposed Norton North and Sandymoor wards. The Conservatives broadly supported the Borough Council's proposed two-member Sandymoor ward. The Conservatives generally supported the Borough Council's proposal for three-member Norton North and Norton South wards however; they stated that these ward names could cause confusion and therefore Norton South ward should be renamed following public consultation.

52 The Conservatives' proposals for Norton South ward would provide the same level of electoral equality as the Borough Council's scheme. Under Option One of the Conservatives' proposals Norton North, Sandymoor and Windmill Hill wards would have electoral variances of 13 per cent, 29 per cent and 39 per cent respectively (13 per cent, zero and 55 per cent by 2005); under Option Two the electoral variances would be 13 per cent, 29 per cent and 38 per cent respectively (13 per cent, 4 per cent and 46 per cent by 2005); under Option Three the electoral variances would be 4 per cent, 29 per cent and 13 per cent respectively (4 per cent, zero and 30 per cent by 2005).

53 We received two further submissions for these wards. Preston Brook Parish Council stated that the parishes of "Moore, Daresbury and Preston Brook should all be part of the same ward ... and should not be grouped with other urban wards", thereby retaining the existing Daresbury ward. However, later in Stage One we received a joint submission from Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook parish councils stating that they "have looked carefully at the areas surrounding the ward and wish to make the proposal of annexing a small part of Sandymoor only into the ward in order to bring the [electorate] figure up to the 1,673 electors necessary to keep Daresbury as a one-member ward". The parish councils proposed transferring the electors south of the Daresbury Expressway, east of Pitts Heath Lane and north of Wharford Lane, currently in Norton ward, into a single-member Daresbury ward. We were pleased to note that the parish councils carried out consultation on their proposals. Questionnaires were sent to one in ten of the electors they proposed transferring into Daresbury ward from Norton ward. Eighty five per cent of questionnaires were returned and "all but one respondent was in favour of being included in Daresbury ward" as they have a strong affinity with the parishes of Daresbury and Moore. The parish councils also stated that "historically, Daresbury has always been a one-member ward" and

argued that their proposals would allow their “rural voice to be both maintained and strengthened”. The parish councils stated that “the knock-on effect to the existing Norton ward would be extremely minimal”.

54 We have considered carefully all representations received concerning these four wards. We studied the proposal put forward by the parish councils of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook to include a small part of Sandymoor in a revised single-member Daresbury ward. While we propose including these electors in the same ward as the parishes of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook, we also propose transferring the remainder of the Sandymoor development into a new two-member Sandymoor ward. We consider that the parish councils of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook’s proposal would not provide effective and convenient local government for the current and future electors of the Sandymoor development as it would be divided between two different wards. Consequently we propose adopting the Borough Council’s proposed two-member Sandymoor ward. Our proposed Sandymoor ward would initially provide a relatively high electoral variance, however, due to projected growth this would improve to provide a high level of electoral equality by 2005.

55 We are also adopting the proposal to create a single-member Windmill Hill ward, as put forward by both the Borough Council and the Conservatives. However, under the proposals put forward by the Borough Council the electoral variance would be 11 per cent by 2005. We consider that this level of electoral equality can be improved upon while still having regard to the statutory criteria. Under the Conservatives’ proposals the electoral variance for all three options would be even higher than under the Borough Council’s proposals. Consequently we propose modifying the Borough Council’s proposed boundaries, transferring the electors of the Nortonwood Lane/Norton Hill area into Windmill Hill ward from the Borough Council’s proposed Norton North ward. To maintain good levels of electoral equality we propose including in Norton North ward the electors to the east of Windmill Hill Avenue North, situated in Windmill Hill ward under the Borough Council’s proposal’s. We consider that our modifications to the Borough Council’s proposed three-member Norton North and single-member Windmill Hill wards would provide high levels of electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We also propose adopting the Borough Council’s proposed Norton South ward, which was supported by the Conservatives. We are adopting the Borough Council’s proposed name of Norton South for our draft recommendations although we would welcome local people’s views during Stage Three.

56 Under our draft recommendations the wards of Norton South and Windmill Hill would have councillor:elector ratios 6 per cent and 2 per cent above the borough average respectively (3 per cent in both wards by 2005). Norton North and Sandymoor wards would have councillor:elector ratios 1 per cent and 29 per cent below the borough average respectively (1 per cent and 4 per cent above by 2005). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Beechwood, Castlefields, Halton Brook and Palace Fields wards

57 These four wards are situated south of the River Mersey and cover the centre of Runcorn town. Under the existing arrangements Beechwood is a two-member ward and Castlefields, Halton Brook and Palace Fields are each three-member wards. The wards of Castlefields, Halton

Brook and Palace Fields currently have councillor:elector ratios 1 per cent, 11 per cent and 6 per cent above the borough average respectively (2 per cent below, 7 per cent above and 2 per cent above by 2005). Beechwood ward has a councillor:elector ratio 8 per cent below the borough average (10 per cent by 2005).

58 The Borough Council proposed three minor amendments to the existing arrangements in these four wards. It proposed that polling district MD, the area east of the Central Expressway (A557) and south of Halton Brow, currently in Halton Brook ward, should be transferred into Castlefields ward as this “provides a better sense of community and is a marginally better solution overall”. It also proposed that polling district QE, the area south of the Whitehouse Expressway (A533), currently in Palace Fields ward, should be transferred into Beechwood ward as “this area is closer in terms of community identity to Beechwood ward”. The Council also proposed that Palace Fields ward should be renamed Halton Lea “to better reflect the community identity of the whole ward”.

59 Under the Borough Council’s proposals the wards of Beechwood, Castlefields, Halton Brook and Halton Lea would have councillor:elector ratios 1 per cent, 10 per cent, 2 per cent and 1 per cent above the borough average respectively (2 per cent below, 6 per cent above, 1 per cent below and 3 per cent below by 2005).

60 Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations generally supported the Council’s proposals for these four wards. However, they stated that they “do not feel that the name ‘Halton’ should figure in ward names”. They therefore opposed the proposal to rename Palace Fields ward as Halton Lea, stating that it should retain its existing name. The Conservatives’ proposals would provide the same levels of electoral equality as under the Borough Council’s proposals.

61 We have considered carefully the representations received, and concluded that the Borough Council’s proposals for these wards provide the best levels of electoral equality currently available while having regard to the statutory criteria. We considered the Conservatives’ proposal to rename Halton Brook and Halton Lea wards and we would welcome local people’s comments on ward names that would reflect the proposed wards. At this stage of the review we are content to adopt the Borough Council’s proposed ward names as part of our draft recommendations.

62 We are pleased to note that the Borough Council’s proposals have been consulted on locally and that they received the general support of the Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations. We therefore intend adopting the Borough Council’s proposals and consequently our recommendations will provide the same levels of electoral equality as the Borough Council’s proposals. We are proposing minor boundary realignments to the wards of Castlefields and Halton Brook to ensure that the ward boundaries adhere to ground detail; these modifications do not affect any electors. Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Grange, Heath and Mersey wards

63 These three wards are situated south of the River Mersey and cover the west of Runcorn town. Grange, Heath and Mersey wards each currently return three councillors. Grange ward currently has a councillor:elector ratio equal to the borough average (3 per cent below by 2005),

Heath ward has a councillor:elector ratio 8 per cent above the borough average (4 per cent by 2005) and Mersey ward currently has a councillor:elector ratio 6 per cent below the borough average (9 per cent by 2005).

64 Halton Borough Council proposed no change to the existing Grange ward and proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Heath and Mersey wards. It proposed that the electors to the east of Penn Lane, currently in Heath ward, should be transferred into Mersey ward to “eliminate the current small under-population in Mersey ward”.

65 Under the Borough Council’s proposals, Grange ward would have the same level of electoral variance as under the existing arrangements. Heath ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 3 per cent above the borough average (1 per cent below by 2005), Mersey ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 1 per cent below the borough average (4 per cent by 2005).

66 Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations stated that for Mersey ward the Commission should “produce a proposal that results in wards of a more logical character”. They generally supported the Borough Council’s proposals for Grange and Heath wards.

67 We have considered carefully representations received for these three wards. We have investigated alternative arrangements for the existing Mersey ward, as requested by Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations. We have concluded that the existing arrangements can be improved upon by transferring the electors south of the Weston Point Expressway, broadly covering the settlement of Weston Point, from Mersey ward into Heath ward. In order to maintain the existing levels of electoral equality we propose transferring the electors north of Greenway Road, including Morley Road, from Heath ward into Mersey ward. We consider that these proposed modifications to the existing three-member wards of Heath and Mersey would provide more cohesive wards linking communities that have common interests, while still providing good levels of electoral equality.

68 We propose adopting the Borough Council’s proposed three-member Grange ward with a minor modification to its northern boundary. We propose including the electors of Ivy Street and Poolside Road, currently situated in Mersey ward, in Grange ward. We consider that this modification provides effective and convenient local government for these electors as they would have direct access to the ward in which they would vote; it would also provide marginally improved electoral equality in Grange ward.

69 Under our draft recommendations Grange ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 4 per cent above the borough average (equal to the borough average by 2005). Heath and Mersey wards would have councillor:elector ratios 1 per cent and 2 per cent below the borough average respectively (4 per cent and 5 per cent by 2005). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Appleton, Halton, Kingsway and Riverside wards

70 These four wards lie to the north of the River Mersey and are situated in the centre and east of Widnes town. Under the existing arrangements each of these four wards return three councillors. Currently Kingsway ward has a councillor:elector ratio equal to the borough average

(4 per cent below by 2005). The wards of Appleton, Halton and Riverside have councillor:elector ratios 11 per cent, 1 per cent and 8 per cent below the borough average respectively (14 per cent, 5 per cent and 11 per cent by 2005).

71 Halton Borough Council proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Appleton and Riverside wards, transferring the electors east of Albert Road and Peel House Lane and south of Millfield Road, currently in Appleton ward, into Riverside ward. It also proposed that Appleton ward should be represented by two members, one fewer than at present. The Council proposed the retention of the existing electoral arrangements in the wards of Halton and Kingsway and consequently there would be no change to the existing levels of electoral equality in these two wards.

72 Under the Borough Council's proposals Appleton and Riverside ward would have councillor:elector ratios 13 per cent and 6 per cent above the borough average respectively (10 per cent and 2 per cent by 2005).

73 Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations proposed that all four of these wards should be modified. The Conservatives stated that Riverside ward "can in no way be described as a natural community"; it proposed that the existing ward should be divided north to south by the A663 Queensway, with the electors to the west of the A663 forming a new three-member St Michaels ward with the electors situated to the east of Philip Road, currently in Ditton ward and the electors south of Liverpool Road and west of Hale Road, currently in Broadheath ward. It stated that "the proposed name 'St Michaels ward' is taken from the golf course which would be at the centre of the proposed new ward". They proposed transferring polling districts DA, DB and DE from the existing Kingsway ward into a new Lowerhouse ward, as outlined later in the chapter. They proposed that the existing Appleton ward should be modified to include polling district AD, the electors south of Derby Road and west of Farnworth Street, currently in Farnworth ward; and "approximately two thirds of the electorate of polling district DD" currently in Kingsway ward. They proposed that this revised three-member Appleton ward should be renamed Victoria ward "derived from Victoria Park which forms much of the area of the ward". The Conservatives put forward a new two-member Waterloo ward, comprising the remainder of the existing Kingsway and Riverside wards. They also proposed transferring the electors south of the Liverpool to Warrington railway, currently in Farnworth ward, into a modified three-member Halton ward, stating that this revised ward would "represent a contiguous community and remove a considerable anomaly". They proposed that Halton ward should be renamed Bowers Brook, to "remove the potential confusion arising from the use of the word 'Halton' in a ward name".

74 Under the Conservatives' proposals, the wards of Bowers Brook, St Michaels, Victoria and Waterloo would have councillor:elector ratios 12 per cent, 4 per cent, 9 per cent and 13 per cent above the borough average respectively (8 per cent, equal to the borough average, 6 per cent and 9 per cent by 2005).

75 We have considered carefully the representations received concerning these four wards. We concur with the Conservatives' opinion that the existing Riverside ward can be improved upon as part of this PER. During the 1996 DER the Commission considered the creation of single-member wards covering the existing Riverside ward, including the creation of a single-member

West Bank ward, but this would have resulted in a “significant impact on neighbouring wards”. However, with the evidence presented to us during this review, including the 2005 electorate forecasts, we have considered various alternatives and are now proposing the creation of a single-member West Bank ward comprising the electors west of Queensway (the A533) and south of Brynn Street and Fiddler Ferry Road, currently situated in the existing Riverside ward. We consider that the creation of a single-member West Bank ward provides a better reflection of community identities as it allows the community to the west of the Queensway to be included in a ward with communities lying to the west of Widnes town. The creation of this single-member ward has had considerable knock-on effects on the neighbouring wards of Broadheath and Ditton (as outlined later in the chapter) and Appleton and Kingsway wards.

76 We propose that the remainder of Riverside ward should be included in a revised three-member Appleton ward, with the whole of the existing Appleton ward and that part of Kingsway ward east of Frederick Street. A modified three-member Kingsway ward would comprise the remainder of Kingsway ward and the electors south of Liverpool Road and east of Grange Road (polling district FE), currently in Broadheath ward. We propose adopting the Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations’ proposed three-member Bowers Brook ward, as we consider that although providing slightly worse electoral equality, the Liverpool to Warrington railway offers a clear and easily identifiable boundary between the communities to its north and south. We are putting forward the Conservatives’ ward name of Bowers Brook however, we would welcome further comments from local people during Stage Three.

77 Under our draft recommendations Appleton and Kingsway wards would both have councillor:elector ratios equal to the borough average (2 per cent and 3 per cent below by 2005). Bowers Brook and West Bank wards would have councillor:elector ratios 12 per cent and 2 per cent above the borough average respectively (8 per cent above and 1 per cent below by 2005). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Broadheath, Ditton and Hale wards

78 These three wards lie to the north of the River Mersey. Hale ward is coterminous with the parish of the same name, while the wards of Broadheath and Ditton are situated to the west of Widnes town. Hale is a single-member ward under the existing arrangements while the wards of Broadheath and Ditton each return three councillors. Broadheath ward currently has a councillor:elector ratio equal to the borough average (4 per cent below by 2005), Ditton ward has a councillor:elector ratio 2 per cent above the borough average (equal to the borough average by 2005), and Hale ward currently has a councillor:elector ratio 2 per cent below the borough average (5 per cent by 2005).

79 Halton Borough Council proposed the retention of the existing electoral arrangements in these three wards and consequently there would be no change to the existing levels of electoral equality.

80 Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations stated that “Hale is a cohesive community” and should therefore retain its existing boundaries. The Conservatives proposed that the existing three-member Ditton ward be modified to include polling district FB, the electors to the west of Bankfield Road, currently situated in Broadheath ward. They also proposed that

the electors of polling district GD, situated to the east of Philip Road, currently in Ditton ward and the electors of polling districts FA and FD, the area to the south of Liverpool Road and west of Hale Road, currently in Broadheath ward, should be included in a new St Michaels ward, outlined earlier in the chapter. The Conservatives proposed that the remainder of Broadheath ward should form a new three-member Lowerhouse ward with polling districts DA, DB and DE, the area west of Kingsway, north of Leigh Avenue, west of Lowerhouse Lane and south of Milton Road currently in Kingsway ward. They proposed the name Lowerhouse as it “derives from a broadly generic name for the central area of the ward”. They proposed that the revised Ditton ward should be renamed Clincton ward “to address the fact the community of Ditton is largely outside...the proposed new ward”.

81 Under the Conservatives’ proposals Hale ward would have the same levels of electoral equality as under the existing arrangements. Clincton ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 5 per cent above the borough average (2 per cent by 2005), Lowerhouse ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 2 per cent below the borough average (6 per cent by 2005).

82 We have considered carefully the representations received for this area. As outlined earlier in the chapter we have decided to reconfigure the existing Riverside ward to better reflect the different communities of Widnes. We have proposed that the electors west of Queensway (A533), east of Hale Road and south of Ditchfield Road, situated in the existing Riverside ward, should be included in a revised two-member Ditton ward with the electors south of Speke Road (A562) (polling district GC), currently situated in the existing Ditton ward. Under the existing arrangements the electors of Hale Bank have no direct access to the electors in the remainder of Ditton ward and have to travel through the part of Riverside ward we are proposing to include in a revised Ditton ward. We consider that this proposal better reflects the communities of Ditton and Hale Bank, which have direct links and stronger community ties. We are proposing that the electors of Marling Park, Wilsden Road and numbers 392 to 474 Liverpool Road, currently in Broadheath ward, should form a new two-member ward with the remainder of Ditton ward, with the exception of the electors east of Philip Road and north of Heralds Close, which should be transferred into Broadheath ward. We propose naming this new two-member ward Clincton as proposed by the Conservatives for the same area, however we would welcome the comments of local people regarding this proposed ward name. We propose the existing three-member Broadheath ward should be retained with minor boundary modifications to include the electors west of Hale Road, currently in Riverside ward and that part of the existing Ditton ward east of Philip Road. We further propose transferring the electors south of Liverpool Road and east of Grange Road (polling district FE) into Kingsway ward from Broadheath ward. We are also endorsing the proposal to retain the existing arrangements for Hale ward.

83 Under our draft recommendations Broadheath, Clincton and Ditton wards would have councillor:elector ratios 8 per cent, 3 per cent and 7 per cent above the borough average respectively (4 per cent, equal to the borough average and 5 per cent by 2005). Hale ward would have the same levels of electoral equality as under the existing arrangements. Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Birchfield, Farnworth and Hough Green wards

84 These three wards are situated broadly to the north of the Liverpool to Warrington railway line and cover the north of Widnes town. Birchfield ward currently returns two councillors, while Farnworth and Hough Green are both three-member wards. The wards of Birchfield, Farnworth and Hough Green currently have councillor:elector ratios 7 per cent, 3 per cent and 10 per cent above the borough average respectively (50 per cent, equal to the borough average and 5 per cent by 2005).

85 Halton Borough Council proposed the retention of the existing arrangements in Farnworth and Hough Green wards. It further proposed that Birchfield ward's existing boundaries should be retained, but that it should return three councillors, an increase of one. We have noted that the Borough Council's proposed Birchfield ward would initially have a relatively high electoral variance; however, this ward is planned to have substantial residential development resulting in improved levels of electoral equality by 2005.

86 Under the Borough Council's proposals there would be no change to the existing levels of electoral equality in Farnworth and Hough Green wards. Birchfield ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 29 per cent below the borough average (equal to the borough average by 2005).

87 Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations supported the Borough Council's proposals for Birchfield and Hough Green wards. However, they put forward modifications to the existing Farnworth ward, proposing to transfer the electors south of the Liverpool to Warrington railway, currently in Farnworth ward, into a new Bowers Brook ward, and including the electors south of Derby Road and west of Farnworth Street, currently in Farnworth ward, in the new Victoria ward, as outlined earlier in the chapter.

88 Under the Conservatives' proposals the wards of Birchfield and Hough Green would provide the same levels of electoral equality as under the Borough Council's proposals. Farnworth ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 18 per cent below the borough average (21 per cent by 2005)

89 We have considered carefully the representations received concerning these three wards. During the 1996 DER we stated that we felt the Liverpool to Warrington railway would provide a more identifiable boundary for all three wards and better reflect community identities. At that time we noted that amending the boundary between Farnworth and Halton wards would have led to Halton ward being significantly under-represented. However, under the Borough Council's electorate forecasts for 2005 such a proposal would lead to an electoral variance of 8 per cent by 2005, which the Commission now considers is justifiable. Consequently we propose using the Liverpool to Warrington railway as the southern boundary for all three of these wards. We propose transferring those electors south of the railway in the existing Farnworth ward into a modified three-member Bowers Brook ward, as described earlier in the chapter. Using the Liverpool to Warrington railway as the southern boundary for Farnworth ward has led to a knock-on effect in Birchfield and Hough Green wards and we are consequently proposing a new configuration of wards north of the railway.

90 In order to maintain high levels of electoral equality following the transfer of the electors south of the railway into Bowers Brook ward, we propose transferring the electors north of Cowanway and Upton Lane, currently in Birchfield ward into the existing three-member Farnworth ward. We propose three two-member wards covering the existing Hough Green ward and the remainder of the existing Birchfield ward. We propose a modified two-member Hough Green ward comprising the electors to the south of Hough Green Road, Northern Lane and Orchard Way (broadly comprising polling districts HB, HC and HD), currently situated in Hough Green ward. The remainder of Hough Green ward (broadly polling district HA) would form a new two-member Upton ward with the electors of the Cornerhouse Lane/Queensbury Way/Upton Grange area, currently in Birchfield ward. Finally, a modified two-member Birchfield ward would comprise the remainder of the existing Birchfield ward. Our proposed Birchfield ward would initially provide a relatively high electoral variance however, due to projected growth this would improve to provide a high level of electoral equality by 2005. Although these proposed wards are considerably different from the existing arrangements and the proposals received during Stage One, we consider that, if the Liverpool to Warrington railway is used as the southern boundary for these wards, our proposals would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area.

91 Under our draft recommendations Farnworth ward would have a councillor:elector ratio equal to the borough average (3 per cent below by 2005). Birchfield, Hough Green and Upton wards would have councillor:elector ratios 38 per cent, 1 per cent and 4 per cent below the borough average respectively (2 per cent below, 5 per cent below and equal to the borough average by 2005). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

92 We received three representations regarding the Borough Council's electoral cycle. The Borough Council itself stated that it "wishes to retain the elections by thirds system". The Conservatives stated that they "support the broad proposals for electoral arrangements contained in the Council's submission". The Runcorn Labour Councillors Group also supported the continuation of elections by thirds.

93 We have considered carefully all representations. At present, there appears to be a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained and we therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds for the Borough Council.

Conclusions

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

- a council of 56 members should be retained;
- there should be 23 wards;

- the boundaries of 20 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of two wards;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

95 Our draft recommendations would involve modifications to all but one of the existing wards in Halton borough, as summarised below:

- we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals for Beechwood, Castlefields, Halton Brook, Halton Lea, Norton South and Sandymoor wards and the Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations' proposals for Bowers Brook ward.
- we are putting forward modifications to the Borough Council's proposed Grange, Norton North and Windmill Hill wards to provide higher levels of electoral equality and stronger boundaries.
- we propose creating a single-member West Bank ward, comprising part of the existing Riverside ward, a two-member Clinton ward, comprising part of the existing Broadheath and Ditton wards, and a two-member Upton ward, comprising part of Birchfield and Hough Green wards.
- we have proposed modifications to the existing wards of Appleton, Birchfield, Broadheath, Ditton, Farnworth, Heath, Hough Green, Kingsway and Mersey to improve community identity and electoral equality across the borough as a whole.
- there should be no change to the ward of Hale.

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

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	56	56	56	56
Number of wards	21	23	21	23
Average number of electors per councillor	1,648	1,648	1,673	1,673
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	4	3	6	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	1	2	3	0

97 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Halton Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from four to three. By 2005 no wards are forecast to vary by more than 8 per cent from the average for the borough.

Draft Recommendation
 Halton Borough Council should comprise 56 councillors serving 23 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.

98 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Halton and welcome comments from the Borough Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and parish council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Halton

5 NEXT STEPS

99 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 2 July 2001. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the Borough Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

100 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
Halton Review
Local Government Commission for England
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
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101 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Secretary of State, who cannot make an Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after he receives them.

APPENDIX A

Halton Borough Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Borough Council in 14 wards, where the Council's proposals were as follows:

Figure A1: Halton Borough Council's Proposals: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Appleton	Appleton ward (part)
Birchfield	<i>Unchanged</i> (Birchfield ward)
Broadheath	<i>Unchanged</i> (Broadheath ward)
Ditton	<i>Unchanged</i> (Ditton ward)
Farnworth	<i>Unchanged</i> (Farnworth ward)
Grange	<i>Unchanged</i> (Grange ward)
Halton	<i>Unchanged</i> (Halton ward)
Heath	Heath ward (part)
Hough Green	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hough Green ward)
Kingsway	<i>Unchanged</i> (Kingsway ward)
Mersey	Heath ward (part); Mersey ward
Norton North	Murdishaw ward (part); Norton ward (part)
Riverside	Appleton ward (part); Riverside ward
Windmill Hill	Norton ward (part)

Figure A2: Halton Borough Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Appleton	2	3,718	1,859	13	3,684	1,842	10
2 Birchfield	3	3,527	1,176	-29	5,020	1,673	0
3 Broadheath	3	4,946	1,649	0	4,838	1,613	-4
4 Ditton	3	5,063	1,688	2	5,010	1,670	0
5 Farnworth	3	5,078	1,693	3	5,014	1,671	0
6 Grange	3	4,963	1,654	0	4,844	1,615	-3
7 Halton	3	4,875	1,625	-1	4,787	1,596	-5
8 Heath	3	5,070	1,690	3	4,991	1,664	-1
9 Hough Green	3	5,414	1,805	10	5,285	1,762	5
10 Kingsway	3	4,944	1,648	0	4,839	1,613	-4
11 Mersey	3	4,883	1,628	-1	4,821	1,607	-4
12 Norton North	3	5,118	1,706	4	5,293	1,764	5
13 Riverside	3	5,220	1,740	6	5,105	1,702	2
14 Windmill Hill	1	1,461	1,461	-11	1,492	1,492	-11

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

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

Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations' Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Halton & Weaver Vale Conservative Associations in 14 wards. The Conservatives put forward three different options for Windmill Hill ward which would provide different levels of electoral equality in Norton North, Sandymoor and Windmill Hill wards, although not changing the constituent parts of the proposed wards. The Conservatives' proposals were as follows:

Figure A3: Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations' Proposals: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Birchfield	<i>Unchanged</i> (Birchfield ward)
Clincton	Broadheath ward (part); Ditton ward (part)
Farnworth	Farnworth ward (part)
Grange	<i>Unchanged</i> (Grange ward)
Heath	Heath ward (part)
Hough Green	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hough Green ward)
Lowerhouse	Broadheath ward (part); Kingsway ward (part)
Mersey	Heath ward (part); Mersey ward
Norton North	Murdishaw ward (part); Norton ward (part)
St Michaels	Broadheath ward (part); Ditton ward (part); Riverside ward (part)
Sandymoor	Daresbury ward; Norton ward (part)
Victoria	Appleton ward; Farnworth ward (part); Kingsway ward (part)
Waterloo	Kingsway ward (part); Riverside ward (part)
Windmill Hill	Norton ward (part)

Note: Although the Conservatives stated that they were not content with the existing Mersey ward they supported the Borough Council's proposals for its neighbouring wards. Consequently, for the purposes of the above table we have outlined the Borough Council's proposed Mersey ward.

Figure A4: Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations' Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Birchfield	3	3,527	1,176	-29	5,020	1,673	0
2 Clincton	3	5,189	1,730	5	5,134	1,711	2
3 Farnworth	3	4,034	1,345	-18	3,979	1,326	-21
4 Grange	3	4,963	1,654	0	4,844	1,615	-3
5 Heath	3	5,070	1,690	3	4,991	1,664	-1
6 Hough Green	3	5,414	1,805	10	5,285	1,762	5
7 Lowerhouse	3	4,834	1,611	-2	4,741	1,580	-6
8 Mersey	3	4,883	1,628	-1	4,821	1,607	-4
8 Norton North	3	4,312	1,437	-13	4,346	1,449	-13
9 St Michaels	3	5,142	1,714	4	5,020	1,673	0
10 Sandymoor	2	2,329	1,165	-29	3,331	1,666	0
11 Victoria	3	5,396	1,799	9	5,322	1,774	6
12 Waterloo	2	3,716	1,858	13	3,636	1,818	9
13 Windmill Hill	1	2,289	2,289	39	2,593	2,593	55

The Conservatives' Option Two for Windmill Hill ward:

1 Norton North	3	4,312	1,437	-13	4,346	1,449	-13
2 Sandymoor	2	2,351	1,176	-29	3,486	1,743	4
3 Windmill Hill	1	2,267	2,267	38	2,439	2,439	46

The Conservatives' Option Three for Windmill Hill ward:

1 Norton North	3	4,746	1,582	-4	4,811	1,604	-4
2 Sandymoor	2	2,329	1,165	-29	3,331	1,666	0
3 Windmill Hill	1	1,855	1,855	13	2,178	2,178	30

Source: Electorate figures are based on the proposed ward descriptions from the Conservatives and electorate information provided by Halton Borough Council.

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

Although the Conservatives' stated that they were not content with the existing Mersey ward they supported the Borough Council's proposals for its neighbouring wards. Consequently, for the purposes of the above table we have outlined the Borough Council's proposed Mersey ward.

Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Runcorn Labour Councillors Group across the whole of the borough. The Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's proposals were as follows:

Figure A5: Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's Proposals: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Barrows Bridge	Daresbury ward; Murdishaw ward (part); Norton ward (part)
Central	Appleton ward (part); Kingsway ward (part)
Crow Wood	Appleton ward (part); Farnworth ward (part); Halton ward (part)
Ditton	Broadheath ward (part); Ditton ward (part); Kingsway ward (part); Riverside ward (part)
Farnworth	Birchfield ward; Farnworth ward (part)
Halton	Castlefields ward (part); Halton Brook ward
Halton Lea	Brookvale ward (part); Palace Fields ward
Higher Runcorn	Grange ward; Heath ward (part)
Mersey	Heath ward (part); Mersey ward
Mousetrap	Brookvale ward (part); Murdishaw ward (part); Norton ward (part)
Norton	Castlefields ward (part); Norton ward (part)
Riverside	Halton ward (part); Kingsway ward (part); Riverside ward (part)
Runcorn South	Beechwood ward; Heath ward (part)
Upton	Broadheath ward (part); Ditton ward (part); Hough Green ward
Widnes West	Ditton ward (part); Hale ward; Riverside ward (part)

Figure A6: Runcorn Labour Councillors Group's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Barrows Bridge	1	4,276	4,276	-30	5,236	5,236	-16
2	Central	1	6,207	6,207	1	6,076	6,076	-3
3	Crow Wood	1	6,730	6,730	9	6,686	6,686	7
4	Ditton	1	6,871	6,871	12	6,722	6,722	7

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
5	Farnworth	1	5,092	5,092	-17	6,552	6,552	5
6	Halton	1	6,599	6,599	7	6,464	6,464	3
7	Halton Lea	1	6,432	6,432	5	6,331	6,331	1
8	Higher Runcorn	1	6,489	6,489	5	6,380	6,380	2
9	Mersey	1	5,710	5,710	-7	5,636	5,636	-10
10	Mousetrap	1	6,321	6,321	3	6,314	6,314	1
11	Norton	1	6,290	6,290	2	6,571	6,571	5
12	Riverside	1	6,286	6,286	2	6,176	6,176	-1
13	Runcorn South	1	5,754	5,754	-6	5,669	5,669	-9
14	Upton	1	6,840	6,840	11	6,691	6,691	7
15	Widnes West	1	6,380	6,380	4	6,292	6,292	1
	Totals	15	92,277	-	-	93,796	-	-
	Averages	-	-	6,152	-	-	6,253	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Runcorn Labour Councillors Group.

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

APPENDIX B

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

1 Section 13(2) of the Local Government Act 1992 places a duty on the Commission to undertake periodic electoral reviews of each principal local authority area in England, and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State.

2 Under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, the Commission is required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for any changes to the electoral arrangements within the areas of English principal authorities as appear desirable to it, having regard to the need to:

- (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (b) secure effective and convenient local government.

3 In reporting to the Secretary of State, the Commission may make recommendations for such changes to electoral arrangements as are specified in section 14(4) of the 1992 Act. In relation to principal authorities, these are:

- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
- the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards or divisions);
- the number of councillors to be elected for each electoral area, and the years in which they are to be elected; and
- the name of any electoral area.

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

- the number of councillors;
- the need for parish wards;
- the number and boundaries of any such wards;
- the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward or, in the case of a common parish, for each parish; and
- the name of any such ward.

5 In conducting the review, section 27 of the 1992 Act requires the Commission to comply, so far as is practicable, with the rules given in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 for the conduct of electoral reviews.

Local Government Act 1972: Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements

6 By virtue of section 27 of the Local Government Act 1992, in undertaking a review of electoral arrangements the Commission is required to comply so far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. For ease of reference, those provisions of Schedule 11 which are relevant to this review are set out below.

7 In relation to shire districts:

Having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the district likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration (by the Secretary of State or the Commission):

- (a) the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors to be elected shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward in the district;
- (b) in a district every ward of a parish council shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district;
- (c) in a district every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district.

8 The Schedule also provides that, subject to (a)–(c) above, regard should be had to:

- (d) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- (e) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

9 The Schedule provides that, in considering whether a parish should be divided into wards, regard shall be had to whether:

- (f) the number or distribution of electors in the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and
- (g) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

10 Where it is decided to divide any such parish into parish wards, in considering the size and boundaries of the wards and fixing the number of parish councillors to be elected for each ward, regard shall be had to:

- (h) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration;
- (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- (j) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

11 Where it is decided not to divide the parish into parish wards, in fixing the number of councillors to be elected for each parish regard shall be had to the number and distribution of electors of the parish and any change which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the fixing of the number of parish councillors.

APPENDIX C

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

2 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.

Figure C1: Commission compliance with Code criteria

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