

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Halton

Report to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and
the Regions

November 2001

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

WHAT IS THE 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 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 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, ward names and the frequency of elections. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish councils.

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

SUMMARY

We began a review of Halton's electoral arrangements on 5 September 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 9 May 2001, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

We found that the existing 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 final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 113-114) are that:

- **Halton Borough Council should have 56 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 21 wards, as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 19 of the existing wards should be modified, and two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 18 of the proposed 21 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 8 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing them before 1 January 2002:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Appleton	3	part of Appleton ward; part of Halton ward; part of Kingsway ward; part of Riverside ward
2	Beechwood	2	Beechwood ward; part of Palacefields ward
3	Birchfield	3	part of Birchfield ward
4	Broadheath	3	part of Broadheath ward
5	Castlefields	3	Castlefields ward; part of Halton Brook ward
6	Daresbury	2	Daresbury ward (Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook parishes); part of Norton ward
7	Ditton	3	part of Ditton ward; part of Riverside ward
8	Farnworth	3	part of Birchfield ward; part of Farnworth ward
9	Grange	3	Grange ward; part of Mersey ward
10	Hale	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hale parish)
11	Halton Brook	3	part of Halton Brook ward
12	Halton Lea	3	part of Palacefields ward
13	Halton View	3	part of Farnworth ward; part of Halton ward
14	Heath	3	part of Heath ward; part of Mersey ward
15	Hough Green	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hough Green ward)
16	Kingsway	3	part of Appleton ward; part of Broadheath ward; part of Kingsway ward
17	Mersey	3	part of Heath ward; part of Mersey ward
18	Norton North	3	part of Murdishaw ward; part of Norton ward
19	Norton South	3	Brookvale ward; part of Murdishaw ward
20	Riverside	2	part of Riverside ward
21	Windmill Hill	1	part of Norton ward

Notes: 1 Halton borough contains four parishes, Daresbury, Hale, Moore and Preston Brook.

2 Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report illustrate all of the proposed ward boundaries.

Table 2: Final 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	5,440	1,813	10	5,391	1,797	7
2 Beechwood	2	3,311	1,656	0	3,287	1,644	-2
3 Birchfield	3	3,214	1,071	-35	4,704	1,568	-6
4 Broadheath	3	4,914	1,638	-1	4,807	1,602	-4
5 Castlefields	3	5,426	1,809	10	5,327	1,776	6
6 Daresbury	2	2,473	1,237	-25	3,612	1,806	8
7 Ditton	3	5,431	1,810	10	5,378	1,793	7
8 Farnworth	3	4,735	1,578	-4	4,672	1,557	-7
9 Grange	3	5,159	1,720	4	5,040	1,680	0
10 Hale	1	1,621	1,621	-2	1,583	1,583	-5
11 Halton Brook	3	5,053	1,684	2	4,944	1,648	-1
12 Halton Lea	3	4,975	1,658	1	4,854	1,618	-3
13 Halton View	3	5,533	1,844	12	5,444	1,815	8
14 Heath	3	4,825	1,608	-2	4,741	1,580	-6
15 Hough Green	3	5,414	1,805	10	5,287	1,762	5
16 Kingsway	3	4,741	1,580	-4	4,637	1,546	-8
17 Mersey	3	4,932	1,644	0	4,876	1,625	-3
18 Norton North	3	4,807	1,602	-3	4,921	1,640	-2
19 Norton South	3	5,222	1,741	6	5,192	1,731	3
20 Riverside	2	3,365	1,683	2	3,267	1,634	-2
21 Windmill Hill	1	1,686	1,686	2	1,717	1,717	3
Totals	56	92,277	-	-	93,681	-	-
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 final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Halton. We have now reviewed 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 finish in 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 carrying out these reviews, we must have regard to:

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

4 Full details of the legislation under which we work are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

5 Our task is to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish [and town] councils in the district.

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 also reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward will have to be fully justified. 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 assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, 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 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.

9 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper called *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, i.e. 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 authorities 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 Orders under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas, and our current *Guidance*.

10 This review was in four stages. 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.

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

12 Stage Three began on 9 May 2001 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Halton*. During this period we sought comments from the public and other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. The Commission's Stage Three consultation period was put into abeyance from 10 May 2001 until 7 June 2001 as a consequence of the General Election; therefore, the closing date for receipt of submissions at the end of Stage Three was 6 August 2001. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 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.

14 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.

15 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated, in percentage terms, 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'.

16 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.

17 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

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Appleton	3	4,385	1,462	-11	4,336	1,445	-14
2	Beechwood	2	3,037	1,519	-8	3,013	1,507	-10
3	Birchfield	2	3,527	1,764	7	5,019	2,510	50
4	Broadheath	3	4,946	1,649	0	4,839	1,613	-4
5	Brookvale	2	3,535	1,768	7	3,503	1,752	5
6	Castlefields	3	5,006	1,669	1	4,907	1,636	-2
7	Daresbury	1	1,205	1,205	-27	1,300	1,300	-22
8	Ditton	3	5,063	1,688	2	5,012	1,671	0
9	Farnworth	3	5,078	1,693	3	5,015	1,672	0
10	Grange	3	4,963	1,654	0	4,846	1,615	-3
11	Hale	1	1,621	1,621	-2	1,583	1,583	-5
12	Halton	3	4,875	1,625	-1	4,788	1,596	-5
13	Halton Brook	3	5,473	1,824	11	5,362	1,787	7
14	Heath	3	5,322	1,774	8	5,238	1,746	4
15	Hough Green	3	5,414	1,805	10	5,287	1,762	5
16	Kingsway	3	4,944	1,648	0	4,840	1,613	-4
17	Mersey	3	4,631	1,544	-6	4,574	1,525	-9
18	Murdishaw	3	4,203	1,401	-15	4,230	1,410	-16
19	Norton	3	5,247	1,749	6	6,406	2,135	28
20	Palace Fields	3	5,249	1,750	6	5,128	1,709	2
21	Riverside	3	4,553	1,518	-8	4,455	1,485	-11
	Totals	56	92,277	-	-	93,681	-	-
	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 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received five representations, including borough-wide schemes from Halton Borough Council, Halton & Weaver Vale Conservative Associations and Runcorn Labour Councillors Group. We also received representations from Preston Brook Parish Council and a joint submission from the parish councils of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Halton*.

19 Our draft recommendations for Runcorn town were based on the Borough Council's proposals; however, we made some minor modifications which achieved improvements in electoral equality, and provided stronger boundaries. We moved away from the Borough Council's scheme for Widnes town, as we considered that the existing arrangements, which the Borough Council wished to retain, did not provide the most suitable electoral arrangements for Widnes, consequently we put forward our own proposals and adopted the Conservatives' proposed Bowers Brook ward. We proposed that:

- Halton Borough Council should be served by 56 councillors, as at present, representing 23 wards, two more than at present;
- the boundaries of 20 of the existing wards should be modified, while one ward should retain its existing boundaries.

Draft Recommendation

Halton Borough Council should comprise 56 councillors, serving 23 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 23 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with all wards varying by no more than 8 per cent from the average in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 29 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Halton Borough Council.

Halton Borough Council

22 The Borough Council stated that it accepted our draft recommendations for the Runcorn area; however, it “strenuously opposes the proposals for Widnes”. The Borough Council wished to see the retention of three-member wards where possible and it therefore reiterated its Stage One proposals for Widnes. It put forward a second option for the Appleton ward and Riverside ward area but stated that its Stage One proposals for this area were still the preferred arrangements.

Political Parties

23 During Stage Three we received submissions from the Leader of the Council, the Leader of the Conservative Group and the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, all supporting the Borough Council’s Stage Three submission.

24 The Runcorn Labour Councillors Group stated that “the Council did not consult anyone over these changes” and that it was “disappointed that the Council size proposals [it put forward at Stage One] could not be considered”. It stated that it still believed in its proposals. Halton Constituency Labour Party stated that the Commission “seem to have been biased in favour of the recommendations of the Conservative parliamentary candidate” and that it supported the submission made by the Borough Council. Broadheath, Ditton & Hough Green Labour Party Branch supported the Borough Council’s proposals “particularly in the case of Widnes”. Weaver Vale Conservative Association supported our draft recommendations in full.

Members of Parliament

25 Mike Hall MP, Member for Weaver Vale, stated that he accepted our draft recommendations for the Runcorn area but he “objected most strongly to [the] draft proposals for Widnes”. He supported the Borough Council’s Stage One submission for Widnes. Derek Twigg MP, Member for Halton, also accepted our draft recommendations for Runcorn but opposed them in Widnes. Mr Twigg argued that our recommendations did not reflect local communities and supported the Borough Council’s proposals which “are valid and workable”.

Parish Councils

26 We received a joint submission from Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook parish councils. They stated that they wished to see the electoral arrangements for the existing Daresbury ward retained to “enable [an] elected member to represent the views of this rural area in what is a dominant and domineering urban area”. They did, however, put forward modifications to our proposed Sandymoor ward as a second option if the existing arrangements could not be retained. Cheshire Association of Town & Parish Councils stated that it wished to see a single-member ward created comprising the three parish councils of Daresbury, Moore and Preston

Brook with electors from the existing Norton ward, as put forward by the three parish councils at Stage One.

Other Representations

27 A further 17 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local organisations, councillors and residents. The Hale & Wyncroft Road Tenants & Residents Association stated that it wished to see the existing three-member Riverside ward retained, and submitted a petition signed by 87 residents. Newtown Tenants Association stated that it opposed our proposed West Bank ward and the Borough Council's second option of a two-member Riverside ward. Streets Ahead (Riverside) Tenants & Residents Association stated that it wished to see a three-member Riverside ward retained, and included a petition signed by 162 residents. It also stated that there should be a uniform pattern of three-member wards across the borough. The New Town Residents Forum stated that it wished to see the existing three-member Riverside ward retained, it included a petition signed by 39 residents. The West Bank Community Forum stated that it supports the retention of a three-member Riverside ward, and included a petition signed by 391 residents. The Secretary of the West Bank Community Forum also wrote on an individual basis stating that the existing boundaries of Riverside ward should be retained. We also received submissions from St Gerards Roman Catholic Primary & Nursery School, the West Bank Medical Centre, West Bank Pharmacy and Catalyst, the Museum of the Chemical Industry, all stating that the existing three-member Riverside ward should be retained.

28 Councillor Parker, member for Farnworth ward, stated that there should be no change to the boundaries of Birchfield and Farnworth wards and that the Borough Council's proposals should be adopted. Councillors Gleave, Leadbetter and Nyland, members for Riverside ward, opposed our proposed West Bank ward and stated that Riverside ward should continue to return three councillors. Councillor Nyland also wrote on an individual basis opposing our draft recommendations in Widnes and supporting the Borough Council's submission. Councillor Hodgkinson, member for Heath ward, made comments concerning the electoral cycle. Three residents of Widnes stated that they supported the Borough Council's submission. A further resident of Widnes proposed the abolition of the borough of Halton, an issue which cannot be addressed as part of a periodic electoral review.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

29 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”.

30 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 within the ensuing five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

31 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.

32 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 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 electorates must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate Forecasts

33 Since the last electoral review there has been little change to the electorate of Halton borough. At Stage One 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 93,681 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expected most of the growth to be in Birchfield ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Norton ward. 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 Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries was obtained.

34 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. 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.

35 We considered carefully the alternative electorate projections submitted to us during Stage One. However, we were not persuaded by the evidence available to us that the Borough Council’s electorate forecasts were incorrect.

36 During Stage Three we received one submission concerning electorate forecasts, from the parish councils of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook. The parish councils stated that the electorate data provided to us state that “the electoral register for Preston Brook is 310 the current register actually shows 486. Since this was compiled more houses have been built and occupied in Preston Brook.” They also stated that the Borough Council “have applied a factor for reducing population ... we believe [this] is not the case in the villages”. At Stage Four of the review we contacted the Borough Council concerning the electorate forecasts for Preston Brook parish. The Borough Council stated that “the new development of 144 properties in polling district TM [Preston Brook parish] ... was initially added to the Daresbury parish figure”. The Borough Council notified the parishes of this error; however, this has no effect on the February 2000 electorate which we are using as our base data and the Council has stated it makes only “a small difference to the [Daresbury] ward forecast for 2005 ... will be 42 higher”. The Borough Council also stated that “it would be wrong to update part of the Borough using the 2001 register as it would clearly be different to that for the year 2000”. Finally Halton Borough Council stated that “it may be true that the falling population is affecting inner wards more than outer ones, but the fall in average household size is being experienced everywhere. That is why we have constrained the future electorate equally across every ward.” Following receipt of this information, the forecast electorate in the remainder of the existing wards in Halton have been subject to minor adjustments between the publication of draft and final recommendations to accommodate the increase in the electorate of Daresbury ward. These adjustments are minimal and have not affected the electoral equality in any wards.

37 We have considered carefully the submission from Daresbury, Moore & Preston Brook parish councils and the evidence provided by Halton Borough Council concerning the electorate data used for Preston Brook Parish Council. We began our review of Halton on 5 September 2000, and in order to make sure that all interested parties would be working from the same electorate data, we asked Halton Borough Council to compile electorate data based on the most recent electoral register, the one published in February 2000. As the Borough Council has stated it would be incorrect for us to change the base data in the light of the 2001 electoral register, any significant changes in electorate should have been accommodated in the Council’s five year electorate forecast. The Borough Council has noted the earlier error it made in placing the new development in the incorrect parish, and this has now been incorporated in our electorate figures.

38 Having carefully considered the evidence submitted to us during this review we remain content that the Borough Council’s revised electorate forecasts for 2005 represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

39 As already explained, we start by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

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

41 The Runcorn Labour Councillors Group proposed a council size of 15, a reduction of 41 members. It based its proposal on a move to a new internal management structure, taking the PER as an opportunity to propose radical change to the current system. 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”.

42 These proposals were 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 did consider the Runcorn Labour Councillors Group’s proposal to reduce the council size to 15 members but we had to assume that these councillors would continue to be part-time. Consequently we had not been provided with any evidence that 15 ‘part-time’ councillors would provide effective and convenient local government in Halton.

43 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. The Commission was consequently not convinced that a decrease in council size to 15 members was justified within the remit of this review.

44 When formulating our draft recommendations we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, and we consequently concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 56 members.

45 During Stage Three Runcorn Labour Councillors Group stated that it “still believes in [its] proposals” for a council size of 15. We received no further comments regarding council size and having stated earlier why we cannot adopt a council size of 15, we propose endorsing our draft recommendation for a council size of 56 as final.

Electoral Arrangements

46 We have been pleased to note that our draft recommendations for Runcorn have received a good level of support during Stage Three. However, we have noted that there has been relatively strong opposition to our draft recommendations in Widnes, especially our proposals for the existing Riverside ward. A number of borough-wide issues have been raised during Stage Three which are discussed in this section.

47 When formulating our draft recommendations for Widnes our starting point was to attempt to provide new electoral arrangements for the existing Riverside ward which covered a large geographical area comprising three main pockets of electorate which were separated from each other by large open spaces and land used solely for industry. As outlined in our draft recommendations report the new warding pattern we proposed for Riverside ward had a considerable knock-on effect across the remainder of Widnes, resulting in boundary modifications to all other existing wards. Officers from the Commission visited the area and following discussions with officers from Halton Borough Council we produced our draft recommendations for Widnes. We have noted that during Stage Three there has been considerable opposition to these draft recommendations, and that local people have provided us with evidence illustrating community identities in Widnes, information which was not available to us at Stage One.

48 During Stage Three a number of submissions have stated that a pattern of predominantly three-member wards should be retained in Halton, to facilitate annual elections under a system of elections by thirds. Once again none of the representations received at Stage One stated a preference for three-member wards, and therefore we attempted to recommend the most suitable electoral arrangements for the borough based on single, two or three-member wards. Across the country many local authorities that hold elections by thirds have a pattern of mixed member wards, as indeed Halton does under the existing arrangements. However, we are pleased to note that during Stage Three local people have stated a preference, where possible, for three-member wards and when formulating our final recommendations we have taken this local preference into account.

49 A number of representations have criticised the Commission for adopting proposals put forward by the Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations as opposed to those put forward by Halton Borough Council. With the exception of our proposed Bowers Brook ward we did not adopt any of the Conservatives' proposed wards as part of our draft recommendations; however, we did agree with the Conservatives that new electoral arrangements should be adopted for the existing Riverside ward. Consequently, as in the Conservatives' submission, this had knock-on effects on the electoral arrangements in neighbouring wards. When considering submissions the Commission looks for weight of evidence and argumentation as opposed to assertion, therefore we do not have regard to who sent us a submission but instead the quality of the arguments put forward to us. At no point during Stage One did we receive argumentation as to why the existing Riverside ward should be retained; however, arguments were put forward as to why we should look for new electoral arrangements. We are pleased to note that during Stage Three we have received representations from local groups and residents of the existing Riverside ward and our conclusions are outlined later in the chapter.

50 At Stage Three Runcorn Labour Councillors Group stated that Halton Borough Council "did not consult anyone over these changes ... our members are involved with over 30 resident, voluntary and non profit organisations and none of these were consulted". However, having received the Borough Council's Stage One submission the Commission wrote to the Council asking for details of the consultation carried out as part of its Stage One submission. The Council provided us with a list of public buildings where the Council's submission was displayed, which included Community Centres across the borough, and details of publicity measures it took during the initial stage of the PER.

51 Councillor McDermott, Leader of Halton Borough Council, stated in his Stage Three submission that the Commission "stressed that boundaries must be hard boundaries, that there was to be no going down the centre of roads or round the backs of houses, and that they must be boundaries which could be justified in 5 – 10 years time. This does not seem to have been fully followed in your representations". Our view on boundaries is that there are no set rules except that they should be tied to ground detail. For example where large, permanent, topographical features are used as ward boundaries, the line should normally be drawn down their centre. However, while a road may effectively delineate communities it may also effectively act as a focus for communities so that a boundary line is best placed behind the houses on one side of the road. This is set out in our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties*.

52 Also at Stage Three the parish councils of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook stated in their joint submission that they "found it very disconcerting ... to find that nearly three quarters of the area covered by our parish councils is missing" from the large map inserted at the back of

our draft recommendations report. When producing our mapping for our draft and final recommendations we attempt to map our proposals in the greatest possible useful detail, therefore our large maps will often only cover the urban areas of districts where we are unable to follow existing parish boundaries for our ward boundaries and by the nature of built up urban areas it is necessary to have more detailed mapping. For the Halton mapping, because of the relatively small area covered by the borough, we were able to map the majority of the borough on our large map; however, in order to provide the greatest detail possible we did not include the areas to the far east and west of the borough. The only boundaries in these areas are the external boundaries of the district and the parishes, which we are unable to modify as part of a periodic electoral review. We showed our proposals for the borough as a whole in outline form on Map 2, as is standard practice in the majority of PERs we have carried out across the country. We apologise for any offence caused by our approach; however, in order to illustrate our proposed boundaries in the greatest possible detail we will be adopting the same approach to mapping our final recommendations as we did for our draft recommendations.

53 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. 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.

54 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 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

55 These four wards are situated to the south of the River Mersey, in the southeast 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 (22 per cent and 16 per cent by 2005).

56 At Stage One Halton Borough Council proposed a new warding pattern across this area. It proposed the creation of a single-member Windmill Hill ward, comprising electors 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. We 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. Under the Borough Council's Stage One 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).

57 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. 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 and its proposal for three-member Norton North and Norton South wards. 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, equal to the borough average 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, equal to the borough average and 30 per cent by 2005).

58 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". We were pleased to note that the parish councils carried out consultation on their proposals. The parish councils 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".

59 When formulating our draft recommendations we 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 proposed including these electors in the same ward as the parishes of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook, we also proposed transferring the remainder of the Sandymoor development into a new two-member Sandymoor ward. We considered 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 adopted the Borough Council's proposed two-member Sandymoor ward.

60 We also adopted 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 considered that this level of electoral equality could 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 modified

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 proposed including the electors to the east of Windmill Hill Avenue North, situated in Windmill Hill ward under the Borough Council's proposals in Norton North ward. We considered that our modifications to the Borough Council's proposed three-member Norton North and single-member Windmill Hill wards provided high levels of electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We adopted the Borough Council's proposed Norton South ward, which was supported by the Conservatives.

61 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).

62 At Stage Three Halton Borough Council, Weaver Vale Conservative Association and Derek Twigg MP accepted our draft recommendations for the wards of Norton North, Norton South, Sandymoor and Windmill Hill. This was supported by Mike Hall MP, who further stated that "the proposed single member ward of Windmill Hill ... is right because of the strong community of interest in Windmill Hill".

63 We received a joint submission from Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook parish councils. The parish councils wished to see the existing electoral arrangements of Daresbury ward retained so that a single member will be able to "represent the views of this rural area in what is a dominant and domineering urban area". However, if the existing arrangements could not be retained, the parish councils also made comments on our proposed two-member Sandymoor ward. They stated that the Bisham Park housing estate should be included in Sandymoor ward as it has no access to the remainder of Norton North ward, from which it is separated by Bridgewater Canal. It also stated that the area to the west of Manor Park Avenue should not be included in Sandymoor ward. Finally it stated that the existing name of Daresbury should be retained instead of Sandymoor ward. The Cheshire Association of Town & Parish Councils stated that it wished to see the parishes of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook included in a single-member Daresbury ward along with whatever number electors from Norton ward are needed to provide good levels of electoral equality.

64 We have carefully considered the representations received concerning our proposed Sandymoor ward. At Stage One the parish councils of Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook acknowledged that electors from the unparished "urban" Norton ward would have to be included in a ward with the three parishes in order to provide good levels of electoral equality. The Cheshire Association of Town & Parish Councils has also acknowledged this at Stage Three. When formulating our draft recommendations we were concerned that any such proposal would not provide effective and convenient local government to the electors of the Sandymoor development as they would be divided between two different wards. We have not been convinced by the representations received at Stage Three that this would not be the case, and consequently we propose retaining a two-member ward in this area. However, we have noted the comments from Daresbury, Moore and Preston Brook parish councils on our proposals. We propose renaming Sandymoor ward as Daresbury and we propose transferring the Bisham Park area into Daresbury ward from Norton North ward. However, we propose using the Daresbury Expressway and Windmill Hill Avenue North as the boundary to the west of Daresbury ward so as not to divide the industrial estates of Manor Park. Consequently the

area south of the Daresbury Expressway and west of Windmill Hill Avenue North will be included in Windmill Hill ward. There are no electors in this area so the electoral equality of Windmill Hill ward will not be affected. We propose no further amendments to the remainder of our draft recommendations in this area.

65 Our final recommendations for Norton South and Windmill Hill wards would provide the same levels of electoral equality as under our draft recommendations. Under our final recommendations Daresbury and Norton North wards would have councillor:elector ratios 25 per cent and 3 per cent below the borough average respectively (8 per cent above and 2 per cent below by 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Beechwood, Castlefields, Halton Brook and Palace Fields wards

66 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).

67 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed three minor amendments to the existing arrangements in these four wards. It proposed transferring electors currently in Halton Brook ward into Castlefields ward. It also proposed that electors currently in Palace Fields ward should be transferred into 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”. Under the Borough Council’s proposals the wards of Castlefields, Halton Brook and Halton Lea would have councillor:elector ratios 10 per cent, 2 per cent and 1 per cent above the borough average respectively (6 per cent above, 1 per cent below and 3 per cent below by 2005). Beechwood ward would have a councillor:elector ratio equal to the borough average (2 per cent below by 2005).

68 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.

69 When formulating our draft recommendations we considered carefully the representations received, and concluded that the Borough Council’s proposals for these wards provided the best levels of electoral equality currently available while having regard to the statutory criteria. We were content to adopt the Borough Council’s proposed ward names as part of our draft recommendations. However, we proposed minor boundary realignments to the wards of Castlefields and Halton Brook to ensure that the ward boundaries adhere to ground detail; these modifications did not affect any electors. Consequently our draft recommendations for Beechwood, Castlefields, Halton Brook and Halton Lea wards provided the same levels of electoral equality as the under the Borough Council’s proposals.

70 During Stage Three Halton Borough Council, Weaver Vale Conservative Association, Mike Hall MP and Derek Twigg MP accepted our draft recommendations for the wards of Beechwood, Castlefields, Halton Brook and Halton Lea. We received no further comments, and we have therefore decided to endorse fully our draft recommendations for these wards. Consequently our final recommendations would provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Grange, Heath and Mersey wards

71 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).

72 During Stage One 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”. 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).

73 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.

74 When formulating our draft recommendations we considered carefully the representations received for these three wards. We investigated alternative arrangements for the existing Mersey ward, as requested by Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations. We concluded that the existing arrangements could 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 transferred those electors north of Greenway Road, including Morley Road, from Heath ward into Mersey ward. We considered that these modifications to the existing three-member wards of Heath and Mersey provided more cohesive wards linking communities that have common interests, while still providing good levels of electoral equality.

75 We adopted the Borough Council’s proposed three-member Grange ward with a minor modification to its northern boundary. We proposed including the electors of Ivy Street and Poolside Road, currently situated in Mersey ward, in Grange ward. We considered that this modification facilitates 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. 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 ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 2 per cent below the borough average (6 per cent by 2005). Mersey ward would have a councillor:elector ratio equal to the borough average (3 per cent below by 2005).

76 During Stage Three Halton Borough Council, Weaver Vale Conservative Association, Mike Hall MP and Derek Twigg MP accepted our draft recommendations for the wards of Grange, Heath and Mersey. We received no further comments, and we have therefore decided to endorse fully our draft recommendations for these wards. Consequently our final recommendations would provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Appleton, Halton, Kingsway and Riverside wards

77 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 returns 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).

78 At Stage One 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 less 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. 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).

79 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. They proposed that the existing Appleton ward should be modified to include 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. 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". 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).

80 When formulating our draft recommendations we considered carefully the representations received concerning these four wards. We concurred with the Conservatives' opinion that the existing Riverside ward could 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, given the evidence presented to us during Stage One of this review, including the 2005 electorate forecasts, we considered various alternatives and proposed 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 considered that the creation of a single-member West Bank ward provided a better reflection of community identities as it would allow 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 had considerable knock-on effects on the neighbouring wards of Broadheath and Ditton (as outlined later in the chapter) and Appleton and Kingsway wards.

81 We proposed that the remainder of Riverside ward 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. Our proposed three-member Kingsway ward would comprise the remainder of Kingsway ward and the electors south of Liverpool Road and east of Grange Road, currently in Broadheath ward. We adopted the Halton and Weaver Vale Conservative Associations’ proposed three-member Bowers Brook ward, as we considered 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 put forward the Conservatives’ ward name of Bowers Brook; however, we encouraged further comments from local people during Stage Three.

82 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).

83 At Stage Three the majority of submissions we received commented on our draft recommendations for Riverside ward and by inference Appleton ward, although there were few direct references to Appleton ward. Halton Borough Council stated its opposition to our proposals for these four wards. Under our draft recommendations we were concerned about the geographical and communication links between the Dundalk Road area and the West Bank area, therefore we included the Dundalk Road area in a new Ditton ward with the Halebank community. The Borough Council stated that the links between the Dundalk Road area and the Halebank area were no better than those between the Dundalk Road area and the West Bank area, and that our draft recommendations created as many problems as they solved. The Council stated that the existing Riverside ward should remain unchanged, with the exception of its Stage One proposal to include electors from Appleton ward. “It does not seem, in the Council’s view, worth causing so much change in Widnes for the sake of altering one ward, especially when the existing arrangements for that ward have not given rise to complaint.” However, the Council stated that “if the Commission is minded to alter the Riverside ward” it offered an alternative proposal that would result in a two-member Riverside ward and a three-member Appleton ward. This alternative would involve electors north of Lugsdale Road, currently in Riverside ward, being transferred into the Commission’s proposed three-member Appleton ward. Those electors west of Hale Road and south of Ditchfield Road currently situated to the west of Riverside ward, would be transferred into the existing three-member Ditton ward. The remainder of the existing Riverside ward would form a new two-member ward under this alternative proposal.

84 Derek Twigg MP, stated that while there may be “an issue of geography and distance in respect of the West Bank and Dundalk Road areas, in practice ... there is not a problem”. He supported the Council’s view that such a change was not worth while due to the impact it would have on the remainder of Widnes and that the Council’s Stage One proposals for Riverside and Appleton wards should be adopted. Councillor McDermott, Leader of the Council, stated that “altering the Riverside ward does have a domino effect on other ward boundaries and we considered carefully the consequences of breaking it up before deciding against it”. Councillors Gleave, Leadbetter and Nyland, members for Riverside ward, stated that “Riverside is a confederation of communities facing similar issues and common problems” and that the Borough Council’s three-member Riverside ward should be adopted.

85 We received submissions from five residents groups; The Hale & Wyncroft Tenants & Residents Association stated that “to make Riverside [ward] anything less than a three-member ward would be to our detriment” and that “any change in the boundaries may lead to us losing one or more of the councillors”. The Newtown Tenants Association stated it was worried about our “proposal to abolish Riverside ward and to make West Bank/Lugsdale into a single-member ward” as the issues arising in the West Bank/Lugsdale area would be too much for one councillor to handle. It also stated that it was opposed to the Borough Council’s alternative option of a two-member Riverside ward. The Streets Ahead (Riverside) Tenants & Residents Association stated that it wished to see a three-member Riverside ward retained as “one councillor would be a disaster for our area”. This was supported by the New Town Residents Forum, who stated that the existing Riverside ward should continue to return three councillors. The West Bank Community Forum opposed “any move to reduce the number of elected members representing Riverside ward” and stated that “it is not possible for one councillor to represent and deal effectively with the problems of the West Bank area”. This submission was supported by the secretary of the West Bank Community Forum, on an individual basis. We also received representations requesting the retention of the existing three-member Riverside ward from the head teacher of St Gerards Roman Catholic Primary & Nursery School, West Bank Medical Centre, West Bank Pharmacy and a Director of ‘Catalyst’ the Museum of the Chemical Industry.

86 We also received representations commenting on our proposed Bowers Brook and Kingsway wards. The Council stated that “the transfer from Broadheath [ward] to Kingsway [ward] of properties in the Chestnut Lodge area makes no sense”. It also stated that it was opposed to our proposal to rename Halton ward as Bowers Brook and that the existing ward name should be retained. Derek Twigg MP was opposed to our proposal to transfer electors from Broadheath ward into Kingsway ward, stating that people in the Chestnut Lodge area “do not identify themselves as being part of the Kingsway community”. Mr Twigg also stated that he was opposed to the proposal to rename Halton ward as Bowers Brook, which is “a polluted water course”. He stated that to “make the ward even more identifiable” it should be renamed Halton View ward. Four residents of Widnes were also opposed to the ward name Bowers Brook.

87 We have considered carefully the representations received during the consultation period. We propose retaining the boundaries of our proposed Bowers Brook ward; however, in the light of strong local opposition to our proposed ward name we propose renaming this ward Halton View ward, as put forward by Derek Twigg MP. We propose including the electors of the Chestnut Lodge area in Broadheath ward instead of Kingsway ward; however, in order to provide an acceptable level of electoral equality in Kingsway ward, we are proposing a minor modification to our proposed eastern boundary. We propose transferring those electors on the

eastern side of Birchfield Road, currently in Appleton ward, into our proposed Kingsway ward. We propose no further modifications to our proposed Kingsway ward.

88 We have given careful consideration to all the submissions received concerning our draft recommendations for Riverside ward, as we are aware that it is our proposals in this area that have caused most concern in Widnes. As outlined earlier in the chapter we have noted that during Stage Three it has become clear there is a local preference for three-member wards, and consequently we have proposed three-member wards in the remainder of unparished Widnes. However, in order to maintain the correct allocation of councillors in Widnes, and retain a single-member Hale ward, a two-member ward has to be created somewhere in Widnes. At Stage One the Borough Council stated that a two-member Appleton ward should be created, and it has reiterated this proposal at Stage Three. Having decided to adopt three member wards in the remainder of Widnes, as outlined earlier and later in this chapter, we have been left with the existing Appleton and Riverside wards which together are entitled to five councillors. We have proposed two modifications to the boundaries of the existing wards. We propose transferring those electors west of St Michael's Road and south of Ditchfield Road, currently in Riverside ward, into a new three-member Ditton ward, as outlined later in the chapter. We also propose a minor boundary modification to the western boundary of Appleton ward, as outlined earlier. We have therefore had to decide how to divide the remainder of the existing Appleton and Riverside wards into one two-member and one three-member ward.

89 We received a number of submissions requesting the retention of the existing three-member Riverside ward, but due to the relatively high levels of electoral equality in both the existing Appleton and Riverside wards this is not a proposal we have been able to adopt at any stage of this review and this was acknowledged by the Borough Council at Stage One. Therefore we have had to decide whether or not to adopt the Borough Council's Stage One proposal for a two-member Appleton ward and a three-member Riverside ward. When formulating recommendations the Commission must have regard to the borough as a whole, consequently when formulating our final recommendation for Riverside ward we have had to consider the effects on neighbouring wards. We have noted the argumentation put forward for retaining a modified three-member Riverside ward. However, we have also noted the effect this proposal would have on the neighbouring Appleton ward. We consider that the proposal to transfer the electors east of Albert Road and Peel House Lane and south of Millfield Road, currently in Appleton ward, into Riverside ward would result in the division of a compact, densely populated area of residential properties. The electors in this area would be placed in a ward with those electors of the Dundalk Road area rather than the electors of the existing Appleton ward. We consider that this would not provide effective and convenient local government for the electors of the existing Appleton ward.

90 Therefore, although we have noted the opposition to anything but a three-member Riverside ward, we consider that due to the poor boundary, and the division of the existing Appleton ward that would occur under the Borough Council's preferred arrangements, we should adopt a two-member Riverside ward and a three-member Appleton ward. We consider that our final recommendations will maintain a clearly identifiable, cohesive Appleton ward with strong boundaries that should not be divided simply in order to provide a three-member Riverside ward. We propose that those electors north of Lugsdale Road, currently in Riverside ward, should be included in our three-member Appleton ward. This ward, with the exception of those electors on the eastern side of Birchfield Road transferred into Kingsway ward, would be identical to the three-member Appleton ward put forward by Halton Borough Council as its second alternative. A two-member Riverside ward would comprise the remainder of the

existing ward, with the exception of those electors west of St Michaels Road who would be transferred into Ditton ward.

91 Under our final recommendations Kingsway ward would have councillor:elector ratio 4 per cent below average (8 per cent by 2005). Appleton, Halton View and Riverside wards would have councillor:elector ratios 10 per cent, 12 per cent and 2 per cent above the borough average respectively (7 per cent above, 8 per cent above and 2 per cent below by 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Broadheath, Ditton and Hale wards

92 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).

93 During Stage One 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.

94 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 should be modified to include the electors to the west of Bankfield Road, currently situated in Broadheath ward. They also proposed that the electors situated to the east of Philip Road, currently in Ditton ward, and the electors of 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 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 Clinton ward “to address the fact the community of Ditton is largely outside ... the proposed new ward”. Under the Conservatives’ proposals Hale ward would have the same levels of electoral equality as under the existing arrangements. Clinton ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 5 per cent above the borough average (2 per cent by 2005) and Lowerhouse ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 2 per cent below the borough average (6 per cent by 2005).

95 When formulating our draft recommendations we considered carefully the representations received for this area. As outlined earlier in the chapter we decided to reconfigure the existing Riverside ward to better reflect the different communities of Widnes. We 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), 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 proposed including them in a revised Ditton ward. We considered that this proposal would better reflect

the communities of Ditton and Hale Bank, which have direct links and stronger community ties. We proposed 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 proposed naming this new two-member ward Clinton, as proposed by the Conservatives for the same area. We proposed that 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 proposed transferring the electors south of Liverpool Road and east of Grange Road into Kingsway ward from Broadheath ward. We endorsed the proposal to retain the existing arrangements for Hale ward.

96 Under our draft recommendations Broadheath, Clinton 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.

97 At Stage Three Halton Borough Council stated its opposition to our proposed Broadheath, Clinton and Ditton wards, stating that the existing three-member Broadheath and Ditton wards should be retained. It stated that the Halebank community should not be linked in a new Ditton ward with the Dundalk Road area. The Council's second option for a two-member Riverside ward would have an impact on Ditton ward, as electors west of Hale Road and south of Ditchfield Road currently situated to the west of Riverside ward, would be transferred into the existing three-member Ditton ward. The Council was opposed to our proposal to transfer the electors of Chestnut Lodge from Broadheath ward into Kingsway ward. It was also opposed to our proposed ward name of Clinton, which it stated "is not an easily identifiable area of urban Widnes".

98 Derek Twigg MP made comments on all four of our proposed wards. He stated that people in the Chestnut Lodge area, currently in Broadheath ward, "do not identify themselves as being part of the Kingsway community". He stated that although West Bank may be geographically separate from the Dundalk Road area, so is Halebank which is to be included in a ward with the Dundalk Road area under our draft recommendations. Mr Twigg also stated that "nobody in the town identifies [Clinton] as an area of Widnes ... most of the ward is in what most people in Widnes would identify as Ditton". He stated that the Borough Council's proposal in this area "is the correct one". Two residents of Widnes stated that they did not know where Clinton was. Newtown Tenants Association was opposed to the Borough Council's second option for Riverside ward, stating that "there is no community links or common interest at all between Riverside, Kingsway and Ditton wards". Cheshire Association of Town & Parish Councils stated that it was "entirely in favour of [the] proposal to retain Hale ward unchanged".

99 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. In the light of these representations, and those received concerning the neighbouring Riverside ward, we propose moving away from our draft recommendations for Broadheath, Clinton and Ditton wards. We propose retaining the existing boundaries of Broadheath ward with minor amendments to its eastern boundary in order to provide a stronger boundary. We no longer propose creating a two-member Clinton ward and we are adopting a three-member Ditton ward, based on the existing Ditton ward, as part of our final recommendations. However, we do propose a modification to the existing Ditton ward. When formulating our draft recommendations we noted that under the existing arrangements the electors of Halebank have no direct access to the remainder of Ditton ward and have to travel through part of Riverside

ward. We are still minded to create a ward which has direct links between its constituent parts, and consequently we propose transferring those electors west of St Michael's Road and south of Ditchfield Road, currently in Riverside ward, into a new three-member Ditton ward. We propose retaining the existing boundaries of the rest of Ditton ward. We have decided to endorse fully our draft recommendations for Hale ward, and consequently our final recommendations would provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations for this ward.

100 Under our final recommendations Broadheath ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 1 per cent below the borough average (4 per cent by 2005), Ditton ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 10 per cent above the borough average (7 per cent by 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Birchfield, Farnworth and Hough Green wards

101 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).

102 At Stage One Halton Borough Council proposed the retention of the existing arrangements in Farnworth and Hough Green wards. It further proposed that the existing boundaries of Birchfield ward should be retained, but that it should return three councillors, an increase of one. We 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. 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).

103 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. 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).

104 When formulating our draft recommendations we considered carefully the representations received concerning these three wards. During the 1996 DER it was stated that the Liverpool to Warrington railway would provide a more identifiable boundary for all three wards and better reflect community identities. At that time it was 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 proposed using the Liverpool to Warrington railway as the southern boundary for all three of these wards as part of our draft recommendations. We

proposed 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 led to a knock-on effect in Birchfield and Hough Green wards and we consequently proposed a new configuration of wards north of the railway.

105 In order to maintain high levels of electoral equality following the transfer of the electors south of the railway into Bowers Brook ward, we proposed transferring the electors north of Cowanway and Upton Lane, currently in Birchfield ward into the existing three-member Farnworth ward. We proposed three two-member wards covering the existing Hough Green ward and the remainder of the existing Birchfield ward. We proposed a modified two-member Hough Green ward comprising the electors to the south of Hough Green Road, Northern Lane and Orchard Way, currently situated in Hough Green ward. The remainder of Hough Green ward 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 good 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 considered 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.

106 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).

107 At Stage Three Halton Borough Council stated that our proposed Hough Green and Upton wards “would result in Upton Community Centre being located within Hough Green ward ... this will inevitably cause much confusion for the electorate”. The Council stated that its Stage One proposals for these three wards should be adopted, and stated its preference for a pattern of three-member wards.

108 Derek Twigg MP stated his opposition to our proposed Birchfield, Farnworth, Hough Green and Upton wards. He stated that the current Hough Green ward “is a clearly identifiable community” and should be retained. He also stated that Hill View and Cowan Way “are clearly part of the same community” and should not be placed in separate wards, as under our draft recommendations. Councillor Parker, member for Farnworth ward, stated that he was opposed to the draft recommendations for Birchfield and Farnworth wards and that he wished to see the existing electoral arrangements of both wards retained.

109 We have considered carefully the representations received during the consultation period concerning these three wards. As outlined earlier in the chapter, when formulating our draft recommendations we were unaware of the strong desire locally to retain three-member wards, and consequently we proposed three two-member wards and a single three-member ward in this area, which gave high levels of electoral equality. When formulating our final recommendations we have attempted to adopt three-member wards in Widnes. We propose that the existing three-member Hough Green ward should be retained and that there should be no two-member Upton ward. We propose that Birchfield and Farnworth wards should both return

three members; however, we are still of the opinion that the Liverpool to Warrington railway would provide a more identifiable boundary and better reflect community identities between the existing Farnworth and Halton wards. Consequently we propose retaining the railway as a boundary. However, we have noted the opposition from Derek Twigg MP to our proposed boundary between Birchfield and Farnworth wards, specifically the fact that Hill View and Cowan Way would be in different wards. We therefore propose running the boundary behind the properties of Cronton Lane. We are unable to retain the existing boundary between Birchfield and Farnworth wards of Wilmere Lane, as this would provide a high level of electoral inequality in Farnworth ward of 13 per cent by 2005. We therefore propose endorsing the remainder of our proposed boundaries as part of our final recommendations.

110 Under our final recommendations Hough Green ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 10 per cent above the borough average (5 per cent above by 2005). Birchfield and Farnworth wards would have councillor:elector ratios 35 per cent and 4 per cent below the borough average respectively (6 per cent and 7 per cent by 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

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

112 At Stage Three Councillor Hodgkinson, member for Heath ward, made enquiries regarding electoral cycles; however, these were not related to the PER. No further comments were received concerning electoral cycles, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

113 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations in Runcorn. However, we propose adopting different electoral arrangements to our draft recommendations, in Widnes, based on the existing wards:

- In Widnes town – we propose retaining the existing Birchfield, Broadheath and Ditton wards with only minor boundary modifications;
- we propose endorsing our proposed Appleton, Bowers Brook and Kingsway wards with only minor boundary modifications;
- we propose new warding arrangements for Riverside ward;
- we propose retaining the existing Hale and Hough Green wards.

- In Runcorn town – we propose endorsing our draft recommendations for Beechwood, Castlefields, Grange, Halton Brook, Halton Lea, Heath, Mersey and Norton South wards as final;
- we propose minor boundary modifications to our proposed Norton North, Sandymoor and Windmill Hill wards;
- we propose renaming Bowers Brook and Sandymoor wards, Halton View and Daresbury respectively.

114 We conclude that, in Halton:

- there should be a council size of 56, as at present;
- there should be 21 wards, as at present;
- the boundaries of 19 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

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

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	56	56	56	56
Number of wards	21	21	21	21
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

116 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from four to three. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2005, with no ward varying by more than 8 per cent from the borough average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Halton Borough Council should comprise 56 councillors serving 21 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Halton

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

118 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 1 January 2002.

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

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