

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Medway

May 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

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

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Medway on 28 November 2000.

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

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

- **in seven of the 35 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district;**
- **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 13 wards and by more than 20 per cent in two wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 131-132) are that:

- **Medway Council should have 55 councillors, 25 fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 22 wards, instead of 35 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 34 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of 13, and one ward should retain its existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **in all but three of the proposed 22 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average;**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

Recommendations are also made for changes to parish council electoral arrangements which provide for:

- **revised parish warding arrangements for the parish of Frindsbury Extra.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 15 May 2001. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 9 July 2001:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Chatham South	3	Horsted ward; Hook Meadow ward (part); Town ward (part); Warren Wood ward (part)
2	Chatham	3	Town ward (part); Holcombe ward;
3	Cuxton & Halling	1	<i>unchanged</i> - parishes of Cuxton and Halling
4	Gillingham North	3	Gillingham North ward; Medway ward; Beechings ward (part)
5	Gillingham South	3	Brompton ward (part); Gillingham South ward; Priestfield ward (part)
6	Hempstead & Wigmore	2	Hempstead & Wigmore ward (part);
7	Lordswood & Capstone	2	Lordswood Ward; North Dane ward (part); Hempstead & Wigmore ward (part)
8	Luton & Wayfield	3	Luton ward; Wayfield ward; North Dane ward (part)
9	Peninsula	3	Hoo St Werburgh ward (the parish of Hoo St Werburgh (part)); All Saints ward (the parishes of All Hallows, High Halstow, Isle of Grain, Saint Mary Hoo and Stoke); Thameside ward (part - the parish of Cooling)
10	Princes Park	2	North Dane ward (part); Walderslade ward (part)
11	Rainham Central	3	Rainham Mark ward (part); Hempstead & Wigmore ward (part); St Margaret's ward (part)
12	Rainham North	2	Riverside ward; Rainham ward (part)
13	Rainham South	3	Parkwood ward; Rainham Mark ward (part); St Margaret's ward (part); Rainham North ward (part)
14	River	2	St Margaret's & Borstal ward (part); Town ward (part); Brompton ward (part);
15	Rochester East	2	Troy Town ward; Warren Wood ward (part)
16	Rochester West	2	St Margaret's & Borstal ward (part); Warren Wood (part);
17	Strood South	3	Earl ward; Temple Farm ward
18	Strood North	3	Rede Court ward; Frindsbury ward
19	Strood Rural	3	Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden ward - the parishes of Frindsbury Extra and Hoo St Werburgh (part)); Thames Side ward (part - the parish of Cliffe & Cliffe Woods)
20	Twydall	3	Watling Street ward (part); Beechings ward (part); Twydall ward; Rainham ward (part);

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
21	Watling	2	Priestfield ward (part); North Dane ward (part); Watling Street ward (part)
22	Weeds Wood & Walderslade	2	Hook Meadow ward (part); Walderslade ward (part)

Note: Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Medway

	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	Chatham South	3	10,256	3,419	3	10,620	3,540	1
2	Chatham	3	10,032	3,344	1	10,391	3,464	-1
3	Cuxton & Halling	1	4,099	4,099	24	4,241	4,241	21
4	Gillingham North	3	9,915	3,305	0	10,567	3,522	1
5	Gillingham South	3	10,418	3,473	5	10,892	3,631	4
6	Hempstead & Wigmore	2	6,635	3,318	0	6,677	3,339	-4
7	Lordswood & Capstone	2	6,975	3,488	5	6,980	3,490	0
8	Luton & Wayfield	3	9,779	3,260	-2	10,080	3,360	-4
9	Peninsula	3	9,504	3,168	-4	10,036	3,345	-4
10	Princes Park	2	7,181	3,591	8	7,292	3,646	4
11	Rainham Central	3	9,789	3,263	-2	9,929	3,310	-5
12	Rainham North	2	6,870	3,435	4	6,947	3,474	-1
13	Rainham South	3	10,883	3,628	9	10,885	3,628	4
14	River	2	3,500	1,750	-47	7,165	3,583	3
15	Rochester East	2	6,927	3,464	5	7,183	3,592	3
16	Rochester West	2	6,470	3,235	-2	6,903	3,452	-1
17	Strood South	3	10,295	3,432	4	10,517	3,506	0
18	Strood Rural	3	8,997	2,999	-10	10,401	3,467	-1
19	Strood North	3	9,861	3,287	-1	10,347	3,449	-1
20	Twydall	3	9,682	3,227	3	9,825	3,275	-1
21	Watling	2	7,477	3,739	5	7,484	3,742	-1
22	Weeds Wood & Walderslade	2	6,729	3,365	2	6,817	3,409	-2
	Totals	55	182,274	-	-	192,179	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,314	-	-	3,494	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Medway, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing Medway as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. We completed reviews of the 12 two-tier districts in Kent in May 2001. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 The Kent (Borough of Gillingham and City of Rochester upon Medway) (Structural Change) Order 1996, SI 1996, No. 1876 created a unitary authority for Medway 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 reduced the number of councillors from 92 to 80 and retained the existing number of wards (35). 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 Medway.

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

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

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

5 We also have regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

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

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

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

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

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

11 Stage One began on 28 November 2000, when we wrote to Medway Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Kent Police Authority, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East Region, the local authority associations, Kent Association of Parish Councils and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 19 February 2001.

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

13 Stage Three began on 15 May 2001 and will end on 9 July 2001. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

15 Medway district covers an area of 20,507 hectares and has a population of 239,978. It forms the largest urban area in Kent and the second largest in the south east outside London. It includes the five historically separate towns of Chatham, Gillingham, Rainham, Rochester and Strood, and also contains large rural areas. Medway is bounded to the north by the River Thames and the M2 motorway runs close to the southern boundary of the area. Medway contains 11 parishes and became a unitary authority on 1 April 1998.

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

17 The electorate of the district is 182,273 (February 2000). The Council presently has 80 members who are elected from 35 wards, which are largely urban in nature to the south of the River Medway and largely rural to its north. Ten of the wards are each represented by three councillors and 25 by two. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

18 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,278 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 2,402 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 seven of the 35 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average. The worst imbalance is in Luton ward where each of the councillors represents 15 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Medway

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	All Saints	2	4,622	2,311	1	4,772	2,386	-1
2	Beechings	2	4,533	2,267	-1	4,579	2,290	-5
3	Brompton	2	4,902	2,451	8	7,601	3,801	58
4	Cuxton & Halling	2	4,099	2,050	-10	4,242	2,121	-12
5	Earl	2	4,389	2,195	-4	4,428	2,214	-8
6	Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden	2	4,953	2,477	9	6,270	3,135	31
7	Frindsbury	2	4,908	2,454	8	5,386	2,693	12
8	Gillingham North	2	4,207	2,104	-8	4,285	2,143	-11
9	Gillingham South	2	4,363	2,182	-4	4,535	2,268	-6
10	Hempstead & Wigmore	3	7,402	2,467	8	7,444	2,481	3
11	Holcombe	3	7,108	2,369	4	7,432	2,477	3
12	Hoo St Werburgh	2	4,725	2,363	4	5,105	2,553	6
13	Hook Meadow	2	4,808	2,404	6	4,827	2,414	0
14	Horsted	2	5,074	2,537	11	5,124	2,562	7
15	Lordswood	3	6,298	2,099	-8	6,303	2,101	-13
16	Luton	2	5,250	2,625	15	5,349	2,675	11
17	Medway	2	4,905	2,453	8	5,476	2,738	14
18	North Dane	2	5,141	2,571	13	5,342	2,671	11
19	Parkwood	3	6,064	2,021	-11	6,068	2,023	-16
20	Priestfield	2	4,667	2,334	2	4,909	2,455	2
21	Rainham Mark	3	6,281	2,094	-8	6,294	2,098	-13
22	Rainham	2	4,782	2,391	5	4,883	2,442	2
23	Rede Court	2	4,953	2,477	9	4,961	2,481	3
24	Riverside	2	5,134	2,567	13	5,197	2,599	8
25	St Margaret's & Borstal	3	6,090	2,030	-11	7,120	2,373	-1
26	St Margaret's	3	6,582	2,194	-4	6,707	2,236	-7
27	Temple Farm	3	5,906	1,969	-14	6,089	2,030	-16
28	Thames Side	2	4,201	2,101	-8	4,290	2,145	-11
29	Town	3	6,513	2,171	-5	6,974	2,325	-3
30	Troy Town	2	4,890	2,445	7	5,145	2,573	7
31	Twydall	2	4,332	2,166	-5	4,345	2,173	-10
32	Walderslade	3	6,535	2,178	-4	6,686	2,229	-7
33	Warren Wood	2	4,696	2,348	3	4,997	2,499	4

	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 (%)
34	Watling Street	2	4,431	2,216	-3	4,439	2,220	-8
35	Wayfield	2	4,529	2,265	-1	4,575	2,288	-5
	Totals	80	182,273	-	-	192,179	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,278	-	-	2,402	-

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

Note: *The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Temple Farm ward were relatively over-represented by 14 per cent, while electors in Luton ward were relatively under-represented by 15 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.*

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

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

20 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met officers and members from the Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 20 representations during Stage One, including a submission from Medway Council which enclosed three alternative schemes from Medway Council Conservative Group, Medway Council Labour Group and Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group. We also received a district wide scheme from Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group. The representations may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

Medway Council

21 The Council proposed a reduction of 25 councillors to 55 and provided evidence of widespread consultation on this issue along with detailed explanation of how it would implement new political management structures under a reduced council size. It stated “that it has not been possible to achieve consensus on one detailed proposal” and enclosed three different schemes for future ward boundaries in Medway from the Conservative Group, Labour Group and Independent Liberal Democrat Group, which are set out below. The Council stated that “it would not wish to recommend any change to the current electoral cycle (ie whole elections every four years).

22 Medway Council Conservative Group (The Conservative Group) proposed a council size of 55 members serving 16 three-member wards, three two-member wards and one single-member ward. The scheme provided for 13 councillors north of the River Medway and 42 to the south and utilised polling districts as building blocks for new wards. The Conservative Group argued that the current council size should be reduced, particularly in the light of the new political management model contained in the Local Government Act 2000, and that a council size of 55 provided for the most representative distribution of councillors north and south of the River Medway. The Conservative Group’s proposals generally provided for good electoral equality; only one ward (Cuxton & Halling) would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average number of electors per councillor by 2005. It expressed support for the retention of whole council elections every four years.

23 Medway Council Labour Group (The Labour Group) also proposed a council size of 55 members, serving eight three-member wards, 15 two-member wards and one single-member ward. The Labour Group also proposed 13 councillors to the north of River Medway and 42 to the south. It argued that the reduced council size would enhance the Council’s decision-making process whilst not impacting adversely upon councillors’ representative role. The Group stated

that if its 55-member scheme was unacceptable due to Cuxton & Halling ward having an imbalance of 21 per cent by 2005 then the Commission should consider its alternative 50-member scheme. The Labour Group's submission generally provided for good electoral equality with only one ward (Cuxton & Halling) varying by more than 10 per cent from the average by 2005. It expressed support for the retention of whole council elections every four years.

24 Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group (The Independent Liberal Democrat Group) also proposed a 55-member council serving a pattern of 17 three-member ward and two two-member wards. It stated that it had "given consideration to the established community affiliation of currently adjoining polling districts and have sought to enhance this wherever possible". Its proposals provided good electoral equality with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average by 2005. It expressed support for elections by thirds.

Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group

25 Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group submitted its proposals separately from the Council's proposals and argued for a council size of 59, stating that a further reduction would lead to the quality of representation decreasing. The Liberal Democrat Group's scheme would provide for a pattern of 20 three-member wards and one two-member ward. The Liberal Democrats' proposals provided for good electoral equality, with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average by 2005. It expressed support for elections by thirds.

Gillingham Conservative Association

26 Gillingham Conservative Association supported the Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals based on a 55-member council, but proposed amendments to three wards. Moreover, in the event that the Commission should adopt a 50-member scheme it proposed alternative warding arrangements for a number of wards south of the River Medway. It argued that Cuxton & Halling should remain a separate ward due its geographical isolation.

Chatham & Aylesford Conservative Association

27 Chatham & Aylesford Conservative Association supported Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals based on a 55-member council size. It stated its opposition to proposals based on a 50-member council size. It supported whole council elections every four years.

Gillingham Liberal Democrats on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Associations for Chatham, Gillingham and Medway

28 The Gillingham Liberal Democrats submitted a representation on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Associations for Chatham, Gillingham and Medway. They supported the Liberal Democrats' proposals for a 59-member scheme, but proposed some minor amendments to two

ward boundaries “to make it easier for electors to reach polling stations”. They expressed support for elections by thirds.

Medway Conservative Association and Medway Conservative Association Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden Branch

29 Medway Conservative Association supported Medway Council Conservative Group’s proposals based on a 55-member council size. It argued that Cuxton & Halling should be retained as a one-member ward and also supported new parish warding arrangements proposed by Frindsbury Extra Parish Council. It also provided alternative warding arrangements in a number of wards in the event that the Commission decided to recommend a council size of 50. Medway Conservative Association Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden Branch supported new parish warding arrangements proposed by Frindsbury Extra Parish Council.

Parish Councils

30 Cuxton Parish Council opposed proposals which would combine them with part of the existing Temple ward or reduce their representation from two councillors to one. Cliffe & Cliffe Woods Parish Council proposed that the existing ward pattern should be retained largely intact and that each ward should be represented by one councillor, arguing that “accountability is also simplified if there is one elected representative”. St James Isle of Grain Parish Council stated that whilst overall there would be an reduction in councillors, it would prefer to be part of a three-member than of a two-member ward. Frindsbury Extra Parish Council stated that it wished to be wholly within a three-member ward and proposed revised parish warding arrangements. Stoke Parish Council stated that Grain, Stoke, Allhallows, St Mary Hoo and High Halstow should be retained in the same ward and expressed support for a 59-member council size. Allhallows Parish Council expressed the same views as Stoke Parish Council.

Other Representations

31 A local resident proposed a council size of 250, but enclosed no further details, while another local resident opposed a reduction in council size and proposed a change to elections by thirds. Another local resident proposed that the existing Cuxton & Halling ward be split into two single-member wards, that wards should generally be as small as possible and that elections should be of the whole council every four years. Finally, a resident of Gravesend made comments not relevant to the aims of this review.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

34 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which provides for exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum.

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

Electorate Forecasts

36 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 5 per cent from 182,273 to 192,179 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

37 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the District Council’s figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

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

39 Medway Council currently has 80 members. At Stage One Medway Council undertook extensive consultation with regards to future council size via the council newspaper, the council website and directly with MEPs, MPs, local party offices, the Kent Association of Parish Councils and parish councils in Medway. The response to this consultation clearly indicated strong local support for a reduction in council size. The Council included details of how it intended to implement new political management arrangements and how this would work under a reduced council size. The Council calculated which council size would provide for the best balance of representation on either side of the River Medway, and concluded that, excluding Cuxton & Halling ward, the most appropriate council size would be 55. The three schemes from Medway Council Labour, Conservative and Independent Liberal Democrat Groups were all based on a council size of 55.

40 The Labour Group also proposed a 50-member scheme in the event of the Commission not accepting proposals for a council size of 55, but stated that a 55-member council was its preferred option. Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group proposed a council size of 59, arguing that any further reduction would mean increased casework, worsening quality of representation and less time for councillors to concentrate on more strategic roles within the council.

41 The Gillingham Conservative Association and the Medway Conservative Association both argued that 55 councillors provided for optimum representation, but also both enclosed proposals based on a 50-member council size in the event that the Commission should consider this to be more appropriate. The Gillingham Liberal Democrats repeated the arguments of the Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group for a council size of 59. Allhallows and Stoke Parish Councils both supported proposals for a 59-member council. A local resident expressed general opposition to any reduction in council size. Another local resident proposed a council size of 250, but enclosed no further details.

42 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One regarding council size. We recognise that there has been extensive consultation on this issue and that there has been detailed consideration of how a new council size would work under new political management models. We also recognise that there is broad consensus that the new council size should be between 50 and 59, and consider that there is sufficient evidence to justify such a reduction. We further note that all proposals based on a 50-member council size were a second choice to a preferred 55-member council size. Having carefully considered schemes based on 55- and 59-member councils we consider that the 55-member schemes provide for a better reflection of the statutory criteria. While we recognise that a council size of 59, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats, provides the potential for good electoral equality on either side of the River Medway,

we are of the view that, in the light of the consensus among three of the political groups on the council in favour of a 55-member council, and given that we consider a combination of the 55-member schemes provides for a better reflection of community identities and interests, our draft recommendations should be based on a council size of 55.

Electoral Arrangements

43 As mentioned earlier, in the light of the available evidence we are proposing a council size of 55 and therefore the proposals based on council sizes of 50 and 59 will not be compatible with a scheme based on 55 members.

44 Having carefully considered the three district wide schemes submitted by the different political groups on the council, we are persuaded that to the north of the River Medway the Conservative Group's proposals provide for the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We note that their proposals provide separate representation for the parishes of Cuxton & Halling, preserve the urban area of Strood on its existing boundaries, retain Frindsbury Extra parish within one district ward and generally reflect the wishes of local parishes. There is therefore no detailed consideration of the 50 and 59 member schemes in the text which follows.

45 South of the River Medway we consider that Medway Council Labour Group's proposals provide for the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Whilst the Conservative and Independent Liberal Democrat Groups' proposals achieve good electoral equality, we do not consider that they provide for an accurate reflection of the statutory criteria, as both sets of proposals generally provide for larger wards which unite areas that share few community links. However, in the south-east of the district we propose basing our draft recommendations on the Conservative Group's proposals as in this particular area we consider they provide for a better reflection of the statutory criteria.

46 In summary, we propose basing our draft recommendations on a mixture of Medway Council Conservative Group's and Medway Council Labour Group's proposals, subject to some minor boundary amendments. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Cuxton & Halling, Earl, Frindsbury, Rede Court and Temple Farm wards;
- (b) All Saints, Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden, Hoo St Werburgh and Thames Side wards;
- (c) Holcombe, Horsted, St Margaret's & Borstal, Town, Troy Town and Warren Wood wards;
- (d) Hook Meadow, Lordswood, Luton, North Dane, Walderslade and Wayfield wards;
- (e) Brompton, Gillingham North, Gillingham South, Medway, Priestfield and Watling Street wards;

- (f) Beechings, Rainham, Riverside and Twydall wards
- (g) Hempstead & Wigmore, Parkwood, Rainham Mark and St Margaret's wards.

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

Cuxton & Halling, Earl, Frindsbury, Rede Court and Temple Farm wards

48 Under the existing arrangements of an 80-member council the four two-member wards of Cuxton & Halling, Earl, Frindsbury and Rede Court currently have 10 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer, 8 per cent more and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (12 per cent fewer, 8 per cent fewer, 12 per cent more and 3 per cent more by 2005). The three-member Temple Farm ward has 14 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (16 per cent fewer by 2005).

49 Medway Council Labour Group proposed retaining the existing Cuxton & Halling ward as a single-member ward, combining Temple Farm and Earl wards in a three-member Strood West ward, and combining Frindsbury ward with part of Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden ward in a two-member Strood East ward. Rede Court ward would be combined with the remainder of Frindsbury & Chattenden ward and polling district MQB from Thames Side ward to form a three-member Strood Rural ward. The Labour Group argued that despite the high level of electoral inequality which would result (21 per cent by 2005), retaining Cuxton & Halling as a separate ward still represented the best available balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. It argued that Cuxton & Halling ward is bounded by the M2 (which is currently being widened to eight lanes) and the River Medway to the east (over which there is no connecting road bridge) and that furthermore, the only alternative would be to ward the rural area of Cuxton & Halling with an urban area of the existing Temple Farm ward. The Labour Group also drew attention to the opposition of Cuxton and Halling parishes during the Council's own consultation to any merger with Temple Farm ward and quoted the Commission's own argument from its Final Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements and Boundaries for The Medway Towns in Kent (1996) which stated that: "The Commission has considered whether the imbalance can be redressed. To do so would require an incorporation into the wards of Temple Farm or St Margaret's & Borstal. However, the former is separated from Cuxton & Halling by the M2 motorway while the latter is separated by the River Medway. Any such incorporation therefore appears to be artificial and would have regard neither to community identities and interests nor convenient and effective local government."

50 The Labour Group argued that the proposed Strood West ward was a clear area of community and that the "separation of any of its parts would be illogical". It argued that its proposals for Strood East and Strood Rural wards combine the rural areas with the "rural fringe" of Strood and keeps the more urban part of Strood separate.

51 Under Medway Council Labour Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Cuxton & Halling, Strood East, Strood Rural and Strood West would have 24 per cent more, 7 per cent fewer, 13 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (21 per cent more, 5 per cent fewer, 5 per cent fewer and equal to the average by 2005).

52 Medway Council Conservative Group proposed retaining the existing Cuxton & Halling ward as a single-member ward, combining Earl and Temple Farm wards in a three-member Strood South ward, and combining Rede Court and Frindsbury wards in a three-member Strood North ward. The Conservative Group argued that the current boundary between Temple Farm and Earl wards is not an obvious border and that the clearest option is to merge the two wards, an argument which it repeated for the amalgamation of Rede Court and Frindsbury wards. The Conservative Group also quoted the Commission's Final Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements and Boundaries for The Medway Towns in Kent (1996), as detailed above, as part of its arguments for the retention of a separate Cuxton & Halling ward. It argued that the high level of electoral inequality is justified by Cuxton & Halling ward's geographical isolation, bordered by the district boundaries on three sides, the River Medway and the M2. It also drew attention to the opposition of Cuxton and Halling parishes, during the Council's own consultation, to any merger with Temple Farm ward.

53 Under Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Cuxton & Halling, Strood North and Strood South would have 24 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (21 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer and equal to the average by 2005).

54 Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group proposed combining the existing Cuxton & Halling ward with the existing Temple Farm ward in a new three-member Medway Valley ward. The existing Earl ward would be combined with the existing Rede Court ward and polling district MBD from the existing Frindsbury ward to form a three-member revised Rede Court ward. The remainder of Frindsbury ward would be combined with Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden ward to form a new three-member Greater Frindsbury ward. The Independent Liberal Democrat Group argued that the M2 does not provide sufficient justification for the high level of electoral equality resulting from retaining Cuxton & Halling as a separate ward, arguing that the A228 crosses the M2 to join Cuxton & Halling ward with Temple Farm ward. Moreover, it argued that Temple Farm ward is "closer" to Cuxton than is Halling and that community ties would be enhanced rather than broken by the amalgamation of these areas. It argued that combining Earl and Rede Court wards together with polling district MBD from Frindsbury "creates a central Strood ward that recognises and links these communities and also houses Medway Council's Civic Centre".

55 Under Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Greater Frindsbury, Medway Valley and Rede Court would have

9 per cent fewer, 1 per cent more and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer by 2005).

56 Cuxton Parish Council opposed any proposals which would either reduce the number of councillors representing Cuxton & Halling ward or combine it with all or part of the adjacent Temple Farm ward. The Medway Conservative Association supported the Medway Council Conservative Group's submission and emphasized how distinct a community Cuxton & Halling is from Temple Farm ward. It also supported the use of the A2 as a ward boundary in Strood. The Gillingham Conservative Association also argued that Cuxton & Halling should remain as a separate ward, arguing that it is geographically distinct and that Cuxton & Halling is rural and parished whilst Temple Farm ward is urban and unparished. Frindsbury Extra Parish Council stated that they wished to be wholly within a three-member district ward.

57 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, we accept the argument that the existing Cuxton & Halling ward merits separate representation. We recognise that Cuxton & Halling ward is unusual in its geographical isolation from the rest of the district and recognise that any solution to the high level of electoral inequality would necessitate the rural parishes of Cuxton & Halling being combined with an urban area of distinctly different community profile. We are therefore still of the opinion expressed in 1996 that proposals to combine Cuxton & Halling with Temple Farm ward are "artificial and would have regard neither to community identities and interests nor effective and convenient local government".

58 We consider that in the urban area of Strood the Conservative Group's proposals provide for the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Its proposals utilise existing boundaries, including the A2, which we consider provides a strong boundary through the centre of Strood. Moreover, the Conservatives proposals facilitate warding arrangements which allow all of Frindsbury Extra parish to be retained within one district ward. We are not convinced that the Labour Group's scheme would provide a good reflection of the statutory criteria as it appears to split the urban core of Strood relatively arbitrarily between its proposed Strood East and Strood Rural wards. The Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposal to split the existing Frindsbury ward would no longer utilise the A2 as a boundary, and is incompatible with our proposals for Cuxton & Halling ward.

59 In summary we therefore propose adopting a single-member Cuxton & Halling ward as proposed by the Conservative and Labour Groups, a three-member Strood South ward as proposed by the Conservative and Labour Groups (notwithstanding the fact that the Labour Group proposed it be named Strood West ward) and a three-member Strood North ward as proposed by the Conservative Group, as part of our draft recommendations.

60 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council, the proposed wards of Cuxton & Halling, Strood North and Strood South would have 24 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (21 per cent more,

1 per cent fewer and equal to the average by 2005). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

All Saints, Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden, Hoo St Werburgh and Thames Side wards

61 Under the existing arrangements of an 80-member council the four two-member wards of All Saints, Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden, Hoo St Werburgh and Thames Side currently have 1 per cent more, 9 per cent more, 4 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent fewer, 31 per cent more, 6 per cent more and 11 per cent fewer by 2005).

62 Medway Council Labour Group proposed that Rede Court ward should be combined with Frindsbury & Chattenden ward (less polling district MMC) and polling district MQB from Thames Side ward in a three-member Strood Rural ward, as detailed above. The remainder of Thames Side ward would be combined with the parishes of High Halstow, St Mary Hoo and Allhallows in a revised two-member Thames Side ward. Hoo St Werburgh ward would be combined with the parishes of Stoke and Isle of Grain in a new two-member Hoo Peninsula ward.

63 The Labour Group argued that in determining the ward split in the area to the north-east of Strood it had attempted to have regard to parish boundaries. It argued that its Hoo Peninsula and Thames Side wards achieved good electoral equality whilst linking rural communities along the River Medway and River Thames respectively. As mentioned earlier, the Labour Group considered its proposed Strood Rural ward “linked demographically with the rural/urban fringe”.

64 Under Medway Council Labour Group’s proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Hoo Peninsula, Strood Rural and Thames Side would have 1 per cent more, 13 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more, 5 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more by 2005).

65 Medway Council Conservative Group proposed combining the current Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden ward with the parish of Cliffe & Cliffe Woods to form a new three-member Strood Rural ward. It argued that the major road access to Cliffe & Cliffe Woods is via Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden ward and that the proposed ward achieved good electoral equality. The parishes of Allhallows, Cooling, High Halstow, Hoo St Werburgh, Isle of Grain, St Mary Hoo and Stoke would be combined to form a three-member Peninsula ward. The Conservative Group argued that the villages in its proposed Peninsula ward shared a strong sense of “peninsula community”, based on issues of common concern.

66 Under Medway Council Conservative Group’s proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Peninsula and Strood Rural would have 4 per cent fewer and 10 per cent fewer

electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2005).

67 As mentioned earlier, Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group proposed combining the existing Frinsbury Extra & Chattenden ward with the existing Frindsbury ward (less polling district MBD) to form a new three-member Greater Frindsbury ward. It proposed that the existing Hoo St Werburgh ward be combined with the parishes of Stoke and Isle of Grain in a new two-member Hoo & Grain ward. The parishes of Allhallows, Cliffe & Cliffe Woods, Cooling, High Halstow and St Mary Hoo would be combined in a revised two-member Thames Side ward.

68 Under Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Greater Frindsbury, Hoo & Grain and Thames Side would have 9 per cent fewer, 1 per cent more and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 2 per cent more by 2005).

69 Frindsbury Extra Parish Council stated that they wanted all the wards of its parish to be wholly within a three-member district ward. Allhallows Parish Council and Stoke Parish Council stated that historically Grain, Stoke and Allhallows have been closely linked and that they would both want recent warding links with St Mary Hoo and High Halstow to be maintained. St James Isle of Grain Parish Council stated they would prefer to be part of a three-member district ward rather a two-member ward.

70 We have carefully considered all representations received at Stage One regarding this area and note that all three district wide schemes provide for good electoral equality in this area. However, we note that only the Conservative Group's proposals provide for Frindsbury Extra Parish Council to be included wholly within a three-member ward, the preference of St James Isle of Grain Parish Council to be included within a three-member ward and the wish of Stoke and Allhallows parish councils that Grain, Stoke, Allhallows, St Mary Hoo and High Halstow should retain their links. We are therefore persuaded that the Conservative Group's proposals provide a better reflection of local communities and the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and propose adopting them as part of our draft recommendations in this area.

71 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Peninsula and Strood Rural would have 4 per cent fewer and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2005). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Holcombe, Horsted, St Margaret's & Borstal, Town, Troy Town and Warren Wood wards

72 Under the existing arrangements of an 80-member council the three two-member wards of Horsted, Troy Town and Warren Wood currently have 11 per cent, 7 per cent more and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent more, 7 per cent more and 4 per cent more by 2005). The three three-member wards of Holcombe, St Margaret's & Borstal and Town have 4 per cent more, 11 per cent fewer and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer by 2005).

73 Medway Council Labour Group proposed minor changes to St Margaret's & Borstal ward. The existing boundary along Maidstone Road (except for one small area) would be maintained while a small area of the existing ward to the north of the railway would be transferred into River ward. The remainder of the ward would be combined with a small part of the existing Warren Wood ward to form a new two-member Rochester West ward. The existing Troy Town ward would be combined with the area to the north of the Thomas Aveling School, in the existing Warren Wood ward, to form a new two-member Rochester East ward. The remainder of Warren Wood ward would be combined with the existing Horsted ward, the southern part of Town ward (properties to the south of Balfour Junior School) and properties to the north of King George Road, in the existing Hook Meadow ward, to form a three-member Chatham South ward. The area of Town ward that lies broadly north of Balfour Junior School and south of New Road would be combined with the existing Holcombe ward to form a new three-member Chatham ward. The remainder of Town ward would be combined with the existing Brompton ward (less those properties to the east of Upbury Manor Secondary School) and that area north of the railway line from the existing St Margaret's & Borstal ward to form a new two-member River ward.

74 The Labour Group argued that Troy Town and the lower part of Warren Wood lie in a valley which creates a natural boundary and would be illogical to split. It argued that its proposed Chatham ward combines "the principal urban part of Town ward with the similar demography of Holcombe ward" and that residents in this area face similar issues and there is "natural linkage". The Labour Group explained that its Chatham South ward, "focuses on the existing Horsted ward, but strengthens it by enlarging to take in similar areas". The Labour Group argued that its proposed River ward reflects community ties and that the River Medway provides common linkage.

75 Under Medway Council Labour Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Chatham, Chatham South, River, Rochester East and Rochester West would have 1 per cent more, 3 per cent more, 47 per cent fewer, 5 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent fewer, 1 per cent more, 3 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer by 2005).

76 Medway Council Conservative Group proposed combining the existing St Margaret's & Borstal ward (less a small area to the north of the railway line) with part of the existing Warren Wood ward (properties to the south of the Fairway) and a small number of properties from the northern tip of the existing Troy Town ward to form a new three-member Rochester West ward. It proposed combining the remainder of Warren Wood ward with the remainder of Troy Town ward, the southern tip of Town ward and the northern tip of Horsted ward to form a three-member Rochester East ward. The remainder of Town ward would be combined with the existing Brompton ward (less those properties to the east of Upbury Manor Secondary School) and the northern half of Gillingham North ward to form a new three-member Maritime ward. Holcombe ward would be retained (less a small area south of Bourneville Avenue and west of Palmerstone Road), but would be represented by two councillors. The aforementioned small area of Holcombe ward would be combined with the existing Horsted ward and the northern part of Hook Meadow ward to form a revised two-member Horsted ward.

77 The Conservative Group argued that the inclusion of the majority of Warren Wood ward with St Margaret's & Borstal ward follows the previous county council division and that the area to the north of the railway line in St Margaret's & Borstal ward shares "a greater sense of community with other riparian development sites". It argued that Holcombe ward as it exists provides a good reflection of community interests and should therefore be retained largely unchanged and also argued that its Maritime ward was based on the major riparian residential development within Medway.

78 Under Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Holcombe, Horsted, Maritime, Rochester East and Rochester West would have 2 per cent more, 9 per cent more, 30 per cent fewer, 3 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent more, 4 per cent more, 2 per cent more, equal to the average and equal to the average by 2005).

79 Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group proposed combining the existing Troy Town ward with the northern part of St Margaret's & Borstal ward (the area that lies roughly to the north of the Ford Almshouses) and the eastern part of the existing Town ward (the area around Fort Pitt Grammar School) to form a new three-member Medway Central ward. It stated that its proposed Medway Central ward brings together polling districts in and around the City of Rochester and that its proposed name recognises its very central location. The remainder of St Margaret's & Borstal ward would be combined with the existing Warren Wood ward and the northern part of Horsted ward in a new three-member Shorts ward. The Independent Liberal Democrat Group stated that the proposed ward name recognises the area's flying history as the Shorts flying boat factory was based on the Esplanade at Borstal. The southern tip of Town ward would be combined with the existing Holcombe ward (less those properties to the east of Magpie Hall Road) to form a three-member Holcombe ward, which the Independent Liberal Democrat Group argued achieves good electoral equality whilst recognising community affiliation. The remainder of Horsted ward would be combined with the existing Hook Meadow ward, southern tip of Wayfield ward and the south western part of the existing Walderslade ward to form a

revised three-member Hook Meadow ward. The remainder of Town ward would be combined with the existing Brompton ward (less part of the residential area to the east of Upbury Manor Secondary School) and the western part of the existing Gillingham North ward to form a three-member Brompton ward.

80 Under Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Brompton, Holcombe, Hook Meadow, Medway Central and Shorts would have 26 per cent fewer, 4 per cent more, equal to, 10 per cent fewer and 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent fewer, 2 per cent more, 4 per cent fewer, 1 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more by 2005).

81 Having carefully considered all the representations received, we recognise that all three schemes provide for good electoral equality, but consider that Medway Council Labour Group's proposals provide for the most accurate reflection of the statutory criteria. We note that the Labour Group's proposals for its Rochester West ward build on existing arrangements and retain strong boundaries, whilst both the Conservative and Independent Liberal Democrat Groups combine this area with areas of dissimilar profile in a larger ward. We note that there is some consensus between the Labour and Conservative Groups on a proposed River or Maritime ward, but that the Labour Group's proposals do not include the more residential areas of Town ward and Gillingham North ward in this proposed ward. We recognise that both the Conservative and Independent Liberal Democrat Groups' proposals for a revised Holcombe ward provide for a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, but concur with the Labour Group's arguments that its proposals would combine the existing Holcombe ward with an area of similar profile from Town ward. We consider that this arrangement provides for the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and statutory criteria whilst facilitating a good scheme throughout the district. Furthermore, we are persuaded that the Labour Group's proposal for a Chatham South ward which combines large areas of the existing Warren Wood and Horsted wards provides for a better reflection of community identity than the Conservative and Independent Liberal Democrat Groups' proposals which unite Warren Wood ward with the existing St Margaret's & Borstal ward in larger ward. Moreover, both the Independent Liberal Democrat Group's and Conservative Group's proposals are incompatible with proposed warding arrangements elsewhere in the district. In summary we consider that the Medway Council Labour Group's proposals provide for the most accurate reflection of the statutory criteria and propose adopting them as part of our draft recommendation in this area.

82 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Chatham, Chatham South, River, Rochester East and Rochester West would have 1 per cent more, 3 per cent more, 47 per cent fewer, 5 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent less, 1 per cent more, 3 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer by 2005). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Hook Meadow, Lordswood, Luton, North Dane, Walderslade and Wayfield wards

83 Under the existing arrangements of an 80-member council the four two-member wards of Hook Meadow, Luton, North Dane and Wayfield currently have 6 per cent more, 15 per cent more, 13 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the district average, 11 per cent more, 11 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer by 2005). The three-member wards of Lordswood and Walderslade have 8 per cent fewer and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (13 per cent fewer and 7 per cent fewer by 2005).

84 Medway Council Labour Group proposed combining the existing Luton ward with the existing Wayfield ward and a small area of the existing North Dane ward (containing no electors) to form a new three-member Luton & Wayfield ward. The existing Lordswood ward would be combined with the part of North Dane ward that lies south of Capstone Road and broadly to the east of North Dane Way to form a new two-member Lordswood & Capstone ward. That area of North Dane ward to the west of North Dane Way would be combined with the northern part of Walderslade ward in a new two-member Princes Park ward. The remainder of Walderslade ward would be combined with Hook Meadow ward (less properties to the north of Kings Road which would form part of a new Chatham South ward, as mentioned earlier) in a new two-member Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward. The remainder of the existing North Dane ward would be combined with the existing Watling Street ward and a small area in the south of Priestfield ward in a new two-member Watling ward.

85 The Labour Group stated that its proposed Luton & Wayfield ward was separated from Chatham by Coney Banks, bounded to the north by the Chatham Hill barrier, separated from Princes Park ward to the east by a ridge, and bounded to the south by Walderslade Road. It argued that Wayfield Road and Luton High Street provide natural linkages within the ward. It argued that its Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward is a natural combination geographically, whilst its Princes Park ward combines a community currently split between the existing Walderslade and North Dane wards. It argued that its proposed Lordswood & Capstone ward is naturally separated from Hempstead by the Capstone Valley.

86 Under Medway Council Labour Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Lordswood & Capstone, Princes Park, Weeds Wood & Walderslade and Watling would have 5 per cent more, 8 per cent more, 2 per cent more and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the district average, 4 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2005).

87 Medway Council Conservative Group proposed combining the existing Luton ward with the existing Wayfield ward and a small area of the existing North Dane ward (properties west of North Dane Way and north of Heron Way) to form a three-member Luton & Wayfield ward. It

proposed combining a small area of North Dane ward to the south of Heron Way with the existing Walderslade ward and the southern part of the existing Hook Meadow ward to form a revised three-member Walderslade ward. The remainder of Hook Meadow ward would be combined with the existing Horsted ward (less the northern tip of this ward) in a revised two-member Horsted ward. It proposed combining the remainder of North Dane ward with part of the existing Watling Street ward (properties to the south of Watling Street and Sovereign Boulevard) and the existing Lordswood ward to form a three-member Darland & Lordswood ward. It stated that its proposed Darland & Lordswood ward combined the Palace Estate in one ward where currently it is split between two wards.

88 Under Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Darland & Lordswood, Horsted, Luton & Wayfield and Walderslade would have 2 per cent more, 9 per cent more, 9 per cent more and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent fewer, 4 per cent more, 5 per cent more and 1 per cent more by 2005).

89 The Independent Liberal Democrat Group proposed combining the existing Luton ward (less a small area in the north of the ward) with part of the existing Holcombe ward (a small area to the east of Magpie Hall Road), the northern part of Wayfield ward and a small area from the eastern part of North Dane ward to form a revised three-member Luton ward. The remainder of the existing Wayfield ward would be combined with the southern half of Horsted ward, the existing Hook Meadow ward and the southern tip of Walderslade ward to form a revised three-member Hook Meadow ward. The remainder of Walderslade ward would be combined with the existing Lordswood ward (less those properties in the area broadly to the north of Bromley Close) and Dove Close and Bank View from the existing North Dane ward in a new three-member Dargets ward. The remainder of the existing North Dane ward, less the area to the north of Capstone Road, would be combined with the existing Hempstead & Wigmore ward (less the area broadly to the north of Wigmore Park) and the remainder of the existing Lordswood ward to form a new three-member Park ward. That area of the existing North Dane ward to the north of Capstone Road would be combined with the existing Watling Street ward, part of Gillingham South ward (that area to the south of Canterbury Street), a small area from the north of Luton ward and a small area in the south east of the existing Brompton ward to form a revised three-member Watling Street ward.

90 Under Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Dargets, Hook Meadow, Park and Watling Street would have 5 per cent more, equal to the average, 8 per cent more and equal to the district average number of electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average, 4 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer by 2005).

91 Gillingham Conservative Association, whilst expressing general support for the Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals, proposed amendments which would affect its proposed Luton & Wayfield, Darland & Lordswood and Hempstead & Wigmore wards. Gillingham

Conservative Association argued that although Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals do unite the Darland estate within one ward, it should not be included with Lordswood ward as it looks more naturally towards Hempstead. Its proposed amendments would provide for Luton & Wayfield as a three-member ward, Lordswood as a two-member ward and Darland & Hempstead as a three-member ward.

92 We consider that the Conservative Group's proposals to combine the Darland and Lordswood areas appear to be artificial and have little regard to community identity. We note that the Gillingham Conservative Association, the Independent Liberal Democrat Group and the Labour Group all propose to ward these areas separately. However, we also consider that the Independent Liberal Democrats' proposals, which combine the existing North Dane ward and parts of Lordswood with the existing Hempstead & Wigmore ward, combine areas that are distinct both geographically and terms of community identity. Furthermore, the Independent Liberal Democrats' proposals to unite the Darland area with parts of the existing Gillingham South and Brompton wards provide for a poor reflection of community identity. We consider that the Labour Group's proposals to unite the whole of Lordswood ward with the rural area of North Dane ward to the south of Capstone Road, while combining the Darland area with the Gillingham Park area to create a ward which focuses "around the neighbourhood shopping area that [is] situated along the A2 at this point", provide for a much more appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

93 We note that there is some consensus regarding the warding of the existing Luton ward with the existing Wayfield ward and in the light of the better electoral equality achieved and the stronger boundaries used, we propose adopting the Labour Group's proposed Luton & Wayfield ward as part of our draft recommendations. Furthermore, we consider that the Labour Group's proposals for the existing Walderslade and Hook Meadow wards provide for clearer boundaries than the alternatives proposed by the Conservative and Independent Liberal Democrat Groups, whilst uniting areas of a similar profile, and in light of these factors and the necessity of achieving a good scheme throughout the district we propose adopting the Labour Group's proposals for this area as a whole. However we do propose amending the eastern boundary of the Labour Group's proposed Lordswood & Capstone ward in order to make the boundary clearer. This change would affect no electors.

94 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Lordswood & Capstone, Princes Park, Weeds Wood & Walderslade and Watling would have 5 per cent more, 8 per cent more, 2 per cent more and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the district average, 4 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2005). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Brompton, Gillingham North, Gillingham South, Medway, Priestfield and Watling Street wards

95 Under the existing arrangements of an 80-member council the six two-member wards of Brompton, Gillingham North, Gillingham South, Medway, Priestfield and Watling Street currently have 8 per cent more, 8 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer, 8 per cent more, 2 per cent more and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (58 per cent more, 11 per cent fewer, 6 per cent fewer, 14 per cent more, 2 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer by 2005).

96 As mentioned earlier, Medway Council Labour Group proposed combining the existing Brompton ward (less those properties to the east of Upbury Manor Secondary School) with part of the existing St Margaret's & Borstal ward (that area to the north of the railway line) and part of Town ward (that area broadly to the north of Fort Pitt Grammar School) to form a new two-member River ward. The remainder of Brompton ward would be combined with the existing Gillingham South ward and most of the existing Priestfield ward (those properties broadly to the north of Carlton Avenue) to form a revised three-member Gillingham South ward. The existing Gillingham North ward would be combined with the existing Medway ward and that area of the existing Beechings ward to the north of the railway line to form a revised three-member Gillingham North ward. The remainder of Priestfield ward would be combined with the existing Watling Street ward and the northern tip of the existing North Dane ward to form a two-member Watling ward.

97 The Labour Group argued that their proposed River ward reflects community ties and that the River Medway provides a common linkage. It argued that its proposed Gillingham North ward combined areas of a similar profile, large parts of which are suffering from deprivation, which would be more effectively represented within one ward. It argued that its proposed Gillingham South ward separates the existing artificial Brompton ward, large parts of which are around the hospital, and although notionally in Brompton, are in reality part of Gillingham.

98 Under Medway Council Labour Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Gillingham North, Gillingham South, River and Watling would be equal to the district average and would have 5 per cent more, 47 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more, 4 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 1 per cent less by 2005).

99 As mentioned earlier, the Conservative Group proposed that the existing Brompton ward (less those properties to the east of Upbury Manor Secondary School) and the northern half of Gillingham North ward should be combined with the existing Town ward (less the area broadly to the south of Fort Pitt Grammar School) to form a new three-member Maritime ward. It argued that its Maritime ward was based on the major riparian residential development within Medway. The remainder of Gillingham North ward would be combined with the existing Medway ward,

that part of Beechings ward to the north of the railway line and part of the existing Brompton ward (properties within the roughly triangular area to the east of the hospital formed by the railway, Marlborough Road and the High Street) to form a revised three-member Gillingham North ward. The remainder of Brompton ward would be combined with the existing Gillingham South ward, the eastern part of the existing Priestfield ward and part of the existing Watling Street ward (the area north of Watling Street and broadly to the west of Brasenose Road, Oxford Road and Holmside) to form a three-member Gillingham South ward. The remainder of Priestfield ward would be combined with the area in the remainder of Watling Street ward that lies to the north of Watling Street, the remainder of Beechings ward and the existing Twydall ward (less Easting Close and River View) to form a three-member Beechings & Twydall ward. As mentioned earlier the remainder of Watling Street ward would be combined with the majority of North Dane ward and Lordswood ward in a three-member Darland & Lordswood ward. It argued that this proposal removes the boundary which currently splits the Darland estate.

100 Under Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Beechings & Twydall, Darland & Lordswood, Gillingham North, Gillingham South and Maritime would have 5 per cent more, 2 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer, 2 per cent more and 30 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average, 2 per cent fewer, equal to the average, 1 per cent more and 2 per cent more by 2005).

101 The Independent Liberal Democrat Group proposed combining the existing Brompton ward (less a small area to the east of the hospital) with the northern part of the existing Town ward and the western part of Gillingham North ward (properties broadly to the east of Victoria Street) in a revised three-member Brompton ward. That part of the remainder of Brompton ward which lies broadly to the south of Canterbury Street would be combined with that part of Gillingham South ward that lies broadly to the south of Canterbury Street, that part of North Dane ward to the north of Capstone Road, a small area from the north of the existing Luton ward and the existing Watling Street ward to form a three-member Watling Street ward. The remaining parts of Gillingham South, Gillingham North and Brompton wards would be combined with the existing Medway ward (less a small area east of Woodlands Road) and the northern part of Priestfield ward to form a revised three-member Priestfield ward. The remaining parts of Medway and Priestfield wards would be combined with the majority of Beechings ward and the southern half of Twydall ward to form a new three-member Woodlands ward. The Independent Liberal Democrat Group argued that they had sought to address both electoral equality and convenience of access in this area.

102 Under Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Brompton, Priestfields, Woodlands and Watling Street would have 26 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer and equal to the average electors per councillor than the district average and be equal to the average respectively (1 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer, 2 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer by 2005).

103 As mentioned earlier, Gillingham Conservative Association, whilst expressing general support for Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals, proposed amendments which would affect its proposed Luton & Wayfield, Darland & Lordswood, Hempstead & Wigmore wards. They argued that the Darland estate, currently in Watling Street ward, should be combined with Hempstead & Wigmore ward.

104 As discussed earlier, we note that there is some consensus between the Labour and Conservative Groups on a proposed River or Maritime ward. However, we note that the Labour Group's proposals do not include the more residential areas of Town ward and Gillingham North ward in this proposed ward and thus provide for a more accurate reflection of community identity. Elsewhere in this area we note that the Labour Group's proposals largely build on existing arrangements and provide for strong boundaries whilst achieving good electoral equality. We note that both the Conservative and Independent Liberal Democrat Groups' proposals split existing communities in this area and combine distinct communities in larger wards. In particular we are not persuaded that the Conservative Group's proposal to combine the southern part of Watling Street ward with Lordswood ward is a good reflection of community identity. Similarly, we consider that the Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposal to combine parts of the existing Gillingham South and Brompton wards with the southern part of Watling Street is a poor reflection of community identity. We propose, therefore, to adopt the Labour Group's proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

105 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Gillingham North, Gillingham South, River and Watling would be equal to the district average and would have 5 per cent more, 47 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more, 4 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 1 per cent less by 2005). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Beechings, Rainham, Riverside and Twydall wards

106 Under the existing arrangements of an 80-member council the four two-member wards of Beechings, Rainham, Riverside and Twydall currently have 1 per cent less, 5 per cent more, 13 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent fewer, 2 per cent more, 8 per cent more and 10 per cent fewer by 2005).

107 Medway Council Labour Group proposed combining the existing Riverside ward with the middle section of the existing Rainham ward (properties broadly between Pembury Way and Scott Avenue) to form a new two-member Rainham North ward. The western part of the remainder of Rainham ward would be combined with the existing Twydall ward and the existing Beechings ward (less those properties to the north of the railway line) and a small part of the existing Watling Street ward (that part to the north of Watling Street and east of Woodlands Road) to form a three-member Twydall ward. As mentioned earlier that part of Beechings ward to the north of the railway line would be combined with the existing Medway ward and the

existing Gillingham North ward in a revised three-member Gillingham North ward. The remainder of Rainham ward would be combined with the northern half of St Margaret's ward and a small part of Parkwood ward to form a new two-member Rainham South ward.

108 The Labour Group argued that its proposed Twydall ward had natural boundaries; that it was bounded to the north by the railway line, to the south by the A2, to the east by Cozenton Park and to the west by Woodlands Road. It argued that it was logical to combine the existing Riverside ward with the town centre part of Rainham as there are three crossings over the railway in this area. It argued that where the A2 bisects its proposed Rainham South ward, it is a "softer" boundary as it has become a single carriageway and a focus for the community rather than a divide. It is also logical, the Labour Group argued, to cede that part of Beechings ward to the north of the railway line into its proposed Gillingham North ward.

109 Under Medway Council Labour Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Gillingham North, Rainham North, Rainham South and Twydall, would be equal to the district average and would have 4 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer, 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent less by 2005).

110 As mentioned earlier the Conservative Group proposed combining the existing Beechings ward (less the area to the north of the railway line) and the existing Twydall ward (less two roads from the north-east corner of the ward) with the eastern half of Priestfield ward and the north-eastern part of the existing Watling Street ward to form a new three-member Beechings & Twydall ward. The existing Rainham ward would be combined with the existing Riverside ward to form a new three-member Rainham North ward. The Conservative Group argued that its proposed wards used strong boundaries and provided for excellent electoral equality.

111 Under Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Beeching & Twydall and Rainham North would have 5 per cent more and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average in both wards by 2005).

112 The Independent Liberal Democrat Group proposed combining the existing Riverside ward with a small area from the north-east corner of the existing Beechings ward, the northern half of the existing Twydall ward and the western half of the existing Rainham ward to form a revised three-member Riverside ward. The southern part of Twydall ward would be combined with the remainder of Beechings ward, the eastern part of Priestfield ward and a small area of the existing Medway ward (properties broadly to the east of Woodlands Road) to form a new three-member Woodlands ward. The remainder of Rainham ward would be combined with the bulk of the existing Rainham Mark ward, a small area from the north-east of Hempstead & Wigmore ward and the north-eastern part of the existing St Margaret's ward to form a revised three-member Rainham Mark ward. The Independent Liberal Democrats stated they had warded areas according to "ease of access" and the need to achieve good electoral equality.

113 Under Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Rainham Mark, Riverside and Woodlands would have 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, equal to the average and 1 per cent fewer than the average respectively (5 per cent more, 3 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer by 2005).

114 Having carefully considered all the representations received we recognise that there is some consensus on the need to combine part of the existing Rainham ward with the existing Riverside ward in order to achieve an appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We consider that the Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposals to further combine part of Beechings and part of Twydall wards is a poor reflection of the statutory criteria. Furthermore, we consider that the Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposed Woodlands ward unites areas of little common interest in an artificial ward which would not reflect the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We concur with the Conservative and Labour Groups' proposal to cede the area north of the railway line in Beechings ward to a Gillingham North ward and concur with the Conservative Group's argument that the A289 provides a strong boundary to the west of the existing Riverside ward. However, we are not convinced that combining the part of Priestfield ward and part of Watling ward with Beechings and Twydall wards provides for a good reflection of the statutory criteria particularly as the areas are separated by open land. We consider the Labour Group's proposals to combine Beechings and Twydall wards with the western part of Rainham to be the best available balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We therefore propose adopting the majority of the Labour Group's proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations, although not their proposed Rainham South ward (which is discussed in the next section).

115 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Rainham North and Twydall wards would have 4 per cent more and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2005). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Hempstead & Wigmore, Parkwood, Rainham Mark and St Margaret's wards

116 Under the existing arrangements of an 80-member council the four three-member wards of Hempstead & Wigmore, Parkwood, Rainham Mark and St Margaret's have 8 per cent more, 11 per cent fewer, 8 per cent fewer and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent more, 16 per cent fewer, 13 per cent fewer and 7 per cent fewer by 2005).

117 Medway Council Labour Group proposed retaining Hempstead & Wigmore virtually unchanged as a two-member ward. A small area of the existing Hempstead & Wigmore ward (those properties north of Drewery Drive and broadly east of Edwards Close) would be combined with the existing Rainham Mark ward to form a revised two-member Rainham Mark ward. The northern part of the existing St Margaret's ward would be combined with a small area from the

north-east corner of the existing Parkwood ward and the eastern end of Rainham ward to form a two-member Rainham South ward as detailed above. The remainder of the Parkwood and St Margaret's wards would form a two-member Parkwood ward.

118 As detailed above, the Labour Group argued that where the A2 bisects its proposed Rainham South ward it is a "softer" boundary as it has become a single carriageway and a focus for the community rather than a divide. It argued that, to the north of the urban part of its proposed Parkwood ward, Deanwood Drive forms a natural boundary from the older developments in southern Rainham. It argued that Hempstead & Wigmore ward has a distinct and strong sense of community as indicated by a highly active residents' association.

119 Under Medway Council Labour Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Hempstead & Wigmore, Rainham Mark, Rainham South and Parkwood would have 4 per cent more, 2 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (being equal to the average, and having 3 per cent fewer, 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2005).

120 Medway Council Conservative Group proposed combining properties to the east of Lonsdale Road in the existing St Margaret's ward with the existing Parkwood ward and part of Rainham Mark ward in a revised three-member Rainham South ward. The remainder of St Margaret's ward would be combined with the existing Rainham Mark ward and those properties north of Drewery Drive in the existing Hempstead & Wigmore ward to form a new three-member Rainham Central ward.

121 The Conservative Group argued that Hempstead & Wigmore ward has a strong sense of community and so it had retained it unchanged in order preserve this. It also argued that its proposed Rainham South ward shares a community of interest based on its geographical location.

122 Under Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Hempstead & Wigmore, Rainham Central and Rainham South would be equal to the average, would have 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average and would be equal to the average respectively (4 per cent fewer, 5 per cent fewer and 5 per cent fewer by 2005).

123 As mentioned earlier, the Independent Liberal Democrat Group proposed combining the majority of North Dane ward to the south of Capstone Road with the existing Hempstead & Wigmore ward (less the area broadly to the north of Wigmore Park) and the northern tip of Lordswood ward to form a new three-member Park ward. It argued that this ward brings together "communities sharing alignment to the open space of Capstone & Darland". The remainder of the existing Hempstead & Wigmore ward would be combined with the existing Rainham Mark ward (less properties broadly to the east of Maidstone Road), that part of the existing St Margaret's ward to the north and east of Lonsdale Drive and the western half of the existing Rainham ward to form a revised three-member Rainham Mark ward. The remainder of Rainham

Mark ward and St Margaret's ward would be combined with the existing Parkwood ward in a new three-member Mierscourt ward.

124 Under Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposals for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Mierscourt, Park and Rainham Mark would have 8 per cent more, 8 per cent more and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 9 per cent more by 2005).

125 As mentioned earlier, Gillingham Conservative Association proposed an amendment to the Conservative Group's proposal, arguing that the area to the north of the Conservative Group's proposed Darland & Lordswood ward should be combined with Hempstead in a three-member ward as it looked more to this area than the community of Lordswood.

126 As detailed earlier, we regard the Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposed Park ward to be a poor reflection of the statutory criteria as it combines areas that are distinct from each other both geographically and in terms of community interest. Similarly we regard its proposed Rainham Mark ward to be an artificial combination of areas providing for a poor reflection of community identity. However, we are not persuaded that the Labour Group's proposals provide for an appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria as its boundaries in the south-east corner of the district appear to be relatively arbitrary. We consider that the Conservative Group's approach of dividing the area into three three-member wards facilitates stronger boundaries and a more logical division of electors. However, in order to combine the Conservative Group's proposals with our proposals elsewhere in the district we propose amending its proposed northern boundary of Rainham South ward to follow the southern boundary of the Labour Group's proposed Rainham North ward and to incorporate the eastern part of the existing Rainham ward.

127 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council the proposed wards of Hempstead & Wigmore, Rainham Central and Rainham South would be equal to the district average, would have 2 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent fewer, 5 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more by 2005). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

128 We received 12 representations regarding the District Council's electoral cycle. The District Council undertook public consultation on the issue of electoral cycle: 53 per cent of respondents supported a change to "more frequent" elections while 40 per cent supported the retention of the existing cycle of whole council elections. The Council stated that it did not consider "this response as sufficient to warrant a change to its electoral cycle". Medway Council Labour Group supported the retention of elections of the whole council every four years, arguing that "a move to annual elections would be detrimental for a strategic authority where implementation of decisions made can often take longer than a 12 month time frame" which could therefore lead

to “short-termist approaches to policy that could be detrimental to the Council’s potential efficiency and effectiveness”. Medway Council Conservative Group stated that it considered elections of the whole council every four years to be appropriate for a unitary authority, particularly when the authority does not have a uniform pattern of three-member wards. Chatham & Aylesford Conservative Association supported the retention of the existing electoral cycle. Medway Conservative Association also supported the retention of the existing electoral cycle.

129 The Medway Liberal Democrat Associations proposed elections by thirds, arguing that such a system is more democratic and that it would lead to an increase in voter turnout. Gillingham Conservative Association supported elections for the whole council every four years. Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group proposed elections by thirds, arguing that this would encourage people to vote, that people prefer the frequent opportunity to express their views about elected representatives, and that continuity is maintained within the council. Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group proposed elections by thirds arguing that the response to the Council’s own consultation indicates public support for this change. Allhallows Parish Council supported elections of the whole council every four years. Stoke Parish Council also supported elections of the whole council every four years. Finally, two local residents both supported elections by thirds as they considered this system to be more democratic.

130 Having carefully considered all the representations received we have noted there is a mixed view with regards to electoral cycle. We recognise that there is some support for annual elections, but do not consider that sufficient evidence has been put forward to justify a change in electoral cycle, particularly in the light of the lack of local consensus. We therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle, but would welcome further comments at Stage Three.

Conclusions

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

- there should 55 councillors, 25 less than at present;
- there should be 22 wards;
- the boundaries of 34 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net decrease of 13 wards, and one ward should retain its existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council every four years.

132 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on a mixture of Medway Council Conservative Group’s and Medway Council Labour Group’s proposals, but propose amending them in the following areas:

- in the south-east of the district we propose amending the northern boundary of the Conservative Group's proposed Rainham South ward;
- in the south of the district we propose amending the boundary between the Labour Group's proposed Lordswood & Capstone ward and the Conservative Group's proposed Hempstead & Wigmore ward.

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

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	80	55	80	55
Number of wards	35	22	35	22
Average number of electors per councillor	2278	3314	2402	3494
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	7	3	13	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	0	2	2	1

134 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Medway Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average, from 13 to one by 2005.

Draft Recommendation

Medway District Council should comprise 55 councillors serving 22 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Maps 2 and A1 and the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

135 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Our draft recommendations do not require any consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of

Medway to reflect the proposed district wards. However, we do propose new parish warding arrangements for Frindsbury Extra Parish Council.

136 The parish of Frindsbury Extra is currently served by 12 councillors representing three wards. At Stage One Frindsbury Extra Parish Council proposed that Frindsbury parish continue to be represented by 12 councillors, but they should represent four new parish wards: Frindsbury Extra North, Frindsbury Extra South, Frindsbury Extra East and Frindsbury Extra West wards, each represented by three parish councillors. It argued that because of new development within the parish causing electoral inequality, four parish wards were now required to achieve better electoral equality. Medway Conservative Association Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden Branch supported Frindsbury Extra Parish Council's proposals. We consider that Frindsbury Extra Parish Council's proposals would provide for better electoral equality between parish wards and therefore propose adopting them as part of our draft recommendations.

Draft Recommendation

Frindsbury Extra Parish Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: North, South, East and West (each returning three councillors). These proposals are illustrated on Map A1 in Appendix A.

137 Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group, Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group, Medway Council Conservative Group and Frindsbury Extra Parish Council all supported the retention of the existing electoral cycle of parish council elections on the same cycle as the District Council. We propose that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in Medway.

Draft Recommendation

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

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

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Medway

5 NEXT STEPS

139 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 9 July 2001. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

140 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

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

Fax: 020 7404 6142

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Medway: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates the proposed warding of Frindsbury Extra Parish

The large map inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed ward arrangements for the urban area of Medway.

Map A1: Proposed Warding of Frindsbury Extra Parish

APPENDIX B

Figure B1: Medway Council Labour Group's 55-member Proposal: number of councillors and electors per ward.

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Chatham South	3	10,256	3,419	3%	10,620	3,540	1%
2	Chatham	3	10,032	3,344	1%	10,391	3,464	-1%
3	Cuxton & Halling	1	4,099	4,099	24%	4,241	4,241	21%
4	Gillingham South	3	10,418	3,473	5%	10,892	3,631	4%
5	Gillingham North	3	9,915	3,305	0%	10,567	3,522	1%
6	Hempstead & Wigmore	2	6,921	3,461	4%	6,963	3,482	0%
7	Hoo Peninsula	2	6,663	3,332	1%	7,061	3,531	1%
8	Lordswood & Capstone	2	6,975	3,488	5%	6,980	3,490	0%
9	Luton & Wayfield	3	9,779	3,260	-2%	10,080	3,360	-4%
10	Parkwood	2	6,924	3,462	4%	6,927	3,464	-1%
11	Princes Park	2	7,181	3,591	8%	7,292	3,646	4%
12	Rainham North	2	6,870	3,435	4%	6,947	3,474	-1%
13	Rainham Mark	2	6,762	3,381	2%	6,775	3,388	-3%
14	Rainham South	2	6,700	3,350	1%	6,827	3,414	-2%
15	River	2	3,500	1,750	-47%	7,165	3,583	3%
16	Rochester West	2	6,470	3,235	-2%	6,903	3,452	-1%
17	Rochester East	2	6,927	3,464	5%	7,183	3,592	3%
18	Strood Rural	3	8,622	2,874	-13%	9,947	3,316	-5%

	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 (%)
19	Strood West	3	10,295	3,432	4%	10,517	3,506	0%
20	Strood East	2	6,192	3,096	-7%	6,670	3,335	-5%
21	Thame Side	2	6,885	3,443	4%	7,106	3,553	2%
22	Twydall	3	10,229	3,410	3%	10,372	3,457	-1%
23	Watling	2	6,930	3,465	5%	6,937	3,469	-1%
24	Weeds Wood & Walderslade	2	6,729	3,365	2%	6,817	3,409	-2%
	Totals	55	182,274	-	-	192,180	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,314	-	-	3,494	-

Source: Electorate Figures are based on Medway Council Labour Group's submission

Figure B2: Medway Council Conservative Group's 55-member Proposal: number of electors and councillors per ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Beechings & Twydall	3	10,462	3,487	5%	10,527	3,509	0%
2	Cuxton & Halling	1	4,099	4,099	24%	4,241	4,241	21%
3	Darland & Lordswood	3	10,110	3,370	2%	10,302	3,434	-2%
4	Gillingham South	3	10,152	3,384	2%	10,611	3,537	1%
5	Gillingham North	3	9,880	3,293	-1%	10,531	3,510	0%
6	Hempstead & Wigmore	2	6,635	3,318	0%	6,677	3,339	-4%
7	Holcombe	2	6,780	3,390	2%	7,104	3,552	2%
8	Horsted	2	7,241	3,621	9%	7,252	3,626	4%
9	Luton & Wayfield	3	10,809	3,603	9%	10,965	3,655	5%
10	Maritime	3	6,967	2,322	-30%	10,677	3,559	2%
11	Peninsula	3	9,504	3,168	-4%	10,036	3,345	-4%
12	Rainham South	3	9,905	3,302	0%	9,907	3,302	-5%
13	Rainham North	3	10,336	3,445	4%	10,500	3,500	0%
14	Rainham Central	3	9,789	3,263	-2%	9,929	3,310	-5%
15	Rochester East	3	10,273	3,424	3%	10,488	3,496	0%
16	Rochester West	3	9,696	3,232	-2%	10,533	3,511	0%
17	Strood Rural	3	8,997	2,999	-10%	10,401	3,467	-1%
18	Strood North	3	9,861	3,287	-1%	10,347	3,449	-1%

	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 (%)
19	Strood South	3	10,295	3,432	4%	10,517	3,506	0%
20	Walderslade	3	10,484	3,495	5%	10,635	3,545	1%
	Totals	55	182,275	-	-	192,180	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,314	-	-	3,494	-

Source: *Electorate Figures are based on Medway Council Conservative Group's submission*

Figure B3: Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group's 55-member Proposal: number of electors and councillors per ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Brompton	3	7,371	2,457	-26%	10,355	3,452	-1%
2	Dargets	3	10,447	3,482	5%	10,533	3,511	0%
3	Greater Frindsbury	3	9,054	3,018	-9%	10,846	3,615	3%
4	Holcombe	3	10,375	3,458	4%	10,726	3,575	2%
5	Hoo & Grain	2	6,663	3,332	1%	7,061	3,531	1%
6	Hook Meadow	3	9,964	3,321	0%	10,087	3,362	-4%
7	Luton	3	10,113	3,371	2%	10,211	3,404	-3%
8	Medway Valley	3	10,005	3,335	1%	10,330	3,443	-1%
9	Medway Central	3	8,989	2,996	-10%	10,408	3,469	-1%
10	Mierscourt	3	10,739	3,580	8%	10,741	3,580	2%
11	Park	3	10,736	3,579	8%	10,823	3,608	3%
12	Priestfield	3	9,507	3,169	-4%	10,092	3,364	-4%
13	Rainham Mark	3	10,853	3,618	9%	11,008	3,669	5%
14	Rede Court	3	10,149	3,383	2%	10,199	3,400	-3%
15	Riverside	3	9,980	3,327	0%	10,129	3,376	-3%
16	Shorts	3	10,633	3,544	7%	11,029	3,676	5%
17	Thames Side	2	6,885	3,443	4%	7,106	3,553	2%

	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 (%)
18	Watling Street	3	9,940	3,313	0%	10,227	3,409	-2%
19	Woodlands	3	9,867	3,289	-1%	10,269	3,423	-2%
	Totals	55	182,270	-	-	192,180	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,314	-	-	3,494	-

Source: *Electorate Figures are based on Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group's submission*

Figure B4: Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group's 55-member Proposal: number of electors and councillors per ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Brompton	3	6,502	2,167	-30%	9,321	3,107	-5%
2	Cuxton & Halling	3	10,005	3,335	8%	10,330	3,443	6%
3	Darland	3	9,795	3,265	6%	9,832	3,277	1%
4	Frindsbury	2	6,192	3,096	0%	6,670	3,335	2%
5	Gillingham South	3	9,011	3,004	-3%	9,426	3,142	-4%
6	Gillingham North	3	9,098	3,033	-2%	9,744	3,248	0%
7	Hoo	3	8,394	2,798	-9%	10,091	3,364	3%
8	Hook Meadow	3	10,114	3,371	9%	10,181	3,394	4%
9	Lordswood	3	10,029	3,343	8%	10,183	3,394	4%
10	Luton	3	9,504	3,168	3%	9,607	3,202	-2%
11	North Dane	3	9,629	3,210	4%	9,863	3,288	1%
12	Peninsular	3	8,823	2,941	-5%	9,062	3,021	-7%
13	Rainham	3	9,883	3,294	7%	10,110	3,370	3%
14	Rainham Mark	3	9,686	3,229	5%	9,699	3,233	-1%
15	Rochester West	3	9,630	3,210	4%	10,184	3,395	4%
16	Strood West	3	9,342	3,114	1%	9,389	3,130	-4%

	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 (%)
17	Town	3	8,067	2,689	-13%	9,353	3,118	-4%
18	Twydall	3	9,617	3,206	4%	9,686	3,229	-1%
19	Warren Wood	3	8,694	2,898	-6%	9,175	3,058	-6%
20	Wigmore	3	10,259	3,420	11%	10,274	3,425	5%
	Totals	59	182,274	-	-	192,180	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,089	-	-	3,257	-

Source: *Electorate Figures are based on Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group's submission*

APPENDIX C

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

1 Section 13(2) of the Local Government Act 1992 places a duty on the Commission to undertake periodic electoral reviews of each principal local authority area in England, and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. Section 13(3) provides that, so far as reasonably practicable, the first such review of any area should be undertaken not less than 10 years, and not more than 15 years, after this Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), submitted an initial electoral review report on the county within which that area, or the larger part of the area, was located. This timetable applies to boroughs within shire and metropolitan counties, although not to South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear¹. Nor does the timetable apply to London Boroughs; the 1992 Act is silent on the timing of periodic electoral reviews in Greater London. Nevertheless, these areas will be included in the Commission's review programme. The Commission has no power to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London.

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

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

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

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

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish

¹ The Local Government Boundary Commission did not submit reports on the counties of South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear.

or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

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

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

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

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

7 In relation to shire boroughs:

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

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

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

- (d) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(e) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

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

(f) the number or distribution of electors in the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and

(g) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

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

(h) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration;

(i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(j) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

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

APPENDIX D

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

Commission compliance with Code criteria

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