

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Medway

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

December 2001

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WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations 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 required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors, ward names and the frequency of elections. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish councils.

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Medway.

SUMMARY

We began a review of Medway's electoral arrangements on 28 November 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 19 June 2001, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

We found that the existing arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in 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 electoral equality is expected to worsen, 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 final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 143–144) 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;**
- **whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 19 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 forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward, Cuxton & Halling, 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 warding arrangements for the parishes of Frindsbury Extra and Hoo St Werburgh.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing them before 15 January 2002:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Chatham Central	3	Town ward (part); Holcombe ward	Large map
2	Cuxton & Halling	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Cuxton and Halling	Large map and Map 2
3	Gillingham North	3	Beechings ward (part); Brompton ward (part); Gillingham North ward; Medway ward (part)	Large map
4	Gillingham South	3	Brompton ward (part); Gillingham South ward (part); Priestfield ward (part)	Large map
5	Hempstead & Wigmore	2	Hempstead & Wigmore ward (part); Watling Street ward (part)	Large map
6	Lordswood & Capstone	2	Hempstead & Wigmore ward (part); Lordswood ward; North Dane ward (part)	Large map
7	Luton & Wayfield	3	Luton ward; North Dane ward (part); Wayfield ward	Large map
8	Peninsula	3	Hoo St Werburgh ward (part – the proposed Central parish ward and the existing East parish ward of Hoo St Werburgh parish); All Saints ward (the parishes of All Hallows, High Halstow, Isle of Grain, Saint Mary Hoo and Stoke); Thames Side ward (part – the parish of Cooling)	Large map and Map 2
9	Princes Park	2	North Dane ward (part); Walderslade ward (part)	Large map
10	Rainham Central	3	Hempstead & Wigmore ward (part); Rainham Mark ward; St Margaret's ward (part)	Large map
11	Rainham North	2	Riverside ward; Rainham ward (part)	Large map
12	Rainham South	3	Parkwood ward; Rainham ward (part); St Margaret's ward (part)	Large map
13	River	2	Brompton ward (part); Gillingham South ward (part); St Margaret's & Borstal ward (part); Town ward (part)	Large map
14	Rochester East	2	Troy Town ward (part); Warren Wood ward (part)	Large map
15	Rochester South & Horsted	3	Horsted ward; Hook Meadow ward (part); Town ward (part); Warren Wood ward (part)	Large map
16	Rochester West	2	Troy Town ward (part); St Margaret's & Borstal ward (part); Warren Wood ward (part)	Large map
17	Strood North	3	Rede Court ward; Frindsbury ward	Large map
18	Strood Rural	3	Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden ward (the parish of Frindsbury Extra and the proposed West parish ward of Hoo St Werburgh parish); Thames Side ward (part – the parish of Cliffe & Cliffe Woods)	Large map and Map A1
19	Strood South	3	Earl ward; Temple Farm ward	Large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
20	Twydall	3	Beechings ward (part); Rainham ward (part); Twydall ward; Watling Street ward (part)	Large map
21	Walderslade	2	Hook Meadow ward (part); Walderslade ward (part)	Large map
22	Watling	2	Priestfield ward (part); North Dane ward (part); Watling Street ward (part)	Large map

Notes: 1 Map 2 and the large map in the back of the report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

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

Table 2: Final 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 Central	3	10,032	3,344	1	10,391	3,464	-1
2 Cuxton & Halling	1	4,099	4,099	24	4,241	4,241	21
3 Gillingham North	3	10,093	3,364	2	10,745	3,582	3
4 Gillingham South	3	10,521	3,507	6	10,995	3,665	5
5 Hempstead & Wigmore	2	6,635	3,318	0	6,677	3,339	-4
6 Lordswood & Capstone	2	6,975	3,488	5	6,980	3,490	0
7 Luton & Wayfield	3	9,779	3,260	-2	10,080	3,360	-4
8 Peninsula	3	9,504	3,168	-4	10,036	3,345	-4
9 Princes Park	2	7,181	3,591	8	7,292	3,646	4
10 Rainham Central	3	9,971	3,324	0	10,111	3,370	-4
11 Rainham North	2	7,011	3,506	6	7,147	3,574	2
12 Rainham South	3	10,701	3,567	8	10,703	3,568	2
13 River	2	3,341	1,671	-50	7,006	3,503	0
14 Rochester East	2	6,978	3,489	5	7,146	3,573	2
15 Rochester South & Horsted	3	9,799	3,266	-1	10,163	3,388	-3
16 Rochester West	2	6,565	3,283	-1	7,086	3,543	1
17 Strood North	3	9,861	3,287	-1	10,347	3,449	-1
18 Strood Rural	3	8,997	2,999	-10	10,401	3,467	-1
19 Strood South	3	10,295	3,432	4	10,517	3,506	0
20 Twydall	3	10,088	3,363	1	10,172	3,391	-3
21 Walderslade	2	7,040	3,520	6	7,128	3,564	2
22 Watling	2	6,808	3,404	3	6,815	3,408	-2
Totals	55	182,274	-	-	192,179	-	-
Averages	-	-	3,314	-	-	3,494	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Medway unitary authority. We have now reviewed 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 finish in 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 carrying out these reviews, we must have regard to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10 This review was in four stages. 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 local authority associations, Kent Association of Parish Councils, parish councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East region 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. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 19 June 2001 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Medway*, and ended on 13 August 2001. During this period we sought comments from the public and other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 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.

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

14 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.

15 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,278 electors, which the 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 two councillors represents 15 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Medway

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	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	2	4,908	2,454	8	5,386	2,693	12
7	Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden	2	4,953	2,477	9	6,270	3,135	31
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
22	Rainham	2	4,782	2,391	5	4,883	2,442	2
21	Rainham Mark	3	6,281	2,094	-8	6,294	2,098	-13
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

	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 (%)
25	St Margaret's	3	6,582	2,194	-4	6,707	2,236	-7
26	St Margaret's & Borstal	3	6,090	2,030	-11	7,120	2,373	-1
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
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 Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 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 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

16 During Stage One we received 18 representations, including a submission from Medway Council which enclosed three alternative district-wide 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, and representations from six parish councils, four political organisations and four residents. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Medway*.

17 Our draft recommendations were based on a combination of Medway Council Conservative Group's and Medway Council Labour Group's proposals, with three minor modifications of our own, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided for a majority of two and three-member wards, with one single-member ward. We proposed that:

- Medway Council should be served by 55 councillors, compared with the current 80, representing 22 wards, 13 fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 34 of the existing wards should be modified, while one ward should retain its existing boundaries;
- there should be revised warding arrangements for the parishes of Frindsbury Extra and Hoo St Werburgh.

Draft Recommendation

Medway Council should comprise 55 councillors, serving 22 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

18 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 19 of the 22 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one ward, Cuxton & Halling, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

19 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 39 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Medway Council.

Medway Council

20 The Council's response to our draft recommendations received unanimous support. It stated that it supported the reduction in council size from 80 to 55 members and the retention of whole-council elections. However, it proposed minor boundary modifications in eight areas in order to secure a better reflection of community identity and more identifiable boundaries. These modifications would secure comparable levels of electoral equality to those under our draft recommendations. The Council also proposed that the proposed wards of Weeds Wood & Walderslade, Chatham and Chatham South be named Walderslade, Chatham Central and Rochester South & Horsted respectively. The Council also enclosed proposed modifications submitted by the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrat Group. However, these "were not agreed by the majority of members".

Medway Council Conservative Group

21 The Conservative Group stated that it supported the minor boundary modifications and revised ward names put forward by the Council, the retention of whole-council elections and the proposed warding of Frindsbury Extra Parish. However, it opposed our proposed two-member Lordswood & Capstone, Weeds Wood & Walderslade and Princes Park wards on community identity grounds. It contended that this area as a whole should be represented by two three-member wards.

Medway Council Liberal Democrat Group and Gillingham Liberal Democrats

22 The Liberal Democrat Group and Gillingham Liberal Democrats jointly proposed elections by thirds for Medway, contending that this was "the majority wish from consultation with the people of Medway" and would result in a greater turnout at elections.

Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group

23 The Independent Liberal Democrat Group also supported elections by thirds. It also supported the Council's proposed modification to the Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward and the revised Walderslade ward name. However, it opposed the Conservative Group's proposals for two three-member wards in the Walderslade and Lordswood areas.

Parish Councils

24 Allhallows Parish Council and St Mary Hoo Parish Council both supported the reduction in council size to 55 members, the retention of whole-council elections every four years (for both Medway Council and parish councils in the area) and the proposed three-member Peninsula ward. St James Isle of Grain

Parish Council also supported the proposed three-member Peninsula ward. Frindsbury Extra Parish Council supported our draft recommendations for Frindsbury Extra parish.

25 Cliffe & Cliffe Woods Parish Council opposed our proposals for two three-member wards in the parished area to the north of the River Medway, expressing “concern regarding the increase in size of wards”. It put forward alternative proposals in this area based on a mix of single and two-member wards. However, under its revised proposals, three wards would vary by more than 20 per cent by 2005, with the worst electoral imbalance being 47 per cent above the district average by 2005 in its proposed Frindsbury Extra ward. It contended that “Differences in electoral balance can be justified by the rural nature of the area”.

Other Representations

26 A further 30 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from a councillor, local political organisations and residents. Councillor Booth supported the Council’s proposal to transfer Mount Pleasant into River ward.

27 Medway Conservative Association, Gillingham Conservative Association and Chatham & Aylesford Conservative Association all supported the views and proposals put forward by the Conservative Group. Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden Ward of the Medway Conservative Association supported our draft recommendations for Frindsbury Extra parish.

28 Fifteen local residents (including 10 pro forma letters) also opposed our draft recommendations in the Princes Park/Walderslade/Lordswood area on community identity grounds. A local resident objected to the proposed Princes Park ward name, arguing that this was “the name given to an unsavoury council estate some 25 years ago.” Another local resident objected to the Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward name, proposing that it should simply be named Walderslade. A local resident expressed concern over the fact that ‘Brompton’ did not feature in any ward name and suggested that the proposed River ward be named Brompton & River ward.

29 A local resident suggested that given the size and geography of the proposed Peninsula ward there was “an argument to provide this ward with a proportionately greater number of councillors, or ...divide it into two wards.” However, he did not submit any specific proposals. He also suggested that Strood Rural ward should be renamed Frindsbury & Cliffe ward.

30 Another local resident expressed support for our proposal not to merge Cuxton and Halling with anywhere else but suggested that “these two parishes ought to have a councillor each if the needs and interests of the two distinct communities are to receive proper representation.” However, he acknowledged that this would not be possible if the total number of councillors is to be reduced stating that our “proposed solution is probably the best.”

31 Two local residents supported the reduction in council size, with one other resident suggesting that it should be reduced further to 50 members. Another local resident opposed the reduction in the number of councillors, contending that it was “change for changes sake”. Another local resident made comments not directly related to the review.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL 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 estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

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

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 minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorates must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate Forecasts

36 At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5 per cent from 182,273 to 192,179 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. We accept that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

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

Council Size

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

39 Medway Council currently has 80 members. At Stage One the 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 should the Commission not accept proposals for a council size of 55, but stated that a 55-member council was its preferred option. The Gillingham Conservative Association and the Medway Conservative Association both argued that 55 councillors provided for optimum representation, but both also enclosed proposals based on a 50-member council size in the event that the Commission considered this to be more appropriate.

41 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. 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 carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One regarding council size. We recognised that there had been extensive consultation on this issue and that there had been detailed consideration of how a new council size would work under new political management models. We also recognised that there was broad consensus that the new council size should be between 50 and 59, and considered that there was sufficient evidence to justify such a reduction. We further noted 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 were of the view that the 55-member schemes provide for a better reflection of the statutory criteria. While we recognised that a council size of 59, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats, provided the potential for good electoral equality on either side of the River Medway, we were 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 considered a combination of the 55-member schemes provided for a better reflection of community identities and interests, our draft recommendations should be based on a council size of 55.

43 At Stage Three the Council stated that there was unanimous support for the reduction in council size from 80 to 55 members. Allhallows Parish Council and St Mary Hoo Parish Council also supported

the reduction in council size to 55 members. Two local residents supported the reduction in council size, with another resident suggesting that it should be reduced further to 50 members. Another local resident opposed the reduction in the number of councillors, contending that it was “change for changes sake”.

44 Having considered all the representations received we have noted that our proposed reduction in council size to 55 members has received unanimous support from Medway Council and support from the majority of other Stage Three respondents. In the light of this local support, we therefore remain of the view that our proposed council size of 55 members would provide for the best balance between securing electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We are therefore content to confirm our proposed council size of 55 as final.

Electoral Arrangements

45 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One and, as discussed earlier, in the light of the available evidence we proposed a council size of 55. Therefore the proposals based on council sizes of 50 and 59 were not compatible with a scheme based on 55 members.

46 Having carefully considered the three 55-member district-wide schemes submitted by the Conservative, Labour and Independent Liberal Democrat groups on the council, we were persuaded that to the north of the River Medway the Conservative Group’s proposals provided for the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We noted that their proposals provided separate representation for the parishes of Cuxton & Halling, preserved the urban area of Strood on its existing boundaries, retained Frindsbury Extra parish within one district ward and generally reflected the wishes of local parishes.

47 To the south of the River Medway we considered that Medway Council Labour Group’s proposals provided for the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. While the Conservative and Independent Liberal Democrat Groups’ proposals achieved good electoral equality, we did not consider that they provided for an accurate reflection of the statutory criteria, as both sets of proposals generally provided for larger wards which united areas that share few community links. However, in the south-east of the district we based our draft recommendations on the Conservative Group’s proposals, as in this particular area we considered they provided for a better reflection of the statutory criteria.

48 At Stage Three the majority of our draft recommendations received broad support. Medway Council stated that it “unanimously agreed its detailed response to the draft recommendations”. It further stated that it supported the reduction in council size to 55 members and also agreed that there should be 22 wards. However, it submitted minor boundary modifications in eight areas, in order to secure more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of local communities, which it wished to see incorporated into the final recommendations.

49 The Conservative Group submitted a separate representation which opposed our proposals in the far south of the district, putting forward an alternative ward pattern in the Lordswood/Princes Park/Walderslade area. Its views and proposals were supported by the Medway, Gillingham and

Chatham & Aylesford Conservative associations. We also received an alternative ward pattern in the parished area to the north of the River Medway from Cliffe & Cliffe Woods Parish Council.

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

- (a) 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.

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

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

52 These five wards are situated in the west of the district. Cuxton & Halling ward comprises the parishes of Cuxton and Halling. The remaining wards cover the town of Strood. Under the existing arrangements of an 80-member council the four two-member wards of Cuxton & Halling, Earl, Frindsbury and Rede Court 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).

53 At Stage One 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.

54 The Labour Group's 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).

55 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's 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).

56 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's 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).

57 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. 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.

58 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, we accepted the argument that the existing Cuxton & Halling ward merited separate representation. We recognised that Cuxton & Halling ward is unusual in its geographical isolation from the rest of the district and recognised 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 were therefore of the opinion 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".

59 We considered that in the urban area of Strood the Conservative Group's proposals provided the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. They utilised existing boundaries, including the A2, which we considered provided a strong boundary through the centre of Strood. Moreover, the Conservative Group's proposals facilitated warding arrangements which allowed all of Frindsbury Extra parish to be retained within one district ward. We were not convinced that the Labour Group's scheme would provide a good reflection of the statutory criteria as it appeared 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 was incompatible with our proposals for Cuxton & Halling ward.

60 We therefore adopted 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 that 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. 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).

61 At Stage Three, Medway Council, the Conservative Group and the Medway, Gillingham and Chatham & Aylesford Conservative associations all supported our draft recommendations in this area. A local resident supported our proposal not to merge Cuxton and Halling with anywhere else but suggested that “these two parishes ought to have a councillor each if the needs and interests of the two distinct communities are to receive proper representation.” However, he acknowledged that this would not be possible if the total number of councillors is to be reduced, stating that our “proposed solution is probably the best.”

62 Having considered all the representations received we have noted that there is broad support for our proposals in this area. Given this local support we are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be the same as under our draft recommendations. We acknowledge that our proposed Cuxton & Halling ward would contain 24 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (21 per cent more by 2005). However, we remain of the view that this level of electoral imbalance is justified, given the particular geography of this area and the better reflection of local community identities that will arise. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

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

63 These four wards are situated in the north of the district, to the north of the River Medway. Under the existing arrangements of an 80-member council the four two-member wards of All Saints (comprising the parishes of Allhallows, High Halstow, Isle of Grain, St Mary Hoo and Stoke) Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden (comprising the parish of Frindsbury Extra and the West parish ward of Hoo St Werburgh parish), Hoo St Werburgh (comprising the Central and East parish wards of Hoo St Werburgh parish) and Thames Side (comprising the parishes Cliffe & Cliffe Woods and Cooling) 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).

64 At Stage One, 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. The Labour Group's 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's 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).

66 As detailed earlier, Medway Council Independent Liberal Democrat Group proposed combining the existing Frindsbury 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. The Independent Liberal Democrat Group's 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).

67 Frindsbury Extra Parish Council stated that it 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 Grain, Stoke and Allhallows have been historically 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 it would prefer to be part of a three-member district ward rather a two-member ward.

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

69 At Stage Three, Medway Council, the Conservative Group and the Medway, Gillingham and Chatham & Aylesford Conservative associations all supported our draft recommendations in this area. Allhallows Parish Council, St James Isle of Grain Parish Council and St Mary Hoo Parish Council all supported the proposed three-member Peninsula ward. Frindsbury Extra Parish Council supported our

draft recommendations for Frindsbury Extra parish, as did Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden Ward of the Medway Conservative Association.

70 Cliffe & Cliffe Woods Parish Council opposed our proposals for two three-member wards in the parished area to the north of the River Medway, expressing “concern regarding the increase in size of wards”. It put forward alternative proposals in this area based on a mix of single and two-member wards. It proposed a single-member Thames Side ward (comprising the parishes of Cliffe & Cliffe Woods and Cooling), a single-member Frindsbury Extra ward (comprising Frindsbury Extra parish) and a two-member Hoo St Werburgh (comprising Hoo St Werburgh parish). Under a council size of 55, the proposed Thameside, Frindsbury Extra and Hoo St Werburgh wards would initially contain 27 per cent more, 21 per cent more and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (23 per cent more, 47 per cent more and 11 per cent fewer electors per councillor by 2005). It further suggested that the remainder of this area could be represented as a two-member ward which, under a 55 member council, would contain 30 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average initially (28 per cent fewer by 2005), or be split into two single-member wards, with the parishes of St Mary Hoo, High Halstow and Allhallows forming one ward and the parishes of Isle of Grain and Stoke forming the other. Under a 55 member council these two wards would initially contain 19 per cent fewer and 42 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (19 per cent fewer and 44 per cent fewer by 2005). Cliffe & Cliffe Woods Parish Council contended that “Differences in electoral balance can be justified by the rural nature of the area.”

71 A local resident suggested that given the size and geography of the proposed Peninsula ward there was “an argument to provide this ward with a proportionately greater number of councillors, or ...divide it into two wards”. However, he did not submit any specific proposals. He also suggested that Strood Rural ward should be renamed Frindsbury & Cliffe ward as “residents of Frindsbury especially draw a strong distinction between Strood and Frindsbury and the inclusion of Strood in the title will cause a great deal of resentment.”

72 Having considered all the representations received we have noted that there is a majority of support for our draft recommendations in this area and therefore propose confirming them as final. We have noted the alternative proposals put forward by Cliffe & Cliffe Woods Parish Council. However, these would result in unacceptably high levels of electoral imbalance under a 55-member council and, therefore, we do not propose adopting them as part of our final recommendations. We also noted the alternative ward names put forward. However, given the majority of local support for our draft recommendations, we do not propose modifying our proposed ward names. Under our final recommendations, as shown on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report, the number of electors per councillor would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

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

73 These six wards are situated in the south-west of the district, broadly covering Rochester and Chatham, to the south of the River Medway. 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 more, 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).

74 At Stage One 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.

75 The Labour Group argued that its proposed River ward reflects community ties and that the River Medway provides common linkage. The Labour Group's 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's 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).

78 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. 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.

79 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 achieved 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. The Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposed wards of Brompton, Holcombe, Hook Meadow, Medway Central and Shorts would have 26 per cent fewer, 4 per cent more, equal to the district average, 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).

80 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, we recognised that all three schemes provided for good electoral equality, but considered that the Labour Group's proposals provided for the most accurate reflection of the statutory criteria. Moreover, both the Independent Liberal Democrat Group's and Conservative Group's proposals were incompatible with proposed warding arrangements elsewhere in the district. To summarise, we considered that the Medway Council Labour Group's proposals provided for the most accurate reflection of the statutory criteria and adopted them as part of our draft recommendations.

81 Under our draft recommendations 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).

82 At Stage Three, Medway Council supported our draft recommendations in this area, but suggested some minor boundary amendments. It proposed modifying the northern boundary of Rochester East ward to follow the centre of East Row/Victoria Street, contending that this would "better reflect community identity in the north". It also proposed amending the southern boundary of the ward to include all of Mooring Road and Anchor Road within the ward. In addition it proposed that the boundary should follow along the entire length of Binnacle Road until it reached The Tideway. It stated that it proposed these changes "in light of the accessibility of properties on the southern boundary only from within Rochester East ward". In addition the Council proposed that the south-eastern boundary of Chatham South ward should be modified so that all of King George Road, Meadow Close and Beckley Mews would be included in Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward. The Council's revised Rochester East, Rochester West and Chatham South wards would contain 5 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average initially (2 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 3 per cent fewer by 2005).

83 The Council also proposed a minor modification to the south-eastern boundary of the proposed River ward which would transfer all the properties in Mount Pleasant from Gillingham South ward into River ward. Councillor Booth supported this modification, contending that residents of this road "have

no affinity with Gillingham” and that “all of their services are accessed from Chatham.” The Council also proposed amending River ward’s eastern boundary so that Johnson Avenue, Kelly Drive and Augusta Close would be transferred into Gillingham North ward, arguing that “the only access to these properties is through the junction with Laurel Road in Gillingham North ward.” It further proposed that the eastern boundary of River ward should follow the centre of Prince Arthur Road and Brompton Road “on the basis that any issues relating to the leisure facilities in this area are likely to be raised by the residents of Gillingham North ward rather than River ward”. Its revised River ward would contain 50 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average initially (equal to the average by 2005).

84 With regards to ward names, the Council proposed that Chatham and Chatham South wards be named Chatham Central and Rochester South & Horsted respectively.

85 The Conservative Group stated that it supported the minor boundary amendments and revised ward names put forward by the Council, a view that was supported by the Medway, Gillingham and Chatham & Aylesford Conservative associations.

86 A local resident expressed concern that ‘Brompton’ did not feature in any ward name and suggested that the proposed River ward be named Brompton & River ward to “ensure that the name is preserved”. He contended that “Brompton has played a key role in the history of this area” and that “Gillingham station was originally known as New Brompton station.”

87 We have considered the representations received at Stage Three, including the Council’s minor boundary amendments. We agree that these modifications would provide for more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of local communities while also securing good electoral equality and, given the unanimous support from all the political groups on the Council, we propose adopting the Council’s revised boundaries as part of our final recommendations, in addition to confirming our proposed Chatham ward as final. Similarly, we propose adopting the Council’s revised ward names, given the unanimous support of the political groups on the Council. However, we do not propose adopting the revised ward name put forward by a local resident, given the local support that has been received in favour of our draft recommendations.

88 Under our final recommendations the proposed wards of Rochester East, Rochester West and Rochester South & Horsted wards would contain 5 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average initially (2 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 3 per cent fewer by 2005). The proposed Chatham Central and River wards would contain 1 per cent more and 50 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average initially (1 per cent fewer and equal to the average by 2005). Our final recommendations are shown on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

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

89 These six wards are situated in the south of the district. 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).

90 At Stage One, 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.

91 The Labour Group's 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).

92 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. The Conservative Group's 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).

93 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. The Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposed wards of Dargets, Hook Meadow, Park and Watling Street would have 5 per cent more, equal to the district average, 8 per cent more and equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the district average, 4 per cent fewer, 3 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer by 2005).

94 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. 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.

95 In formulating our draft recommendations, we considered 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", provided for a much more appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We noted that there was 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 adopted the Labour Group's proposed Luton & Wayfield ward as part of our draft recommendations, as well as its proposals for this area as a whole. However we amended the eastern boundary of the Labour Group's proposed Lordswood & Capstone ward in order to make the boundary clearer. This change affected no electors.

96 Under our draft recommendations the proposed wards of Lordswood & Capstone, Luton & Wayfield, Princes Park, Weeds Wood & Walderslade and Watling would have 5 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer, 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 fewer, 4 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2005).

97 At Stage Three, Medway Council supported our draft recommendations but suggested some minor boundary amendments. As detailed earlier, it proposed modifying the north-western boundary of Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward to include all of King George Road, Meadow Close and Beckley Mews in the ward. In addition, the Council also proposed that Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward be named simply Walderslade ward. The Council also proposed amending the eastern boundary of Lordswood & Capstone ward so that the four properties in Sows Bottom off Pear Tree Lane would be included in Hempstead & Wigmore ward "for reasons of access". The Council also proposed modifying the northern boundary of Watling ward so that it followed the centre of Sturdee Avenue (between Woodlands Road and Barnsole Road). In addition, the revised ward would include the area bounded by Coulman Street and the northern parts of Barnsole Road and Napier Road. It stated that it had put forward these modifications on the grounds that they reflect "improved community identity". The Council's revised Lordswood & Capstone, Walderslade and Watling wards would contain 5 per cent more, 6 per cent more and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (equal to, 2 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer by 2005).

98 The Conservative Group opposed our proposed two-member wards of Weeds Wood & Walderslade, Lordswood & Capstone and Princes Park. It argued that our proposals would divide the current CFC polling district which, it contended, has a “strong coherent identity ... evidenced by a Neighbourhood Watch scheme” and that Princes Park and the part of the current Walderslade ward to be included in the proposed Princes Park ward “are distinct without historical linkage”. It proposed that this area as a whole should be represented by two three-member wards. It proposed a Lordswood ward comprising our proposed Lordswood & Capstone ward and the northern part of our proposed Princes Park ward (to the north of Monarch Close, Dove Close and Charlotte Close/Hardy Close). The remainder of the proposed Princes Park ward would be combined with our proposed Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward to form a three-member Walderslade ward. The Conservative Group’s revised Lordswood and Walderslade wards would contain 6 per cent more and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (1 per cent more and equal to the average by 2005). The Conservative Group’s submission was supported by the Medway, Gillingham and Chatham & Aylesford Conservative associations.

99 The Independent Liberal Democrat Group supported the Council’s proposed modification to the Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward and the revised Walderslade ward name. However, it opposed the Conservative Group’s alternative proposals for two three-member wards in the Walderslade and Lordswood areas.

100 Fifteen local residents (including 10 pro forma letters) also opposed our draft recommendations in the Princes Park/Walderslade/Lordswood area on community identity grounds. The majority contended that the part of polling district CFC to be included in the Princes Park ward shared greater links with Lordswood. A local resident objected to the proposed Princes Park ward name, arguing that this was “the name given to an unsavoury council estate some 25 years ago”. Another local resident objected to the Weeds Wood & Walderslade ward name, proposing that it should be named simply Walderslade.

101 We have carefully considered all the representations received regarding this area. We have noted the Conservative Group’s alternative proposal for two three-member wards. However, we have not been persuaded that sufficient evidence has been submitted to move away from our draft recommendations in this area. We have noted the comments that the boundary between the proposed Princes Park and Lordswood ward would divide the current CFC polling district. However, on balance, we are of the view that the Conservative Group’s alternative Lordswood ward would not provide for a better reflection of local communities as it would link two geographically distinct and separate areas, Princes Park and Lordswood, in the same ward. Furthermore, we have noted that our draft recommendations for three two-member wards in this area have received the majority of local support (from the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Independent Liberal Democrat groups on the Council).

102 We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final, subject to the minor boundary amendments put forward by the Council. We agree that these would provide for more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of local communities while also securing good electoral equality. In addition we propose adopting the Council’s revised Walderslade ward name as we are of the view that this would receive local support. We also propose confirming our proposed Princes Park ward as final. However, we have noted that there was some opposition to the Princes Park ward name but that no alternative ward name has been put forward. However, this may be a point that the Secretary of State may wish to address when considering our final recommendations report.

103 Under our final recommendations the proposed Lordswood & Capstone, Luton & Wayfield, Princes Park, Walderslade and Watling wards would contain 5 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer, 8 per cent more, 6 per cent more and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (equal to the district average, 4 per cent fewer, 4 per cent more, 2 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer by 2005). Our final recommendations are shown on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

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

104 These six wards are situated in the centre of the district, in and around Gillingham, to the south of the River Medway. 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).

105 As detailed earlier, at Stage One the 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, as detailed earlier. The Labour Group's proposed wards of Gillingham North, and Gillingham South would have equal to the district average and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more and 4 per cent more by 2005).

106 As detailed 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. 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 outlined 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. The Conservative Group's proposed wards of Beechings & Twydall, Gillingham North and Gillingham South would have 5 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average, equal to the average and 1 per cent more by 2005).

107 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, as detailed earlier. 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, as detailed earlier. 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. Its proposed wards of Priestfields and Woodlands would have 4 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer by 2005).

108 As detailed earlier, Gillingham Conservative Association, whilst expressing general support for Medway Council Conservative Group's proposals, put forward amendments which would affect its proposed Luton & Wayfield, Darland & Lordswood, Hempstead & Wigmore wards.

109 As discussed earlier in this chapter, we adopted the Labour Group's proposed River and Watling wards in the western part of this area as part of our draft recommendations. Elsewhere in this area we noted that the Labour Group's proposals largely built on existing arrangements and provided for strong boundaries whilst achieving good electoral equality. We noted that both the Conservative and Independent Liberal Democrat Groups' proposals split existing communities in this area and combined distinct communities in larger wards. We therefore adopted the Labour Group's proposals for the remainder of the area as part of our draft recommendations.

110 Under our draft recommendations the proposed wards of Gillingham North and Gillingham South would have equal to the average and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more and 4 per cent more).

111 At Stage Three, Medway Council supported our draft recommendations in this area, but suggested some minor boundary amendments. It proposed modifying the southern boundary of Gillingham South ward in two areas and proposed amending the western boundary of Gillingham North ward, as detailed earlier in this chapter. Its revised Gillingham North and Gillingham South wards would contain 2 per cent more and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (3 per cent more and 5 per cent more by 2005).

112 The Conservative Group stated that it supported the minor amendments put forward by the Council, a view that was supported by the Medway, Gillingham and Chatham & Aylesford Conservative associations.

113 We have considered the representations received at Stage Three, including the Council's minor boundary amendments. We agree that these modifications would provide for more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of local communities while also securing good electoral equality and, given the unanimous support from all the political groups on the Council, we propose adopting the Council's revised wards as part of our final recommendations. The revised Gillingham North and Gillingham South wards, as shown on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report, would contain 2 per cent more and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (3 per cent more and 5 per cent more by 2005).

Beechings, Rainham, Riverside and Twydall wards

114 These four wards are situated in the east of the district, to the south of the River Medway. 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 fewer, 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).

115 At Stage One, 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 outlined 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. The Labour Group's proposed wards of Gillingham North, Rainham North, Rainham South and Twydall, would have equal to the average, 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 fewer by 2005).

116 As detailed 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's 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 district average in both wards by 2005).

117 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 Democrat Group's proposed wards of Rainham Mark, Riverside and Woodlands would have 9 per cent more, equal to the average and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent more, 3 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer by 2005).

118 Having carefully considered all the representations received we recognised that there was 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 considered that 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 adopted 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). Under our draft recommendations 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).

119 At Stage Three, Medway Council supported our draft recommendations in this area, but suggested a minor boundary amendment. It proposed transferring the area around Cozenton Park (to the east of Bloors Lane and to the south and east of Penshurst Close) from the proposed Twydall ward into the proposed Rainham North ward. The revised wards of Twydall and Rainham North would contain 1 per cent more and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (3 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more by 2005).

120 The Conservative Group stated that it supported the minor amendment put forward by the Council, a view that was supported by the Medway, Gillingham and Chatham & Aylesford conservative associations.

121 We have considered the representations received at Stage Three, including the Council's minor boundary amendments. We agree that these modifications would provide for more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of local communities while also securing good electoral equality and, given the unanimous support from all the political groups on the Council, we propose adopting the Council's revised boundaries as part of our final recommendations.

122 Under our final recommendations the proposed Twydall and Rainham North wards, as shown on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report, would contain 1 per cent more and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (3 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more by 2005).

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

123 These four wards are situated in the south-east of the district. 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).

124 At Stage One, 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. The Labour Group's 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 (equal to the average, 3 per cent fewer, 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2005).

125 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. The Conservative Group's proposed wards of Hempstead & Wigmore, Rainham Central and Rainham South would have equal to the average, 2 per cent fewer and equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent fewer, 5 per cent fewer and 5 per cent fewer by 2005).

126 As detailed 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. The Independent Liberal Democrat Group's 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).

127 As detailed 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.

128 In formulating our draft recommendations, we regarded the Independent Liberal Democrat Group's proposed Park ward to be a poor reflection of the statutory criteria. However, we were not persuaded that the Labour Group's proposals provided for an appropriate balance between electoral

equality and the statutory criteria as its boundaries in the south-east corner of the district appeared to be relatively arbitrary. We considered that the Conservative Group's approach of dividing the area into three three-member wards facilitated 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 amended 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.

129 Under our draft recommendations the proposed wards of Hempstead & Wigmore, Rainham Central and Rainham South would have equal to the average, 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).

130 At Stage Three, Medway Council supported our draft recommendations in this area, but suggested some minor boundary amendments. As detailed earlier in this report, it proposed a minor amendment to the western boundary of Hempstead & Wigmore ward. In addition, it proposed a modification to the eastern boundary of Rainham Central ward which would transfer Barleycorn Drive, Chesham Drive and part of Lonsdale Road from Rainham South into the revised ward. The revised Hempstead & Wigmore, Rainham Central and Rainham South wards would contain equal to the average, equal to the district average and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (4 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more by 2005).

131 The Conservative Group stated that it supported the minor amendments put forward by the Council, a view that was supported by the Medway, Gillingham and Chatham & Aylesford conservative associations.

132 We have considered the representations received at Stage Three, including the Council's minor boundary amendments. We agree that these modifications would provide for more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of local communities while also securing good electoral equality and, given the unanimous support from all the political groups on the Council, we propose adopting the Council's revised boundaries as part of our final recommendations.

133 Under our final recommendations the proposed Hempstead & Wigmore, Rainham Central and Rainham South wards, as shown on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report, would contain equal to the average, equal to the average and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially (4 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more by 2005).

Electoral Cycle

134 At Stage One we received 12 representations regarding the Medway 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".

135 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. The Chatham & Aylesford, Medway and Gillingham Conservative associations all supported the retention of the existing electoral cycle of elections for the whole council every four years. Allhallows Parish Council and Stoke Parish Council both supported elections of the whole council every four years.

136 The Medway Liberal Democrat associations proposed elections by thirds, arguing that such a system was more democratic and that it would lead to an increase in voter turnout. 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. Finally, two local residents both supported elections by thirds as they considered this system to be more democratic.

137 Having carefully considered all the representations received we noted there was a mixed view with regards to electoral cycle. We recognised that there was some support for annual elections, but did not consider that sufficient evidence had been put forward to justify a change in electoral cycle, particularly in the light of the lack of local consensus. We therefore proposed no change to the current electoral cycle, but welcomed further comments during Stage Three.

138 At Stage Three Medway Council stated that it “supports the recommendation of the LGCE that there should be no change to the electoral cycle with elections for all councillors continuing to be held once every four years”. However, in its submission the Council enclosed a proposal from the Liberal Democrat Group which had been “put forward for consideration but [was] not supported by the council as a whole”, which proposed that the current electoral cycle be changed to elections by thirds.

139 The Liberal Democrat Group and Gillingham Liberal Democrats jointly proposed elections by thirds for Medway, contending that this was the majority wish from consultation with the people of Medway, was the stated preference of central government, would result in a greater turnout at elections and that it is not necessary to have an equal number of councillors in each ward to operate elections by thirds.

140 The Independent Liberal Democrat Group also supported elections by thirds, stating that this reflected “the wish of the people following consultation and also the stated preference of central government”.

141 The Conservative Group stated that it had “unreserved support” for the recommendation that elections for the whole council be held every four years. This view was supported by the Medway, Gillingham and Chatham & Aylesford Conservative associations. Allhallows Parish Council and St Mary Hoo Parish Council both supported the retention of whole-council elections every four years.

142 We have carefully considered all the representations received at Stage Three. We have noted that the Liberal Democrats and the Independent Liberal Democrat Group have both reiterated their support for elections by thirds. However, we have also noted that the majority of respondents who commented specifically on electoral cycle wished to retain the existing arrangement of whole-council elections every four years. Therefore, in the absence of any consensus and in view of the majority of local support for the retention of whole-council elections at Stage Three, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for the retention of whole-council elections as final.

Conclusions

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

- we propose adopting the eight minor boundary amendments put forward by Medway Council;
- we propose naming the proposed Weeds Wood & Walderslade, Chatham and Chatham South wards as Walderslade, Chatham Central and Rochester South & Horsted respectively, as proposed by Medway Council.

144 We conclude that, in Medway:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 80 to 55;
- there should be 22 wards, 13 fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 34 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

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

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	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

146 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 13 to one by 2005. One ward, Cuxton & Halling, would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average by 2005, at 21 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

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

Parish Council Electoral Arrangements

147 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable 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. Accordingly, we are proposing a consequential change to the warding arrangements for Hoo St Werburgh parish. In addition we are proposing revised parish warding arrangements for Frindsbury Extra Parish Council.

148 The parish of Hoo St Werburgh is currently served by 15 councillors representing three wards: Central ward (represented by seven councillors), East ward (represented by five councillors) and West ward (represented by three councillors). In our draft recommendations report we proposed modifying the boundary between the current Central and West parish wards in order to reflect our proposed district ward boundary. This modification was made in order to tie the boundary to ground detail. This proposal

did not affect any electors. We did not propose any other modifications to parish ward boundaries in this area, nor did we propose amending the allocation of parish councillors.

149 In response to our consultation report, Medway Council commented on our revised boundary, requesting that our minor modification be clarified. No further comments were received from the District Council or the Parish Council. Given that we propose confirming our draft recommendations for district wards in this area as final, we are therefore confirming our draft recommendation to modify the parish warding of Hoo St Werburgh parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Hoo St Werburgh Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards. The existing East ward should be retained and be represented by five parish councillors, as at present. The revised Central and West parish wards should be represented by seven and three parish councillors respectively, as at present. The revised boundary between the parish wards of Central and East should reflect the proposed district boundary shown on the large map at the back of the report.

150 The parish of Frindsbury Extra is currently served by 12 councillors representing three wards: East, Central and West, each represented by four councillors. At Stage One Frindsbury Extra Parish Council proposed that Frindsbury parish continue to be represented by 12 councillors but that 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 considered that Frindsbury Extra Parish Council's proposals would provide for better electoral equality between parish wards and therefore adopted them as part of our draft recommendations.

151 At Stage Three, Frindsbury Extra Parish Council, the Conservative Group, Medway Conservative Association Frindsbury Extra & Chattenden Branch and the Medway, Gillingham and Chatham & Aylesford Conservative associations all supported our draft recommendations relating to Frindsbury Extra Parish Council. Given this local support, we are therefore confirming our draft recommendation for the warding of Frindsbury Extra parish as final.

Final Recommendation

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

152 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the district. At Stage Three, Allhallows Parish Council and St Mary Hoo Parish Council both stated that they supported the retention of parish council elections on the same cycle as the district council elections. In the light of this support, and in the absence of any opposition, we are confirming this as final.

Final Recommendation

Parish council elections should continue to take place every four years, at the same time as elections for the district ward of which they are part.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Medway

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

154 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 15 January 2002.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Medway: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates the proposed warding of Frindsbury Extra parish

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for the urban area of Medway.

Map A1: Proposed Warding of Frindsbury Extra Parish

