

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Reading

January 2002

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CONTENTS

	page
WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?	v
SUMMARY	vii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS	5
3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED	9
4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS	11
5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?	21
APPENDICES	
A Code of Practice on Written Consultation	23

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

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, and the number of councillors, ward names and the frequency of elections.

With effect from 1 April 2002, subject to Parliamentary approval, the Electoral Commission will assume the functions of the Local Government Commission for England and take over responsibility for making Orders putting in place the new arrangements resulting from periodic electoral reviews (powers which currently reside with the Secretary of State). As part of this transfer the Electoral Commission will set up a Boundary Committee for England which will take over responsibility for the conduct of PERs from the Local Government Commission for England. The Boundary Committee for England will conduct electoral reviews following the same rules and in the same manner as the Local Government Commission for England. Its final recommendations on future electoral arrangements will then be presented to the Electoral Commission which will be able to accept, modify or reject the Boundary Committee for England's findings. Under these new arrangements there will remain a further opportunity to make representations directly to the Electoral Commission after the publication of the final recommendations, as was previously the case with the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to send comments to the Electoral Commission.

SUMMARY

We began a review of the electoral arrangements for 12 June 2001.

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

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

- **in five of the 15 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and two wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 this situation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in five wards and by more than 20 per cent in two wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 65-66) are that:

- **Reading Borough Council should have 46 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 16 wards, instead of 15 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **The number of electors per councillor in all 16 wards would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue with the number of electors per councillor in all of the proposed 16 wards expected to vary by no more than 7 per cent from the average for the borough in 2006.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 15 January 2002. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, which, subject to Parliamentary approval, with effect from 1 April**

2002 will be responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.

- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 11 March 2002:

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Reading Review
Local Government Commission for England
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Table 1: Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Abbey	3	part of Abbey ward.	Large Map
2	Battle	3	part of Abbey ward; part of Battle ward.	Large Map
3	Caversham	3	part of Caversham ward; part of Thames ward.	Large Map
4	Church	3	part of Church ward; part of Redlands ward.	Large Map
5	Katesgrove	3	part of Abbey ward; part of Katesgrove ward.	Large Map
6	Kentwood	3	part of Battle ward; part of Kentwood ward.	Large Map
7	Mapledurham	1	part of Thames ward.	Large Map
8	Minster	3	part of Minster ward.	Large Map
9	Norcot	3	part of Battle ward; part of Norcot ward; part of Tilehurst ward	Large Map
10	Park	3	part of Abbey ward; part of Park ward.	Large Map
11	Peppard	3	part of Caversham ward; part of Peppard ward.	Large Map
12	Redlands	3	part of Redlands ward.	Large Map
13	Southcote	3	part of Minster ward; part of Southcote ward.	Large Map
14	Thames	3	part of Caversham ward; part of Peppard ward; part of Thames ward.	Large Map
15	Tilehurst	3	part of Norcot ward; part of Tilehurst ward.	Large Map
16	Whitley	3	part of Katesgrove ward; part of Whitley ward.	Large Map

Notes: 1 The whole borough is unparished.

2 The wards in the above table are illustrated on Map 2 and the Large Map at the back of the report.

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

Table 2: Draft Recommendations for Reading

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Abbey	3	6,435	2,145	-7	7,358	2,453	3
2 Battle	3	6,568	2,189	-6	7,277	2,426	2
3 Caversham	3	6,928	2,309	0	6,963	2,321	-2
4 Church	3	7,087	2,362	2	7,154	2,385	0
5 Katesgrove	3	6,694	2,231	-4	6,910	2,303	-3
6 Kentwood	3	6,988	2,329	0	7,004	2,335	-2
7 Mapledurham	1	2,348	2,348	1	2,348	2,348	-1
8 Minster	3	6,893	2,298	-1	7,248	2,416	2
9 Norcot	3	7,238	2,413	4	7,265	2,422	2
10 Park	3	7,111	2,370	2	7,161	2,387	0
11 Peppard	3	7,217	2,406	4	7,257	2,419	2
12 Redlands	3	7,234	2,411	4	7,240	2,413	2
13 Southcote	3	6,620	2,207	-5	6,634	2,211	-7
14 Thames	3	7,149	2,383	3	7,274	2,425	2
15 Tilehurst	3	7,230	2,410	4	7,278	2,426	2
16 Whitley	3	6,882	2,294	-1	6,935	2,312	-3
Totals	46	106,622	-	-	109,306	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,318	-	-	2,376	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Reading, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the six districts in Berkshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Reading. Reading's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in April 1979 (Report no. 331). Since undertaking that review, Reading has become a unitary authority (1998). The change in unitary status has led to the loss of 15 county councillors, bringing the total number of councillors for Reading from 60 to 45.

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

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 Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

6 In our *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been created locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local people are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configurations 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, as 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 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the Review

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

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

11 Stage One began on 12 June 2001, when we wrote to Reading Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Thames Valley Police, the local authority associations, Berkshire Association of Local Councils, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, 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 Reading Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 16 September 2001.

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

13 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 15 January 2002 and will end on 11 March 2002, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

14 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

15 Reading is a unitary authority, situated 30 miles to the west of London. Comprising 4,044 hectares, the borough has a population of 147,840 and is unparished. The borough is urban in character and has a strong retail and business economy. Reading is bisected by the River Thames.

16 Since 1975 the electorate in Reading has grown by 13 per cent from 93,260 to 106,622, and is forecast to rise a further 2.5 per cent to 109,306 over the next five years. A significant amount of this growth is expected to be in the centre of the borough, in the wards of Abbey and Battle. The Council currently has 45 members and is elected by thirds from a uniform pattern of 15 three-member wards.

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

18 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,369 electors, which the Council forecasts will increase to 2,429 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration since the last review, the number of electors per councillor in five of the 15 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, two wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Caversham ward, where the councillor represents 25 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Reading

Table 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Abbey	3	8,305	2,768	17	9,228	3,076	27
2 Battle	3	6,661	2,220	-6	7,370	2,457	1
3 Caversham	3	8,905	2,968	25	8,940	2,980	23
4 Church	3	5,759	1,920	-19	5,826	1,942	-20
5 Katesgrove	3	6,417	2,139	-10	6,633	2,211	-9
6 Kentwood	3	6,665	2,222	-6	6,681	2,227	-8
7 Minster	3	7,507	2,502	6	7,862	2,621	8
8 Norcot	3	6,821	2,274	-4	6,848	2,283	-6
9 Park	3	6,847	2,282	-4	6,897	2,299	-5
10 Peppard	3	7,541	2,514	6	7,581	2,527	4
11 Redlands	3	8,687	2,896	22	8,693	2,898	19
12 Southcote	3	6,052	2,017	-15	6,066	2,022	-17
13 Thames	3	7,211	2,404	1	7,336	2,445	1
14 Tilehurst	3	6,565	2,188	-8	6,613	2,204	-9
15 Whitley	3	6,679	2,226	-6	6,732	2,244	-8
Totals	45	106,622	-	-	109,306	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,369	-	-	2,429	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Tilehurst ward were relatively over-represented by 8 per cent, while electors in Redlands ward were relatively under-represented by 22 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

19 At the start of the review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Reading Borough Council.

20 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received nine representations during Stage One, including borough-wide schemes from Reading Borough Council and Reading East Conservative Association, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the Council.

Reading Borough Council

21 Reading Borough Council put two schemes forward for consultation during Stage One, both of which sought to address the particular need for increased representation for the area north of the river: ‘Option 1’ sought to maintain the current 45-member council, with a uniform three-member ward pattern, by creating a ward straddling the River Thames; ‘Option 2’ maintained the river as a boundary, but addressed the issue of representation by proposing a 46-member council, with the creation of an additional single-member ward in the area north of the river. Both schemes were similar in the remaining wards, to the south of the river.

22 As a result of the consultation, the Council submitted ‘Option 3’, based, excepting some minor modifications, on ‘Option 2’. The Council proposed a council of 46 members, one more than at present, serving 16 wards, compared to the existing 15. Its proposals for the borough would provide 15 three-member wards and one single-member ward. Under its proposals there would be significant improvement to the current high electoral variances, with no ward having a variance of more than 10 per cent in 2001 or 2006.

Reading East Conservative Association

23 Reading East Conservative Association objected to both of the Council’s consultation schemes. They proposed an alternative scheme based on 18 wards, represented by a uniform pattern of either two- or three-members ward, resulting in a council size of 36- or 54-members respectively.

Members of Parliament

24 We received a submission from Jane Griffiths MP, supporting the Council’s ‘Option 2’ in principle, but proposing a number of minor amendments.

Other Representations

25 We received a further six representations from local residents, all of whom supported ‘Option 2’ in principle, particularly that it continued to utilise the River Thames as a boundary. However, three residents objected to the creation of three three-member wards and one single-member ward in the area north of the river and instead proposed a pattern of two two-member wards and two three-member wards.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

31 Since 1975, the electorate in Reading has grown by 13 per cent from 93,260 to 106,622. The Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 2.5 per cent to 109,306. A significant amount of this growth is expected to be in the centre of the borough, in the wards of Abbey and Battle. 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.

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

Council Size

33 As explained earlier, we start by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective

and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

34 Reading is currently represented by 45 members, 36 members to the south of the River Thames and nine to the north. Under these arrangements the area north of the river is under-represented. To address this issue the Council put two schemes forward for public consultation. 'Option 1' would maintain the current 45-member council by creating a ward straddling the River Thames. 'Option 2' addressed the issue of representation by proposing a 46-member council, with the creation of an additional single-member ward for the area north of the river. Both schemes were similar in the remaining wards to the south of the river.

35 As a result of the consultation, the Council put forward a third option, based on a council size of 46 members and similar to its consultation scheme 'Option 2'. The Council proposed a council of 46 members, one more than at present, serving 16 wards, compared to the existing 15. Under its proposals there would be significant improvement to the current high electoral variances and the area north of the river would receive its correct level of representation.

36 We have also examined the schemes put forward by Reading East Conservative Association, based on either a 36- or 54-member council. We note that under these schemes there would be a dramatic change in council size. Changes in council size, either increases or decreases, can be detrimental to the functioning of local democracy. Too few councillors can mean that the interests of residents are not adequately represented; too many can lead to difficulties in the internal management of the council. It is therefore important that such proposals are supported by sufficient argumentation and evidence of public consultation. The Conservative scheme did not provide any particular argumentation for this alternative council size, nor was it the subject of any local consultation, therefore we have not been persuaded to adopt the Conservative proposals for council size.

37 We received seven representations all supporting the creation of a 46-member council. We have carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One. We note that the Council's scheme addresses the existing electoral imbalances and gives good electoral equality in both 2001 and 2006. Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 46 members.

Electoral Arrangements

38 We have given careful consideration to the views that we received during Stage One, including the borough-wide schemes received from the Council and the Reading East Conservative Association. As already explained, we consider that there was insufficient evidence of consultation or detailed argument for us to adopt the Reading East Conservative Association's proposals for a change in council size. It is clear from the submissions received that there is strong support for the creation of a 46-member council, with 36 councillors for the area south of the river and 10 councillors for the area to the north. We received three submissions, put forward independently, proposing differing arrangements of two two-member wards and two three-member wards for the area north of the river. We also received four submissions supporting the Council's 'Option 2', on which its submission, 'Option 3', is broadly based. Furthermore, the Council forwarded just under 100 responses that it received during its own consultation, the significant majority of which supported 'Option 2' and the creation of an additional single-member ward for the area north of the river.

39 We therefore propose basing our recommendations on the Council's scheme. We consider that this would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. However, to improve electoral equality further and having regard to local community identities and interests, we have decided to move away from the Council's proposals in number of areas.

40 It should be noted that given the different average councillor:elector ratio of the Council's scheme and that of Reading East Conservative Association we have been unable to make a ward-by-ward comparison between the two schemes, and therefore the Reading East Conservative Association scheme is not considered further in the text which follows. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Caversham, Peppard and Thames wards;
- (b) Abbey, Battle and Park wards;
- (c) Kentwood, Norcot and Tilehurst wards;
- (d) Minster; Southcote and Whitley wards;
- (e) Church; Katesgrove and Redlands wards.

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

Caversham, Peppard and Thames wards

42 These three three-member wards are situated in the north of the borough, north of the River Thames. Caversham ward is currently 25 per cent under-represented (23 per cent by 2006). Peppard ward is currently 6 per cent under-represented (4 per cent by 2006). Thames ward is currently 1 per cent under-represented (1 per cent by 2006).

43 The Council proposed the creation of a new single-member Mapledurham ward, comprising part of the existing Thames ward, south west of Woodcote Road and Conisboro Avenue. Mapledurham ward would be 1 per cent under-represented (1 per cent over-represented by 2006). The Council also proposed the realignment of the existing three-member Caversham, Thames and Peppard wards. Under this scheme Caversham ward would comprise the south of the existing Caversham ward, less the area to the north of Henley Road and east of Balmore Walk, but would additionally include the area of the existing Thames ward to the east of The Mount and south of Caversham County Primary School. It would initially have a variance of zero per cent, but would be 2 per cent over-represented by 2006. Peppard ward would comprise the majority of the existing Peppard ward, less a small area to the west of Hill Road, but would additionally include a small area of the existing Caversham ward to the south of Fallow Field Close. It would initially be 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006). Thames ward would comprise part of the existing Thames ward, less the area to the south west of Woodcote Road and Conisboro Avenue and the area to the east of The Mount, but would additionally include the area of the existing Caversham ward to the north of Henley Road and east of Balmore Walk and the area of the existing Peppard ward to the west of Hill Road. It would initially be 3 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006). As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, we have been unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association.

44 The Council's public consultation and the responses we received indicated that there was strong support for the creation of an additional single-member ward for the area north of the river and that to create a ward straddling the river would not reflect community identity, as it would be crossing a very distinct boundary. However, one respondent questioned whether the creation of a single-member ward "would make it stand out as 'something different'". They, along with two other respondents, suggested alternative proposals for the area north of the river, involving the creation of two two-member wards and two three-member wards. We have examined this option, but consider there to be insufficient evidence to suggest that the creation of a single-member ward would be detrimental to the interests of electors within this ward. We also note the considerable support for a scheme involving the creation of a single-member Mapledurham ward in response to the Council's own consultation.

45 In her response to the Council's consultation schemes, Jane Griffiths MP, while expressing support for 'Option 2' and the creation of a single-member Mapledurham ward, expressed concern over the proposals for the Grosvenor Road/Derby Road area of the proposed Caversham ward and the Chiltern Road/Mayfield Road area of the proposed Peppard ward. She stated that "the people living in Chiltern Road and Mayfield Drive, together with the minor roads off, see themselves as part of the community around Henley Road", adding, "[The] people living in the Grosvenor Road/Derby Road area see themselves as being more of a community with the people living off Peppard Road than Henley Road." The Council subsequently altered their scheme to include all these areas in their proposed Thames ward.

46 After careful consideration of the evidence and in view of the strong support for the creation of a single-member Mapledurham ward, we propose adopting the Council's scheme in this area without modification. We consider that the revised wards would balance the need to reflect local communities, while providing improved levels of electoral equality. These recommendations would result in the same levels of electoral equality as under the Council's proposals. These recommendations are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

47 However, given the comments from Jane Griffiths MP we have identified possible alternative boundaries between Caversham, Peppard and Thames wards. This would maintain the existing Caversham/Thames boundary along St Anne's Road and include the Chiltern Road and Mayfield Drive area in Caversham ward. This would provide good electoral equality while providing better access for the residents in this area. We would welcome views and evidence from local people on this alternative during Stage Three.

Abbey, Battle and Park wards

48 These three three-member wards are all situated in the centre of the borough, to the south of the River Thames. Abbey ward is currently 17 per cent under-represented (27 per cent by 2006). Battle ward is currently 6 per cent over-represented (1 per cent under-represented by 2006). Park ward is currently 4 per cent over-represented (5 per cent by 2006).

49 The Council proposed a realignment of the boundaries of these three existing wards. Under these proposals Abbey ward would comprise the majority of the existing Abbey ward, less the area to the south of the A329 and west of Sidmouth Street, the area to the west of Prospect Street and George Street, and a small section to the far east of the ward, around Rupert Street and Rupert Walk. It would initially be 7 per cent over-represented (3 per cent under-represented by 2006). Battle ward would comprise the majority of the existing Battle

ward, less the area to the south west of Oxford Road and Wantage Road and the area to the west of Little Johns Farm, but would additionally include the area of the existing Abbey ward to the west of Prospect Street and George Street. It would initially be 6 per cent over-represented (2 per cent under-represented by 2006). Park ward would comprise the existing Park ward and a small area of the existing Abbey ward, to the east of Rupert Street and Rupert Walk. It would initially be 2 per cent under-represented (zero per cent by 2006). As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, we have been unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association. None of the remaining submissions, except that of Jane Griffiths MP, made specific comments regarding the wards south of the river.

50 Jane Griffiths, MP for Reading East, expressed concern that the proposed boundary between Battle and Abbey wards would move away from the railway line, suggesting “The new boundary splits the community in this area in two and does not reflect where people on the ground consider they live.” The Commission noted these concerns and also notes that the railway divides the north west of Minster ward (discussed below), although it should also be noted that the current boundary does not consistently follow the railway. We have examined a number of alternative warding arrangements which would utilise the railway line as a ward boundary, but have concluded that there is insufficient evidence to justify the poor levels of electoral equality that would result. We have also visited the area with officers from the Council and are satisfied that there is sufficient access across the railway line via the Oxford Road, Tilehurst Road and Bath Road, so as not to be detrimental to community relationships.

51 We are therefore adopting the Council’s scheme in this area as part of our draft recommendations, with minor modification to the Battle ward boundary to tie it to ground detail. We consider that the revised wards would balance the need to reflect local communities, while providing improved levels of electoral equality. These recommendations would result in the same levels of electoral equality as under the Council’s proposals. These recommendations are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Kentwood, Norcot and Tilehurst wards

52 These three three-member wards are situated in the west of the borough, to the south of the River Thames. Kentwood ward is currently 6 per cent over-represented (8 per cent by 2006). Norcot ward is currently 4 per cent over-represented (6 per cent by 2006). Tilehurst ward is currently 8 per cent over-represented (9 per cent by 2006).

53 The Council proposed some minor amendments to the boundaries of these three existing wards to improve electoral equality. Under these proposals Kentwood ward would comprise the existing Kentwood ward and that part of the existing Battle ward to the west of Little John’s Farm. It would initially have an electoral variance of zero per cent (2 per cent over-represented by 2006). Norcot ward would comprise part of the existing Norcot ward, less the area to the west of Lousehill Copse and Compart’s Plantation and less the houses on Honey End Lane, but would additionally include the area of the existing Battle ward to the south west of Oxford Road and Wantage Road. It would initially be 3 per cent under-represented (1 per cent by 2006), Tilehurst ward would comprise the existing Tilehurst ward, and that part of the existing Norcot ward to the west of Lousehill Copse and Compart’s Plantation. It would initially be 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006). As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, we have been unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association. None of the

remaining submissions made specific comments regarding the wards south of the river.

54 We are satisfied with the Council's proposals for Kentwood ward, but are proposing a minor amendment to tie the boundary to ground detail. We are also recommending a number of minor boundary amendments to its proposed Norcot and Tilehurst wards, chiefly to improve ward access. Firstly, we propose retaining the properties on Routh Lane in Tilehurst ward; we propose utilising the existing boundary that runs between Medway Road and Usk Road, with two amendments, we propose placing the houses in Tarlton Court and No. 17a Wye Close in Norcot ward. Secondly, we propose taking the boundary along the back of the houses on The Medway and Elan Close to retain them in Norcot ward. Finally, we propose retaining the existing boundary between Norcot and Southcote wards, and consequently retaining Honey End Lane in Norcot ward.

55 Under these proposals Kentwood ward would initially have a variance of zero per cent, but would be 2 per cent over-represented by 2006. Norcot ward would initially be 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006). Tilehurst ward would initially be 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006).

56 We consider that the revised wards would reflect local communities, whilst providing improved levels of electoral equality. These recommendations are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Minster, Southcote and Whitley wards

57 These three three-member wards are situated in the south of the borough. Minster ward is currently 6 per cent under-represented (8 per cent by 2006). Southcote ward is currently 15 per cent over-represented (17 per cent by 2006). Whitley ward is currently 6 per cent over-represented (8 per cent by 2006).

58 The Council proposed realigning the boundaries of these three existing wards. Under these proposals Minster ward would comprise the existing Minster ward, less the area to the west of Parkside road. Minster ward would initially be 1 per cent over-represented (2 per cent under-represented by 2006). The proposed Southcote ward would comprise the existing Southcote ward and that part of the existing Minster ward to the west of Parkside Road. It would initially be 4 per cent over-represented (6 per cent by 2006). Whitley ward would comprise the existing Whitley ward and that part of the existing Katesgrove ward to the south west of Longbarn Lane. It would initially be 1 per cent over-represented (3 per cent by 2006). As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, we have been unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association. None of the remaining submissions made specific comments regarding the wards south of the river.

59 As highlighted earlier, there was some concern that under these proposals the north west of the proposed Minster ward would be separated from the rest of that ward by the railway line. However, as explained earlier, we have examined alternative warding arrangements but have concluded that there is insufficient evidence to justify the poor levels of electoral equality that would result. We have also visited the area with officers from the Council and are satisfied that there is sufficient access across the railway line, via the Tilehurst Road and Bath Road.

60 We are broadly satisfied with the Council's proposals and propose adopting them, subject

to a minor modification to retain the existing boundary between Norcot and Southcote wards, retaining Honey End Lane in Norcot ward. Consequently, Southcote ward initially would be 5 per cent over-represented (7 per cent in 2006). Minster and Whitley wards would be unaffected by these changes. We consider that the revised wards would balance the need to reflect local communities, while providing improved levels of electoral equality. These recommendations are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Church, Katesgrove and Redlands wards

61 These three three-member wards are situated in east of the borough, south of the River Thames. Church ward is currently 19 per cent over-represented (20 per cent by 2006). Katesgrove ward is currently 10 per cent over-represented (9 per cent by 2006). Redlands ward is currently 22 per cent under-represented (19 per cent by 2006).

62 The Council proposed realigning the boundaries of these three existing wards. Church ward would comprise the existing Church ward and the south eastern part of the existing Redland ward around Sherfield Hall, University of Reading. Under these proposals Church ward would initially be 2 per cent under-represented (zero per cent by 2006). Katesgrove ward would comprise the existing Katesgrove ward, less the area to the south west of Longbarn Lane, but would additionally include the area of the existing Abbey ward to the south of the A329 and west of Sidmouth Street. It would initially be 4 per cent over-represented (3 per cent by 2006). Redlands ward would comprise the existing Redlands ward, less the south east area around Sherfield Hall, University of Reading. Under these proposals Redlands ward would initially be 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006). As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, we have been unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association. None of the remaining submissions made specific comments regarding the wards south of the river.

63 After careful consideration of the evidence, we propose adopting the Council's scheme in this area without modification. We consider that the revised wards would balance the need to reflect local communities, while providing improved levels of electoral equality. These recommendations would result in the same levels of electoral equality as under the Council's proposals. These recommendations are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

64 At Stage One we received no proposals in relation to the electoral cycle of the district. We therefore make no recommendation for change to the present system of elections by thirds.

Conclusions

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

- there should be an increase in council size from 45 to 46;
- there should be 16 wards;

- the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one ward;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

66 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's proposals, but propose departing from them in the following area:

- we propose an alternative ward boundary between Abbey and Battle wards;
- we propose an alternative ward boundary between Battle and Kentwood wards;
- we propose an alternative ward boundary between Norcot and Tilehurst wards;
- we propose an alternative ward boundary between Norcot and Southcote wards;
- we propose an alternative ward boundary between Church and Redland wards.

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

Table 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	45	46	45	46
Number of wards	15	16	15	16
Average number of electors per councillor	2,369	2,318	2,429	2,376
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	5	0	5	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	2	0	2	0

68 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Reading Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 5 to zero. By 2006 no ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of more than seven per cent.

Draft Recommendation

Reading Borough Council should comprise 46 councillors serving 16 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 elections by thirds.

Map 2: Draft Recommendations for Reading

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

69 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Reading contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 11 March 2002. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

70 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

Fax: 020 7404 6142

E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk

www.lgce.gov.uk

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

APPENDIX A

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

Table A1: LGCE compliance with Code criteria

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