

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Rother in East Sussex

February 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

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A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for Battle and Bexhill-on-Sea is inserted inside the back cover of the report.

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Rother on 25 July 2000.

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

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

- **in 18 of the 26 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and seven wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 18 wards and by more than 20 per cent in nine wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 79-80) are that:

- **Rother District Council should have 38 councillors, seven fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 20 wards, instead of 26 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 25 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of five, and one ward should retain its existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In one of the proposed 20 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **An improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue with the number of electors per councillor in 19 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for Battle parish.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for nine weeks from 20 February 2001. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 23 April 2001:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Barnhorne	2	St Marks ward (part); Collington ward (part); St Stephens ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
2	Battle Town	2	Battle ward (part - the proposed Marley and Watch Oak parish wards of Battle parish)	Map 2 and large map
3	Bexhill Down	2	St Stephens ward (part); Old Town ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
4	Brede Valley	2	Brede & Udimore ward (Brede and Udimore parishes); Westfield ward (Westfield parish)	Map 2
5	Central	2	Central ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
6	Collington	2	Collington ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
7	Crowhurst	1	Catsfield & Crowhurst ward (Catsfield and Crowhurst parishes); Ashburnham ward (part - Ashburnham and Penhurst parishes); Battle ward (part - the proposed Telham parish ward of Battle parish)	Map 2 and large map
8	Darwell	2	Burwash ward (Burwash parish); Ashburnham ward (part - the parishes of Brightling, Dallington and Mountfield); Battle ward (part - Netherfield parish ward of Battle parish); Sedlescombe & Whatlington ward (part - Whatlington parish)	Map 2 and large map
9	Eastern Rother	2	Camber ward (part - the parishes of Camber, East Guldeford, Iden and Playden); Winchelsea ward (Icklesham parish)	Map 2
10	Ewhurst & Sedlescombe	1	Bodiam & Ewhurst ward (part - Ewhurst parish); Sedlescombe & Whatlington ward (part - Sedlescombe parish)	Map 2
11	Godwin	2	Fairlight ward (Fairlight parish); Guestling & Pett ward (Guestling and Pett parishes)	Map 2
12	Kewhurst	2	Collington ward (part); St Marks ward (part); St Stephens ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
13	Old Town	2	Old Town ward (part); St Michaels ward (part); Sidley ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
14	Pebsham	2	St Michaels ward (part); Old Town ward (part); Sackville ward (part)	Map 2 and large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
15	Rother Levels	2	Beckley & Peasmarsh ward (Beckley and Peasmarsh parishes); Northiam ward (Northiam parish); Camber ward (part - Rye Foreign parish)	Map 2
16	Rye	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Rye parish)	Map 2
17	Sackville	2	Sackville ward (part); Central ward (part); St Michaels ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
18	Salehurst	2	Salehurst ward (Salehurst and Robertsbridge parish); Bodiam and Ewhurst ward (part - Bodiam parish); Etchingham & Hurst Green ward (part - Hurst Green ward)	Map 2
19	Sidley	2	Sidley ward (part); Old Town ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
20	Ticehurst & Etchingham	2	Ticehurst ward (Ticehurst parish); Etchingham & Hurst Green ward (part - Etchingham parish)	Map 2

Note: Bexhill-on-Sea is the only unparished area in the district.

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Rother

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 Barnhorne	2	3,713	1,857	5	3,696	1,848	1
2 Battle Town	2	3,651	1,826	3	3,861	1,931	5
3 Bexhill Down	2	3,257	1,629	-8	3,522	1,761	-4
4 Brede Valley	2	3,704	1,852	4	3,758	1,879	2
5 Central	2	3,756	1,878	6	3,839	1,920	5
6 Collington	2	3,607	1,804	2	3,701	1,851	1
7 Crowhurst	1	1,952	1,952	10	1,966	1,966	7
8 Darwell	2	3,708	1,854	5	3,795	1,898	3
9 Eastern Rother	2	3,590	1,795	1	3,820	1,910	4
10 Ewhurst & Sedlescombe	1	1,847	1,847	4	1,916	1,916	4
11 Godwin	2	3,240	1,620	-9	3,283	1,642	-11
12 Kewhurst	2	3,840	1,920	8	3,833	1,917	4
13 Old Town	2	3,065	1,533	-14	3,612	1,806	-2
14 Pebsham	2	3,704	1,852	4	3,875	1,938	6
15 Rother Levels	2	3,605	1,803	2	3,753	1,877	2
16 Rye	2	3,225	1,613	-9	3,290	1,645	-10
17 Sackville	2	3,611	1,806	2	3,662	1,831	0
18 Salehurst	2	3,229	1,615	-9	3,337	1,669	-9
19 Sidley	2	3,908	1,954	10	3,952	1,976	8
20 Ticehurst & Etchingam	2	3,200	1,600	-10	3,313	1,657	-10
Totals	38	67,412	-	-	69,784	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,774	-	-	1,836	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Rother District Council's submission.

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 draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Rother in East Sussex on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the eight districts in East Sussex as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Rother. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in November 1979 (Report No. 362). The electoral arrangements of East Sussex County Council were last reviewed in August 1981 (Report No. 417). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

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

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

11 Stage One began on 25 July 2000, when we wrote to Rother District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police Authority, the local authority associations, East Sussex Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests 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 District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 16 October 2000.

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

13 Stage Three began on 20 February 2001 and will end on 23 April 2001. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 Rother district is situated in the east of East Sussex and is bordered to the west by Wealden district, to the south by the English Channel and Hastings borough and to the east and north by Kent county. The district covers an area of around 51,048 hectares and has a population of 91,530. The principal settlement is Bexhill-on-Sea, while Battle and Rye are also significant local settlements. It is a diverse borough, containing a large urban area and an extensive rural hinterland. Agriculture and tourism both occupy important positions within the economy of the district.

17 The district contains 33 parishes, but Bexhill-on-Sea town itself is unparished. Bexhill-on-Sea comprises 48 per cent of the district's total electorate.

18 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'.

19 The electorate of the district is 67,412 (February 1999). The Council at present has 45 members who are elected from 26 wards. Eight of the wards are each represented by three councillors, three are each represented by two councillors and 15 are single-member wards. The Council is elected together every four years.

20 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Rother district, with around 11 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments.

21 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,498 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,551 by the year 2005 if the current number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 18 of the 26 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, seven wards by more than 20 per cent and three wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Winchelsea ward where the councillor represents 38 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Rother

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Ashburnham	1	1,175	1,175	-22	1,189	1,189	-23
2 Battle	3	4,578	1,526	2	4,799	1,600	3
3 Beckley & Peasmarsch	1	1,688	1,688	13	1,760	1,760	13
4 Bodiam & Ewhurst	1	1,080	1,080	-28	1,111	1,111	-28
5 Brede & Udimore	1	1,731	1,731	16	1,751	1,751	13
6 Burwash	1	2,046	2,046	37	2,112	2,112	36
7 Camber	1	1,791	1,791	20	2,007	2,007	29
8 Catsfield & Crowhurst	1	1,256	1,256	-16	1,264	1,264	-18
9 Central	3	3,968	1,323	-12	4,054	1,351	-13
10 Collington	3	4,206	1,402	-6	4,226	1,409	-9
11 Etchingam & Hurst Green	1	1,664	1,664	11	1,711	1,711	10
12 Fairlight	1	1,492	1,492	0	1,513	1,513	-2
13 Guestling & Pett	1	1,748	1,748	17	1,770	1,770	14
14 Northiam	1	1,650	1,650	10	1,700	1,700	10
15 Old Town	2	3,281	1,641	10	3,986	1,993	29
16 Rye	3	3,225	1,075	-28	3,290	1,097	-29
17 Sackville	2	3,399	1,700	13	3,447	1,724	11
18 St Marks	3	4,760	1,587	6	4,785	1,595	3
19 St Michaels	3	4,369	1,456	-3	4,521	1,507	-3
20 St Stephens	3	4,570	1,523	2	4,721	1,574	1
21 Salehurst	1	1,913	1,913	28	1,994	1,994	29

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 %
22 Sedlescombe & Whatlington	1	1,290	1,290	-14	1,330	1,330	-14
23 Sidley	3	3,908	1,303	-13	3,956	1,319	-15
24 Ticehurst	2	2,585	1,293	-14	2,678	1,339	-14
25 Westfield	1	1,973	1,973	32	2,007	2,007	29
26 Winchelsea	1	2,066	2,066	38	2,106	2,106	36
Totals	45	67,412	–	–	69,788	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,498	–	–	1,551	–

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Bodiam & Ewhurst ward were relatively over-represented by 28 per cent, while electors in Winchelsea ward were relatively under-represented by 38 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

22 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 Rother District Council and its constituent parish councils.

23 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 20 representations during Stage One, including a district-wide scheme from the District Council and detailed proposals for the rural area from Councillor Hardy, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

Rother District Council

24 The District Council proposed a council of 38 members, seven fewer than at present, serving a uniform pattern of 19 two-member wards. The Council considered that such a reduction in council size would facilitate the achievement of electoral equality for the district while having regard to local community identities and interests. It also considered that any future move to “an executive style of political management coupled with an enhanced scrutiny role for councillors would better be served by a reduced council size”. Under the District Council’s proposals a new ward would be formed in the centre of Bexhill-on-Sea, and Battle parish would be warded into four parts and combined with neighbouring parishes to form new district wards.

25 Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in one ward. By 2005 only one ward, comprising the parishes of Fairlight, Guestling and Pett, would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in fact varying by 11 per cent. The Council’s proposal is summarised at Appendix B.

Parish and Town Councils

26 We received representations from nine parish and town councils during Stage One. Battle Town Council opposed the District Council’s proposals for Battle parish as it noted that the proposals would divide the parish between different district wards. The Town Council considered that Battle parish should remain in a single district ward as this would reflect local community identities and interests. Dallington, Etchingam and Whatlington parish councils each opposed the District Council’s proposals, arguing that they would not reflect local community ties. Whatlington Parish Council proposed that the parish should form part of a ward together with the parishes of Brede, Ewhurst and Sedlescombe. Sedlescombe Parish Council supported the formation of a ward comprising the parishes of Brede, Ewhurst and Sedlescombe. Bodiam Parish Council expressed disappointment that the existing arrangements could not be retained in its area. Rye Town Council considered that it should continue to be represented by three district

councillors, referring in particular to the fact that “the population rises substantially at certain times of the year - notably during the principal tourist season”. Mountfield Parish Council considered that it was unnecessary to seek equality of representation between district wards, and argued that the District Council’s proposed amendments would not reflect the community identities and interests of small parishes. It argued that if change is necessary its present arrangements should be retained subject to the addition of Netherfield ward of Battle parish. Guestling Parish Council supported the District Council’s proposals.

Other Representations

27 We received a further ten representations from local political parties, district councillors and local residents. Councillor Hardy, member for Bodiam & Ewhurst ward, put forward proposals for the rural area based on a council size of 42, arguing that his proposals would better reflect local community identities and interests. Under his proposals none of the wards in the rural area of the district would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

28 The Liberal Democrat Constituency Party of Bexhill & Battle opposed the District Council’s proposals to divide Battle parish between different district wards. It also proposed that, wherever possible, rural wards should be represented by a single councillor. A resident of Battle also opposed the proposals for Battle and made a number of other observations relating to the rural part of the district. Councillor Mrs Bridger & Councillors Carey, Fleming and Winterbottom, members of the Labour Group, opposed the District Council’s 38-member scheme, instead indicating that they supported a 42-member proposal, subject to stating that this scheme would need “a few amendments”. Councillor Mrs Russell, member for Battle ward, supported utilising single-member wards in the rural part of the district and opposed the District Council’s proposals for Battle parish as she considered that the proposals would not reflect existing community ties. Councillor Southam, leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, expressed concern at the failure of the District Council to consider alternative schemes when arriving at its proposals. Councillor Vereker, member for Burwash ward, expressed concern at the reasons for the review, referring in particular to the differing needs of the rural areas of the district. Councillor Kemp, member for Catsfield and Crowhurst ward, opposed the District Council’s 38-member proposal, instead preferring a 42-member council size. A resident of Playden providing information relating to community identities in the area. A resident of Bexhill-on-Sea considered that there was a case for retaining the existing levels of representation in Central and Sidley wards.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

33 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 4 per cent from 67,412 to 69,788 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects the greatest growth to be in Old Town ward. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

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

Council Size

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

36 Rother District Council presently has 45 members. At Stage One the District Council proposed a council size of 38, a reduction of seven, while Councillor Hardy and the Labour Group each supported a council size of 42, a reduction of three. The District Council considered that its amended council size was justified as it would facilitate substantial improvements to electoral equality while permitting a good reflection of local community identities and interests. It also considered that its proposed amendments would facilitate possible future changes under the Government’s modernisation agenda. In particular it considered that “an executive style of political management coupled with an enhanced scrutiny role for councillors would better be served by a reduced council size”.

37 As discussed below, in examining the two schemes for council sizes of 42 and 38, we consider that a council size of 38 would facilitate a scheme providing the best balance between the need to improve electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 38 members.

Electoral Arrangements

38 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received during Stage One and, in particular, to the District Council’s district-wide scheme and to the detailed proposals for the rural area which we received from Councillor Hardy. As outlined above, while we note that there is evidence of some support for a reduction in council size, we have noted that there is no agreement as to the precise size of such a reduction. Furthermore, we have noted that under both the District Council and Councillor Hardy’s proposed schemes substantial improvements would be secured to electoral equality across the district. However in considering the relative merits of the two schemes which we have received we consider that, in general, the District Council’s scheme provides the better balance between the need to seek improvements to electoral equality and the statutory criteria, for the district as a whole. Consequently we are adopting the District Council’s proposals as the basis for our draft recommendations, subject to some amendments where we judge that improvements can be made. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Central, Collington, Sackville, St Marks and St Michaels wards;
- (b) Old Town, St Stephens and Sidley wards;
- (c) Ashburnham, Battle, Catsfield & Crowhurst and Sedlescombe & Whatlington wards;

- (d) Bodiam & Ewhurst, Burwash, Etchingam & Hurst Green, Salehurst and Ticehurst wards;
- (e) Beckley & Peasmarsh and Northiam wards;
- (f) Brede & Udimore, Camber, Fairlight, Guestling & Pett, Rye, Westfield and Winchelsea wards.

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

Central, Collington, Sackville, St Marks and St Michaels wards

40 These five wards together comprise the coastal area of Bexhill-on-Sea. Sackville ward is represented by two councillors while each of the remaining wards is represented by three councillors; each ward is entirely unparished. The number of electors per councillor is 12 per cent below the district average in Central ward (13 per cent below in 2005), 6 per cent below in Collington ward (9 per cent below in 2005), 13 per cent above in Sackville ward (11 per cent above in 2005), 6 per cent above in St Marks ward (3 per cent above in 2005) and 3 per cent below in St Michaels ward both now and in 2005.

41 At Stage One the District Council proposed a number of modifications to these wards to improve electoral equality and it also proposed that each of the five new wards should be represented by two members. It proposed that St Michaels ward should be modified so that the area generally to the north and west of Hastings Road would be transferred to a revised Old Town ward (discussed later). It proposed that several properties on Worsham Lane should be transferred to St Michael's ward. The District Council proposed that Sackville ward should be modified to include part of Central ward to the east of Wilton Road. It proposed that Collington ward should be modified to transfer an area generally to the north of the eastern end of Cranston Avenue to a new ward (discussed later). It further proposed that Collington ward should be further modified to include an area around Effingham Drive in the new ward (discussed later). The Council proposed that a large area of St Marks ward around Birk Dale should also be transferred to the new ward. It considered that its proposals for these wards would provide substantial improvements to electoral equality while having regard to local community identities and interests. It also stated that "although not considered by the Council, the Commission may wish to have regard to the following in the naming of wards". Accordingly they proposed that the modified St Marks ward could be renamed Barnhorne ward and St Michaels ward could be renamed Pebsham ward.

42 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 6 per cent above the district average in Central ward (5 per cent above in 2005), 2 per cent above in Collington ward (1 per cent above in 2005), 2 per cent above in Sackville ward (equal to the average in 2005), 5 per cent above in St Marks ward (1 per cent above in 2005) and 4 per cent above in St Michaels ward (6 per cent above in 2005).

43 A resident of Bexhill-on-Sea considered that there was a case for retaining the existing level of representation in Central ward.

44 We have carefully considered the views received in this area. We note in particular the substantial improvements to electoral equality which would result under the District Council's proposals and consider that the proposed warding arrangements would provide a good reflection of the statutory criteria. Consequently we are proposing to adopt the District Council's proposals for these five wards, subject to two minor amendments to the northern boundary of Sackville ward to ensure that it follows recognisable ground detail; these amendments would not affect any electors. We are also adopting the District Council's alternative names as part of our draft recommendations. We would welcome further views on ward names during Stage Three.

45 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent above in Barnhorne ward (1 per cent above in 2005), 6 per cent above the district average in Central ward (5 per cent in 2005), 2 per cent above in Collington ward (1 per cent above in 2005), 4 per cent above in Pebsham ward (6 per cent above in 2005) and 2 per cent above in Sackville ward (equal to the average in 2005). Our draft recommendations for these wards are shown on the large map at the back of the report.

Old Town, St Stephens and Sidley wards

46 The wards of Old Town, St Stephens and Sidley are situated in the north of Bexhill-on-Sea and each is unparished. Old Town ward is represented by two councillors while St Stephens and Sidley wards are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor would be 10 per cent above the district average in Old Town ward (29 per cent above in 2005), 2 per cent above in St Stephens ward (1 per cent above in 2005) and 13 per cent below in Sidley ward (15 per cent below in 2005).

47 As described above, at Stage One the District Council proposed a new two-member ward in the west of Bexhill-on-Sea comprising parts of Collington and St Marks wards together with an area of the existing St Stephens ward generally to the south of Broad Oak Lane, to the west of West Down Road and to the south of the eastern part of Little Common Road. The Council considered that its proposals would "create a new ward comprising similar status residential areas" while providing good levels of electoral equality. In addition to the modifications to Old Town ward, described earlier, the District Council proposed that St Stephens ward should be expanded to the west to include an area of the existing Old Town ward generally to the west of Chantry Lane and Bexhill Hospital and to the south of Springfield Road and St George's Road. It proposed that Sidley ward should be retained on its existing boundaries. The Council considered that its proposals would generally secure improvements to electoral equality while having regard to local community identities and interests. While it noted that Sidley ward would have the greatest electoral imbalance in 2005 of all the wards in Bexhill-on-Sea, it considered that the strength of community identity and the strong boundaries of the ward justified such a variance from the

district average. The District Council proposed that each of these wards should be represented by two members. It also stated that “although not considered by the Council, the Commission may wish to have regard to the following in the naming of wards”. Accordingly they proposed that the New ward could be named Kewhurst, while the modified St Stephens ward could be renamed Bexhill Down.

48 Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent above the district average in the New ward (4 per cent above in 2005), 14 per cent below in Old Town ward (2 per cent below in 2005), 8 per cent below in St Stephens ward (4 per cent below in 2005) and 10 per cent above in Sidley ward (8 per cent above in 2005).

49 A resident of Bexhill-on-Sea considered that there was a case for retaining the existing level of representation in Sidley ward.

50 We have carefully considered the views received in this area. We note in particular the substantial improvements to electoral equality which would generally result under the District Council’s proposals and consider that the proposed warding arrangements would offer a good reflection of the statutory criteria. While we note that under these proposals Sidley ward would vary by 8 per cent from the district average by 2005, we consider that seeking further improvements to electoral equality in this area would have an adverse effect on community identities and could not be achieved without moving away from the clearly identifiable boundaries which currently exist. Consequently we are proposing to adopt the District Council’s proposals for these four wards, subject to a number of minor amendments to the southern boundary of Sidley ward to ensure that it follows recognisable ground detail; these amendments would not affect any electors. We are also adopting the District Council’s alternative names as part of our draft recommendations. We would welcome further views on ward names during Stage Three.

51 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent below the district average in Bexhill Down ward (4 per cent below in 2005), 8 per cent above the district average in Kewhurst ward (4 per cent above in 2005), 14 per cent below in Old Town ward (2 per cent below in 2005) and 10 per cent above in Sidley ward (8 per cent above in 2005). Our draft recommendations for these wards are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Ashburnham, Battle, Catsfield & Crowhurst and Sedlescombe & Whatlington wards

52 These four wards are located in the west of the district. Battle ward (comprising the parish of the same name) is represented by three councillors while Ashburnham ward (comprising the parishes of Ashburnham, Brightling, Dallington, Mountfield and Penhurst), Catsfield & Crowhurst ward (comprising the parishes of those names) and Sedlescombe & Whatlington (comprising the parishes of those names) are each represented by a single councillor. The number of electors per councillor is 22 per cent below the district average in Ashburnham ward (23 per cent below in

2005), 2 per cent above in Battle ward (3 per cent above in 2005), 16 per cent below in Catsfield & Crowhurst ward (18 per cent below in 2005) and 14 per cent below in Sedlescombe & Whatlington ward both now and in 2005.

53 At Stage One the District Council proposed a substantial re-warding in this area. The Council did not include proposed names for the wards in the parished part of the district but referred to the wards with numbers. It proposed that a new two-member Rural Ward Three should comprise the parishes of Ashburnham, Catsfield, Crowhurst and Penhurst together with an area of Battle parish generally to the south and east of the High Street. The District Council proposed that a new two-member Rural Ward Two should comprise the parishes of Brightling, Burwash, Dallington and Etchingham together with Netherfield parish ward of Battle parish. It proposed that the remainder of Battle parish should be combined with Sedlescombe and Whatlington ward to form a new two-member Rural Ward Four. In addition the District Council proposed that Mountfield ward should be combined with parishes to the north, discussed later. The District Council stated that while it had considered alternative warding configurations for patterns of two-member wards in the Battle area “no overall advantages [were] identified in any of these proposals”. It therefore considered that its proposals would achieve substantial improvement to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria.

54 Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above the district average in Rural Ward Two (3 per cent above in 2005), 4 per cent below in Rural Ward Three both now and in 2005 and 2 per cent below in Rural Ward Four both now and in 2005.

55 Councillor Hardy proposed an alternative configuration of wards in this area. He proposed that a new two-member Battle Town ward should comprise “so much of both Watch Oak and Marley polling districts as would create an acceptable electoral number, but keeping in sympathy with clear geographic or local community boundaries”. Councillor Hardy proposed that the remainder of Battle parish should be combined with the parishes of Ashburnham, Catsfield, Crowhurst, Penhurst and Whatlington to form a new two-member Furnaces ward. He proposed that a new two-member Dudwell ward should comprise Burwash ward and the parishes of Brightling, Dallington and Mountfield, while the parishes of Sedlescombe, Ewhurst, Bodiam and Brede would be combined to form a new two-member Powdermill ward.

56 Under Councillor Hardy’s proposals for a council size of 42, which only included electorate figures for 2005, the number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent above the district average in Battle Town ward, 10 per cent below in Dudwell ward, 6 per cent below in Furnaces ward and 9 per cent above in Powdermill ward.

57 Battle Town Council, the Liberal Democrat Constituency Party of Bexhill & Battle, Councillor Mrs Russell and a local resident opposed the District Council’s proposals for Battle parish on the grounds that they would divide the parish between different district wards. The

Town Council considered that Battle parish should remain in a single district ward as this would reflect local community identities and interests. Dallington, Etchingham and Whatlington parish councils each opposed the District Council's proposals in their areas as they argued that they would not reflect community identities and interests in their areas. Sedlescombe Parish Council supported the formation of a ward comprising the parishes of Brede, Ewhurst and Sedlescombe. Whatlington Parish Council expressed disappointment that the existing arrangements could not be retained in its area and considered that, if change is necessary, it should form part of a ward together with the parishes of Brede, Ewhurst and Sedlescombe. Mountfield Parish Council considered that it was unnecessary to seek equality of representation between district wards, and argued that the District Council's proposed amendments would not reflect the local community identities and interests of small parishes.

58 We have given careful consideration to the representations which we have received in this area. While we note that the District Council examined a number of different options when arriving at its draft recommendations, and that under a council size of 38 the parish of Battle cannot be retained in a single district ward if reasonable levels of electoral equality are to be achieved, we are not persuaded that dividing the central urban area of Battle parish between different district wards offers the best available reflection of local community identities and interests. Consequently we have sought an alternative arrangement in this area which permits the retention of a single ward to cover the central urban area of Battle parish, while providing satisfactory electoral equality under a council size of 38. We are therefore proposing a similar Battle Town ward to that put forward by Councillor Hardy, modified to comprise the whole of the proposed parish wards of Marley and Watch Oak. We are proposing that the proposed Telham parish ward should be combined with the parishes of Ashburnham, Catsfield, Crowhurst and Penhurst to form a new single-member Crowhurst ward. While we note the preferences of Mountfield and Whatlington parish councils, we note that their proposals would not permit the achievement of satisfactory levels of electoral equality across the wider area and consequently we are not adopting their proposals as part of our draft recommendations. We are proposing that a new two-member Darwell ward should comprise the parishes of Brightling, Burwash, Dallington, Mountfield, Whatlington and Netherfield parish ward of Battle parish. We are also proposing that a new single-member Ewhurst & Sedlescombe ward should comprise the parishes of Ewhurst and Sedlescombe. We consider that these amendments would secure satisfactory electoral equality while providing a good reflection of local community identities and interests in this area, in particular providing a single ward to cover the central urban area of Battle parish.

59 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Battle Town ward (5 per cent above in 2005), 10 per cent above in Crowhurst ward (7 per cent above in 2005), 5 per cent above in Darwell ward (3 per cent above in 2005) and 4 per cent above in Ewhurst ward both now and in 2005. Our draft recommendations for Battle are shown on the large map at the back of the report.

Bodiam & Ewhurst, Burwash, Etchingham & Hurst Green, Salehurst and Ticehurst wards

60 These five wards together cover much of the north-west of the district. Bodiam & Ewhurst, Burwash, Etchingham & Hurst Green and Salehurst wards are each represented by a single councillor while Ticehurst ward is represented by two councillors. The five wards are entirely parished: Bodiam & Ewhurst, Burwash, Etchingham & Hurst Green and Ticehurst wards each comprise the parishes of those names, while Salehurst ward comprises Salehurst & Robertsbridge parish. The number of electors per councillor is 28 per cent below the district average in Bodiam & Ewhurst ward both now and in 2005, 37 per cent above in Burwash ward (36 per cent above in 2005), 11 per cent above in Etchingham & Hurst Green ward (10 per cent above in 2005), 28 per cent above in Salehurst ward (29 per cent above in 2005) and 14 per cent below in Ticehurst ward both now and in 2005.

61 At Stage One the District Council proposed a re-configuration of wards in this area and, as noted earlier, it did not include proposed names for the wards in the parished part of the district but referred to the wards with numbers. As detailed earlier, the District Council proposed that Rural Ward Two should comprise the parishes of Brightling, Burwash, Dallington and Etchingham together with Netherfield parish ward of Battle parish. It proposed that a new two-member Rural Ward One should comprise the parishes of Hurst Green and Ticehurst. The District Council further proposed a new Rural Ward Five should comprise the parishes of Bodiam, Ewhurst, Mountfield and Salehurst & Robertsbridge. The District Council considered that its proposals for these wards would provide improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria.

62 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in Rural Ward One both now and in 2005 and 5 per cent below in Rural Ward Five both now and in 2005.

63 In addition to the proposed Dudwell and Powdermill wards, outlined earlier, Councillor Hardy proposed further modifications to the wards in this area. He proposed that a new two-member Limden ward should comprise the parishes of Etchingham and Ticehurst, while Hurst Green and Salehurst & Robertsbridge parishes should be combined to form a modified two-member Salehurst ward. Under Councillor Hardy's proposals, which were based on a council size of 42 and only included electorate figures for 2005, the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the district average in Limden ward and 8 per cent below in Salehurst ward.

64 Etchingham Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposals in its area as it considered that the proposals would not reflect local community identities and interests. The Parish Council stated that it preferred an alternative scheme considered by the District Council at an earlier stage, Option 32A, which placed Etchingham parish in a ward with Hurst Green and Ticehurst parishes. Bodiam Parish Council considered that the current arrangements were satisfactory and that there should be as little change to the existing arrangements as possible.

65 We have given careful consideration to the alternative proposals which we have received in this area. While we note the preferences of Bodiam and Etchingham parish councils, in conducting this review we are unable to have regard to any single area in isolation but must have regard to the impact which any changes would have upon our proposals for the wider area. Consequently we are unable to adopt the proposals put forward by Bodiam or Etchingham parish councils as, under a council size of 38, these proposals would not secure satisfactory electoral equality for the wards affected. Similarly, as a result of our amendments to wards in the west of the district, we are unable to adopt the Council's proposals in this area. Consequently we are proposing that a modified two-member Ticehurst & Etchingham ward should comprise the parishes of Etchingham and Ticehurst (as put forward in Councillor Hardy's Limden ward), while a modified two-member Salehurst ward should comprise the parishes of Bodiam, Hurst Green and Salehurst & Robertsbridge. We judge that these proposals would provide a reasonable reflection of the statutory criteria, and while we note that by 2005 these wards would vary by 9 per cent and 10 per cent from the district average respectively, we consider that such levels of electoral equality are justified as they facilitate the formation of a good district-wide scheme.

66 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent below the district average in Salehurst ward and 10 per cent below in Ticehurst & Etchingham ward, both now and in 2005. Our proposals for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Beckley & Peasmarsch and Northiam wards

67 These two single-member wards are situated in the north of the district and each comprises the parishes indicated in the ward names. The number of electors per councillor is 13 per cent above the district average in Beckley & Peasmarsch ward both now and in 2005, and 10 per cent above the district average in Northiam ward both now and in 2005.

68 At Stage One the District Council proposed that these two wards should be combined with Rye Foreign parish (in the existing Camber ward) to form a new two-member Rural Ward Seven, comprising the parishes of Beckley, Northiam, Peasmarsch and Rye Foreign. The District Council considered that "these rural parishes have a common agricultural background forming the northern boundary of the Rother district". The Council also observed that Rye Foreign parish has good road links with Peasmarsch parish. Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in Rural Ward Seven both now and in 2005.

69 Councillor Hardy proposed that a new two-member Sherbourne ward should comprise the parishes of Beckley, Northiam and Peasmarsch. Under this proposal for a 42-member council the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above the district average in Sherbourne ward in 2005.

70 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received in this area. We consider that under a council size of 38 the District Council's proposals would provide a good

reflection of the need to seek improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. Consequently we are adopting the District Council's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, but are proposing that Rural Ward Seven should be named Rother Levels. Our draft recommendation for this ward is illustrated on Map 2.

Brede & Udimore, Camber, Fairlight, Guestling & Pett, Rye, Westfield and Winchelsea wards

71 These seven wards together cover much of the east of the district. Rye ward is represented by three councillors and the remaining wards are each represented by a single councillor. Camber ward comprises the parishes of Camber, East Guldeford, Iden, Playden and Rye Foreign and Winchelsea ward comprises Icklesham parish; the remaining wards of Brede & Udimore, Fairlight, Guestling & Pett, Rye and Westfield each comprise the parishes of those names. The number of electors per councillor is 16 per cent above the district average in Brede & Udimore ward (13 per cent above in 2005), 20 per cent above in Camber ward (29 per cent above in 2005), equal to the average in Fairlight ward (2 per cent below in 2005), 17 per cent above in Guestling & Pett ward (14 per cent above in 2005), 28 per cent below in Rye ward (29 per cent below in 2005), 32 per cent above in Westfield ward (29 per cent above in 2005) and 38 per cent above in Winchelsea ward (36 per cent above in 2005).

72 At Stage One the District Council proposed a revised pattern of four two-member wards to cover most of this area. It proposed that Rural Ward 10 should comprise the existing Rye ward and be represented by two councillors, its correct allocation under a council size of 38. The Council proposed that Rural Ward Six should comprise the existing wards of Brede & Udimore and Westfield, while Rural Ward Eight should comprise the existing wards of Fairlight and Guestling & Pett. It proposed that Rural Ward Nine should cover the remaining area, comprising Winchelsea ward and the parishes of Camber, East Guldeford, Iden and Playden. The District Council considered that its proposals for this area would generally provide the best available balance of the need to seek improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria.

73 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above the district average in Rural Ward Six (2 per cent above in 2005), 9 per cent below in Rural Ward Eight (11 per cent below in 2005), 1 per cent above in Rural Ward Nine (4 per cent above in 2005) and 9 per cent below in Rural Ward 10 (10 per cent below in 2005).

74 Councillor Hardy proposed four two-member wards to cover this area. He proposed that Rye ward should be retained on its existing boundaries and should be represented by two councillors, its correct allocation under a council size of 42. Councillor Hardy proposed that Camber ward should be combined with part of Icklesham parish to form a new two-member The Levels ward. He proposed that the remainder of Icklesham parish should be combined with the parishes of Fairlight, Pett and Udimore to form a two-member Pannel ward, while Guestling and Westfield

parishes should be combined to form a new two-member Doleham ward. Under his proposals, which only included electorate figures for 2005, the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent below the district average in Doleham ward, 3 per cent below in Pannel ward, 1 per cent below in Rye ward and 1 per cent above in The Levels ward.

75 Rye Town Council opposed the proposed reduction in representation for the town, arguing that the fluctuating population of the town due to the tourist season warranted additional representation. Guestling Parish Council supported the District Council's proposals.

76 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received in this area. With regard to the existing Rye ward, while we note the views of Rye Town Council regarding variations in the population of the town during the year, in conducting this review we are only able to have regard to the existing electorate and the electorate forecast for 2005 as they would appear on the electoral roll. Consequently in view of the general support for retaining the existing boundaries of Rye ward, we are adopting a two-member Rye ward as part of our draft recommendations. In the remaining area we are adopting the District Council's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, as we judge that they would provide the best balance of the need to improve electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. While we note that under our draft recommendations Rural Ward Eight would vary by slightly more than 10 per cent from the district average in 2005, we judge that seeking further improvements to electoral equality would necessitate additional parish warding in this area which would not reflect community identities and interests in the area concerned. We propose that Rural Ward Six should be renamed Brede Valley, that Rural Ward Eight should be renamed Godwin, that Rural Ward Nine should be renamed Eastern Rother and that Rural Ward 10 should be renamed Rye.

77 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above the district average in Brede Valley ward (2 per cent above in 2005), 9 per cent below in Godwin ward (11 per cent below in 2005), 1 per cent above in Eastern Rother ward (4 per cent above in 2005) and 9 per cent below in Rye ward (10 per cent below in 2005). Our draft recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Electoral Cycle

78 At Stage One we received no evidence of widespread support for change to the electoral cycle of the district. Accordingly, we make no recommendation for change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years.

Conclusions

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

- there should be a reduction in council size from 45 to 38;
- there should be 20 wards;
- the boundaries of 25 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of five wards;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

80 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the District Council's proposals, but propose departing from them in the western rural area of the district where we are putting forward our own proposals for six wards, including a new Battle Town ward.

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

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	45	38	45	38
Number of wards	26	20	26	20
Average number of electors per councillor	1,498	1,774	1,551	1,836
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	18	1	18	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	7	0	9	0

82 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Rother District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 18 to one. By 2005 only one ward is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

Draft Recommendation

Rother District Council should comprise 38 councillors serving 20 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

83 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for Battle parish to reflect the proposed district wards.

84 The parish of Battle is currently served by 17 councillors representing two wards: Battle and Netherfield, represented by fifteen and two councillors respectively. In the light of our draft recommendations for district warding we are adopting the District Council’s proposals for parish warding in Battle parish. We therefore propose that Battle parish should comprise four parish wards Marley, Netherfield, Telham and Watch Oak, to be represented by five, two, two and eight councillors respectively.

Draft Recommendation

Battle Parish Council should comprise 17 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Marley (returning five councillors), Netherfield (two), Telham (two) and Watch Oak (eight). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

85 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district.

Draft Recommendation

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

86 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Rother and welcome comments from the District Council and others relating to the proposed ward

boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Map 2: The Commission’s Draft Recommendations for Rother

5 NEXT STEPS

87 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 23 April 2001. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the District Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

88 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

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

Fax: 020 7404 6142

E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Rother: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in the large map at the back of the report.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Battle and for Bexhill-on-Sea.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Rother: Key Map

APPENDIX B

Rother District Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

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

Figure B1: Rother District Council's Proposals: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Rural Ward One	Etchingham & Hurst Green ward (part - Hurst Green parish); Ticehurst ward (Ticehurst parish)
Rural Ward Two	Ashburnham ward (part - Brightling and Dallington parishes); Battle ward (part - Netherfield ward of Battle parish); Burwash ward (Burwash parish); Etchingham & Hurst Green ward (part - Etchingham parish)
Rural Ward Three	Ashburnham ward (part - Ashburnham and Penhurst parishes); Battle ward (part - Marley and Telham wards of Battle parishes); Catsfield & Crowhurst ward (Catsfield & Crowhurst parishes)
Rural Ward Four	Battle ward (part - Watch Oak ward of Battle parish); Sedlescombe & Whatlington ward (Sedlescombe and Whatlington parishes)
Rural Ward Five	Salehurst ward (Salehurst & Robertsbridge parish); Bodiam & Ewhurst ward (Bodiam and Ewhurst parishes); Ashburnham ward (part - Mountfield parish)

Figure B2: Rother District Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Rural Ward One	2	3,634	1,817	2	3,754	1,877	2
Rural Ward Two	2	3,697	1,849	4	3,795	1,898	3
Rural Ward Three	2	3,405	1,703	-4	3,541	1,771	-4
Rural Ward Four	2	3,488	1,744	-2	3,616	1,808	-2
Rural Ward Five	2	3,363	1,682	-5	3,482	1,741	-5

Source: Electorate figures are based on Rother District Council's submission.

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.

APPENDIX C

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 In relation to shire districts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX D

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

Commission compliance with Code criteria

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