

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Castle Point in Essex

Report to the Secretary of State for the
Environment, Transport and the Regions

November 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Castle Point in Essex.

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



Local Government Commission for England

28 November 2000

Dear Secretary of State

On 30 November 1999 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Castle Point under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in May 2000 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although a minor modification has been made (see paragraphs 79-80), in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Castle Point.

We recommend that Castle Point Borough Council should be served by 41 councillors representing 14 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should hold elections by thirds, as opposed to whole council elections every four years, as at present.

The Local Government Act 2000 contains provisions relating to changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as Orders are made implementing those arrangements, we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

I would like to thank members and officers of the Borough Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Grant'.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Castle Point on 30 November 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 16 May 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in six of the 14 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and one ward varies by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 electoral equality is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in six wards and by more than 20 per cent in one ward.**

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

- **Castle Point Borough Council should have 41 councillors, two more than at present;**
- **there should be 14 wards, as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 14 of the existing wards should be modified;**
- **elections should take place by thirds as opposed to whole council elections every four years, as at present.**

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

- **In all of the proposed 14 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all 14 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2004.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 9 January 2001:

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1 Appleton	3	Appleton ward (part); Boyce ward (part); St Mary's ward (part)
2 Boyce	3	Appleton ward (part); Boyce ward (part); St James' ward (part)
3 Canvey Island Central	3	Canvey Island Central ward; Canvey Island West ward (part); Canvey Island Winter Gardens ward (part)
4 Canvey Island East	3	Canvey Island East ward (part)
5 Canvey Island North	3	Canvey Island North ward (part); Canvey Island East ward (part); Canvey Island Winter Gardens ward (part)
6 Canvey Island South	3	Canvey Island South ward; Canvey Island North ward (part); Canvey Island West ward (part)
7 Canvey Island West	2	Canvey Island West ward (part)
8 Canvey Island Winter Gardens	3	Canvey Island Winter Gardens ward (part); Canvey Island North ward (part)
9 Cedar Hall	3	Cedar Hall ward (part); St Peter's ward (part)
10 St George's	3	St George's ward (part)
11 St James'	3	St James' ward (part); Victoria ward (part)
12 St Mary's	3	St Mary's ward (part); Appleton ward (part)
13 St Peter's	3	St Peter's ward (part); St George's ward (part)
14 Victoria	3	Victoria ward (part); Cedar Hall ward (part)

Notes: 1 The Borough is unparished.

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Castle Point

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Appleton	3	5,192	1,731	4	5,287	1,762	5
2	Boyce	3	5,001	1,667	0	5,021	1,674	-1
3	Canvey Island Central	3	5,151	1,717	3	5,185	1,728	3
4	Canvey Island East	3	5,145	1,715	3	5,259	1,753	4
5	Canvey Island North	3	4,679	1,560	-7	4,707	1,569	-7
6	Canvey Island South	3	5,140	1,713	3	5,146	1,715	2
7	Canvey Island West	2	3,543	1,772	6	3,635	1,818	8
8	Canvey Island Winter Gardens	3	5,084	1,695	2	5,243	1,748	4
9	Cedar Hall	3	4,615	1,538	-8	4,655	1,552	-8
10	St George's	3	5,065	1,688	1	5,070	1,690	0
11	St James'	3	5,055	1,685	1	5,062	1,687	0
12	St Mary's	3	5,130	1,710	2	5,128	1,709	1
13	St Peter's	3	4,907	1,636	-2	4,951	1,650	-2
14	Victoria	3	4,697	1,566	-6	4,706	1,569	-7
	Totals	41	68,404	-	-	69,055	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,668	-	-	1,684	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Castle Point in Essex. We have now reviewed the 12 two-tier districts in Essex 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 was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Castle Point. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in January 1976 (Report No.137). The electoral arrangements of Essex County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 401). We completed a directed electoral review of Thurrock in 1996 and a periodic electoral review of Southend-on-Sea in 1999. We expect to undertake a periodic electoral review of Thurrock later this year and a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

3 In undertaking these reviews, we have had 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 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the Borough Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999), which 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, so far as practicable, 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 borough council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other districts.

9 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, i.e. in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. 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 areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/00 PER programme, including the Essex districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State's intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. 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 Orders under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of our current *Guidance* and existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in the two-tier district areas.

11 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 30 November 1999, when we wrote to Castle Point Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Essex County Council, Essex Police Authority, the local authority associations, Essex Local Councils' Association, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 28 February 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 16 May 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Castle Point in Essex*, and ended on 10 July 2000. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 The borough of Castle Point is situated on the Thames coastline of south-east Essex. The borough is centred around Benfleet Creek, an inlet of the Thames estuary, which essentially results in the creation of two separate communities. To the north of the Creek is Benfleet, which comprises the communities of Benfleet, Thundersley and Hadleigh, while to the south is Canvey Island. The borough is compact, covering an area of approximately 4,500 hectares and borders Basildon and Thurrock to the west, Southend-on-Sea to the east and Rochford to the north. The borough has good communication links to Southend-on-Sea and London by rail and the A13 and A127 trunk roads. The borough contains no civil parishes.

14 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 borough average in percentage terms. In the text which follows this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

15 The electorate of the borough is 68,404 (February 1999). The Council at present has 39 councillors who are elected from 14 wards. Eleven of the wards are each represented by three councillors and the remaining three wards are represented by two councillors. The whole council is elected every four years.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Castle Point borough, with around 19 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Canvey Island North, Canvey Island South and Canvey Island Winter Gardens wards.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,754 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,771 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in six of the 14 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, one of which varies by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Canvey Island Winter Gardens ward, where the two councillors represent 62 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Castle Point

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Appleton	3	5,364	1,788	2	5,459	1,820	3
2	Boyce	3	5,014	1,671	-5	5,034	1,678	-5
3	Canvey Island Central	3	4,306	1,435	-18	4,318	1,439	-19
4	Canvey Island East	3	5,332	1,777	1	5,478	1,826	3
5	Canvey Island North	3	5,572	1,857	6	5,616	1,872	6
6	Canvey Island South	2	3,786	1,893	8	3,783	1,892	7
7	Canvey Island West	2	4,077	2,039	16	4,202	2,101	19
8	Canvey Island Winter Gardens	2	5,669	2,835	62	5,778	2,889	63
9	Cedar Hall	3	4,575	1,525	-13	4,617	1,539	-13
10	St George's	3	5,489	1,830	4	5,494	1,831	3
11	St James'	3	4,567	1,522	-13	4,574	1,525	-14
12	St Mary's	3	4,900	1,633	-7	4,898	1,633	-8
13	St Peter's	3	5,207	1,736	-1	5,249	1,750	-1
14	Victoria	3	4,546	1,515	-14	4,555	1,518	-14
	Totals	39	68,404	-	-	69,055	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,754	-	-	1,771	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Castle Point 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 1999, electors in Canvey Island Central ward were relatively over-represented by 18 per cent, while electors in Canvey Island Winter Gardens ward were relatively under-represented by 62 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received two borough-wide schemes, one from the Borough Council and one from Castle Point Conservative Association. There was a degree of consensus between both schemes, particularly in relation to council size and ward names. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Castle Point in Essex*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's proposals for the Benfleet area, and the Conservatives' proposals for the Canvey Island area. This achieved improved electoral equality and provided a pattern of three-member wards with the exception of Canvey Island West ward which would be represented by two councillors. However, we moved away from these proposals in a number of areas, affecting seven wards, using options generated by Council officers during the early stages of the review process, together with some of our own proposals. We also proposed four amendments within the borough to realign boundaries to identifiable ground detail. We proposed that:

- Castle Point Borough Council should be served by 41 councillors, compared with the current 39, representing 14 wards, as at present;
- the boundaries of all 14 of the existing wards should be modified;

Draft Recommendation

Castle Point Borough Council should comprise 41 councillors, serving 14 wards. The Council should hold elections by thirds as opposed to whole council elections every four years, as at present.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in all of the proposed 14 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to continue with no wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2004.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, six representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Castle Point Borough Council and the Commission.

Castle Point Borough Council

22 The Borough Council welcomed and agreed with our draft recommendations in their entirety. Its submission stated, however, that the seven Conservative members on the committee requested that their votes against this resolution be recorded.

Castle Point Conservative Association

23 Castle Point Conservative Association reiterated their support for their Stage One proposals, stating that, “our comments remain as before”.

Other Representations

24 A further four representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from councillors and a local resident.

25 Councillor Fisher, (Appleton ward), supported our draft recommendations in relation to council size, the number of wards and a transition to elections by thirds. However, he proposed modifications to our proposed Appleton ward in order to improve electoral equality. Councillor Riley, (Victoria ward), opposed part of our draft recommendations for Victoria ward and proposed amending the boundary between Cedar Hall and Victoria wards. Councillors Challis and Dick, (St Peter’s ward), in a joint submission stated that ideally they would like the boundaries in the Benfleet area to remain unchanged. However, they supported elements of our draft recommendations, but proposed a number of minor amendments to our proposed Cedar Hall, St George’s and St Peter’s wards. A local resident expressed support for our draft recommendations in relation to council size, an additional two councillors for the Canvey Island area and a change to elections by thirds.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

26 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Castle Point 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”.

27 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 ensuing five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

28 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.

29 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, such an objective 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 absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

30 At Stage One, the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 1 per cent from 68,404 to 69,055 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expected most of the growth to be in Canvey Island East ward. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorate of changes to ward boundaries was obtained.

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

Council Size

32 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.

33 Castle Point Borough Council is at present served by 39 councillors. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed an increase in council size from 39 to 41. It stated that this increase would achieve improved levels of electoral equality throughout the borough.

34 In their Stage One submission, the Conservatives argued that an increase in council size of two, from 39 to 41, would go some way to achieving their intention of creating a pattern of predominantly three-member wards for the borough.

35 In our draft recommendations report we recognised that, since the last review, the electorate of Canvey Island has grown at a faster rate than that of Benfleet and that a small increase in council size would provide each part of the borough with the number of councillors to which it is entitled. Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 41 members.

36 During Stage Three, the Borough Council supported our proposed council size, as did Councillor Fisher and a local resident. Castle Point Conservative Association reiterated their Stage One proposals which were based on a council size of 41. Accordingly, we remain persuaded that the balance of evidence supports increasing the number of councillors in Castle Point to 41, which we consider would achieve the best balance between the appropriate number of members necessary to facilitate effective and convenient local government, while reflecting the identities and interests of local communities. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for a council size of 41 as final.

Electoral Arrangements

37 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered the two borough-wide submissions received at Stage One. From these representations, some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

38 We noted that there was a significant consensus between the Borough Council's and the Conservatives' borough-wide schemes. Both proposed an increase in council size to 41, the retention of 14 wards and a change to elections by thirds. We therefore based our draft recommendations on elements of both schemes submitted, as we considered that this would provide for the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We did, however, propose further modifications in a number of areas.

39 At Stage Three our draft recommendations received a degree of local support and we propose that our draft recommendations should be substantially endorsed, subject to a minor boundary amendment.

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

- (a) **Benfleet**
 - Cedar Hall, St George’s, St Peter’s and Victoria wards;
 - Appleton, Boyce, St James’ and St Mary’s wards.

- (b) **Canvey Island**
 - Canvey Island East, Canvey Island North and Canvey Island South wards;
 - Canvey Island Central, Canvey Island Winter Gardens and Canvey Island West wards.

41 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map inserted inside the back cover of this report.

Benfleet (eight wards)

42 The urban area of Benfleet covers the settlements of Benfleet, Thundersley and Hadleigh. It comprises over half the borough’s total electorate and is separated from Canvey Island by Benfleet Creek and sparsely populated land. The area contains no civil parishes and is represented by eight borough wards, three of which have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from the borough average.

Cedar Hall, St George’s, St Peter’s and Victoria wards

43 The existing wards of Cedar Hall, St George’s, St Peter’s and Victoria are situated in the north of the borough and broadly cover the area to the north of the A13 trunk road. All four wards are currently represented by three councillors. Under current arrangements, Cedar Hall, St Peter’s and Victoria wards contain 13 per cent, 1 per cent and 14 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, while St George’s ward contains 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

44 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed minor modifications to all four wards in order to provide improved levels of electoral equality. It proposed that the area to the east of Roseberry Avenue and north of Church Road, and the area bounded by Church Road and Kennington Road should be transferred from St George’s ward to St Peter’s ward. The Council proposed that two areas should be transferred from St Peter’s ward to Cedar Hall ward. It proposed that the boundary between the two wards should, in future, continue down Kenneth Road for its entire length, resulting in the transfer of The Chase and adjacent roads from St Peter’s ward to Cedar Hall ward. In addition, in the north, the Council proposed that Goldfinch Lane and adjoining

roads, plus the new developments on the A127 Arterial Road and Rivenhall, should be transferred from St Peter's ward to Cedar Hall ward. In relation to the boundary between Cedar Hall and Victoria wards, the Council proposed that the Queensmere area be transferred from Cedar Hall ward to Victoria ward. Finally, it proposed that the area to the south of Poors Lane be transferred from Victoria ward to St James' ward.

45 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Cedar Hall, St George's, St Peter's and Victoria wards would contain 2 per cent, 1 per cent, 6 per cent and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years

46 The Conservatives proposed retaining the existing warding arrangements for Cedar Hall, St George's, St Peter's and Victoria wards, arguing that the current arrangements provided for acceptable levels of electoral equality, while representing clear and defined areas of the borough. They argued that any small changes to ward boundaries in this area would only be for political gain. Under the Conservatives' proposals, Cedar Hall and Victoria wards would each contain 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average, while St George's and St Peter's wards would contain 10 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to marginally deteriorate over the next five years.

47 We concluded that the Borough Council's proposals for this area provided a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and were content to adopt them as part of our draft recommendations. We did, however, propose one amendment in order to retain the whole of Woodside Avenue and Woodside View in St George's ward, rather than dividing it between St George's and St Peter's wards as proposed by the Council.

48 While we considered that the Conservatives' proposals to retain the existing warding arrangements for this area had some merit, we noted that they would have resulted in higher levels of electoral inequality than the proposals submitted by the Borough Council.

49 Under our draft recommendations, the revised Cedar Hall, St Peter's and Victoria wards would contain 2 per cent, 8 per cent and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, (2 per cent, 8 per cent and 7 per cent fewer by 2004). St George's ward would contain 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the average, improving to equal to the average by 2004.

50 At Stage Three, the Borough Council supported our proposals for this area, while Castle Point Conservative Association reiterated their Stage One submission. In a joint submission, Councillors Challis and Dick, (St Peter's ward) expressed a preference for retaining the existing arrangements in Benfleet. However, they expressed support for our proposals for the south-eastern corner of St George's ward, and the southern part of Cedar Hall ward. In addition, they opposed our proposal to transfer the area to the east of Roseberry Avenue and north of Church Road to a revised St Peter's ward and favoured retaining the existing boundary. They also opposed our proposed boundary in the north of Cedar Hall ward, arguing that the modified boundary would leave residents isolated by the Great Common, and proposed retaining the

existing boundary with a minor modification, to include the whole of the Rivenhall area in a revised Cedar Hall ward as proposed in our draft recommendations.

51 Councillor Riley, (Victoria ward) supported our proposed boundary modification between Victoria and St James' wards. However, he opposed our proposals in relation to the boundary between Victoria and Cedar Hall wards, arguing that the proposal was politically motivated and that inclusion of roads to the west of the Rayleigh Road would "further confuse the already disjointed boundary line". He proposed amending the boundary between Cedar Hall and Victoria wards to follow the west side of Rayleigh Road for its entire length, thereby transferring all the properties on this road to a revised Victoria ward. Accordingly the area to the west of Rayleigh Road would form part of a revised Cedar Hall ward.

52 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendation for St George's and Victoria wards. We have considered the alternative proposals submitted by Councillor Riley with regards to the boundary between Cedar Hall and Victoria wards, and have not been persuaded that transferring the properties on Rayleigh Road to Victoria ward would satisfactorily reflect the identities and interests of the local community. We note that under Councillor Riley's proposals a number of roads having sole access from Rayleigh Road, and therefore Victoria ward, would be located in Cedar Hall ward. Furthermore, we consider that in the north, the current boundary down the centre of Rayleigh Road forms a strong natural division between the two wards. We have also considered the proposals submitted by Councillors Challis and Dick regarding the boundary between St George's and St Peter's wards, and have not been persuaded that community identities and interests would be better served than under our draft recommendations if the area east of Roseberry Avenue were to be retained in St George's ward.

53 However, we have decided to move away from our draft recommendations in one area, as proposed by Councillors Challis and Dick. We consider that their proposal to utilise the existing boundary, following a footpath across the Great Common with a deviation in the north to include the whole of the Rivenhall area in a revised Cedar Hall ward, would better reflect the identities and interests of the local community than our draft recommendations, while having little impact on electoral equality.

54 Under our final recommendations, Cedar Hall, St Peter's and Victoria wards would contain 8 per cent, 2 per cent and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8 per cent, 2 per cent and 7 per cent fewer by 2004), while St George's ward would contain 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the average, improving to equal to the average by 2004.

Appleton, Boyce, St James' and St Mary's wards

55 The existing wards of Appleton, Boyce, St James' and St Mary's are situated in the centre of the borough and cover the South Benfleet and Hadleigh areas. All four wards are currently represented by three councillors. Under current arrangements, Boyce, St James' and St Mary's wards contain 5 per cent, 13 per cent and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, while Appleton ward contains 2 per cent more electors per

councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is projected to marginally deteriorate over the next five years.

56 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed minor modifications to Appleton, St James' and St Mary's wards, while proposing that Boyce ward should remain unchanged. It proposed transferring the whole of Limetree Avenue, Oakfield Close and Oakfield Road from Appleton ward to a revised St Mary's ward. It also proposed modifying the boundary between Victoria and St James' wards to follow Poors Lane, as outlined above. Under the Borough Council's proposals, Appleton, St James' and St Mary's wards would contain 3 per cent, 2 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, while Boyce ward would contain equal to the average number of electors per councillor. This level of electoral equality is projected to marginally improve over the next five years.

57 The Conservatives proposed retaining the existing warding arrangements for Appleton, Boyce, St James' and St Mary's wards, arguing that the current arrangements provided for acceptable levels of electoral equality, while representing clear and defined areas of the borough. They also argued that any small changes to ward boundaries in this area would only be for political gain. Under the Conservatives' proposals, Appleton ward would contain 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average, while St James' and St Mary's wards would contain 9 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. Boyce ward would contain equal to the average number of electors per councillor for the borough. This level of electoral equality is projected to marginally deteriorate over the next five years.

58 In our draft recommendations report, we considered that the Borough Council's proposals for this area would provide for improved levels of electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria, and proposed basing our draft recommendations for this area on its scheme. However, in order to better reflect the local community and provide for more clearly identifiable boundaries, we proposed modifying the Council's proposals in four areas. Firstly, we proposed a minor modification to the boundary between the revised Appleton and Boyce wards in order to transfer the whole of Downer Road, to the north of the junction with Bowers Road, to Appleton ward. Secondly, we proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Boyce and St James' wards in order to unite the properties on Benfleet Road, to the west of the junction with St John's Road with similar properties in Boyce ward. Thirdly, we proposed a modification to the boundary between Appleton and St Mary's wards in order to tie the current ward boundary to ground detail. Finally, we proposed a further modification to the boundary between Appleton and Boyce wards to provide a clearer boundary. While none of these minor amendments would have a significant effect on electoral equality, we considered that they would provide clearer, more identifiable boundaries for these wards.

59 At Stage Three, the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations for this area, while Castle Point Conservative Association reiterated their Stage One submission. Councillor Fisher, (Appleton ward) expressed concern that, under our draft recommendations, electoral equality in Appleton ward would be marginally worse than under the existing arrangements. He therefore proposed a number of minor modifications to our proposed Appleton ward. He proposed including all the properties on Chestnut Grove and Elmhurst Avenue and adjoining roads in a revised St Mary's ward. He argued that this area forms part of a close community,

based around the Jotmans Primary School. Alternatively, he proposed amending the eastern ward boundary to follow Clarence Road, thereby transferring all the properties on Avondale Road, Clarence Road, Clarence Road North and adjoining roads to a revised Boyce ward. Councillor Fisher supported our proposals for the Oakfield Road and Downer Road areas in Appleton ward.

60 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received in relation to this area. However, we propose endorsing our draft recommendations for Appleton, Boyce, St James' and St Mary's wards as final. While we note the concerns of Councillor Fisher, we have not been persuaded that either of his proposed options would better reflect community identities and interests than the proposals put forward under our draft recommendations. We are also concerned that the proposed amendment to the boundary between Appleton and Boyce wards would result in the deterioration of electoral equality in Boyce ward from 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average to 8 per cent more.

61 Under our final recommendations, Appleton, St James' and St Mary's wards would contain 4 per cent, 1 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, (5 per cent more, equal to the average and 1 per cent more by 2004). Boyce ward would contain equal to the average number of electors per councillor, (1 per cent fewer by 2004).

Canvey Island (six wards)

62 Canvey Island is separated from Benfleet by Benfleet Creek, with the only links being the A130 Canvey Way and the Canvey Road. The island is densely populated around the centre and surrounded by sparse areas to its south and west. The area contains no civil parishes and is divided into six wards, three of which have electoral imbalances of more than 10 per cent from the borough average.

Canvey Island East, Canvey Island North and Canvey Island South wards

63 The existing wards of Canvey Island East, Canvey Island North and Canvey Island South broadly cover the eastern half of Canvey Island. Canvey Island East and Canvey Island North wards are both currently represented by three councillors, while Canvey Island South ward is represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Canvey Island East, Canvey Island North and Canvey Island South wards contain 1 per cent, 6 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

64 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed amending the boundaries of all three wards in order to achieve improved levels of electoral equality. It proposed that Canvey Island North ward should be expanded to include the part of Canvey Island East ward to the west of Westerland Avenue, and that the part of Canvey Island North ward to the west of Central Wall Road should be transferred to a revised Canvey Island Central ward. The Council also proposed amending the western boundary of Canvey Island South ward to transfer the area to the west of Welbeck Road to Canvey Island West ward. Canvey Island East and Canvey Island North wards would continue to return three councillors and Canvey Island South ward, two councillors. Under the Borough Council's proposals, Canvey Island East and Canvey Island North wards would

contain 3 per cent and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, while Canvey Island South ward would contain 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is projected to marginally deteriorate over the next five years.

65 The Conservatives also proposed modifications to the boundaries of all three wards, as well as an additional councillor for Canvey Island South ward. They proposed modifying the southern boundary of Canvey Island North ward with Canvey Island South ward to follow the High Street, thereby transferring the town centre and 1,075 electors from Canvey Island North ward to Canvey Island South ward. They also proposed a modification to the boundary between Canvey Island North and Canvey Island East wards. They proposed transferring the part of Canvey Island East ward to the west of Baardwyk Avenue, Hassell Road and Orange Road to a revised Canvey Island North ward. The Conservatives proposed two further minor modifications in this area. Firstly, they proposed that the boundary between Canvey Island South and Canvey Island Central wards should follow the centre of Furtherwick Road resulting in the transfer of properties on the west side to Canvey Island Central ward. Secondly, they proposed modifying the western boundary of Canvey Island South ward, transferring the whole of Rose Road, Berkeley Lane and Chichester Close from Canvey Island West ward.

66 Under the Conservatives' proposals, Canvey Island East and Canvey Island North wards would each contain 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average, while Canvey Island South ward would contain 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain constant over the next five years.

67 In our draft recommendations report, we noted that both the Borough Council's and the Conservatives' proposals for this area achieved reasonable levels of electoral equality. However, we were not persuaded that the Borough Council's proposals would adequately reflect the identities and interests of the local community. In particular, we were concerned that the modification to the western boundary of Canvey Island North ward would have resulted in the Harvest Road area being combined with areas with which it has no affinity and from which it is physically separated. As a consequence of not utilising the Council's boundary in this area, we were unable to take account of the Borough Council's scheme for the majority of the Canvey Island area. We therefore adopted the Conservatives' proposals in the Canvey Island area, subject to some modifications. In the east of the island, we adopted the Borough Council's boundary between Canvey Island East and Canvey Island North wards. We considered that its proposed boundary was clearer than that proposed by the Conservatives, which we considered would not satisfactorily reflect the identities and interests of the local community. We also proposed that the existing boundary be retained between Canvey Island Central and Canvey Island South wards in order to retain the whole of Furtherwick Road, one of the shopping streets in the town, in a single ward. In addition, we proposed that the western boundary and part of the southern boundary of Canvey Island North ward both be realigned in order to tie them to identifiable ground detail.

68 In response to our draft recommendations report, the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations for this area, while Castle Point Conservative Association reiterated their Stage One submission. We received no further submissions in relation to this area and are therefore content to confirm our draft recommendations as final. Under our final recommendations the

revised Canvey Island East and Canvey Island South wards would each contain 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average, (4 per cent and 2 per cent more respectively by 2004). Canvey Island North ward would contain 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average, both now and in five years' time.

Canvey Island Central, Canvey Island Winter Gardens and Canvey Island West wards

69 The existing wards of Canvey Island Central, Canvey Island Winter Gardens and Canvey Island West broadly cover the western half of Canvey Island. Canvey Island West and Canvey Island Winter Gardens wards are each currently represented by two councillors, while Canvey Island Central is represented by three councillors. Under current arrangements, there is a relatively poor level of electoral equality. Canvey Island West and Canvey Island Winter Gardens wards contain 16 per cent and 62 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, while Canvey Island Central ward contains 18 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is projected to marginally deteriorate over the next five years.

70 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed modifying the boundaries of all three wards, together with allocating an additional councillor each for Canvey Island Winter Gardens and Canvey Island West wards. It proposed transferring the south-western corner of Canvey Island Winter Gardens ward (First Avenue, Second Avenue, Link Road, The Weald and Crossways) to Canvey Island West ward. It also proposed a modification to the boundary between Canvey Island Central and Canvey Island North wards to incorporate the area to the west of Central Wall Road in Canvey Island Central ward, and to the boundary between Canvey Island West and Canvey Island South wards to incorporate an area to the west of Welbeck Road in Canvey Island West ward. Both of these changes are discussed in more detail above. Under the Borough Council's proposals, Canvey Island Winter Gardens and Canvey Island West wards would contain 2 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, while Canvey Island Central ward would be equal to the average number of electors. This level of electoral equality is projected to marginally deteriorate over the next five years.

71 The Conservatives proposed transferring the same area from Canvey Island Winter Gardens as the Borough Council and increasing its representation from two to three councillors. However, they proposed that this area, together with an area containing 239 electors from the existing Canvey Island West ward, should be transferred to Canvey Island Central ward. They also proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Canvey Island South and Canvey Island West wards, to incorporate the Rose Road area in Canvey Island South ward, and to transfer part of Furtherwick Road from Canvey Island Central ward to Canvey Island South ward, as discussed above. Under the Conservatives' proposals, Canvey Island Central, Canvey Island Winter Gardens and Canvey Island West wards would contain 2 per cent, 2 per cent and 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to marginally deteriorate over the next five years.

72 In our draft recommendations report, we noted that both the Borough Council's and the Conservatives' proposals achieved improved levels of electoral equality. However, as outlined above, we were not persuaded that the Borough Council's proposals for the Canvey Island area satisfactorily reflected the identities and interests of the local community and therefore adopted

the Conservatives' proposals in this area, subject to minor modifications. We proposed three minor modifications to the revised Canvey Island Central ward in order to provide for more clearly identifiable boundaries. In the south-west corner of the ward, we proposed that the boundary should in future follow the centre of Long Road, rather than to the rear of properties. We also proposed amending part of the boundary between Canvey Island Central and Canvey Island Winter Gardens wards to include part of Meadow View Walk in Canvey Island Central ward. We also proposed a minor modification to the eastern boundary of Canvey Island Winter Gardens ward in order to align the boundary with Hilton Dyke.

73 In response to our draft recommendations report, the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations for this area, while Castle Point Conservative Association reiterated their Stage One submission. We received no further submissions in relation to this area and are therefore content to confirm our draft recommendations as final. Under our final recommendations, the revised Canvey Island Central, Canvey Island West and Canvey Island Winter Gardens wards would contain 3 per cent, 6 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, (3 per cent, 8 per cent and 4 per cent more by 2004).

Electoral Cycle

74 At Stage One, we received two representations regarding the Borough Council's electoral cycle. The Borough Council stated that, following a special meeting, it had approved the proposal to transfer from whole council elections to elections by thirds by 30 votes to four.

75 The Conservatives also proposed a move to elections by thirds, in line with a move towards a borough-wide pattern of three-member wards.

76 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we were content to consult on a change to the electoral cycle from whole council elections to elections by thirds as part of our draft recommendations. We particularly welcomed the views of local residents and interested parties at Stage Three.

77 At Stage Three, the Borough Council supported a change from whole council elections to elections by thirds, as did the Castle Point Conservative Association, who reiterated their Stage One submission. We also received support for this transition from Councillor Fisher and a local resident.

78 Having considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendation for a change from whole council elections to elections by thirds for the Borough Council as final.

Conclusions

79 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our draft recommendations, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to:

- amending the boundary between Cedar Hall and St Peter’s wards.

80 We conclude that, in Castle Point:

- there should be an increase in council size from 39 to 41;
- there should be 14 wards, as at present;
- the boundaries of 14 of the existing wards should be modified;
- elections should take place by thirds as opposed to whole council elections every four years, as at present

81 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 and 2004 electorate figures.

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	39	41	39	41
Number of wards	14	14	14	14
Average number of electors per councillor	1,754	1,668	1,771	1,684
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	6	0	6	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	1	0	1	0

82 As shown in Figure 4, our draft recommendations for Castle Point Borough Council would result in all wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This improved level of electoral equality is projected to continue over the next five years. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Castle Point Borough Council should comprise 41 councillors serving 14 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report. The Council should, in future, hold elections by thirds.

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Castle Point

6 NEXT STEPS

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

84 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made before 9 January 2001.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Castle Point

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of only two wards, where our draft proposals are set out below.

Figure A1: The Commission’s Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Cedar Hall	Cedar Hall ward (part); St Peter’s ward (part)
St Peter’s	St Peter’s ward (part); St George’s ward (part)

Figure A2: The Commission’s Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Cedar Hall	3	4,907	1,636	-2	4,949	1,650	-2
St Peter’s	3	4,615	1,538	-8	4,657	1,552	-8

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Castle Point 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.

