

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Rochdale

February 2003

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England (BCFE) is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to The Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 no. 3692). The Order also transferred to The Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE
Robin Gray
Joan Jones CBE
Ann M Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

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

Summary

We began a review of the electoral arrangements for Rochdale on 14 May 2002.

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

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

- **in 12 of the 20 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the borough average and four wards vary by more than 20% from the average;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 13 wards and by more than 20% in five wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 91-92) are that:

- **Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council should have 60 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 20 wards, the same as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 20 of the existing wards should be modified.**

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

- **In all of the proposed 20 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards forecast to vary by no more than 10% from the average for the borough in 2006.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 25 February 2003. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission the body responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 22 April 2003:

**Team Leader
Rochdale Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Large Map
1	Balderstone	3	Part Balderstone ward	1, 3 & 4
2	Bamford & Marland	3	Part Brimrod & Deeplish ward, part Norden & Bamford ward, part Spotland ward	1
3	Bowlee Park	3	Part Middleton West ward, part Middleton Central ward	3
4	Castleton	3	Part Castleton ward, part Middleton North ward	1 & 3
5	Central & Deeplish	3	Part Brimrod & Deeplish ward, Central & Falinge ward, part Newbold ward	1 & 4
6	Healey	3	Part Central & Falinge ward, Part Healey ward, part Wardle ward	1, 2 & 4
7	Heywood North	3	Part Castleton ward, part Heywood North ward, part Heywood South ward	1 & 3
8	Heywood West	3	Part Heywood West ward, part Heywood North ward	1 & 3
9	Hopwood Hall	3	Part Heywood South ward, part Middleton Central ward	1 & 3
10	Inner Rochdale	3	Part Central & Falinge ward, part Smallbridge & Wardleworth ward	1 & 4
11	Littleborough	3	Part Littleborough ward, part Milnrow & Newhey ward, part Wardle ward	2 & 4
12	Middleton East	3	Part Middleton East ward, part Middleton North ward	3
13	Middleton North	3	Part Middleton Central ward, part Middleton East ward, part Middleton North ward	3
14	Middleton South	3	Part Middleton South ward	3
15	Milnrow & Newhey	3	Part Milnrow ward	4
16	Newbold	3	Part Newbold ward, part Smallbridge and Wardleworth ward	4
17	Norden & Caldershaw	3	Part Heywood North ward, part Healey ward, part Norden & Bamford ward, part Spotland ward	1
18	Smallbridge & Firgrove	3	Part Milnrow, part Newbold ward, part Smallbridge & Wardleworth ward, part Wardle ward	4
19	Spotland & Falinge	3	Part Central & Falinge, part Healey ward, part Spotland ward, part Norden & Bamford ward	1
20	Wardle	3	Part Littleborough ward, part Wardle ward	1,2 & 4

Notes:

- 1) *The whole borough is unparished.*
- 2) *The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2 and the large maps.*

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Rochdale

	Ward name	No. of councillors	Electorate 2001	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate 2006	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Balderstone	3	7,016	2,339	-9	7,020	2,340	-10
2	Bamford & Marland	3	7,885	2,628	2	7,974	2,658	2
3	Bowlee Park	3	7,920	2,640	3	8,214	2,738	5
4	Castleton	3	7,878	2,626	2	7,849	2,616	1
5	Central & Deeplish	3	7,345	2,448	-5	7,307	2,436	-6
6	Healey	3	7,626	2,542	-1	7,807	2,602	0
7	Heywood North	3	7,859	2,620	2	7,944	2,648	2
8	Heywood West	3	8,138	2,713	6	7,982	2,661	2
9	Hopwood Hall	3	7,872	2,624	2	8,052	2,684	3
10	Inner Rochdale	3	7,590	2,530	-1	7,458	2,486	-4
11	Littleborough	3	7,312	2,437	-5	7,515	2,505	-4
12	Middleton East	3	7,806	2,602	1	7,803	2,601	0
13	Middleton North	3	7,872	2,624	2	8,029	2,676	3
14	Middleton South	3	7,919	2,640	3	7,861	2,620	1
15	Milnrow & Newhey	3	7,779	2,593	1	7,991	2,664	3
16	Newbold	3	8,040	2,680	4	8,158	2,719	5
17	Norden & Caldershaw	3	7,132	2,377	-7	7,266	2,422	-7
18	Smallbridge & Firgrove	3	7,432	2,477	-3	7,450	2,483	-4
19	Spotland & Falinge	3	8,208	2,736	7	8,218	2,739	5
20	Wardle	3	7,245	2,419	6	7,939	2,646	2
	Totals	60	153,874	-	-	155,837	-	-
	Average	-	-	2,565	-	-	2,597	-

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

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

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the metropolitan borough of Rochdale, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the eight metropolitan boroughs in Greater Manchester as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. The programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Rochdale. Rochdale's last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in April 1979 (Report no. 322).

3 In carrying out these metropolitan reviews we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 no. 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Rochdale is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reviews* (published by the Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

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

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

7 We are not prescriptive on council size. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction or no change, should be supported by evidence and argumentation. Given the stage now reached in the introduction of new political management structures under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, it is important that whatever council size interested parties may propose to us they can demonstrate that their proposals have been fully thought through, and have been developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structure. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, or that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 there is no limit on the number of councillors that can be returned from each metropolitan borough ward. However, the figure must be divisible by three. In practice, all metropolitan borough wards currently return three councillors. Where our recommendation is for multi-member wards, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution

of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

9 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the review

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

10 Stage One began on 14 May 2002, when we wrote to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified the Greater Manchester Police Authority, the Local Government Association, National Association of Local Councils, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 16 September 2002.

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

12 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 25 February 2003 and will end on 22 April 2003, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

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

2 Current electoral arrangements

14 The metropolitan borough of Rochdale lies in the north-west of Greater Manchester and covers an area of 15,976 hectares with a population of 207,400.

15 The electorate of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough is presently 153,874 (December 2001) and is projected to increase to 155,838 by 2006. The Council currently has 60 members who are elected from 20 wards.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,565 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,597 by the year 2006 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 12 of the 20 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average, four wards by more than 20% and one ward by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Middleton West ward, where each councillor represents 40% less electors than the borough average.

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

Map 1: Existing wards in Rochdale

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in Rochdale

	Ward name	No. of councillors	Electorate 2001	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate 2006	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Balderstone	3	7,453	2,484	-3	7,492	2,492	-4
2	Brimrod & Deeplish	3	6,305	2,102	-18	6,352	2,117	-18
3	Castleton	3	7,756	2,585	1	7,723	2,574	-1
4	Central & Falinge	3	7,630	2,543	-1	7,618	2,539	-2
5	Healey	3	9,833	3,278	28	10,026	3,342	29
6	Heywood North	3	7,038	2,346	-9	6,983	2,328	-10
7	Heywood South	3	8,464	2,821	10	8,825	2,942	13
8	Heywood West	3	6,303	2,101	-18	6,162	2,054	-21
9	Littleborough	3	9,391	3,130	22	9,873	3,291	27
10	Middleton Central	3	6,624	2,208	-14	6,569	2,190	-16
11	Middleton East	3	6,631	2,210	-14	6,622	2,207	-15
12	Middleton North	3	8,520	2,840	11	8,688	2,896	12
13	Middleton South	3	7,923	2,641	3	7,867	2,622	1
14	Middleton West	3	4,585	1,528	-40	4,824	1,608	-38
15	Milnrow	3	8,849	2,950	15	9,043	3,014	16
16	Newbold	3	7,773	2,591	1	7,859	2,620	1
17	Norden & Bamford	3	9,961	3,320	29	10,077	3,359	29
18	Smallbridge & Wardleworth	3	9,120	3,040	19	9,075	3,025	16
19	Spotland	3	6,676	2,225	-13	6,645	2,215	-15
20	Wardle	3	7,039	2,346	9	7,515	2,505	-4
	Totals	60	153,874	-	-	155,838	-	-
	Average	-	-	2,565	-	-	2,597	-

Source: *Electorate figures are based on information provided by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.*

Note: *The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Middleton West ward were relatively over-represented by 40%, while electors in Norden & Bamford ward were relatively under-represented by 29%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.*

3 Submissions received

18 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

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

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council

20 The Borough Council proposed retaining the present council size of 60 members, representing 20 wards.

The Liberal Democrats

21 The Liberal Democrat Group on the council (the Liberal Democrats) submitted an alternative scheme proposing 57 members representing 19 wards.

Other representations

22 Castleton Residents Association stated it preferred the present electoral arrangements for Castleton ward. Hopwood Community Association stated it preferred the Hopwood area to remain wholly within one ward, and that any amendment to the wards within Heyward Township should be made between these wards. Heywood Conservative Wards Group stated it objected to the proposals that altered the present Heywood Township. One resident objected to the proposed Bamford & Marland ward. Three residents objected to the proposed Hopwood Hall ward. One resident commented on the general review process.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

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

24 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Rochdale is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended): the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'.

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

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

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

Electorate forecasts

28 Since 1975 there has been a 3% increase in the electorate of Rochdale. However, between 1994 and 2001 there has been no substantial growth overall. The Borough Council stated there was a need to address the disparity between the electors to the south and west of the borough that are decreasing and the north and east of the borough that are increasing.

29 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 1% from 153,874 to 155,838 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006.

30 In order to prepare these forecasts, the Borough Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to unitary developments plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

31 The Liberal Democrat Group's borough-wide scheme provided the same electorate forecasts for 2006 as the Borough Council.

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

Council size

33 Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council presently has 60 members representing 20-wards. The Labour and Conservative groups jointly developed proposals for a 60 member 20-ward scheme. These proposals were amended by the Borough Council and adopted on 12 September 2003 at its official proposals.

34 In October 2001 Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council adopted a new political management system based on a Leader and Cabinet structure. The Borough Council stated that the roles for non-executive members have been made more effective through the adoption of comprehensive overview and scrutiny arrangements. It further stated that the individuality and practicality of local decision-making was retained through the four Township Committees that tend to reflect the separate community identities within the borough.

35 The Borough Council retains a 10 member Cabinet that meets monthly to formulate the Borough Council's policy and budget framework and also makes implementation decisions within the framework. The Cabinet consists of the Leader of the Council and nine members who each hold different portfolios relating to a particular area of the Borough Council's work.

36 The Borough Council argued that the borough is a complex area made up of four discrete communities that retain their own identities. The Borough Council therefore retained the four Township Committees of Heywood, Rochdale, Middleton and Pennines that it first established in 1992. These committees meet twice per quarter and comprise all the members of the wards that fall within the boundaries of each Township. The Township Committees have extensive delegated powers with at least 95% of all planning applications being dealt with at Township level. The Borough Council further stated that the Township Committees retain their own Township funds that are used for community and environment projects as well as devolved budgets for use in areas such as highway maintenance.

37 The Borough Council also has six Overview & Scrutiny Committees that enable members not involved in Cabinet decision-making to maintain a check on the delivery of local services. The Borough Council stated it operates committees that serve the regulatory and quasi-judicial functions. The regulatory committee comprises nine members who consider planning applications not dealt with at Township Committee level. The Personnel Committee considers all staffing issues relating to the Borough Council's 8,000 employees. Appeals Committees comprise at least five members who deal with a wide range of appeals, including, those relating to for example staffing. The Borough Council also retains a Standards Committee to deal with issues relating to the conduct of the councillors.

38 It further stated that the borough has over 150 community/residents groups and over 800 voluntary groups and organisations that maintain regular contact and links with councillors. In addition to this some members take on regional local government roles, for example, active involvement in the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.

39 Based on the current committee sizes the Borough Council stated that the total number of seats on the Committees worked out at four per member. This committee work did not include councillors' commitment to outside bodies and representative functions. The Borough Council argued that having operated a modernised structure since 1998, it considered that a reduction in council size would have a detrimental effect on the representational workload of councillors. The Borough Council stated that the average size of the Cabinet, Regulatory and Overview & Scrutiny Committees is 10 members. It therefore argued that, given the wide briefs of these

committees, a reduction in the overall number of members would reduce the Borough Council's effectiveness.

40 With regard to councillor workload, the Borough Council stated that these arrangements meant that on average councillors attended 40 scheduled Committee meetings per annum. It argued that there was insufficient evidence to suggest that a reduction in councillors could be achieved without sacrificing local decision-making at Township level or reducing the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny.

41 The Borough Council therefore argued that a reduction in councillors would diminish the effectiveness of Cabinet and Township decisions. The Borough Council also stated that this would lead to the centralisation of the decision-making process and damage the viability of the well established Township Committee structures. It further argued that a reduction would lead to unacceptably high ward caseloads for the councillors and jeopardise the councillors' participation in external events. It also stated that it was not convinced that an increase in council size was appropriate, as it considered the high workload on councillors an argument for increased support. It therefore proposed retaining the present political management system within a council of 60 members.

42 The Liberal Democrats stated that they initially supported the Borough Council's proposal for retention of 60 members within a pattern of 20 wards. However, in considering that the resulting ward boundary amendments would be unpopular, they alternatively proposed reducing the number of wards by one to 19 and the number of councillors by three to 57.

43 The Liberal Democrats stated that a reduction in council size would bring Rochdale into line with the rest of the Greater Manchester area in terms of average electorate per ward. They stated that such a decrease in council size would lead to a small increase in the workload for councillors. However, they also accepted that this increase did not take into account other pressures on councillors' time, such as participation on regional and sub-regional bodies.

44 We have given careful consideration to all the evidence and representations received. In evaluating the appropriate council size on which to base our draft recommendations, we give more weight to argumentation and evidence that establishes how the Borough Council will operate effectively on a proposed size, whatever that size may be.

45 We have little doubt that the council could operate effectively and conveniently under a council size of either 60 or 57 members albeit in relation to 57 members, with a number of adjustments to the overview and scrutiny commissions. However, it appears to us that the balance of argumentation and evidence points in favour of the Borough Council's proposal, which addressed both the political management and representative roles of councillors in a more persuasive manner than that submitted by the Liberal Democrats. As mentioned earlier, we cannot take into consideration levels of representation in other councils when determining the most appropriate council size. Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by retaining a council of 60 members as proposed by the Borough Council.

Electoral arrangements

46 Having reviewed the submissions received at Stage One, we propose adopting the council size proposed by the Borough Council as the basis of our draft recommendations. This would provide for 60 members based on a 20-ward pattern.

47 At Stage One the main issue of contention between the proposals from the Borough Council and the Liberal Democrats was that of council size. This made the ward patterns developed, particularly in the south and centre of the borough, mutually exclusive.

48 Both schemes were the subject of extensive public consultation. We also noted the opposition we received to the Borough Council's proposals in two areas. One resident objected to the present Norden & Bamford ward being split due to political and geographical considerations. Within the Heywood and Middleton areas we received objections from two local organisations and three local residents relating to the Borough Council's proposed Hopwood Hall ward. However, we cannot look at ward proposals in isolation, and having carefully considered all the responses received at Stage One, we are convinced that the proposal submitted by the Borough Council in both areas represents the best basis for draft recommendations that balance the statutory criteria.

49 Both borough-wide schemes provide good levels of electoral equality, however, in view of our recommendations on council size, the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Borough Council's proposals and the consultation exercise that it undertook, we have decided to base our recommendations on the Borough Council's scheme.

50 We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or the Liberal Democrats' proposals. We also consider that the Borough Council has provided more persuasive evidence with regard to the most appropriate council size. In view of this we have been unable to incorporate elements of the Liberal Democrats' scheme and do not discuss it further in the sections below.

51 The following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- a) Brimrod & Deeplish, Central & Falinge, Healey, Heywood North, Norden & Bamford and Spotland wards;
- b) Balderstone, Castleton, Heywood South, Heywood West, Middleton Central, Middleton East, Middleton North, Middleton South and Middleton West wards;
- c) Littleborough, Milnrow, Newbold, Smallbridge & Wardleworth and Wardle wards.

52 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

Brimrod & Deeplish, Central & Falinge, Healey, Heywood North, Norden & Bamford and Spotland wards

53 These unparished wards, located in the west of the borough, are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 18% below the borough average in Brimrod & Deeplish ward (18% below by 2006), 1% below the borough average in Central & Falinge ward (2% below by 2006), 28% above the borough average in Healey ward (29% above by 2006), 9% below the borough average in Heywood North ward (10% below by 2006), 29% above the borough average in Norden & Bamford ward (29% above by 2006) and 13% below the borough average in Spotland ward (15% below by 2006).

54 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that the north-west of the borough be represented by six three-member wards. It proposed uniting the terraced housing in the Falinge area that focuses around Spotland Community Centre into a proposed Spotland & Falinge ward. It further proposed a new Central & Deeplish ward comprising the Stoneyfield area in the south and the area below the St Mary's Gate/A58 road in the north. It argued that this ward would unite the community situated around the Milkstone Road railway bridge.

55 The Borough Council proposed an Inner Rochdale ward comprising the Mitchell Hey area in the south-east and the Town Head area in the centre of the ward. It proposed that this ward should include the unified area around Whitworth Road that is presently split between three wards, the Wardleworth area and the estates of Lower Falinge and College Bank.

56 The Borough Council stated that its rationale for the north west of the borough was guided by the geographical structure of Healey ward and the increase in new build in the Healey, Norden and Bamford areas. It therefore proposed that the Norden and Bamford areas be divided, with the area of Brimrod presently in Marland & Brimrod ward and the area of Oakenrod presently in Spotland ward being combined into a new Bamford & Marland ward linked by Rock Valley Way.

57 It argued that it was not possible within the present Healey ward to cross the Healey Dell without first travelling one and a half miles through two other wards to get to the other side. It therefore proposed that the present Healey ward be split along the Dell with the area to the east of it being placed in the new Healey ward. This ward would also include the area of Central and Falinge to the north of Falinge Park School and Falinge Park. It further proposed that the Bothroyd estate to the west be included in the proposed Spotland & Falinge ward with the areas of Cutgate, Spotland and Greave, to which it is similar in character.

58 The Borough Council proposed that the remaining area west of the Dell would be placed in the proposed Norden & Caldershaw ward that would also include the Norden settlement, new build within the Caldershaw area and the Somerset Grove area from the present Spotland ward.

59 At Stage One we received one objection from a local resident to the Borough Council's proposed Bamford & Marland ward on the grounds of the close geographical proximity of the Norden and Bamford areas to each other. This resident also stated that she perceived the purposes of the Borough Council proposals were 'purely party political on their behalf to give them more votes'.

60 Having adopted a council size of 60 members we are persuaded that the Borough Council's proposals for this area provide the best basis for the draft recommendations. We noted the objections to the proposed Bamford & Marland ward, however we cannot take into account the potential party political implications of boundary amendments in proposing the draft recommendations. Being at the western edge of the borough and surrounded by a large rural hinterland, a ward pattern for this area would need to divide the remaining urban areas in such a way as to meet the statutory criteria. We are therefore persuaded that the proposed Bamford & Marland ward compliments the most viable ward pattern available for this area of the borough.

61 However, to improve community links around the Redfearn Wood area we propose amending the boundaries between the proposed Norden & Caldershaw and Spotland & Falinge wards, with Redfearn Wood area now being transferred to the latter ward. We consider that this amendment would unite a continuous urban area between Redfearn Wood and Brotherod Wood within one ward, and would not have an adverse effect on the electoral equality in the surrounding wards.

62 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 2% above the borough average in Bamford & Marland ward (2% above by 2006), 5% below the borough average in Central & Deeplish ward (6% below by 2006), 1% below the borough average in Healey ward (equal to the average by 2006), 1% below the borough average in Inner Rochdale ward (4% below by 2006), 7% below the borough average in Norden & Caldershaw ward (7% below by 2006) and 7% above the borough average in Spotland & Falinge ward (5% above by 2006).

Balderstone, Castleton, Heywood South, Heywood West, Middleton Central, Middleton East, Middleton North, Middleton South and Middleton West wards

63 These unparished wards are located towards the south of the borough and are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 3% below the borough average in Balderstone ward (4% below by 2006), 1% above the borough average in Castleton ward (1% below by 2006), 10% above the borough average in Heywood South ward (13% above by 2006), 18% below the borough average in Heywood West ward (21% below by 2006), 14% below the borough average in Middleton Central ward (16% below by 2006), 14% below the borough average in Middleton East ward (15% below by 2006), 11% above the borough average in Middleton North ward (12% above by 2006), 3% above the borough average in Middleton South ward (1% above by 2006) and 40% below the borough average in Middleton West ward (38% below by 2006).

64 At Stage One the Borough Council stated the population in the south and west of the borough was decreasing, and that between the Townships of Heywood and Middleton it considered there had to be a reduction of one ward. In terms of allocation it stated that Heywood Township would be too small for three wards and that Middleton Township would be too large for four wards.

65 The Borough Council therefore proposed that part of the present Heywood South ward and that part of the present Middleton Central ward to the north of Hollin Lane be combined in a proposed Hopwood Hall ward. This would link the Lane End area north of the M62 motorway with the Hollins area to the south of the same motorway.

66 It argued that this proposal would enable the townships of Heywood and Middleton to be represented by seven wards and provide the best balance between the statutory criteria. It admitted that this proposal would be contentious locally. However, it stated that the parts of Heywood and Middleton within the proposed ward would still retain distinct representation on both the Heywood and Middleton Townships. It argued that this proposal provided the most viable ward pattern for the south of the borough. It further noted that the Liberal Democrats' alternative proposals for linking the areas of Middleton's Village and the Silver Birch estate within Heywood South did not take into account projected expansion of the Silver Birch area envisaged through the Borough Council's master plan for the Langley area.

67 The Borough Council proposed a new Heywood West ward that would comprise the present Heywood West ward and the Broadfield area to its east. It proposed a Heywood North ward bounded to its north by the Bury & Rochdale Old Road and including the Bottom O 'Th' Brow area in the west. It proposed to include the Captain Fold area in the east and that area above Walton Street to the south in this ward.

68 The Borough Council proposed a new Castleton ward that would comprise the present Castleton ward and the Thornham settlement from the present Middleton North ward. It further proposed that Balderstone ward remain the same as at present.

69 To the south, the Borough Council proposed a new Bowlee Park ward bounded by the M62 motorway to the north and the North Manchester Golf Course to the south of the ward. It proposed that this ward also comprise the Bowlee area in the west and the Langley settlement in the east of the ward.

70 The Borough Council proposed a new Middleton South ward comprising the Rhodes settlement in the west, the Lime Fields in the east and the Alkrington Garden Village area in the south. It further proposed a Middleton North ward bounded by the Rochdale A664 road to the north of the ward. It proposed this ward should comprise the John Lee Fold area towards the

southern boundary, including those groups of properties either side of the Oldham Road. The Borough Council further proposed a new Middleton East ward comprising the Mills Hill area in the north, the Moorclose area in the east and the areas of Jumbo and Brookside Links either side of the Wince Brook.

71 At Stage One the Castleton Residents Association stated that it was content with the present electoral arrangements for the Castleton ward. The Hopwood Community Association stated that it preferred the area that it covers remain within a Heywood ward. It also stated that it had little community identity with the Middleton area that is separated from it by green belt and the M62 motorway. It further proposed that part of the present Heywood South ward north of Pilsworth Road be placed in a proposed Heywood West ward. Three residents from the Middleton Township also objected to being placed in the proposed Hopwood Hall ward.

72 Heywood Conservative Wards Group proposed that any amendments to the ward boundaries in Heywood Township should be made only between the Heywood wards.

73 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received at Stage One. We noted the objections to the proposed Hopwood Hall ward that would unite areas separated by the M62 motorway within one ward. We also noted that the only alternative proposals for the Heywood/Middleton areas from the Liberal Democrats proposed that the northern part of the Langley settlement be divided, leaving it isolated and with poor access to the remainder of their proposed Heywood South & Birch ward.

74 The Borough Council accepted that its proposals for this area would be contentious locally. However, it stated the electorate in these areas would be able to retain their respective Heywood and Middleton identities through the maintenance of effective representation on both the Heywood and Middleton Township Committees. Having visited this area, we note that between the Lane End and Hollins settlements there is good road access, provided via the Middleton A6046 road.

75 Therefore, having adopted a council size of 60 members, we are persuaded that the Borough Council's proposals to include the Hollins and Lane End settlements in the proposed Hopwood Hall ward provides the best basis for a ward pattern in this area that balances the statutory criteria. We note the objections received from local residents and interest groups. However, we are persuaded that the Borough Council's proposals facilitate the most viable ward pattern available.

76 However, to improve community links further within the ward boundaries to the south of the borough we propose a number of amendments. With regard to Balderstone ward, we propose transferring that part of the proposed Newbold ward along Queensway Road and south of the disused Rochdale Canal into Balderstone ward. As a consequence of this amendment to the north of the proposed Balderstone ward to insure a balance of the statutory criteria, we also propose transferring the Lower Place area from the proposed Balderstone ward to the proposed Newbold ward. We are convinced that these amendments would better reflect community identity in this area and would not have an adverse effect on electoral equality.

77 Between the boundaries of the proposed Bowlee Park and Middleton South ward we propose transferring the properties around Joseph Street and Higher Wood Street to the former ward to provide boundaries that better reflect community identity. We also propose transferring that part of the industrial estate to the west of the proposed Middleton North ward, around Touchet Hall Road and Boarshaw Lane, to the proposed Castleton ward. We note the responses submitted by the Castleton Residents Association, The Hopwood Community Association and the Heywood Conservative Wards Group. However, we are persuaded that the Borough Council's proposals offer the best basis for a ward pattern in terms of a viable scheme for the whole of the borough. These changes would not have an adverse effect on the electoral

equality of the wards. We are further convinced that these amendments would provide more clearly defined ward boundaries in terms of community identity.

78 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 9% below the borough average in Balderstone ward (10% below by 2006), 2% above the borough average in Castleton ward (1% above by 2006), 3% above the borough average in Bowlee Park ward (5% above by 2006), 2% above the borough average in Heywood North ward (2% above by 2006), 6% above the borough average in Heywood West ward (2% above by 2006), 2% above the borough average in Hopwood Hall ward (3% above by 2006), 1% above the borough average in Middleton East ward (equal to the average by 2006), 2% above the borough average in Middleton North ward (3% above by 2006) and 3% above the borough average in Middleton South ward (1% below by 2006).

Littleborough, Milnrow, Newbold, Smallbridge & Wardleworth and Wardle wards

79 These unparished wards are in the east of the borough and are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 22% above the borough average in Littleborough ward (27% above by 2006), 15% above the borough average in Milnrow ward (16% above by 2006), 1% above the borough average in Newbold ward (1% above by 2006), 19% above the borough average in Smallbridge & Wardleworth ward (16% above by 2006) and 9% above the borough average in Wardle ward (4% below by 2006).

80 At Stage One the Borough Council stated that the large electorate in the Pennines wards left little option for manoeuvre in the east of the borough. It therefore proposed five new three-member wards for this area that are quite similar to the present configuration of wards.

81 The Borough Council proposed a new Littleborough ward comprising the Summit settlement in the north and the Smithy Bridge settlement in the south of the ward. The Borough Council stated that the Smithy Bridge settlement would retain access to the Littleborough settlement in the centre of this ward via the Hollingworth Road and Canal Street. It further proposed that the southern edge of this ward be bounded by the M62 motorway.

82 The Borough Council also proposed that the new Wardle ward comprise the Wardle settlement in the centre, and those parts of the Shore and Caldermoor settlements west of Shore Road.

83 The Borough Council further proposed that the new Milnrow & Newhey ward would exclude the Cray estate and comprise the Lady House and Butterworth Hall areas in the west of the ward. To the south the Borough Council proposed a ward to should include the Newhey and Haugh settlements.

84 The Borough Council also proposed a new Smallbridge & Firgrove ward. This ward would comprise the areas from Wardle Ashbrook Hey and Hurstead generally north of the Halifax Road, the east of Wardle Road and Ash Brook and the west side of Birch Road and roads up to Wardle High School. This would be linked via the Pennine View area along Alberts Royds Street and include the properties of the Bishops Street, Clover Hall, Belshill and St Annes areas. Towards the south, the ward would continue with the inclusion of the Cray and Firgrove areas.

85 It further proposed that the new Newbold ward comprise the Newbold Brow area, with the Belfield area to the north and the Queensway area to the west being linked by the retained part of Deeplish south of the canal.

86 Having adopted a council size of 60 members we are persuaded that the Borough Council's proposals for this area provide the best basis for the draft recommendations. However, to improve community links and insure better access within these wards we propose two amendments.

87 As stated above, in paragraph 76, we propose transferring that area of Lower Place, in the Borough Council's proposed Balderstone ward into the proposed Newbold ward. As a consequence of this amendment, we further propose transferring that area along Queensway Road and south of the disused Rochdale Canal into the proposed Balderstone ward. We believe this amendment would provide a better reflection of community identity.

88 We further propose amending the boundary between Smallbridge & Firgrove and Milnrow & Newhey wards. We propose transferring that area south of the disused railway line and around Buckley Hill Lane into the latter ward. These changes would not have an adverse effect on the electoral equality for these wards, and unite the Buckley Hill Lane area in a ward that would provide a better reflection of community identity.

89 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 5% below the borough average in Littleborough ward (4% below by 2006), 4% above the borough average in Newbold ward (5% above by 2006), 1% above the borough average in Milnrow & Newhey ward (3% above by 2006), 3% below the borough average in Smallbridge & Firgrove ward (4% below by 2006) and 6% below the borough average in Wardle ward (2% above by 2006).

Electoral cycle

90 Under section 7(3) of the Local Government Act 1972, all Metropolitan boroughs have a system of elections by thirds.

Conclusions

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

- a council size of 60 there should be retained;
- there should be 20 wards;
- the boundaries of all 20 existing wards should be modified.

92 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following areas:

- the boundaries between Balderstone and Newbold wards, Bowlee Park and Middleton South wards, Middleton North and Castleton wards, Norden & Caldershaw and Spotland & Falinge wards, Smallbridge & Firgrove and Milnrow & Newhey wards should be amended.

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

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 Electorate		2006 Electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	60	60	60	60
Number of wards	20	20	20	20
Average number of electors per councillor	2,565	2,565	2,597	2,597
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	12	0	13	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	4	0	5	0

94 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 12 to none. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

Draft recommendation

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council should comprise 60 councillors serving 20 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A and the large maps.

Map 2: Draft recommendations for Rochdale

5 What happens next?

95 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Rochdale contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 22 April 2003. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

96 Express your views by writing directly to us:

**Team Leader
Rochdale Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

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

Appendix A

Draft recommendations for Rochdale: Detailed mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the areas that are shown in more detail in the large maps.

The **large maps** illustrate the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Rochdale.

Map A1: Draft recommendations for Rochdale: Key map

Appendix B

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. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table B1: Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria

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