

Draft recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements for  
Maidstone in Kent

*November 2000*

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

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# CONTENTS

|  | page      |
|--|-----------|
| SUMMARY  | <i>v</i>  |
| 1 INTRODUCTION   | <i>1</i>  |
| 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS                                 | <i>5</i>  |
| 3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED                                       | <i>9</i>  |
| 4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS                             | <i>11</i> |
| 5 NEXT STEPS   | <i>25</i> |
| APPENDICES   |           |
| A Maidstone Borough Council's Proposed<br>Electoral Arrangements | <i>27</i> |
| B The Statutory Provisions                                       | <i>31</i> |

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



## SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Maidstone on 9 May 2000.

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

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

- **in 16 of the 28 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and 11 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 17 of the 28 wards would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and 13 wards by more than 20 per cent.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 84 – 85) are that:

- **Maidstone Borough Council should have 55 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 27 wards, instead of 28 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one, and five wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to be held by thirds.**

These draft 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 six of the proposed 27 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 expected to improve further with the number of electors per councillor in 26 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea, Boxley and Thurnham.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 14 November 2000. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 22 January 2001:

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Website: [www.lgce.gov.uk](http://www.lgce.gov.uk)**

Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

|    | <b>Ward name</b>         | <b>Number of councillors</b> | <b>Constituent areas</b>  | <b>Map reference</b> |
|----|--------------------------|------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1  | Allington*               | 3                            | Allington ward (part)   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 2  | Barming                  | 1                            | <i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Barming and Teston)   | Map 2                |
| 3  | Bearsted                 | 3                            | Bearsted ward (part – that part of Bearsted parish that lies in Bearsted ward); Thurnham ward (part – that part of Bearsted parish that lies in Thurnham ward)      | Map 2 & large map    |
| 4  | Boughton Monchelsea      | 1                            | Boughton Monchelsea ward (part – the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton)  | Map 2 & large map    |
| 5  | Boxley                   | 3                            | Boxley ward (part – the Boxley North and Boxley South parish wards of Boxley parish) Detling ward (part – the parish of Bredhurst)                                  | Map 2 & large map    |
| 6  | Bridge*                  | 2                            | Allington ward (part); Bridge ward (part)   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 7  | Coxheath & Hunton        | 2                            | Coxheath ward (the parish of Coxheath); Marden ward (part – the parish of Hunton)   | Map 2                |
| 8  | Detling & Thurnham       | 1                            | Boxley ward (part – the Boxley South East parish ward of Boxley parish); Detling ward (part – the parish of Detling); Thurnham ward (part – the parish of Thurnham) | Map 2 & large map    |
| 9  | Downswood & Otham        | 1                            | Langley ward (part – the parishes of Downswood and Otham)   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 10 | East*                    | 3                            | Boxley ward (part – the Boxley Woodlands parish ward of Boxley parish); East ward   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 11 | Fant*                    | 3                            | Bridge ward (part); Heath ward (part)   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 12 | Harrietsham & Lenham     | 2                            | Harrietsham and Lenham ward (part – the parishes of Harrietsham and Lenham)   | Map 2                |
| 13 | Headcorn                 | 2                            | Headcorn ward (part – the parishes of Headcorn, Ulcombe and Boughton Malherbe); Sutton Valence ward (part – the parish of East Sutton)                              | Map 2                |
| 14 | Heath*                   | 2                            | Heath ward (part); Bridge ward (part)   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 15 | High Street*             | 3                            | High Street ward; South ward (part)   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 16 | Langley & Sutton Valence | 1                            | Langley ward (part – the parish of Langley); Sutton Valence ward (part – the parish of Sutton Valence)  | Map 2                |

| <b>Ward name</b>      | <b>Number of councillors</b> | <b>Constituent areas</b>  | <b>Map reference</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| 17 Leeds              | 1                            | <i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Leeds and Broomfield & Kingswood)   | Map 2                |
| 18 Loose              | 1                            | <i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Loose)  | Map 2 & large map    |
| 19 Marden             | 2                            | Marden ward (part – the parishes of Marden and Linton); Yalding ward (part – the parish of Collier Street)  | Map 2                |
| 20 North*             | 3                            | <i>Unchanged</i> ; North ward   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 21 North Downs        | 1                            | Hollingbourne ward (part – the parishes of Hollingbourne, Huckling, Bicknor, Wormshill and Frinsted); Detling ward (part – the parish of Stockbury); Harrietsham & Lenham ward (part – the parishes of Wichling and Otterden) | Map 2                |
| 22 Park Wood*         | 2                            | Park Wood ward (part); Boughton Monchelsea ward (part – the parish ward of Boughton Monchelsea North)   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 23 Shepway East*      | 2                            | Shepway East ward (part); Park Wood ward (part)   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 24 Shepway West*      | 3                            | Shepway West ward; Shepway East ward (part); Park Wood ward (part)  | Map 2 & large map    |
| 25 South*             | 3                            | South ward (part)   | Map 2 & large map    |
| 26 Staplehurst        | 2                            | <i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Staplehurst)  | Map 2                |
| 27 Yalding & Farleigh | 2                            | Yalding ward (part – the parishes of Yalding and Nettleshead); Farleigh ward (the parishes of East and West Farleigh)   | Map 2 & large Map    |

Notes: 1 Maidstone is the only unparished part of the borough and comprises the 11 wards indicated by an \* above.

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Maidstone

|    | <b>Ward name</b>         | <b>Number of councillors</b> | <b>Electorate (2000)</b> | <b>Number of electors per councillor</b> | <b>Variance from average %</b> | <b>Electorate (2005)</b> | <b>Number of electors per councillor</b> | <b>Variance from average %</b> |
|----|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 1  | Allington                | 3                            | 5,391                    | 1,797                                    | -9                             | 6,510                    | 2,170                                    | 4                              |
| 2  | Barming                  | 1                            | 1,894                    | 1,894                                    | -4                             | 1,964                    | 1,964                                    | -6                             |
| 3  | Bearsted                 | 3                            | 6,521                    | 2,174                                    | 10                             | 6,642                    | 2,214                                    | 6                              |
| 4  | Boughton Monchelsea      | 1                            | 2,086                    | 2,086                                    | 6                              | 2,109                    | 2,109                                    | 1                              |
| 5  | Boxley                   | 3                            | 6,553                    | 2,184                                    | 11                             | 6,596                    | 2,199                                    | 5                              |
| 6  | Bridge                   | 2                            | 3,977                    | 1,989                                    | 1                              | 4,100                    | 2,050                                    | -2                             |
| 7  | Coxheath & Hunton        | 2                            | 3,566                    | 1,783                                    | -10                            | 3,785                    | 1,893                                    | -10                            |
| 8  | Detling & Thurnham       | 1                            | 2,203                    | 2,203                                    | 12                             | 2,254                    | 2,254                                    | 8                              |
| 9  | Downswood & Otham        | 1                            | 2,148                    | 2,148                                    | 9                              | 2,293                    | 2,293                                    | 10                             |
| 10 | East                     | 3                            | 6,406                    | 2,135                                    | 8                              | 6,535                    | 2,178                                    | 4                              |
| 11 | Fant                     | 3                            | 5,810                    | 1,937                                    | -2                             | 6,058                    | 2,019                                    | -3                             |
| 12 | Harrietsham & Lenham     | 2                            | 4,051                    | 2,026                                    | 3                              | 4,231                    | 2,116                                    | 1                              |
| 13 | Headcorn                 | 2                            | 3,941                    | 1,971                                    | 0                              | 3,985                    | 1,993                                    | -5                             |
| 14 | Heath                    | 2                            | 3,111                    | 1,556                                    | -21                            | 3,965                    | 1,983                                    | -5                             |
| 15 | High Street              | 3                            | 5,829                    | 1,943                                    | -2                             | 6,027                    | 2,009                                    | -4                             |
| 16 | Langley & Sutton Valence | 1                            | 2,151                    | 2,151                                    | 9                              | 2,183                    | 2,183                                    | 4                              |
| 17 | Leeds                    | 1                            | 1,883                    | 1,883                                    | -5                             | 1,910                    | 1,910                                    | -9                             |
| 18 | Loose                    | 1                            | 1,894                    | 1,894                                    | -4                             | 1,920                    | 1,920                                    | -8                             |
| 19 | Marden                   | 2                            | 3,896                    | 1,948                                    | -1                             | 3,931                    | 1,966                                    | -6                             |
| 20 | North                    | 3                            | 5,649                    | 1,883                                    | -5                             | 5,868                    | 1,956                                    | -6                             |
| 21 | North Downs              | 1                            | 1,992                    | 1,992                                    | 1                              | 2,030                    | 2,030                                    | -3                             |
| 22 | Park Wood                | 2                            | 2,630                    | 1,315                                    | -33                            | 3,917                    | 1,959                                    | -6                             |

|    | <b>Ward name</b>   | <b>Number of councillors</b> | <b>Electorate (2000)</b> | <b>Number of electors per councillor</b> | <b>Variance from average %</b> | <b>Electorate (2005)</b> | <b>Number of electors per councillor</b> | <b>Variance from average %</b> |
|----|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 23 | Shepway East       | 2                            | 4,433                    | 2,217                                    | 12                             | 4,467                    | 2,234                                    | 7                              |
| 24 | Shepway West       | 3                            | 6,295                    | 2,098                                    | 6                              | 6,333                    | 2,111                                    | 1                              |
| 25 | South              | 3                            | 5,743                    | 1,914                                    | -3                             | 6,576                    | 2,192                                    | 5                              |
| 26 | Staplehurst        | 2                            | 4,505                    | 2,253                                    | 14                             | 4,737                    | 2,369                                    | 13                             |
| 27 | Yalding & Farleigh | 2                            | 4,509                    | 2,030                                    | 3                              | 4,113                    | 2,057                                    | -2                             |
|    | <b>Totals</b>      | <b>55</b>                    | <b>108,617</b>           | <b>-</b>                                 | <b>-</b>                       | <b>115,039</b>           | <b>-</b>                                 | <b>-</b>                       |
|    | <b>Averages</b>    | <b>-</b>                     | <b>-</b>                 | <b>1,975</b>                             | <b>-</b>                       | <b>-</b>                 | <b>2,092</b>                             | <b>-</b>                       |

*Source: Electorate figures are based on Maidstone Borough Council's submission.*

*Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the 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 draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Maidstone in Kent on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the 12 two-tier districts in Kent 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 2005.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Maidstone. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in October 1975 (Report No. 101). The electoral arrangements of Kent County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 402). We completed a directed electoral review of Medway in 1996. We expect to commence a periodic electoral review of Medway later this year, and of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

5 We also have regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999). This sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equality of representation across the borough 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 borough 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 borough’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 The review is in four stages (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

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

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, ie in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities.

11 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Kent 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 Order under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas, and our present *Guidance*.

12 Stage One began on 9 May 2000, when we wrote to Maidstone Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Kent County Council, Kent Police Authority, the local authority associations, Kent Association of Parish Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 31 July 2000.

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

14 Stage Three began on 14 November 2000 and will end on 22 January 2001. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

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



## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 The Borough of Maidstone covers 39,368 hectares with a population of 140,700. It includes the town of Maidstone which is the commercial and industrial centre of the borough, having direct road and rail access to London and the Kent and Sussex coasts. Maidstone covers one of the largest hop-growing areas in the country and through it runs the River Medway. Agriculture is the main industry although general and light industry and commerce have strong footholds. The borough contains 41 parishes and Maidstone town is the only unparished area. The Council is elected by thirds.

17 The electorate of the borough is forecast to increase by 6 per cent from 108,617 to 115,039. The most significant reason for the major increases in the electorate between the years 2000 and 2005 is the consideration of the allocations in the emerging Maidstone borough-wide Local Plan for housing development. In addition to the housing allocations, planning permissions outstanding for housing development throughout the borough also explain the significant increases in electorate, although to a lesser extent.

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

19 The electorate of the borough is 108,617 (May 2000). The Council at present has 55 members who are elected from 28 wards, 12 of which are relatively urban in Maidstone town and Bearsted wards and the remainder being predominantly rural. Of the 28 wards 11 are represented by three councillors, five are represented by two councillors and 12 are single-member wards.

20 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Maidstone borough, with around 22 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in the Grove Green area of Boxley ward, Heath and Allington wards.

21 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,975 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,092 by the year 2005 if the current number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 16 of the 28 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, 12 wards by more than 20 per cent and four wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Boxley ward where the councillor represents 265 per cent more electors than the borough average.

*Map 1: Existing Wards in Maidstone*

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

|    | Ward name            | Number of councillors | Electorate (2000) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average (%) | Electorate (2005) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average (%) |
|----|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1  | Allington            | 3                     | 5,851             | 1,950                             | -1                        | 7,005             | 2,335                             | 12                        |
| 2  | Barming              | 1                     | 1,894             | 1,894                             | -4                        | 1,964             | 1,964                             | -6                        |
| 3  | Bearsted             | 3                     | 5,134             | 1,711                             | -13                       | 5,236             | 1,745                             | -17                       |
| 4  | Boughton Monchelsea  | 1                     | 2,110             | 2,110                             | 7                         | 2,937             | 2,937                             | 40                        |
| 5  | Boxley               | 1                     | 7,214             | 7,214                             | 265                       | 7,271             | 7,271                             | 248                       |
| 6  | Bridge               | 3                     | 6,447             | 2,159                             | 9                         | 6,839             | 2,280                             | 9                         |
| 7  | Coxheath             | 2                     | 3,083             | 1,542                             | -22                       | 3,263             | 1,632                             | -22                       |
| 8  | Detling              | 1                     | 1,538             | 1,538                             | -22                       | 1,589             | 1,589                             | -24                       |
| 9  | East                 | 3                     | 6,042             | 2,014                             | 2                         | 6,170             | 2,057                             | -2                        |
| 10 | Farleigh             | 1                     | 1,516             | 1,516                             | -23                       | 1,543             | 1,543                             | -26                       |
| 11 | Harrietsham & Lenham | 2                     | 4,289             | 2,145                             | 9                         | 4,477             | 2,239                             | 7                         |
| 12 | Headcorn             | 2                     | 3,705             | 1,853                             | -6                        | 3,745             | 1,873                             | -10                       |
| 13 | Heath                | 3                     | 5,961             | 1,987                             | 1                         | 6,869             | 2,290                             | 9                         |
| 14 | High Street          | 3                     | 4,735             | 1,578                             | -20                       | 4,869             | 1,623                             | -22                       |
| 15 | Hollingbourne        | 1                     | 1,181             | 1,181                             | -40                       | 1,208             | 1,208                             | -42                       |
| 16 | Langley              | 1                     | 3,124             | 3,124                             | 58                        | 3,307             | 3,307                             | 58                        |
| 17 | Leeds                | 1                     | 1,883             | 1,883                             | -5                        | 1,910             | 1,910                             | -9                        |
| 18 | Loose                | 1                     | 1,894             | 1,894                             | -4                        | 1,920             | 1,920                             | -8                        |
| 19 | Marden               | 2                     | 3,842             | 1,921                             | -3                        | 3,875             | 1,938                             | -7                        |
| 20 | North                | 3                     | 5,649             | 1,883                             | -5                        | 5,868             | 1,956                             | -6                        |
| 21 | Park Wood            | 3                     | 4,678             | 1,559                             | -21                       | 5,005             | 1,668                             | -20                       |
| 22 | Shepway East         | 3                     | 4,315             | 1,438                             | -27                       | 4,349             | 1,450                             | -31                       |
| 23 | Shepway West         | 3                     | 4,431             | 1,477                             | -25                       | 4,466             | 1,489                             | -29                       |
| 24 | South                | 3                     | 6,837             | 2,279                             | 15                        | 7,794             | 2,598                             | 24                        |
| 25 | Staplehurst          | 2                     | 4,505             | 2,253                             | 14                        | 4,737             | 2,369                             | 13                        |
| 26 | Sutton Valence       | 1                     | 1,411             | 1,411                             | -29                       | 1,438             | 1,438                             | -31                       |

| Ward name       | Number of councillors | Electorate (2000) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average (%) | Electorate (2005) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average (%) |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 27 Thurnham     | 1                     | 2,238             | 2,238                             | 13                        | 2,272             | 2,272                             | 9                         |
| 28 Yalding      | 1                     | 3,080             | 3,080                             | 56                        | 3,113             | 3,113                             | 49                        |
| <b>Totals</b>   | <b>55</b>             | <b>108,617</b>    | –                                 | –                         | <b>115,039</b>    | –                                 | –                         |
| <b>Averages</b> | –                     | –                 | <b>1,975</b>                      | –                         | –                 | <b>2,092</b>                      | –                         |

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Maidstone 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 2000, electors in Hollingbourne ward were relatively over-represented by 40 per cent, while electors in Boxley ward were relatively under-represented by 265 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

22 At the start of the review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Maidstone Borough Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

23 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission 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 13 representations during Stage One, including a borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council and a borough-wide scheme that was submitted independently by three Conservative Associations. These may be inspected at the offices of the Borough Council and the Commission by appointment.

#### **Maidstone Borough Council**

24 The Borough Council proposed a council of 55 members, the same as at present, serving 29 wards, compared to the existing 28. The Council proposed eight single-member wards, five three-member wards and 16 two-member wards. It proposed that the unparished town of Maidstone be represented by 13 wards and that the parished area of the borough be represented by 16 wards.

25 Under the Borough Council's scheme, there would be improved electoral equality with the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent in 21 wards and by no more than 20 per cent in 27 of the 29 wards. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve by 2005 with the number of electors per councillor varying by more than 10 per cent in one ward (Staplehurst) and by no more than 20 per cent in all wards. The Council's proposal is summarised at Appendix A.

#### **Kent County Council**

26 The County Council stated that it had no comments to make on the PER at this stage but would wish to make a representation at Stage Three of the review.

#### **Political Organisations**

27 Borough-wide schemes were also received from three Conservative Associations (The Conservative Group on Maidstone Borough Council, Maidstone & The Weald Conservative Association and Faversham & Mid Kent Conservative Association), hereafter referred to as the Conservatives, who each proposed the same scheme for the borough. The Conservatives proposed a 55-member council, serving 28 wards. They put forward eight single-member wards, twelve two-member wards and 11 three-member wards, proposing that the unparished area of Maidstone be represented by 11 wards and the parished area be represented by 17 wards.

28 Under the Conservatives' scheme, there would be improved electoral equality with the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent in 22 of the 28 wards and by more than 20 per cent in only one ward. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve by 2005 with the number of electors per councillor varying by more than 10 per cent in one ward

(Staplehurst) and by more than 20 per cent in no ward. The Conservatives' proposal is summarised at Appendix A.

## **Parish Councils**

29 We received representations from six parish councils. Barming Parish Council stated that it had no points to make but would continue to “maintain a watching brief on the parish boundaries at points where problems exist”. Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council proposed that the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton remain as a single-member ward and that the Commission should consider creating a new ward consisting of Park Wood and Langley wards. Marden Parish Council proposed that Linton parish be transferred to Coxheath ward and that Collier Street parish be transferred to Marden ward. Boxley Parish Council argued that Boxley ward is under-represented and proposed that High Street and Shepway West wards each transfer a councillor to Boxley ward. Ulcombe Parish Council proposed that Ulcombe parish remain in Headcorn ward and Bearsted Parish Council proposed aligning the boundaries of Bearsted borough ward with its parish boundary.

## **Other Representations**

30 We received a further three representations from the leader of Kent County Council, a borough councillor and a local resident. Mr Bruce-Lockhart, leader of Kent County Council, expressed concern that Vinters Valley Park could become separated from Boxley Parish Council under this review. Borough Councillor Luxton proposed that the Council's proposed Tovil ward should be renamed South West ward to better reflect the total identity of the whole ward. He also proposed a minor boundary change to this ward.

31 A resident argued that there are currently too many councillors on the Borough Council, contending that a reduction to around half the existing number of councillors would give more importance to those elected. The resident also supported annual elections and proposed minor amendments to the boundary of Park Wood ward.

## 4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

34 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.

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

### **Electorate Forecasts**

36 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of 6 per cent from 108,617 to 115,039 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Allington, Heath and Park Wood wards. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

37 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the Borough Council’s figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

## **Council Size**

38 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. Maidstone Borough Council at present has 55 members. The Borough Council and the Conservatives proposed retaining the existing council size.

39 A resident argued that there are currently too many councillors and that reducing the number would give more importance to those elected. The resident stated that “about half the existing number on Maidstone Borough Council would be about right”. We note the resident’s argument in favour of a dramatic reduction in council size but, in view of the lack of support for such a proposal, we have not been persuaded to adopt such a recommendation.

40 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 55 members.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

41 We have noted that the Borough Council and the Conservatives both submitted the same warding arrangement for the rural area. The two schemes were also similar in Maidstone town. Although the Conservatives queried the electorate figures used by the Borough Council, the Borough Council confirmed that their figures were as accurate as was possible at the time of submitting their scheme. Having considered the representations received, we have concluded that we should base our recommendations on a mixture of the Borough Council’s and the Conservatives’ schemes. We have endeavoured to reflect consensus between the two schemes where it exists. We consider that these schemes for the rural area have good local support while reflecting the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and are therefore content to adopt them as part of our draft recommendations.

42 However, we propose amendments to both the Council’s and the Conservatives’ schemes in the town of Maidstone, which would improve electoral equality and use more easily identifiable boundaries. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

### **Maidstone Town (unparished)**

- (a) Allington, Bridge, East, Heath and North wards;
- (b) High Street, Park Wood, Shepway East, Shepway West and South wards;

## **Rural area (parished)**

- (c) Barming, Coxheath, Farleigh, Loose, Marden and Yalding wards;
- (d) Boughton Monchelsea, Headcorn, Langley, Leeds, Sutton Valence and Staplehurst wards;
- (e) Bearsted, Boxley, Detling, Harrietsham & Lenham, Hollingbourne and Thurnham wards.

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

## **Allington, Bridge, East, Heath and North wards**

44 These five wards are situated in the north and west of the town of Maidstone and are each represented by three councillors. Under the existing council size of 55 members the number of electors per councillor in Allington and Bridge wards is 1 per cent below the borough average (12 per cent above by 2005) and 9 per cent above (8 per cent above by 2005) respectively. In East, Heath and North wards the number of electors per councillor is 2 per cent above, 1 per cent above and 5 per cent below the borough average respectively (2 per cent below, 9 per cent above and 6 per cent below respectively by 2005).

45 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed minor amendments to the boundaries of Allington, Bridge and Heath wards. It argued that the “most of the boundaries should go along distinctive features” and thus proposed dividing the existing Allington ward into a two-member Allington North ward and a two-member Allington South ward. The Council proposed an amended Bridge ward comprising the area to the south of Buckland Hill and Somerfield Road with a small alteration to the existing south west boundary of the ward.

46 The Council also proposed dividing Heath ward into a two-member North ward and a two-member South ward using Tonbridge Road as a boundary. The Council considered only minor amendments were necessary to the existing East ward and proposed incorporating the Woodlands Estate, currently in Boxley parish to improve the variance of its proposed Boxley ward.

47 Under the Council’s scheme for a 55-member council the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Allington North and Allington South wards would be 1 per cent above and 5 per cent below the borough average respectively (3 per cent above and 5 per cent above by 2005). In Bridge and East wards the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent below and 8 per cent above the borough average respectively (4 per cent below and 4 per cent above by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Heath North, Heath South and North wards would be 25 per cent below, 7 per cent below and 5 per cent below the borough average respectively (2 per cent below, 10 per cent below and 6 per cent below respectively by 2005).

48 The Conservatives proposed a three-member Allington ward similar to the existing ward but proposed transferring Buckland Lane and Little Buckland Avenue to its proposed Bridge ward. It proposed a two-member Bridge ward comprising the area south of its proposed Allington ward

to Tonbridge Road. It proposed that the area to the south of Tonbridge Road form a new three-member Fant ward and that the area to the north of Tonbridge Road form the new two-member Heath ward. The Conservatives put forward three two-member wards to comprise the existing North and East wards. It proposed a two-member Ringlestone ward incorporating the area bounded by the River Medway, Hilary Road and Boxley Road up to the prison. Its proposed two-member North ward would consist of the area to the east of this boundary to Sittingbourne Road, Hatherall Road, Park Avenue, Heathfield Road and along Boxley Road to the M20. The Conservatives proposed a two-member East ward comprising the area to the east of this boundary to Vinters Park.

49 Under the Conservatives' 55-member scheme the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Allington, Bridge, East wards would be 4 per cent below, 7 per cent below and 1 per cent above the borough average respectively (5 per cent above, 5 per cent above and 3 per cent below by 2005). In Fant, Heath, North and Ringlestone wards the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent below, 19 per cent below, 1 per cent above and 3 per cent above the borough average respectively (5 per cent below, equal to the average, 2 per cent below and 1 per cent below by 2005).

50 Having considered the representations received at Stage One we propose basing our draft recommendations on the Conservatives' scheme for Allington, Bridge, Fant and Heath wards, with some minor modifications to improve electoral equality in Allington ward and to rectify minor anomalies in its proposed Bridge and Heath wards. We also propose adopting the Borough Council's proposed warding arrangements for East and North wards. On balance we consider that the Conservatives' scheme represents a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in Allington, Bridge, Fant and Heath wards. In particular, we consider that the Conservatives' scheme utilises more easily identifiable boundaries between these wards. We considered alternative boundaries between East and North wards to create a more identifiable boundary between the wards. However, we are of the opinion that the Borough Council's proposals accurately reflect the identity of this area while providing reasonable levels of electoral equality. We note the Conservatives' proposal to create three wards for this area but have not been persuaded that we should alter the existing boundary between North and East wards. We would, however, welcome views on this proposal at Stage Three of the review.

51 In view of the under-representation that would result in the Conservatives' proposed Allington ward, we propose amending the southern boundary to include the properties on Buckland Avenue, Little Buckland Lane, Palmar Road and Grace Avenue in our proposed Bridge ward. In order to improve electoral equality in our proposed Heath ward, we also propose including all the properties on Bower Mount Road, Melford Drive, Malling Terrace and those on Queens Road up to Shaftesbury Drive. We note that the proposed new developments by Oakwood Hospital would link these properties.

52 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Allington, Bridge and East ward would be 9 per cent below, 1 per cent above and 8 per cent above the borough average respectively (4 per cent above, 2 per cent below and 4 per cent above by 2005). In Fant, Heath and North wards the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent below, 21 per cent below and 5 per cent below the borough average respectively (3 per cent below, 5 per cent below and 6 per cent below by 2005).

## **High Street, Park Wood, Shepway East, Shepway West and South wards**

53 These five wards are situated in the centre, south and east of the town of Maidstone and are each represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in High Street and Park Wood wards is 20 per cent below and 21 per cent below the borough average respectively (22 per cent below and 19 per cent below by 2005). In Shepway East, Shepway West and South wards the number of electors per councillor is 27 per cent below, 25 per cent below and 15 per cent above the borough average respectively (31 per cent below, 29 per cent below and 24 per cent above by 2005).

54 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed minor amendments to ward boundaries. It proposed a new two-member Tovil ward comprising Tovil parish with the addition of some properties from the existing High Street ward. It also proposed a two-member South ward to comprise the existing South ward minus the new Tovil ward with the addition of some properties from High Street ward. The Council also proposed a minor amendment to the existing High Street ward, proposing that part be transferred to its proposed Tovil ward.

55 The Borough Council proposed a minor modification to the existing Shepway East ward, suggesting that the properties on Orchard Road be transferred to its proposed Detling and Thurnham ward, and that those on Ashford Road be transferred to its proposed Boxley ward. It proposed amending the northern boundary of Shepway West ward to include West Park Road, York Road and The Spinney in High Street ward and proposed amending the southern boundary of the existing Park Wood ward to transfer new developments on Langley Park Farm West, Pested Bars Road and Furfield Quarry from Boughton Monchelsea parish. The Council argued that it would be more appropriate for these properties to be included in an urban ward. Consequently, parish warding would be required of both Boughton Monchelsea and Otham parishes.

56 Under the Borough Council's 55-member scheme the number of electors per councillor in its proposed High Street, Park Wood and Shepway East wards would be 12 per cent above, 21 per cent below and 3 per cent above the borough average respectively (8 per cent above, 2 per cent below and 2 per cent below by 2005). In Shepway West, South and Tovil wards the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent above, 1 per cent above and 10 per cent below the borough average respectively (3 per cent above, 5 per cent above and 4 per cent below by 2005).

57 The Conservatives proposed no change to the existing warding arrangements for Shepway East and Shepway West wards, other than to transfer numbers 191 – 239 Sutton Road from Park Wood ward to Shepway East ward. They also proposed including the new development on Pested Bars Road currently in Boughton Monchelsea parish in the Park Wood ward. The Conservatives' only proposed amendment to the existing South and High Street ward was a slight boundary amendment between the two wards.

58 Under the Conservatives' 55-member scheme the number of electors per councillor in its proposed High Street and Park Wood wards would be 4 per cent below and 21 per cent below the borough average respectively (equal to the average and 2 per cent below by 2005). In Shepway East, Shepway West and South wards the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent

above, 12 per cent above and 1 per cent below the borough average respectively (4 per cent above, 6 per cent above and 3 per cent above by 2005).

59 Councillor Luxton argued that the proposed Tovil ward should be named South West ward conceding that although Tovil parish forms a major part of the ward, the name South West would “better reflect the total identity of the ward”. He also suggested that the north western boundary of this ward should run along the eastern side of Eccleston Road and that numbers 2 – 44 Tovil Road should be transferred from High Street ward to the proposed Tovil ward. He stated that a community centre is proposed to be built in Eccleston Road and “it seems only logical that it should be in the ward that it serves”. A resident proposed that the northern boundary of Park Wood ward should follow the centre of Sutton Road “to keep natural communities together”, while further stating that the new development at Pested Bars Road should be included in the proposed Park Wood ward.

60 We have noted the general consensus for minimal change to these wards but propose some minor modifications to the schemes received at Stage One in order to improve community interest and identity and to secure more easily identifiable boundaries between the wards. We propose that the boundary between High Street and South wards should follow the northern boundary of Tovil parish and then along the centre of Armstrong Road. Having considered the representations received, we remain of the view that this would be the most easily identifiable boundary between the two wards which would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality without adversely affecting community identity. We have noted the comments of Councillor Luxton but are content that the existing named South ward would accurately reflect the identity of the ward. However, we would welcome further views at Stage Three.

61 We propose that the boundary between Shepway East and Shepway West wards should follow the middle of Oxford Road, Worcester Road and Leicester Road to Sutton Road. Officers of the Commission having visited the area, we considered that this would unite the properties around the Northumberland Road shops and recreation area thus reinforcing the identity of the local community. We propose adopting the Conservatives’ proposals for the western boundary of Shepway West ward, as it uses good boundaries and retains communities within a single ward. As a consequence of the new boundaries between Shepway East and Shepway West wards, we propose that Mote Park be transferred to the proposed Shepway West ward. We propose incorporating the area of Park Wood ward to the north of Sutton Road in the new Shepway East ward to improve electoral equality. We also consider that Sutton Road would represent a strong boundary between Shepway East and Shepway West wards and our proposed Park Wood ward. We are of the view that the Borough Council’s and Conservatives’ proposal to transfer the new developments on Pested Bars Road, Langley Park Farm West and Furfield Quarry from Boughton Monchelsea parish to the urban Park Wood ward would reflect the more urban identity of the ward and propose adopting this as part of our draft recommendations. In order to further improve community identity in the area while creating a clear boundary, we also propose that the northern boundary of Park Wood ward should be along the centre of Sutton Road then along the centre of Gore Court Road. Consequently, the properties on the northern side of Sutton Road, currently in Park Wood ward would be transferred to Shepway East and Shepway West wards.

62 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed High Street and Park Wood wards would be 2 per cent below and 33

per cent below the borough average respectively (4 per cent below and 6 per cent below by 2005). In Shepway East, Shepway West and South wards the number of electors per councillor would be 12 per cent above, 6 per cent above and 3 per cent below the borough average respectively (7 per cent above, 1 per cent above and 5 per cent above by 2005).

### **Barming, Coxheath, Farleigh, Loose, Marden and Yalding**

63 These wards are situated in the west and south west of the borough. Barming ward (comprising the parishes of Barming, Teston), Farleigh ward (comprising the parishes of East Farleigh and West Farleigh), Loose ward (comprising the parish of Loose) and Yalding ward (comprising the parishes of Nettleshead, Yalding and Collier Street) are each represented by a single councillor. Coxheath ward (comprising the parish of Coxheath) and Marden (comprising the parishes of Marden, Hunton and Linton) wards are both represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements the number of electors per councillor in Barming, Coxheath, Farleigh, Loose, Marden and Yalding wards varies from the borough average by 4 per cent, 22 per cent, 23 per cent, 4 per cent, 3 per cent and 56 per cent respectively (6 per cent, 22 per cent, 26 per cent, 8 per cent, 7 per cent and 49 per cent respectively by 2005).

64 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed no change to the existing Barming and Loose wards. In order to improve the electoral inequality in the existing Farleigh and Yalding wards, it proposed combining Farleigh ward with Yalding and Nettleshead parishes to form a new two-member Yalding & Farleigh ward. It also proposed combining the parishes of Coxheath and Hunton to form a two-member ward. Although the Council acknowledged that Coxheath parish could join with Linton parish to form a two-member ward, it reasoned that this would result in a ward variance in excess of 10 per cent whereas their proposal would provide better electoral equality. Consequently, it proposed that the parishes of Linton, Collier Street and Marden form a two-member Marden ward.

65 The Conservatives proposed the same arrangement for these wards. They supported their proposals in this area by stating that these arrangements would “improve voter ratio” but also argued that their proposed Marden ward would “combine identifiable communities”.

66 Marden Parish Council stated that its preference was for Linton parish to join Coxheath parish in a two-member ward and for Hunton parish to remain in a ward with Marden parish and be joined by Collier Street. It argued that “these parishes are all adjacent to each other in the rural area and have many similarities”. Barming Parish Council stated that it had no comments to make at this stage.

67 In view of the general consensus in this area, we propose to endorse the proposals of the Borough Council and the Conservatives in their entirety. We have noted the comments of Marden Parish Council in favour of a two-member Linton and Coxheath ward but remain of the opinion that, at this stage, the majority view is that Coxheath should be combined in a ward with Hunton parish. However, we have reservations about the higher level of electoral inequality that would result in a Coxheath and Linton ward, and welcome further views on this proposal at Stage Three.

68 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council there would be improved electoral equality with the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Barming, Coxheath

& Hunton, Loose, Marden and Yalding & Farleigh wards varying by 4 per cent, 10 per cent, 4 per cent, 1 per cent and 3 per cent from the borough average respectively (6 per cent, 10 per cent, 8 per cent, 6 per cent and 2 per cent respectively by 2005).

## **Boughton Monchelsea, Headcorn, Langley, Leeds, Sutton Valence and Staplehurst**

69 These wards are situated in the centre and south of the borough and are each represented by a single councillor, except for Headcorn and Staplehurst wards which are both currently represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Boughton Monchelsea ward (comprising the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton), Headcorn ward (comprising the parishes of Headcorn, Boughton Malherbe and Ulcombe), Langley ward (comprising the parishes of Langley, Otham and Downswood), Leeds ward (comprising the parishes of Leeds and Broomfield & Kingswood), Staplehurst ward (comprising the parish of Staplehurst) and Sutton Valence ward (comprising the parishes of Sutton Valence and East Sutton) varies from the borough average by 7 per cent, 6 per cent, 58 per cent, 5 per cent, 14 per cent and 29 per cent respectively (41 per cent, 10 per cent, 58 per cent, 9 per cent, 13 per cent and 31 per cent by 2005).

70 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed no change to the existing Leeds and Staplehurst wards. Although it acknowledged that this would leave Staplehurst ward with a variance of 13 per cent above the borough average by 2005, it supported retaining its existing warding arrangements stating that “it is not possible to vary the boundaries”. The Council supported its proposal by illustrating that its geographical location at the edge of the borough would not facilitate alternative warding arrangements without adversely affecting electoral equality and community identity in surrounding wards.

71 In order to account for the housing developments on Pested Bars Road, Langley Park Farm West and Furfield Quarry in Boughton Monchelsea parish, the Borough Council proposed that this area should be transferred to Park Wood ward. The Council stated that “it would be more appropriate that these were included as part of the urban area rather than the existing rural area”. In order to address the current level of under-representation in Langley ward, the Council proposed combining Sutton Valence parish of Headcorn ward with Langley parish of Langley ward to form a new single-member Langley & SuttonValence ward. As a consequence of its proposals in this area, the Council proposed that the parishes of Boughton Malherbe, East Sutton, Headcorn and Ulcombe comprise the new two-member Headcorn ward and that the parishes of Downswood and Otham form a new single-member ward. The Conservatives proposed the same warding arrangements as the Borough Council in this area.

72 Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council proposed that the parishes of Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton remain as a single-member ward and contended that the “possibility” of a merger with Sutton Valence parish is “unnecessary and would create a need for two Council members”. It suggested that the Commission consider a new urban ward comprising the Park Wood and Langley wards “in view of the large housing developments that are in the pipeline”. Ulcombe Parish Council stated its support for the proposal that the parish remain in Headcorn ward.

73 Having carefully considered all the representations received regarding this part of the rural area, we have noted that there is strong local support for the Borough Council's and Conservatives' schemes. We note that both schemes provide a good balance between achieving good electoral equality, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and providing effective and convenient local government and therefore propose to accept them in their entirety as part of our draft recommendations. We have concluded that a combined urban Park Wood and Langley ward would result in a greater number of electors than could be represented by three councillors and would lead to a consequent deterioration in electoral equality.

74 Under our draft recommendations for a 55-member council the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Boughton Monchelsea, Downswood & Otham, Headcorn, Langley & Sutton Valence, Leeds and Staplehurst wards would vary from the district average by 6 per cent, 9 per cent, equal to the average, 9 per cent, 5 per cent and 14 per cent respectively (1 per cent, 10 per cent, 5 per cent, 4 per cent, 9 per cent and 13 per cent respectively by 2005).

### **Bearsted, Boxley, Detling, Harrietsham & Lenham, Hollingbourne and Thurnham**

75 These wards are situated in the centre, north and east of the borough. Boxley ward (comprising the parish of Boxley), Detling ward (comprising the parishes of Bredhurst, Detling and Stockbury), Hollingbourne ward (comprising the parishes of Bicknor, Frinsted, Hollingbourne, Hucking and Wormshill) and Thurnham ward (comprising the parish of Thurnham and part of the parish of Bearsted) are each represented by a single councillor. Bearsted ward (comprising the parish ward of Bearsted) and Harrietsham & Lenham ward (comprising the parishes of Harrietsham, Lenham, Otterden and Wichling) are represented by three and two councillors respectively. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Bearsted, Boxley, Detling, Harrietsham & Lenham, Hollingbourne and Thurnham wards varies from the district average by 13 per cent, 265 per cent, 22 per cent, 9 per cent, 40 per cent and 13 per cent respectively (16 per cent, 248 per cent, 24 per cent, 7 per cent, 42 per cent and 9 per cent by 2005 respectively).

76 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed that Bearsted borough ward should be coterminous with the parish boundary. In view of the fact that the existing Boxley ward is too large to be represented by three councillors, the Council proposed transferring the Woodlands Estate from Boxley parish to the East ward. The Council also acknowledged that the parishes of Detling and Thurnham could not form a ward without the inclusion of some of the existing Boxley ward. It therefore proposed transferring an area east of Weaving Street in Boxley parish to a new single-member Detling & Thurnham ward. It supported this proposal by notifying us that this is also the proposed parish boundary amendment under consideration as part of the Parish Review. In order to reduce the number of electors in its proposed Detling & Thurnham ward, the Council also proposed transferring Bredhurst parish from Detling ward to the new Boxley ward and Stockbury parish from Detling ward to its proposed North Downs ward.

77 The Borough Council proposed a new single-member North Downs ward comprising the parishes of Bicknor, Frinsted, Hollingbourne, Hucking, Otterden, Stockbury, Wichling and Wormshill. Although conceding that this would form a geographically long ward, the Council argued that the parishes on the North Downs have "similar problems" and "therefore do provide

a relevant mix”. As a consequence of this proposal, the Council proposed that the parishes of Harrietsham and Lenham comprise the new two-member Harrietsham and Lenham ward because of their “historical association”. The Conservatives recommended the same warding arrangements for this area.

78 Boxley Parish Council argued that the current level of under-representation in Boxley ward could be resolved by transferring one councillor from each of High Street and Shepway West wards to this ward. It justified its proposal by stating that no alterations would be required to existing ward boundaries. Bearsted Parish Council supported the Borough Council’s proposal to realign its ward boundary with the parish boundary. Mr Bruce-Lockhart, Leader of Kent County Council, was perturbed that Boxley Parish Council could lose the management of Vinters Park as a result of the review of Maidstone.

79 In view of the general consensus in support of the Council’s and Conservatives’ proposals for these wards we propose to adopt them as our draft recommendations. We consider that the proposals would result in better overall electoral equality and do not consider that they would adversely affect the identities and interests of local communities. We have noted Boxley Parish Council’s proposals for Boxley ward but consider that the Borough Council’s and the Conservatives’ proposals would result in better levels of electoral equality. We recognise that the Grove Green area of Boxley parish is an urban overspill with little in common with the remainder of Boxley, Detling or Thurnham parishes. We have considered several alternative warding patterns including the creation of a two-member Grove Green ward and involving combinations of the remainder of Boxley parish with Detling and Thurnham parishes but have been unable to arrive at an arrangement which would not be detrimental to the levels of electoral equality. However, we would welcome views on such a proposal at Stage Three of the review.

80 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Bearsted, Boxley, Detling & Thurnham, Harrietsham & Lenham and North Downs wards would vary from the borough average by 10 per cent, 11 per cent, 12 per cent, 3 per cent and 1 per cent respectively (6 per cent, 5 per cent, 8 per cent and 1 per cent respectively by 2005).

## **Electoral Cycle**

81 We received two representations regarding the Borough Council’s electoral cycle. The Borough Council itself stated that “it did not consider the matter of the electoral cycle in detail but has generally been satisfied with the current system of election by thirds”.

82 A resident supported frequent elections, contending that “an election each year keeps the council on its toes”.

83 We have carefully considered all representations. At present, there appears to be a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained and we therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds.

## Conclusions

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

- A council of 55 members should be retained;
- there should be 27 wards;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one ward;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

85 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's and Conservative Group's proposals and our draft recommendations are summarised below:

- we propose no change to the existing Barming, Leeds, Loose, North and Staplehurst wards;
- in Maidstone we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposal for East and North wards;
- we propose adopting the Conservatives' proposals for Fant ward and propose minor modifications to its proposed Allington, Bridge, Heath, High Street and South wards;
- we propose our own warding arrangements for Park Wood, Shepway East and Shepway West wards.

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

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

|  | 2000 electorate      |                       | 2005 forecast electorate |                       |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
|  | Current arrangements | Draft recommendations | Current arrangements     | Draft recommendations |
| Number of councillors  | 55                   | 55                    | 55                       | 55                    |
| Number of wards  | 28                   | 27                    | 28                       | 27                    |
| Average number of electors per councillor                              | 1,975                | 1,975                 | 2,092                    | 2,092                 |
| Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average | 16                   | 6                     | 17                       | 1                     |
| Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average | 11                   | 2                     | 13                       | 0                     |

87 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Maidstone Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from 16 to 6. By 2005 only 1 ward is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough.

#### **Draft Recommendation**

Maidstone Borough Council should comprise 55 councillors serving 27 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

### **Parish Council Electoral Arrangements**

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

89 The parish of Boughton Monchelsea is currently served by 9 councillors representing one ward. At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed an increase in the number of parish councillors from nine to 15 to reflect the new housing developments in the north of the parish. Consequently, it proposed creating two new parish wards. It proposed a new Boughton Monchelsea North parish ward to be included in the Park Wood borough ward and that this ward be represented by four parish councillors. It proposed that the remainder of Boughton Monchelsea parish be named Boughton Monchelsea South parish ward and be represented by 11 parish councillors and we are content to endorse this as part of our draft recommendations.

**Draft Recommendation**

Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, an increase of six, representing two wards: Boughton Monchelsea North parish ward (returning four councillors) and Boughton Monchelsea South parish ward (returning 11 parish councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

90 The parish of Boxley is currently served by 15 councillors serving two wards. Boxley North (returning 6 councillors) and Boxley South (returning 9 councillors). The Borough Council proposed creating two new parish wards and a reallocation of parish councillors to reflect the new ward changes. It proposed a new parish ward of Boxley Woodlands to be included in the proposed East borough ward, recommending that this ward be served by a single councillor. It also proposed creating a Boxley South East parish ward to be included in the proposed Detling & Thurnham borough ward, recommending that this ward be served by a single councillor. Consequently, it recommended that Boxley North parish ward continue to be served by six councillors and that Boxley South parish ward be served by 7 councillors and that they form part of the proposed Boxley borough ward. We are content that this is a reasonable distribution of councillors, and are therefore adopting the Borough Council’s proposals as part of our draft recommendations.

**Draft Recommendation**

Boxley Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Boxley North, returning six councillors, Boxley South, returning seven councillors, Boxley South East, returning a single councillor and Boxley Woodlands, returning a single councillor. The boundary between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

91 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the Borough.

**Draft Recommendation**

For parish councils, elections should continue to be held by thirds, on the same cycle as that of the Borough Council.

**92 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Maidstone and welcome comments from the Borough Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, 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.**

*Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Maidstone*

## **5 NEXT STEPS**

93 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 22 January 2001. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the Borough Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

94 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

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

Fax: 020 7404 6142  
E-mail: [reviews@lgce.gov.uk](mailto:reviews@lgce.gov.uk)  
[www.lgce.gov.uk](http://www.lgce.gov.uk)

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



## APPENDIX A

### Maidstone Borough Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Borough Council in only 11 wards, where the Council's proposals were as follows:

*Figure A1: Maidstone Borough Council's Proposal: Constituent Areas*

| Ward name       | Constituent areas                                 |
|-----------------|---|
| Allington North | Allington ward (part); Bridge ward (part)         |
| Allington South | Allington ward (part); Bridge ward (part)         |
| Bridge          | Bridge ward (part); Heath ward (part)             |
| Heath North     | Heath ward (part)                                 |
| Heath South     | Heath ward (part); Bridge ward (part)             |
| High Street     | High Street ward (part); Shepway West ward (part) |
| Park Wood       | Park Wood ward (part); Langley ward (part)        |
| Shepway West    | Shepway West ward (part)                          |
| Shepway East    | Shepway East ward (part); Park Wood ward (part)   |
| South           | South ward (part); High Street ward (part)        |
| Tovil           | South ward (part); High Street ward (part)        |

*Figure A2: Maidstone Borough Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward*

| Ward name       | Number of councillors | Electorate (2000) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2005) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Allington North | 2                     | 3,894             | 1,992                             | 1                       | 4,290             | 2,145                             | 3                       |
| Allington South | 2                     | 3,737             | 1,869                             | -5                      | 4,402             | 2,201                             | 5                       |
| Bridge          | 2                     | 3,917             | 1,959                             | -1                      | 4,025             | 2,013                             | -4                      |
| Heath North     | 2                     | 2,965             | 1,483                             | -25                     | 4,107             | 2,054                             | -2                      |
| Heath South     | 2                     | 3,683             | 1,842                             | -7                      | 3,779             | 1,890                             | -10                     |
| High Street     | 2                     | 4,404             | 2,202                             | 12                      | 4,538             | 2,269                             | 8                       |
| Park Wood       | 3                     | 4,679             | 1,560                             | -21                     | 6,121             | 2,040                             | -2                      |
| Shepway East    | 2                     | 4,059             | 2,030                             | 3                       | 4,093             | 2,046                             | -2                      |

| <b>Ward name</b> | <b>Number of councillors</b> | <b>Electorate (2000)</b> | <b>Number of electors per councillor</b> | <b>Variance from average %</b> | <b>Electorate (2005)</b> | <b>Number of electors per councillor</b> | <b>Variance from average %</b> |
|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Shepway West     | 2                            | 4,283                    | 2,142                                    | 8                              | 4,317                    | 2,158                                    | 3                              |
| South            | 2                            | 3,975                    | 1,988                                    | 1                              | 4,385                    | 2,192                                    | 5                              |
| Tovil            | 2                            | 3,546                    | 1,773                                    | -10                            | 4,024                    | 2,012                                    | -4                             |

*Source: Electorate figures are based on Maidstone Borough Council's submission.*

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

## The Conservatives' Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Conservatives in 10 wards, where the Conservatives' proposals were as follows:

*Figure A3: The Conservatives' Proposals: Constituent Areas*

| Ward name    | Constituent areas  |
|--------------|--|
| Allington    | Allington ward (part)  |
| Bridge       | Bridge ward (part); Allington ward (part)  |
| East         | East ward (part); Boxley ward (part)   |
| Heath        | Heath ward (part)  |
| High Street  | High Street ward (part); South ward (part)   |
| North        | East ward (part); North ward (part)  |
| Ringlestone  | North ward (part)  |
| Shepway East | Shepway East ward (part); Shepway West ward (part); Park Wood ward (part); Boughton Monchelsea ward (part) |
| Shepway West | Shepway West ward (part)   |
| South        | South ward (part)  |

*Figure A4: The Conservatives' Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward*

| Ward name    | Number of councillors | Electorate (2000) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2005) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Allington    | 3                     | 5,689             | 1,896                             | -4                      | 6,635             | 2,212                             | 5                       |
| Bridge       | 2                     | 3,685             | 1,843                             | -7                      | 3,979             | 1,990                             | -5                      |
| East         | 2                     | 3,972             | 1,986                             | 1                       | 4,052             | 2,026                             | -4                      |
| Heath        | 2                     | 3,211             | 1,606                             | -19                     | 4,196             | 2,098                             | 0                       |
| High Street  | 3                     | 5,697             | 1,899                             | -4                      | 6,324             | 2,108                             | 0                       |
| North        | 2                     | 3,976             | 1,988                             | 1                       | 4,122             | 2,061                             | -2                      |
| Ringlestone  | 2                     | 4,057             | 2,029                             | 3                       | 4,179             | 2,090                             | -1                      |
| Shepway East | 2                     | 4,315             | 2,158                             | 9                       | 4,351             | 2,176                             | 4                       |
| Shepway West | 2                     | 4,431             | 2,216                             | 12                      | 4,466             | 2,233                             | 6                       |
| South        | 3                     | 5,875             | 1,958                             | -1                      | 6,498             | 2,166                             | 3                       |

*Source: Electorate figures are based on the Conservatives' submission.*

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



## APPENDIX B

### The Statutory Provisions

#### Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 In relation to shire districts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

