

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
SUTTON

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

January 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Sutton.

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



Local Government Commission for England

25 January 2000

Dear Secretary of State

On 5 January 1999 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Sutton under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in June 1999 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation. However, before we finalised our final recommendations we sought further evidence from the Borough Council and the three political parties represented on the council on the issue of council size.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraphs 119 to 120) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Sutton.

We recommend that Sutton Borough Council should be served by 54 councillors representing 18 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

We note that you have now set out in the White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People* (Cm 4014, HMSO), legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as that new legislation is in place we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Sutton on 5 January 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 29 June 1999, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation. We also sought further evidence on alternative council sizes from all three political groups on the council and the Borough Council itself.

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

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

- **in nine of the 25 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough;**
- **by 2004 electoral equality shows no overall improvement, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in nine wards, and by more than 20 per cent in two wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 119-120) are that:

- **Sutton Borough Council should be served by 54 councillors, compared to 56 at present;**
- **there should be 18 wards, seven fewer than at present, which would involve changes to the boundaries of all existing wards.**

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

- **In all of the 18 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 4 per cent from the average for the borough in 2004.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 7 March 2000:

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

*Figure 1:
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas (existing wards)
1 Beddington North	3	Beddington North ward; Beddington South ward (part); Wallington North ward (part)
2 Beddington South	3	Beddington South ward (part); Clockhouse ward (part); Wallington South ward (part); Woodcote ward (part)
3 Belmont	3	Belmont ward (part); Carshalton Beeches ward (part); Sutton South ward (part)
4 Carshalton Central	3	Carshalton Central ward (part); Carshalton North ward (part); Sutton East ward (part); Sutton South ward (part); Wallington North ward (part)
5 Carshalton South & Clockhouse	3	Carshalton Beeches ward (part); Carshalton Central ward (part); Clockhouse ward (part); Wallington South ward (part)
6 Cheam	3	Cheam South ward; Cheam West ward (part); North Cheam ward (part)
7 Nonsuch	3	North Cheam ward (part); Cheam West ward (part); Worcester Park South ward (part)
8 St Helier	3	Rosehill ward (part); St Helier North ward (part); St Helier South ward (part); Wandle Valley ward (part); Wrythe Green ward (part)
9 Stonecot	3	North Cheam ward (part); Sutton Common ward
10 Sutton Central	3	Carshalton North ward (part); Sutton Central ward (part); Sutton East ward (part);
11 Sutton North	3	Rosehill ward (part); Sutton Central ward (part); Sutton East ward (part)
12 Sutton South	3	Belmont ward (part); Carshalton Beeches ward (part); Sutton South ward (part)
13 Sutton West	3	Belmont ward (part); Sutton Central ward (part); Sutton West ward
14 The Wrythe	3	Carshalton North ward (part); St Helier South ward (part); Wandle Valley ward (part); Wrythe Green ward (part)
15 Wallington North	3	Carshalton Central ward (part); Wallington North ward (part)
16 Wallington South	3	Beddington South ward (part); Carshalton Beeches ward (part); Wallington South ward (part); Woodcote ward (part)

*Figure 1 (continued):
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas (existing wards)
17 Wandle Valley	3	St Helier North ward (part); Wandle Valley ward (part); Wrythe Green ward (part)
18 Worcester Park	3	Worcester Park North ward; Worcester Park South ward (part)

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

Figure 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Sutton

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Beddington North	3	7,416	2,472	0	7,416	2,472	-1
2 Beddington South	3	7,374	2,458	0	7,374	2,458	-1
3 Belmont	3	7,320	2,440	-1	7,495	2,498	0
4 Carshalton Central	3	7,277	2,426	-2	7,277	2,426	-3
5 Carshalton South & Clockhouse	3	6,839	2,280	-7	7,311	2,437	-2
6 Cheam	3	7,627	2,542	3	7,627	2,542	2
7 Nonsuch	3	7,645	2,548	3	7,645	2,548	2
8 St Helier	3	7,302	2,434	-1	7,363	2,454	-1
9 Stonecot	3	7,643	2,548	3	7,643	2,548	2
10 Sutton Central	3	7,162	2,387	-3	7,162	2,387	-4
11 Sutton North	3	7,367	2,456	0	7,367	2,456	-1
12 Sutton South	3	7,323	2,441	-1	7,323	2,441	-2
13 Sutton West	3	7,266	2,422	-2	7,546	2,515	1
14 The Wrythe	3	7,684	2,561	4	7,684	2,561	3
15 Wallington North	3	7,450	2,483	1	7,450	2,483	0
16 Wallington South	3	7,378	2,459	0	7,378	2,459	-1
17 Wandle Valley	3	7,497	2,499	1	7,637	2,546	2
18 Worcester Park	3	7,491	2,497	1	7,666	2,555	3
Totals	54	133061	—	—	134,364	—	—
Averages	—	—	2464	—	—	2,488	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on information supplied by Sutton Borough Council.

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

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the London borough of Sutton.

2 In broad terms, the objective of this periodic electoral review of Sutton is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor on the Borough Council is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. 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.

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (second edition published in March 1998), which sets out our approach to the reviews. We are not required to have regard to parliamentary constituency boundaries in developing our recommendations. Any new ward boundaries will be taken into account by the Parliamentary Boundary Commission in its reviews of parliamentary constituencies.

5 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the borough as a whole. Wherever possible we try 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.

6 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 an 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 boroughs.

The London Boroughs

7 Our programme of periodic electoral reviews of all 386 local authorities in England started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004. The 1992 Act requires us to review most local authorities every 10 to 15 years. However, the Act is silent on the timing of reviews by the Commission of the London boroughs. The Commission has no power to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London.

8 Most London boroughs have not been reviewed since 1977. Following discussions with local authority interests on the appropriate timing of London borough reviews, we decided to start as soon as possible after the May 1998 London local government elections so that all reviews could be completed, and the necessary orders implementing our recommendations made by the Secretary of State, in time for the next London elections scheduled for May 2002. Our reviews of the 32 London boroughs started on a phased basis between June 1998 and February 1999.

9 We have sought to ensure that all concerned were aware of our approach to the reviews. Copies of our *Guidance* were sent to all London boroughs, along with other major interests. In March 1998 we briefed chief executives at a meeting of the

London branch of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, and we also met with the Association of London Government. Since then we welcomed the opportunity to meet with chief officers and, on an all-party basis, members in the majority of individual authorities. This has enabled us to brief authorities about our policies and procedures, our objective of electoral equality having regard to local circumstances, and the approach taken by the Commission in previous reviews.

10 Before we started our work in London, the Government published for consultation a Green Paper, *Modernising Local Government – Local Democracy and Community Leadership* (February 1998) which, inter alia, promoted the possibility of London boroughs having annual elections with three-member wards so that one councillor in each ward would stand for election each year. In view of this, we decided that the order in which the London reviews are undertaken should be determined by the proportion of three-member wards in each borough under the current arrangements. On this basis, Sutton was in the fourth phase of reviews.

11 The Government's subsequent White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, published in July 1998, set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. For all unitary councils, including London boroughs, it proposed elections by thirds. It also refers to local accountability being maximised where the whole electorate in a council's area is involved in elections each time they take place, thereby pointing to a pattern of three-member wards in London boroughs to reflect a system of elections by thirds.

12 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1998/99 PER programme, including the London boroughs, that until any direction is received from the Secretary of State, the Commission would continue to maintain the approach to PERs as set out in the March 1998 Guidance. Nevertheless, we added that local authorities and other interested parties would no doubt 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. Our general experience has been that proposals for three-member ward patterns emerged from most areas in London.

13 Finally, it should be noted that there are no parishes in London, and in fact there is no legislative provision for the establishment of

parishes in London. This differentiates the reviews of London boroughs from the majority of the other electoral reviews we are carrying out elsewhere in the country, where parishes feature highly and provide the building blocks for district or borough wards.

The Review of Sutton

14 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements for Sutton. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in March 1977 (Report No. 194).

15 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 5 January 1999, when we wrote to Sutton Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified the local authority associations, the Metropolitan Police, Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following publication of our draft recommendations, we placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and other publicity, and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations was 29 March 1999. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

16 Stage Three began on 29 June 1999 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Sutton*, and ended on 13 September 1999. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. We sought further evidence on the issue of council size following the end of Stage Three, inviting the Borough Council and the three political parties on the council to make representations to us by 8 November 1999. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three and further evidence and now publish our final recommendations.

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

17 The borough of Sutton lies on the southern edge of Greater London. It is bordered by open countryside on its southern boundary and the London Borough of Croydon to the west. The borough of Sutton historically derives from the small early settlements of Cheam, Sutton, Carshalton and Beddington which developed further when road links with London and Croydon were improved. It is now well connected to London and the South Coast. The main road network includes a number of radial routes from central London to the M25, including the A24, A217 and A237. The borough is also served by a number of suburban rail services with the London terminals of Victoria, London Bridge and Waterloo.

18 Much of the development in Sutton took place during the inter-war period and gave the borough its present suburban residential character, with further development in the early 1960s. Industrial and commercial development in the borough is concentrated in three strategic industrial areas at Beddington, Kimpton and Imperial Way. The major industrial areas are all close to important transport routes into London and to the M25. Sutton town centre has become one of the larger commercial centres in London and provides the bulk of office and shopping floor space in the borough.

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

20 The electorate of the borough (February 1999) is 133,061. The Council currently has 56 councillors who are elected from 25 wards (Map 1 and Figure 3). Eight wards are each represented by three councillors, 15 wards elect two councillors and two wards elect one councillor each. As in all London boroughs, the whole council is elected together every four years.

21 Since the last electoral review, there has been a slight increase in electorate in the borough, with around 1 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments, particularly in Belmont and Wandle Valley wards.

22 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,376 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,399 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in nine of the 25 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, and in two wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Belmont ward where the two councillors represent on average 40 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Sutton



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Figure 3:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Beddington North	2	5,182	2,591	9	5,182	2,591	9
2 Beddington South	3	6,439	2,146	-10	6,439	2,146	-10
3 Belmont	2	6,663	3,332	40	6,663	3,332	40
4 Carshalton Beeches	3	6,730	2,243	-6	7,202	2,401	1
5 Carshalton Central	2	4,877	2,439	3	4,877	2,439	3
6 Carshalton North	2	5,255	2,628	11	5,255	2,628	11
7 Cheam South	2	4,580	2,290	-4	4,580	2,290	-4
8 Cheam West	2	4,384	2,192	-8	4,384	2,192	-8
9 Clockhouse	1	1,552	1,552	-35	1,552	1,552	-35
10 North Cheam	2	5,099	2,550	7	5,099	2,550	7
11 Rosehill	2	4,555	2,278	-4	4,555	2,278	-4
12 St Helier North	3	6,176	2,059	-13	6,237	2,079	-13
13 St Helier South	2	4,121	2,061	-13	4,121	2,061	-13
14 Sutton Central	2	4,997	2,499	5	4,997	2,499	5
15 Sutton Common	2	4,632	2,316	-3	4,632	2,316	-3
16 Sutton East	3	5,895	1,965	-17	5,895	1,965	-17
17 Sutton South	3	7,885	2,628	11	8,060	2,687	13
18 Sutton West	2	4,419	2,210	-7	4,699	2,350	-1
19 Wallington North	3	7,591	2,530	6	7,591	2,530	6
20 Wallington South	3	7,189	2,396	1	7,189	2,396	1
21 Wandle Valley	2	5,063	2,532	7	5,203	2,602	9
22 Woodcote	1	2,782	2,782	17	2,782	2,782	17
23 Worcester Park North	3	7,054	2,351	-1	7,229	2,410	1

continued overleaf

Figure 3 (continued):
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
24 Worcester Park South	2	4,657	2,329	-2	4,657	2,329	-2
25 Wrythe Green	2	5,284	2,642	11	5,284	2,642	11
Totals	56	133,061	—	—	134,364	—	—
Averages	—	—	2,376	—	—	2,399	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on information supplied by Sutton Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1999, electors in Clockhouse ward were relatively over-represented by 35 per cent, while electors in Belmont ward were relatively under-represented by 40 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

²³ During Stage One we received two borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council, one comprising 18 three-member wards and one comprising 20 three-member wards. Sutton Borough Council Labour Group submitted a borough-wide scheme based on the Borough Council's 20-ward scheme. At this time the Commission invited the Borough Council to state a preference between the two schemes it had submitted, but it declined to do so. We also received two representations from local residents. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Sutton*.

²⁴ Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's 18-ward scheme, which achieved improved electoral equality, provided good boundaries while having regard to the statutory criteria and proposed a pattern of entirely three-member wards. However, we moved away from the Borough Council's scheme in four areas, affecting eight wards. We proposed that:

- (a) Sutton Borough Council should be served by 54 councillors;
- (b) there should be 18 wards, involving changes to the boundaries of all existing wards.

Draft Recommendation

Sutton Borough Council should comprise 54 councillors serving 18 wards.

²⁵ Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in all of the 18 wards varying by no more than 7 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with all wards expected to vary by no more than 4 per cent from the borough average in 2004.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

²⁶ During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, seven representations were received. A list of respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Sutton Borough Council and the Commission.

Sutton Borough Council

²⁷ The Borough Council objected to the draft recommendations for Sutton, and requested that its 20-ward Stage One proposal be adopted. The Borough Council submitted details outlining its proposals to introduce new democratic structures in Sutton to reflect the Government's modernising local government agenda, which it stated took effect from 1 September 1999. The Borough Council went on to assert that, under the new structure, "it is extremely important that representation by councillors is as effective as possible. This will be facilitated by reducing the number of electors per councillor. The 20-ward proposal consistently recognises the existing communities in the borough. It is these communities on which the Council's democratic structure is built."

²⁸ However, the Borough Council also submitted comments on the draft recommendations which were based on its own 18-ward scheme. The Borough Council objected to the Commission's modifications to its 18-ward scheme, on the grounds that the wards proposed by the Borough Council were designed to reflect communities by keeping whole streets together where appropriate. It also asserted that under the draft recommendations residents "may not easily understand which councillor is representing them. This is particularly true where roads are split or where residents have to walk through another ward to get to their polling station." The Borough Council objected to the proposed amendments to Beddington North, Beddington South, Belmont, Sutton Central, Sutton South, Sutton West, Wallington North and Wallington South wards.

Sutton Borough Council Labour Group

²⁹ The Labour Group on the Borough Council objected to the draft recommendations for a pattern of 18 three-member wards in Sutton. It rescinded its Stage One amendments to the Borough Council's 20-ward scheme and expressed its support for the Council's 20-ward scheme in its entirety, reiterating its arguments for a council size of 60. However, the Group also proposed amendments to the 18-ward draft recommendations, for the proposed wards of Carshalton South & Clockhouse, Wallington South, Beddington South, The Wrythe and Wandle Valley, and proposed a number of alternative ward names.

Other Representations

³⁰ A further five representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from a borough councillor, three local residents and a resident of Lewisham.

³¹ Councillor Gallop, member for Sutton Common ward, supported the draft recommendations for Sutton, particularly the proposed Stonecot ward. She objected to the Borough Council's 20-ward option, considering that under the 20-ward scheme, Sutton Common would be less well identified. A local resident also supported the draft recommendation for the proposed Stonecot ward. Two local residents objected to the draft recommendations, particularly for the proposed Nonsuch ward, and supported the 20-ward scheme, stating that "the underlying problem with the current proposals is that wards are too big and lack focus". A resident from Lewisham generally supported the draft recommendations but proposed two alternative ward boundaries between the proposed St Helier and Wandle Valley wards and the proposed Beddington North and Wallington North wards, and suggested alternative ward names in a number of areas.

Further Evidence

32 As mentioned earlier, at Stage Three the Borough Council stated its preference for its 20-ward scheme involving a council size of 60. However, given the views expressed at the time, the Commission did not consider that there was sufficient evidence to enable us to make conclusions on council size, which would require substantial change to our draft recommendations. As a result, the Commission sought further evidence on the issue of council size. We wrote to Sutton Borough Council and the three political parties represented on the Council, inviting them to provide evidence to show a direct link between a council size of 60 and the new political management structure, and to illustrate how a council size of 54 members might hinder it. We received three representations.

Sutton Borough Council

33 The Borough Council reiterated its Stage Three arguments in more detail. It briefly outlined its new council structure, asserting that the previous Area Environmental Sub-Committees have been upgraded to full Area Committees with a wider remit. The Borough Council asserted that it would be against the spirit of the White Paper, *Modern Local Government - In Touch With The People* to increase the councillor:elector ratio, and that “20 wards will enable individual councillors to spend more time working on behalf of individual residents.” It also stated that “the initial paper work and conversations with the Local Government Commission inferred that it was extremely unlikely that an increase in councillors would be considered.”

34 The Borough Council went on to assert that in other London Boroughs, such as Merton, proposals to increase the number of councillors had been accepted by the Commission without any justification based on a new democratic structure. It argued that Merton and Sutton are similar boroughs in terms of area and population.

35 The Borough Council referred to its consultation with local residents on internal political management structure, noting that 80 per cent of the respondents were in favour of the Council’s proposals.

Sutton Borough Council Labour Group

36 The Labour Group stated that it “agrees with the Council’s response to your letter which demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of councillors on our council believe that a 20-ward option is the most appropriate for Sutton in view of our changes to our democratic structures that were reviewed at the same time as our review of ward boundaries”. The Group went on to reiterate the Borough Council’s argument that the London Borough of Merton had started to review its council structure after an increase in council size had been recommended by the Commission.

Sutton Borough Council Conservative Group

37 The Conservative Group supported our view that an increase in council size had not been fully justified, stating that it had sought a reduction in council size to 51 members. It further stated that “the council offered two options to the Commission and we, like yourselves, were surprised to find the council then arguing against acceptance of one of the options they had advocated.”

38 The Conservative Group also stated that it “shared the Commission’s concerns over an unsubstantiated upward drift in the number of councillors. We believe that this statement encapsulates what is being proposed for Sutton.”

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

39 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Sutton is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 - the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities 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".

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

41 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.

42 Our *Guidance* states that, while we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, 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. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. We will require particular justification for schemes which result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance over 10 per cent in any ward. In reviews of predominantly

urban areas such as the London boroughs, our experience suggests that we would expect to achieve a high degree of electoral equality in all wards.

Electorate Forecasts

43 At Stage One the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of around 1 per cent from 133,061 to 134,364 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expected most of the growth to be in Carshalton Beeches and Sutton West wards. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to the unitary development plan for the borough, and 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 was obtained.

44 In our draft recommendations report we accepted that forecasting electorate is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

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

Council Size

46 Much of the debate in our review of Sutton has centred on the issue of council size and, in particular, the implications for council size of the Government's proposals for executive styles of political management in local government, as set out in the White Paper Local Leadership, Local Choice and the Local Government Bill which was published on 26 November 1999.

47 The Government's proposals, which include an enhanced scrutiny and representational role for councillors, have led many local authorities, among

them the London borough of Sutton, to consider whether there should be changes to their current council size. However, there is no implicit or explicit assumption either in the White Paper or in the Local Government Bill that a greater or smaller number of councillors would be needed to implement a new structure of political management. Local government seems divided on the implications for council size of a move towards a new structure; some local authorities and political groupings are of the view that, to undertake the scrutiny and representational functions, they will require more councillors, others believe firmly that a cabinet or executive style of management will require fewer.

48 We have always been willing to willing to facilitate local authority proposals for developments in different democratic styles and political management structures. A number of authorities, such as Sutton, have already initiated changes to their management structures in advance of legislation. A PER provides the opportunity for council size to be changed if that should be a desirable corollary to implementing such a scheme of modernisation. However, there are a number of relevant considerations which we take into account.

49 Interested parties must be able to demonstrate to us that such schemes have been fully thought through; how, in detail, they intend to implement their proposals and what new structure they intend putting in place. We place particular importance on proposals for significant changes in council size being properly developed in the context of a review of internal management and the role of councillors in the new structure.

50 In reaching conclusions on council size, we start from the general assumption that the existing number of councillors elected to serve on a council already secures effective and convenient local government. We are always willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case, particularly in the context of new political management structures. However, as our Guidance makes clear, we have found it necessary to guard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and any proposals we receive for an increase in council size need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of an authority simply to make it more consistent with that of a neighbouring authority.

51 While Sutton, like a number of other local authorities, has come a long way in introducing a

new political management structure, it cannot be assumed that there will be no further changes to the council's internal management. The Local Government Bill still at an early stage in its passage through Parliament, and additional initiatives aimed at furthering the Government's agenda for modernising local government may follow. Our objective in making recommendations is to put in place a council size which will not simply address immediate concerns, but be enduring. Accordingly, we need to be wary of acceding to changes in council size which are based on the assumption that, in authorities which have already introduced new political management structures, those structures are now fixed.

52 Finally, there is the issue of political advantage. To a greater or lesser extent there is a political dimension to each PER, with party groupings putting forward competing electoral schemes for our consideration. These often owe more to achieving a desired political outcome at local elections than to providing effective and convenient local governance of an area. It therefore behoves us to be vigilant in considering proposals involving significant changes in council size, or proposals which, for no obvious reason, their proponents alter part way through a review.

53 Sutton Borough Council currently has 56 members. At Stage One the Council submitted two schemes based on a uniform pattern of three-member wards; an 18-ward scheme involving a decrease in council size from 56 to 54 councillors; and a 20-ward scheme involving an increase in council size of four councillors from 56 to 60. We invited the Borough Council, both during and after Stage One, to specify a preference for one of its schemes. Some further evidence was submitted after the end of Stage One but too late to be considered by the Commission when formulating its draft recommendations. In any event, the Council still did not express a preference for a particular scheme, despite being requested to do so by the Commission.

54 In its Stage One submission, the Labour Group argued that more councillors were needed to take into account an increasing workload, and requested a return to the pre-1976 level of representation. It stated that a 60-member Council would "restore the size of Council back to what it was in 1964-78 (59 councillors and Aldermen at a time when the old Greater London Council had an operational role for housing which we now carry out).

However, it will be nowhere near as many councillors that were elected by the three constituent authorities from the 1930s to 1964. At that time there were 84 councillors administering far less services than the Borough does today.”

55 In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received and the evidence available at that time. We concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by a council of 54 members. It should be noted that our draft recommendations were based, almost entirely, on one of the Borough Council’s Stage One schemes, which had been agreed by its Policy and Resources Committee. We made only minor boundary modifications to eight of the proposed wards.

56 At Stage Three the Borough Council re-submitted its Stage One 20-ward scheme, involving an increase in council size of four members, clearly stating its preference for this option over its alternative 18-ward scheme. The Council argued that increasing the number of councillors from 56 to 60 would reflect the Government’s legislative proposals for new forms of local government and changes to the political management of local authorities, as set out in the White Paper Local Leadership, Local Choice. It provided details of its new internal political management structure, highlighting the public consultation exercise it had carried out. The Borough Council stated that “the results of the consultation exercise show an overwhelming vote in favour of establishing a new democratic structure with a Strategy Committee and Leader”. It also drew comparisons between the 20-ward scheme and our final recommendations for an adjoining borough, Merton, where we proposed an increase in council size.

57 In the event that we were not minded to accept the 20-ward scheme, which it now preferred, the Council also commented on our draft recommendations for 18 three-member wards. The Council objected to the modifications we had made to its original scheme, arguing that they breached a number of the protocols which had been used in its development. It indicated that these concerns were shared by the majority Liberal Democrat Group and the Labour Group opposition on the Council.

58 At Stage Three, the Labour Group reiterated its arguments for a council size of 60, and

expressed support for the Borough Council’s 20-ward option.

59 We received a further five representations at Stage Three commenting on our draft recommendations. Three of these supported our proposals, while two stated a preference for the Borough Council’s 20-ward scheme.

60 Given the Council’s reluctance to specify a preference for either 54 or 60 councillors during Stage One, we were puzzled by the emphasis now placed in its Stage Three submission on the need for the larger council size. To ensure that we were fully conversant with all aspects of the Council’s argument sought further evidence from Sutton Borough Council and the three political parties on this issue. In our letter we stated “in particular, the Commission would welcome evidence which explains, in terms, how a council size of 60 members would facilitate the new political management structure and, conversely, why a council size of 54 might hinder it, and whether the arguments are specific to the new arrangements or are simply the generic argument, applicable to any council, that having more councillors allows the workload to be more widely spread”.

61 In response, the Borough Council put forward a number of arguments for a council size of 60. Firstly, it outlined its new structure, emphasising the enhanced role it intended for its Area Committees. However, the Borough Council provided no details as to how these Area Committees would be incompatible with the warding arrangements proposed in our draft recommendations. Secondly, the Borough Council opposed any increase in the number of electors represented by each councillor, stating that this “would be against the spirit of the White Paper”.

62 Thirdly, the Borough Council asserted that we had inferred that increases in council size were extremely unlikely to be considered and it was for this reason that it had put forward a 54-member scheme at Stage one. It also commented that we had recommended an increase of two councillors representing Merton Borough Council, although we had not based our justification for such an increase on a new democratic structure.

63 Finally, the Council reiterated that it had undertaken consultation with local people on the type of political structure they would wish to see adopted.

64 It is now clear to us that the three political parties on the council hold differing views on the appropriate council size for Sutton. The Borough Council, which is Liberal Democrat controlled, is and the Labour Group strongly support an increase in the number of councillors to 60, while the Conservative Group oppose any increase, stating in its response to our request for further evidence that it in fact sought a reduction in council size to 51. From the submissions received during the review it is not possible to identify whether there is more wide-spread support for a particular council size in Sutton; during Stage One we received only two other submissions, while during Stage Three we received only four, excluding those from the Borough Council and the Labour Group. Support for alternative council sizes was split, with some respondents supporting our draft recommendations, while others supported the Borough Council's proposals based on a council size of 60.

65 The Borough Council stated that they had been lead to believe that increases in council size were extremely unlikely to be considered; hence their alternative 54-member scheme. The Council also compared the review of Sutton to that of neighbouring Merton, where the Commission has recommended an increase in council size. As mentioned earlier, the Borough Council argued that we had recommended an increase in council size without evidence based on a new political management structure in the neighbouring borough of Merton. Our Guidance is clear on this matter. It states that "we believe that proposals for increases in council size should be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that increases in an authority's electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of an authority simply to make it more consistent with that of a neighbouring area. We will only seek equality of representation within a principal authority area, not between areas".

66 As to the review in Merton, we did not recommend an increase in council size in the light of a move to an alternative internal structure; that recommendation was based on other factors, including the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria, to which the Commission has regard. Given that circumstances in each local authority that we have reviewed so far are different and that each area is unique, the Commission attempts to ensure that the approach we take to each review is the same, by giving attention to a

common range of considerations but, in each case, looking at those considerations on their merits. This may result in differing outcomes. We therefore do not preclude increases in council size. But such proposals do need to be justified by persuasive and well-argued evidence.

67 We note the Borough Council undertook public consultation on its new political management structure, and that a high response rate was achieved. However, while clearly outlining the different political management options available, views were not sought on the issue of council size.

68 We have carefully considered all the evidence received in response to our draft recommendations. However, we do not consider the evidence provided has established how a council size of 60 members, as opposed to one of 54 members, would better reflect our statutory criteria. Nor are we persuaded that the effective operation of the new political management structure that has been introduced in Sutton is dependent on such a council size. Indeed, in response to our request for further evidence, the Borough Council stated "it is not an absolute case of 20 wards fulfilling exactly the Council's objectives and 18 failing. Our new structure would work more effectively with a greater number of councillors and a smaller number of residents per councillor".

69 The Council's Area Committee arrangements are clearly an important aspect of its new management structure. However, notwithstanding our request for further evidence, the extent to which the coverage of the Area Committees is incompatible with our draft recommendations remains unclear. We consider that our proposed wards, while not being completely coterminous with the Area Committees cover generally similar areas and that the differences between them are, in most cases, minimal.

70 Given the evidence received during Stage Three and subsequently, we do not consider our draft recommendation for a council size of 54 members, which was based on one of the Borough Council's own schemes put forward at Stage One, to be fundamentally flawed. We have concluded that the evidence submitted does not establish a direct link between the proposed new democratic structure the Council has put in place and a council size of 60. Nor does it demonstrate that the new structure would be unable to operate effectively with a council size of 54, as the Council initially proposed. Accordingly, in view of the improved level of

Road, delineates communities and provides a clear boundary. We concluded that the proposed Stonecot ward also reflects community areas and provides a clear and identifiable boundary, and we therefore put these proposals forward for consultation.

78 At Stage Three neither the Borough Council nor Labour Group made specific comments on the draft recommendations for this area.

79 Four other representations were received regarding the proposals for the area. District Councillor Ms Gallop (Sutton Common ward) supported the draft recommendations for the proposed Stonecot ward, stating that “the Sutton by-pass and the railway line have provided a quite definite barrier between Rosehill and Sutton Common wards. The Commission’s 18-ward scheme respects this while the 20-ward proposal containing as it does parts of Sutton Central and Rosehill will change the nature of the ward entirely”. We received a further representation from a local resident who also supported the draft recommendations for the proposed geographical composition and naming of Stonecot ward. Two local residents objected to the draft recommendations in general, arguing that the wards in the 18-ward scheme would be too big. In particular, both residents objected to the proposed Nonsuch ward stating that “under the proposed 18 ward scheme, and to a certain extent the 20-ward scheme, the Nonsuch ward is spread across a number of disparate communities which have little or nothing in common”.

80 We have given careful consideration to the further evidence and representations received, but are not convinced that there is justification for substantial change to our draft recommendations in the proposed Nonsuch ward. We maintain the view that the proposed warding arrangements for the area provide for the best balance available between improved electoral equality and community identity. We therefore confirm our draft recommendation for Cheam, Nonsuch, Stonecot and Worcester Park wards as final.

Belmont, Rosehill, Sutton Central, Sutton East, Sutton South and Sutton West wards

81 These wards lie to the east of the Sutton by-pass. Belmont, Rosehill, Sutton Central and Sutton West wards return two councillors each, while Sutton East and Sutton South wards return three

councillors each. The existing Belmont ward currently has the highest number of electors per councillor and is under-represented by 40 per cent, whilst Sutton South ward is currently over-represented by 11 per cent (40 per cent and 13 per cent respectively by 2004). Rosehill, Sutton East and Sutton West wards are over-represented by 4 per cent, 17 per cent and 7 per cent respectively (4 per cent, 17 per cent and 1 per cent by 2004).

82 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a reconfiguration of the wards covering the Sutton area. It proposed that the western boundary of the existing Sutton West ward be realigned to include the whole of St James’s Road, Sherwood Park Road, Sutton Road, Grove Road, and the Homefield Park area, currently in Sutton Central ward. This would reduce the electoral variance in Sutton West ward to 5 per cent (2 per cent by 2004). The Borough Council further proposed a new Sutton North ward covering much of the existing Rosehill ward and the area north of Oakhill Road in the existing Sutton East ward. The number of electors per councillor in the new Sutton North ward would be equal to the average now and 1 per cent below by 2004.

83 The Borough Council also proposed that Belmont ward be modified to include the area south of Egmont Road in the existing Sutton South ward. The north west corner of the existing Belmont ward would then be included with the remainder of the existing Sutton South ward in a modified Sutton Central ward. The Council further proposed realigning the eastern boundary of Sutton Central ward to include part of polling district QB in the existing Carshalton North ward. These proposals would result in the number of electors per councillor in the modified Belmont ward being 3 per cent below the borough average, whilst in the modified Sutton South and Sutton Central wards this figure would be 1 per cent above and equal to the borough average respectively (2 per cent, equal to and 1 per cent below the average by 2004).

84 After considering all the evidence available, we based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council’s scheme, subject to a number of boundary modifications, in order to further improve electoral equality and to provide, in our view, clearer boundaries. We proposed modifying the eastern boundary of Sutton West ward to run along Robin Hood Lane and onto Sutton Park Road to include a further 174 electors from Sutton Central ward.

This would address the slight over-representation in the Sutton West ward, providing a more even distribution of electors between the two wards, and would result in the number of electors per councillor being 2 per cent below the average for the borough in Sutton West ward and 3 per cent below in Sutton Central ward (1 per cent above and 3 per cent by 2004).

85 Although the proposals for the Belmont and Sutton South wards would involve crossing the B2230 and the railway line (the existing boundary), both areas appear to be well connected by road, and we considered that these proposals would not have a detrimental effect on communities. However, we concluded that electoral equality could be further improved, while providing clear boundaries, by including those electors in Overton Road, Overton Court, Bramble Close, Lyndhurst Court and Washington Court in the Belmont ward, so that the boundary would run along Overton Road. We also proposed realigning part of the southern boundary of Sutton South ward, so that it would run along Langley Park Road, including all the electors in the west of this ward in the modified Belmont ward. These amendments would result in the number of electors per councillor in Belmont and Sutton South wards being 1 per cent below the borough average (equal to and 2 per cent below the average by 2004).

86 At Stage Three the Borough Council objected to the amendments described above. It stated that the transfer of electors from Sutton Central ward to Sutton West ward did not improve electoral equality, and that residents in Falcourt Close in Sutton Central ward would not have any direct access to the rest of the ward. It also opposed the amendments proposed for the Belmont and Sutton South wards, stating that the residents in Overton Road being transferred from the proposed Sutton South ward have more in common with the electors across the road in Sutton South ward than with those in Belmont ward. The Borough Council also objected to the proposal to move several electors in Langley Road from Sutton South to Belmont ward.

87 The Labour Group expressed support for the draft recommendations for Sutton Central, Sutton North and Sutton West wards stating that “they accurately reflect community identity.” It proposed that Belmont ward be revised so that Egmont Road be included in Sutton South ward rather than Belmont ward, it argued that “the housing is of

similar composition to the rest of the proposed Sutton South ward”. In order to facilitate this transfer, the Group proposed that Pine Walk, Pine Crescent, South Way, West Way and West Drive in the proposed Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward be included in Belmont ward. The Labour Group argued that as our draft recommendations had involved the transfer of electors to the south of this area in Belmont ward, this proposal would help unify the communities which share a residents’ association. The Group further proposed that in order to address the levels of electoral inequality that this proposal would leave in Sutton South ward, that the area to the east of Upland Road, excluding Downside Road which has little in common with the remainder of Sutton South ward, should be included in Carshalton South & Clockhouse. The Group put forward alternative names for the proposed Sutton Central, Sutton North, Sutton West wards, suggesting the names St Nicholas, Benhilton and Gander Green respectively. Under the Labour Group’s proposals, the number of electors per councillor for Belmont and Sutton South wards would both be equal to the average (1 per cent above and 1 per cent below the borough average in 2004).

88 A resident of Lewisham suggested that the proposed Sutton Central, Sutton North, Sutton South and Sutton West wards be renamed Perretts Field, Rosehill, St Nicholas (or Benhilton) and Christchurch respectively.

89 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. We note the Borough Council’s concerns that the amendments made to Sutton Central and Sutton West would mean that residents in Falcourt Close would have access to Sutton Central ward through Sutton West ward. We therefore propose realigning the boundary between these two wards so that Falcourt Close is included in Sutton West ward, for community identity reason.

90 The Labour Group’s proposals would have provided for similar levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations. However, the Commission is not persuaded that the draft recommendations for Belmont and Sutton South wards have a detrimental effect on local communities and in the absence of evidence of local opposition to our proposals, we confirm our draft recommendations as final, subject to the minor boundary amendment between Sutton West

and Sutton Central wards described above. This amendment to our draft recommendations would not alter the levels of electoral equality in the two wards, with the number of electors per councillor in Sutton Central and Sutton West wards being 3 per cent below and 2 per cent below the borough average respectively (4 per cent and 1 per cent above by 2004).

Carshalton Central, Carshalton North, St Helier North, St Helier South, Wandle Valley and Wrythe Green wards

91 These wards lie in the north of the borough. The three-member St Helier North ward and the two-member St Helier South ward are both over-represented by 13 per cent (both now and by 2004). Carshalton North, Wandle Valley and Wrythe Green wards each return two councillors and are under-represented by 11 per cent, 7 per cent and 11 per cent respectively (11 per cent, 9 per cent and 11 per cent by 2004). The two-member Carshalton Central ward is currently over-represented by 3 per cent (both now and in 2004).

92 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a new St Helier ward comprising part of St Helier North ward, the existing St Helier South ward and a number of electors from Green Wrythe Lane and Buckhurst Avenue in the current Wandle Valley ward. The remainder of St Helier North ward would then form part of a modified Wandle Valley ward covering the majority of Wandle Valley ward, less the area of Culvers Avenue, Endoven Close, and Phillips Close. The Borough Council argued that the eastern boundary should follow the natural boundary of the railway line to encompass the warehouse storage area in the south of the ward. It further proposed placing Culvers Avenue, Endoven Close and Phillips Close in a modified Wrythe Green ward, arguing that there is no vehicular access from Culvers Avenue to London Road. It also proposed that the western boundary of the modified Wrythe Green ward be amended to include polling district QA, the whole of Erskine Road and part of Wrythe Lane from the existing Carshalton North ward. The Council also proposed changing the name of the modified Wrythe Green ward to "The Wrythe".

93 The Council further proposed a modified Carshalton Central ward, covering much of the existing ward, but proposed realigning the south-eastern boundary, so that it would no longer follow

the railway line, but would run along the back of the properties in Gordon Road. It also proposed including much of polling districts QB and QC from the existing Carshalton North ward, and transferring Papermill Close from the existing Wallington North ward to the modified Carshalton Central ward.

94 The Borough Council's proposals would result in the number of electors per councillor in Carshalton, St Helier, Wandle Valley and The Wrythe wards being 2 per cent below, 1 per cent below, 1 per cent above and 4 per cent above the borough average respectively (3 per cent, 1 per cent, 2 per cent and 3 per cent by 2004).

95 In its Stage One submission, the Labour Group made particular reference to the northern wards in the borough, and proposed splitting the St Helier area in an east/west direction. It stated that these proposals would reflect the two natural communities of interest around the Rosehill shopping area and the Middleton Circle shopping area as well as the focus of the roads in the area. It also stated that the present Wandle Valley ward is artificial in that it comprises two separate communities either side of the River Wandle. It argued that an alternative solution, linking polling district OA and MC, would more accurately reflect the communities in the area. It further stated that the community in polling district OB has traditionally looked southward to the communities in polling district VA of Wallington North ward. It asserted that, "for this reason we cannot support the Council's proposed Wandle Valley ward in its proposed 18-ward option."

96 In the light of these comments from the Labour Group, we looked at an alternative option for the proposed Wandle Valley and The Wrythe wards. Using the River Wandle as a boundary, and placing the polling districts of MC, OA and PA together to form a modified Wandle Valley ward, and polling districts OB, PB and QA together to form a modified The Wrythe ward, would result

recommendations on the basis that they provide an appropriate balance between electoral equality and the interests of local communities and utilised clear boundaries. We invited further comments on these proposals during Stage Three.

98 At Stage Three the Council did not make any specific comments on our draft recommendations for these wards.

99 The Labour Group put forward alternative proposals for The Wrythe and Wandle Valley wards at Stage Three. In The Wrythe ward, the Group proposed that the area north of Culvers Avenue be transferred into Wandle Valley ward, in order to “create a stronger boundary in the area”. The Group also argued that the proposed Wandle Valley ward has never been a cohesive or coherent ward and that “the two separate parts of the ward have no transport links; people in the western half are part of St Helier and look towards St Helier for shopping and amenities. The eastern half look towards Hackbridge for local amenities”. It therefore argued that in order to reflect community identities and achieve electoral equality, that the area to the west of London Road be transferred to The Wrythe, so that the boundary runs to the north of Senga Road to the existing boundary. Under the Labour Groups proposals, the number of electors per councillor for The Wrythe and Wandle Valley wards would be 2 per cent above and 3 per cent above the borough average respectively (1 per cent and 4 per cent by 2004). The Group suggested that the proposed Carshalton Central, St Helier and Wandle Valley wards be renamed Carshalton, St Helier West and St Helier East.

100 The Labour Group’s proposals for The Wrythe and Wandle Valley wards provide for similar levels of electoral equality to our draft recommendations both now and in 2004. We did not receive any other comments on these wards from local residents concerning community identities and interests in the area. We do not therefore consider that there is sufficient evidence to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations, in formulating our final recommendations for the area.

101 We also received a representation from a resident of Lewisham commenting on the proposed boundary between St Helier and Wandle Valley wards, who proposed that the boundary run along Middleton Road and Green Wrythe Lane until it meets the existing boundary. Under these

proposals the number of electors per councillor in St Helier and Wandle Valley wards would be approximately 3 per cent below and 6 per cent above the borough average (4 per cent and 6 per cent by 2004). He also suggested that Carshalton Central and The Wrythe wards be renamed Carshalton Town and Wrythe Green, however, without local support for these alternative names we do not propose to move away from our draft recommendations.

102 Having carefully considered the representations received, we remain of the view that the Council’s original proposals for the area would achieve the best electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations, in their entirety, for the area as final.

Carshalton Beeches and Clockhouse wards

103 The wards of Carshalton Beeches and Clockhouse lie in the south of the borough. The railway line provides the existing boundary between the wards of Carshalton Central and Carshalton Beeches. Both the single-member Clockhouse ward and the three-member Carshalton Beeches ward are over-represented, with the number of electors per councillor being 35 per cent and 6 per cent below the borough average respectively (35 per cent and 1 per cent above the borough average by 2004). Clockhouse ward covers a large area, is sparsely populated compared to the other wards in the borough with an electorate of 1,522, and is separated from the remainder of the borough by open space. It comprises areas of countryside and parks, with most of the residents living in the area south of the A2022, bordering Surrey.

104 At Stage One, in order to address the over-representation in the area, the Borough Council proposed amalgamating both wards, creating a new three-member Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward. It also proposed realigning the northern boundary to include Gordon Road and Grosvenor Avenue, currently in Carshalton Central ward, and realigning the eastern boundary to include all of Dalmeny Road, Mount Park Road, Mount Way, Mount Close, Briar Lane and Bramble Banks, currently in Wallington South ward. To the west of the ward it proposed aligning the boundary along the rear of properties in Banstead Road until it meets Crossways, thereby including the whole of

Banstead Road South in the modified Belmont ward. These proposals would provide for improved levels of electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in the new Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward being 7 per cent below the borough average initially, improving further to 2 per cent by 2004.

105 In its Stage One submission the Labour Group argued that Clockhouse ward is geographically separate from the rest of the borough and should be considered for parishing. However, as stated earlier, there is no provision in current legislation for the parishing of London boroughs. It also stated that the name Clockhouse should be included in the name of any ward that covers the area.

106 In our draft recommendations report we considered possible alternatives for this area, but in the light of representations received, and taking into account the size and geography of the area, we were unable to find another alternative which achieved comparable levels of electoral equality, whilst having regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore adopted the Council's proposed Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward as part of our draft recommendations. Under our recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent below the average (2 per cent by 2004).

107 At Stage Three the Borough Council made no comments regarding the proposed Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward.

108 The Labour Group proposed that the existing eastern boundary between Carshalton Beeches and Wallington South should be retained, with the exception of Dalmeny Road and Boundary Road, which should be included in Wallington South ward. The Group argued that this would address the electoral imbalance that the transfer of Pine Walk, Pine Way, South Way, West Way and West Drive from Carshalton South & Clockhouse to Belmont ward would create (as described earlier). It further argued that this proposal would "unify the majority of the community in this area and retain the strong community links that exist". The Group suggested that this ward be renamed Carshalton Beeches & Clockhouse. Under the Labour Group's proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be 6 per cent below the average (1 per cent by 2004).

109 A resident from Lewisham suggested that the proposed Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward be renamed Beeches/Clockhouse.

110 We have given careful consideration to the views expressed to us during the consultation stage by the Labour Group and the Lewisham resident. However, we consider that our draft recommendations provide an appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and in the absence of any evidence of a groundswell of local opposition to our draft recommendations in the area, are confirming our draft recommendations for Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward as final.

Beddington North, Beddington South, Wallington North, Wallington South and Woodcote wards

111 These wards lie in the east of the borough. The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Beddington North and the three-member Wallington North wards is currently 9 per cent and 6 per cent above the borough average respectively (9 per cent and 6 per cent by 2004). The number of electors per councillor in the three-member Beddington South and Wallington South wards is currently 10 per cent below and 1 per cent above the borough average respectively (10 per cent and 1 per cent by 2004), whilst in the single-member Woodcote ward this figure is 17 per cent above the borough average (17 per cent by 2004).

112 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed minor amendments to the boundary between the Beddington North and Wallington North wards, including those electors in Bloxworth Close, part of Croydon Road and Rectory Lane, Montagu Gardens and Morton Gardens in Beddington North ward. In the south, it proposed including part of the existing Beddington South ward in the modified Beddington North ward, moving away from the railway line as the boundary. It further proposed a minor amendment to the western boundary of Wallington North ward, including electors from the modified Carshalton Central ward, as outlined earlier. These proposals would provide for improved levels of electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in Beddington North ward being 1 per cent below the average and 2 per cent above the borough average in Wallington North ward (2 per cent and 1 per cent respectively by 2004).

¹¹³ To address the over-representation in Beddington South ward and the under-representation in Woodcote ward, the Borough Council proposed combining these two wards in a modified Beddington South ward. It also proposed transferring Mellows Road and Bandon Rise from the existing Beddington South ward to the modified Wallington South ward. The remainder of the proposed Beddington South ward western boundary would run along the rear of properties in Sandy Lane South to include the whole of this road, Woodcote Green and Woodcote Lane in the modified Beddington South ward. In the west of Wallington South ward, the Borough Council proposed realigning the boundary between Wallington South ward and the proposed new Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward, as outlined earlier. The levels of electoral equality would improve significantly under this scheme, with the number of electors per councillor in Beddington South ward being 2 per cent below and Wallington South ward being 1 per cent above the borough average (3 per cent and equal to the borough average by 2004.)

¹¹⁴ Given the improved levels of electoral equality which these proposals would achieve, we decided to base our recommendations on these proposals. However, we concluded that, in order to improve electoral equality further, and to provide clearer boundaries, slight amendments should be made to the boundaries between Beddington North and Wallington North wards, and Beddington South and Wallington South wards. We proposed including Bond Gardens in Beddington North ward, but to retain the rest of the existing boundary until it reaches the railway line. To further address the slight over-representation in Beddington South ward, we propose transferring electors from Lavender Vale into the Beddington South ward. This would result in the number of electors per councillor in both Beddington North and Beddington South wards being equal to the average (1 per cent below the borough average by 2004). The number of electors per councillor in Wallington North and Wallington South wards would be 1 per cent above and equal to the borough average (equal to and 1 per cent below the borough average respectively by 2004).

¹¹⁵ At Stage Three the Borough Council objected to proposals to move Bond Gardens into Beddington North ward on the grounds that residents would have to walk past one polling station to reach their polling station. It also

objected to the proposal to move most of Montagu Gardens into Wallington North ward so that the boundary would run along The Bridle Way, on the grounds that Montagu Gardens would be split between two wards. It further objected to proposals to move part of Lavender Vale and part of Stafford Road from Wallington South to Beddington South.

¹¹⁶ At Stage Three, the Labour Group argued that in order to accommodate the loss of the electors transferred from the south west corner of Wallington South ward to Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward, as described earlier, so that the whole of Lavender Vale should be included in Wallington South ward. The Group asserted that this would provide a better boundary and avoid splitting the road between two wards. It also suggested that Beddington South ward be renamed Roundshaw. Under the Labour Group's proposals the number of electors per councillor for the Beddington South and Wallington South wards would be 1 per cent below and 2 per cent below the borough average (2 per cent and 3 per cent by 2004).

¹¹⁷ We received one further representation for the area from a resident from Lewisham, who proposed that the boundary between Beddington North and Wallington North follow the existing boundary.

¹¹⁸ We have noted the views expressed to us by the Borough Council regarding the boundary realignment between Beddington North and Wallington North. However, the siting of polling stations is an administrative matter for the council, and that there is insufficient evidence of the need for change to our draft recommendations. Retaining Bond Gardens in Wallington North ward would worsen electoral equality slightly, and in the absence of representations of local residents, the Commission considers that its draft recommendations provide the best levels of electoral equality whilst having regard to community identity. We also note the views made concerning the transfer of part of Lavender Vale and Stafford Road from Beddington South to Wallington South. However, we have concluded that the centre of Lavender Vale provides a clear and identifiable boundary while securing good levels of electoral equality. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for the wards of Beddington North, Beddington South, Wallington North and Wallington South as final.

Conclusions

119 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendment:

- (a) We propose realigning the boundary between the modified Sutton Central ward and the modified Sutton West ward.

120 We conclude that, in Sutton:

- (a) there should be a reduction in council size from 56 to 54;
- (b) there should be 18 wards, seven less than at present, which would involve changes to the boundaries of all of the existing wards.

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

122 As shown in Figure 4, our final recommendations for Sutton Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards where the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from eleven to none. This improved balance of representation is expected to improve further with all wards expected to vary by less than 4 per cent in 2004. Our final recommendations are set out in more detail in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Final Recommendation

Sutton Borough Council should comprise 54 councillors serving 18 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large map in the back of the report.

*Figure 4 :
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements*

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	56	54	56	54
Number of wards	25	18	25	18
Average number of electors per councillor	2,376	2,464	2,399	2,488
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	11	0	9	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	2	0	2	0

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Sutton



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6. NEXT STEPS

¹²³ Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Sutton and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

¹²⁴ It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made earlier than six weeks from the date that our recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

¹²⁵ All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Sutton

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

Figure B1:

The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Sutton Central	3	7,206	2,402	-3	7,206	2,402	-3
Sutton West	3	7,222	2,407	-2	7,502	2,501	1

Source: Electorate figures are based on Sutton Borough Council's Stage One 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.

