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Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body that conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. The broad purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements – the number of councillors, and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions – for a specific local authority. We conducted an electoral review of Braintree District Council following a request from the authority.

The review aimed to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same. The Commission commenced the review in March 2013.

This review was conducted as follows:

Stage starts	Description
26 March 2013	Consultation on council size
16 July 2013	Invitation to submit proposals for warding arrangements to LGBCE
24 September 2013	LGBCE's analysis and formulation of draft recommendations
21 January 2014	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
15 April 2014	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Draft recommendations

We proposed a council size of 49 members comprising six single-member wards, 17 two-member wards and three three-member wards. During the consultation period on a warding pattern for Braintree we received 63 submissions, including district-wide schemes from the Conservative group on the Council and from the local district Labour and Green parties. All submissions can be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Our draft recommendations for Braintree sought to reflect the evidence of community identities received while ensuring good electoral equality and providing for effective and convenient local government.

Submissions received

During the consultation on the draft recommendations for Braintree, we received 60 submissions. These included submissions from the Returning Officer at Braintree District Council, seven local political groups, five district councillors, 10 parish and town councils, one town councillor, two local organisations and 34 members of the public.

All submissions can be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Analysis and final recommendations

Electorate figures

Braintree District Council has forecast an increase in electorate of approximately 4.8% across the district by 2019.

Following publication of our draft recommendations, we did not receive any comments on the electorate figures. Having considered the information provided by the Council, we are content that the Council's projected figures are the best available at the present time. These figures form the basis of the final recommendations.

General analysis

We have considered all submissions received during the consultation on our draft recommendations. As a result, we have proposed to make minor amendments to the boundary between our Braintree Central & Beckers Green and Bocking Blackwater wards and we have proposed to change the names of three wards. Elsewhere, we have confirmed our draft recommendations as final.

Our final recommendations for Braintree are that the Council should have 49 members representing six single-member, 17 two-member and three three-member wards. None of the wards will have a variance of more than 10% from the average for the district by 2019. Having taken into account the evidence we have received during consultation, we believe that our final recommendations will ensure good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and providing for effective and convenient local government.

What happens next?

We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for Braintree District Council. An Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament and will be implemented subject to Parliamentary scrutiny. The Order will provide for new electoral arrangements which will come into force at the next elections for Braintree District Council in 2015.

We are grateful to all those organisations and individuals who have contributed to the review through expressing their views and advice. The full report is available to download at www.lgbce.org.uk

Our final recommendations can also be viewed at
<http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk>

1 Introduction

1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body which conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. This electoral review is being conducted following a formal request by Braintree District Council for an electoral review of the authority, with a view to considering council size.

2 We wrote to Braintree District Council as well as other interested parties inviting the submission of proposals on warding arrangements for the Council. The submissions received during the consultation on warding patterns informed our *Draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Braintree District Council*, which were published on 21 January 2014. Consultation on our draft recommendations took place until 14 April 2014.

What is an electoral review?

3 The main aim of an electoral review is to try to ensure ‘electoral equality’, which means that all councillors in a single authority represent approximately the same number of electors. Our objective is to make recommendations that will improve electoral equality, while also trying to reflect communities in the area and provide for effective and convenient local government.

4 Our three main considerations – equalising the number of electors each councillor represents; reflecting community identity; and providing for effective and convenient local government – are set out in legislation¹ and our task is to strike the best balance between them when making our recommendations. Our powers, as well as the guidance we have provided for electoral reviews and further information on the review process, can be found on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Why are we conducting a review in Braintree?

5 We decided to conduct this review because a formal request was made by Braintree District Council for an electoral review of the authority, with a view to considering council size.

How will the recommendations affect you?

6 The recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the Council. They will also decide which ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward and, in some instances, which parish or town council wards you vote in. Your ward name may change, as may the names of parish or town council wards in the area. If you live in a parish, the name or boundaries of that parish will not change as a result of our recommendations.

¹ Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

7 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Members of the Commission are:

Max Caller CBE (Chair)
Professor Colin Mellors (Deputy Chair)
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL
Alison Lowton
Sir Tony Redmond
Dr Colin Sinclair CBE
Professor Paul Wiles CB

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill
Director of Reviews: Archie Gall

2 Analysis and final recommendations

8 We have now finalised our recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Braintree District Council.

9 As described earlier, our prime aim when recommending new electoral arrangements for Braintree is to achieve a level of electoral fairness – that is, each elector’s vote being worth the same as another’s. In doing so we must have regard to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act),² with the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government
- provide for equality of representation
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities, in particular
 - the desirability of arriving at boundaries that are easily identifiable
 - the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties

10 Legislation also states that our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on the existing number of electors in an area, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of electors likely to take place over a five-year period from the date of our final recommendations. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for the wards we put forward at the end of the review.

11 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral fairness is unlikely to be attainable and there must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach is to keep variances in the number of electors each councillor represents to a minimum. We therefore recommend strongly that in formulating proposals for us to consider, local authorities and other interested parties should also try to keep variances to a minimum, making adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. As mentioned above, we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral fairness over a five-year period.

12 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in the 2009 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different divisions or wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single division or ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

13 These recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of Braintree District Council or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that the recommendations will have an adverse effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. The proposals do not take account of parliamentary constituency boundaries and we are not therefore able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Submissions received

14 Prior to, and during, the initial stages of the review, we visited Braintree District Council (‘the Council’) and met with members and officers. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 60 submissions during

² Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

the consultation on our draft recommendations. All submissions may be inspected at both our offices and those of the Council. All representations received can also be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

15 We take the evidence received during consultation very seriously and the submissions were carefully considered before we formulated our final recommendations.

Electorate figures

16 As part of this review, the Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2019, a period five years on from the scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2014. This is prescribed in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 ('the 2009 Act'). These forecasts were broken down to polling district level and projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 4.8%. The forecasts provided by the Council took into account planned developments across the district, as well as population forecasts made by the Office for National Statistics.

17 Having considered the information provided by the Council, we are content that the Council's projected figures are the best available at the present time. These figures form the basis of our final recommendations.

Council size

18 The Council currently has 60 councillors elected from 30 district wards. During the preliminary stage of the review, we met with Group Leaders and the Full Council. The Council agreed that it would not make a formal submission on council size but would instead invite the three political groups to make their own submissions.

19 We subsequently received submissions on council size from the Conservative, Labour and Green groups on the Council, and a separate representation from a district councillor.

20 The Conservative group proposed a council size of 50 for Braintree district, a reduction of 10 from the existing council size. It argued that given the abolition of Area Committees, the reform of the Overview & Scrutiny function and the transfer of responsibilities away from the Council, members' workloads were lower than at the time of the last review and so a membership of 50 would be more appropriate for the way the Council now functions.

21 The Green and Labour groups both proposed a council size of 60, no change from the existing council size. Both submissions argued that member workload had increased as councillors were now expected to take a more active role in their communities, helping facilitate the delivery of services at a local level which would previously have been delivered directly by the council. The Labour group also stated that it opposed the abolition of Area Committees and had a policy commitment to reintroduce them if it regained control of the Council.

22 The district councillor argued for a membership of 40. He stated that there was currently little for many backbench councillors to do, and that a membership of 40 would facilitate the most effective warding arrangements for the district.

23 We subsequently commenced a public consultation on a council size of 50. This consultation ended on 7 May 2013. We received 56 submissions during the consultation on council size. We received one submission from a local political party, one from the Essex Police and Crime Commissioner, nine from district councillors, nine from parish councils and 36 from local residents.

24 Forty-six respondents supported a council size of 60, while six supported a council size of 50. One submission proposed a non-specific increase in council size, while three made no proposal.

25 Many respondents supporting a council size of 60 argued that the responsibilities of members had increased in recent years, in particular as a consequence of the 'localism agenda'. Some argued that a reduction in council size would have a negative impact in rural areas.

26 Those arguing for a council size of 50 argued that such a reduction would reduce bureaucracy at the Council and encourage it to be more effective and efficient, increasing engagement with local government.

27 We took the view that the preliminary submission of the Conservative group continued to make the most persuasive case for any one council size and that much of its rationale had not been refuted by the evidence received during the public consultation. We were therefore minded to adopt a council size of 50 elected members as the basis of this electoral review. A consultation on warding arrangements began on 16 July 2013 and ended on 23 September 2013.

28 During the consultation on warding arrangements we received a submission from the Green group proposing warding arrangements based on a membership of 59. The group maintained its view that a larger council size was most appropriate, and argued that it also enabled warding arrangements which better reflected our statutory criteria.

29 We did not consider that the evidence received during the consultation on warding arrangements was persuasive enough to consider adopting a larger council size as part of our draft recommendations. However, in developing our draft recommendations, we noted that a membership of 49 provided a better allocation of councillors across the district as well as a better balance between our statutory criteria. We therefore based our draft recommendations on a council size of 49 rather than 50.

30 During the consultation on our draft recommendations we received 19 submissions which commented on council size. We did not consider that any of the evidence received during the consultation on our draft recommendations was persuasive enough to consider adopting a different council size as part of our final recommendations. We therefore confirm a council size of 49 members for Braintree as part of our final recommendations.

Electoral fairness

31 Electoral fairness, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. It is expected that our recommendations will provide for

electoral fairness, reflect communities in the area, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

32 In seeking to achieve electoral fairness, we work out the average number of electors per councillor. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district (111,493 in 2013 and 116,844 by 2019) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 49 under our final recommendations. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our final recommendations is 2,275 in 2013 and 2,385 by 2019.

33 Under our final recommendations, none of our proposed wards will have an electoral variance of greater than 10% from the average for the district by 2019. We are therefore satisfied that we have achieved good levels of electoral fairness under our final recommendations for Braintree.

General analysis

34 Prior to formulating our draft recommendations we received 63 submissions, including district-wide schemes from the Conservative group on the Council and from the local district Labour and Green parties.

35 We also received district-wide submissions from Councillor Canning and two local residents, and a submission from Brooks Newmark MP (Braintree) for the area of the district covered by his parliamentary constituency. These latter four submissions proposed the same scheme as each other with the exception of the town of Witham. The schemes were identical to the Conservative group submission in all but two of the wards in the rural area and were identical in the town of Braintree. In Halstead, the four submissions proposed a scheme for two two-member wards. In Witham, one of the local residents proposed a scheme identical to that of the Conservative group, while Councillor Canning and the other local resident proposed an alternative scheme.

36 In addition to the district-wide schemes, we received one submission from a local organisation, five from district councillors, 20 from representatives of parish and town councils and 30 from local residents. Most submissions provided localised comments on warding arrangements in particular areas of the district. These included proposals for Halstead town from Halstead Town Council and Halstead Residents' Association.

37 The proposals of the district Green Party were based on a council size of 59. We did not consider that the evidence provided by the Green Party to support this council size was persuasive, and considered that a council size of around 50 was most appropriate for Braintree based on the evidence received during our consultation on council size.

38 Our draft recommendations were for six single-member wards, 17 two-member wards and three three-member wards. We considered that our proposals provided for good levels of electoral equality while reflecting our understanding of community identities and interests in Braintree district.

39 During the consultation on our draft recommendations, we received 60 submissions. These included submissions from the Returning Officer at Braintree

District Council, seven local political groups, five district councillors, 10 parish and town councils, one town councillor, two local organisations and 34 members of the public.

40 We received 33 submissions that commented on our draft recommendations for Witham. Of these, 10 expressed their support for the Labour Party's submission made during the previous consultation on warding arrangements; however, no new proposals were made for the town. Other submissions commented on our proposals in localised areas including Black Notley, Braintree, Bocking, Feering, Great Notley, Kelvedon and Rivenhall.

41 We have considered all submissions received during consultation on our draft recommendations. In our final recommendations for Braintree, we have sought to address evidence received during consultation and to achieve good levels of electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests.

42 Our final recommendations are for six single-member, 17 two-member and three three-member wards. No ward would have a variance of more than 10% from the average for the district by 2019. A summary of our proposed electoral arrangements is set out in Table A1 (on pages 20–2) and on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Electoral arrangements

43 This section of the report details the submissions we have received, our consideration of them, and our final recommendations for each area of Braintree. The following areas of the authority are considered in turn:

- Rural Braintree (pages 9–11)
- Braintree Town (pages 12–13)
- Halstead (page 13)
- Witham (pages 13–14)

44 Details of the final recommendations are set out in Table A1 on pages 20–2 and illustrated on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Rural Braintree

45 The rural part of Braintree comprises the entirety of the north of the district, the central area to the west and east of Braintree town, and the villages between Braintree and Witham. During consultation on our draft recommendations, we received 26 submissions which commented on our proposals for this area. These were from two district councillors, seven political groups, nine parish councils and eight members of the public. The respondents expressed mixed support for our draft recommendations.

46 At the northern end of the rural area our draft recommendations were for the four single-member wards of Bumpstead, Stour Valley North, Stour Valley South and Yeldham. During consultation on our draft recommendations we received three submissions that commented on this area from Bures Hamlet Parish Council, Gestingthorpe Parish Council and one member of the public.

47 Bures Hamlet Parish Council and Gestingthorpe Parish Council both expressed concern about the distances that district councillors would have to cover in order to effectively represent the proposed Stour Valley South ward. Gestingthorpe Parish Council also stated that it is currently in a ward with parishes with similar local issues. However, neither parish council made a substantive alternative proposal for the area. A member of the public argued that Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards should each have two councillors rather than one. However, this would result in significant over-representation of these two wards.

48 We did not receive any further comments on our proposed wards in this area and we therefore confirm our draft recommendations as final.

49 Under our final recommendations Bumpstead, Stour Valley North, Stour Valley South and Yeldham wards are forecast to have 1% more, 1% fewer, 3% more and 6% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2019, respectively.

50 In the centre of the district our draft recommendations were for the single-member wards of Gosfield & Greenstead Green and Rayne, and the two-member wards of Hedingham, The Colnes and Three Fields. During consultation on our draft recommendations we received four submissions that commented on this area which included two separate submissions from the Council's Conservative Group and submissions from Great Bardfield Parish Council and Great Saling Parish Council.

51 The submission from Great Saling Parish Council was made in opposition to the inclusion of the parish in Rayne ward, arguing that the parish should be included in Three Fields ward. Whilst the submission included evidence of community identity, moving the parish would have a significant consequential effect on the neighbouring wards in terms of electoral equality which were not addressed in the submission, nor was a substantive alternative proposal for the area made. The submission from Great Bardfield Parish Council stated that the draft recommendations appeared to recognise the common interests and concerns of the parishes within Three Fields ward and implied their support for the recommendations.

52 The Conservative group proposed an amendment to the boundary between our proposed Rayne, Braintree West and Great Notley & Black Notley wards. The submission suggested that the northern boundary of Great Notley & Black Notley ward should run along the A120 rather than to the north of it, with the area to the north being divided between Rayne and Braintree East wards. A separate submission from the Conservative Group argued that the name of our proposed Three Fields ward should be changed to Three Fields & The Pant Valley, a name which it considered more inclusive. We consider that neither of these suggestions were supported by substantive enough evidence to justify changing our draft recommendations.

53 We did not receive any further comments on our proposed wards in this area and therefore confirm our draft recommendations as final.

54 Under our final recommendations Gosfield & Greenstead Green, Hedingham, Rayne, The Colnes and Three Fields wards are forecast to have 5% fewer, 2% fewer, 6% fewer, 3% fewer and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2019, respectively.

55 In the south-east of the district our draft recommendations were for the two-member wards of Coggeshall, Kelvedon and Silver End & Cressing. During consultation on our draft recommendations we received 10 submissions that commented on this area which included submissions from two district councillors, Witham & Braintree Green Party, four parish councils and three members of the public.

56 Submissions from Councillors Foster and Mitchell (Conservative, Kelvedon ward) both welcomed the proposed Kelvedon ward. However, they both suggested that the ward should be named Kelvedon & Feering to reflect both parishes that make up the ward. This view was also put forward by Feering Parish Council and three members of the public. Having considered the evidence provided we are content to name the proposed ward Kelvedon & Feering under our final recommendations.

57 We received three submissions regarding our proposed Silver End & Cressing ward. Submissions from the Witham & Braintree Green Party and Rivenhall Parish Council argued that the name of the ward should include Rivenhall. A submission from Cressing Parish Council argued that the ward should also include the parish of Bradwell citing agricultural and ecclesiastical links between the parishes of Bradwell and Cressing. We consider that neither of these suggestions is supported by substantive evidence and are not persuaded to change our draft recommendations for Silver End & Cressing.

58 We did not receive any further comments in regard to our proposed Coggeshall ward and we therefore confirm our draft recommendations as final.

59 Under our final recommendations Coggeshall, Kelvedon & Feering and Silver End & Cressing wards are forecast to have equal to, 7% fewer and 1% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2019, respectively.

60 In the south-west of the district our draft recommendations were for a two-member Hatfield Peverel & Terling ward and a three-member Great Notley & Black Notley ward. During the consultation on our draft recommendations we received four submissions that commented on this area from the Council's Conservative Group, Black Notley Parish Council and two members of the public.

61 As outlined in paragraph 52 the Conservative Group suggested an amendment to the northern boundary of Great Notley & Black Notley ward; however, we consider that this was not supported by sufficient evidence to justify a change to our draft recommendations.

62 The submission from Black Notley Parish Council stated that the parish would wish to be in a ward with neighbouring villages such as Terling or Cressing rather than larger urban developments such as Great Notley. However, the Parish Council provided no evidence in support of its request, nor did it propose any alternative warding arrangements for the area. Two members of the public also opposed the draft recommendations for Great Notley & Black Notley. These too failed to provide an alternative proposal for the area.

63 Accordingly, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations for the south-west of the district as final. Under our final recommendations Hatfield Peverel & Terling and Great Notley & Black Notley wards are forecast to have 1% more and

2% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2019, respectively.

Braintree town

64 Braintree is the largest town in Braintree district. It and the neighbouring Maylands area are the only parts of the district that are unparished. During consultation on our draft recommendations we received 14 submissions which commented on our proposals for this area. These were from the Returning Officer at Braintree District Council, Witham & District Co-op Party, Braintree District Labour Party, Braintree and Bocking Carnival Committee and 10 members of the public.

65 Braintree & District Labour Party argued that its previous proposals for Braintree, made during the consultation on warding arrangements, are 'more robust and reflect the local community better than the Draft Proposals'. The submission reiterated the original proposals. Seven members of the public also opposed our draft recommendations, with four of those respondents lending their support to the Labour Party's proposals. One member of the public voiced their support for the draft recommendations. We consider that our draft recommendations provided the best balance between the statutory criteria for Braintree and we are not persuaded that sufficient evidence has been received to the contrary to justify significant changes.

66 A submission from the Returning Officer at Braintree District Council suggested two minor boundary changes to wards in Braintree. The first was to the boundary between our proposed Braintree Central & Beckers Green and Braintree Blackwater wards. Under our draft recommendations the boundary between these two wards runs to the west of 440 Coggeshall Road placing the properties at 440–446 Coggeshall Road in Braintree Blackwater ward and separating them from the rest of the properties on the south side of Coggeshall Road. The Returning Officer proposed amending this boundary so that it instead runs to the east of these four properties. We consider that there is merit to this proposal and we are content to adopt it as part of our final recommendations. The second proposal was to amend the boundary between our proposed Bocking North and Bocking South wards so that one property, 76 Church Lane, is moved to Bocking South ward from Bocking North on the basis that it shares a postcode with properties to the south. We do not take postcodes into account when conducting electoral reviews and we do not therefore propose to amend the boundaries of our Bocking North and Bocking South wards.

67 Several submissions commented on our proposed ward names for Braintree. Braintree & District Labour Party, Braintree and Bocking Carnival Committee and one member of the public proposed that Braintree Central & Beckers Green ward should be renamed Braintree East & Central. Witham & District Co-op Party argued that the ward should be renamed Braintree East. We do not consider that the evidence provided in support of these proposals was sufficiently persuasive and we confirm the ward name of Braintree Central & Beckers Green as part of our final recommendations.

68 Braintree & District Labour Party and Witham & District Co-op Party also proposed that Braintree Blackwater ward should be renamed Bocking Blackwater. The Labour Party argued that the area north of Coggeshall Road 'is in fact the parish of Bocking'. Notwithstanding the fact that the area is, in fact, unparished, we recognise that this area is considered Bocking rather than Braintree and we are

content to adopt the proposed ward name Bocking Blackwater as part of our final recommendations.

69 We did not receive any further comments on our proposed wards in Braintree and elsewhere and therefore confirm our draft recommendations as final.

70 Under our final recommendations Bocking Blackwater, Bocking North, Bocking South, Braintree Central & Beckers Green, Braintree South and Braintree West wards are forecast to have 6% more, 8% fewer, equal to, 6% fewer, equal to and 1% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2019, respectively.

Halstead

71 Halstead is a market town in the centre of the district. As part of our draft recommendations we proposed the two-member wards of Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity.

72 We received seven submissions commenting on our draft recommendations for Halstead. These submissions were made by Councillor Shute (Braintree East ward), Halstead & District Branch Labour Party, Witham & District Co-op Party and four members of the public.

73 Of these seven submissions, six expressed their support for our draft recommendations for Halstead with one member of the public describing them as 'borderline acceptable'. We did not receive any alternative proposals for Halstead and as such we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations for the town as final.

74 Under our final recommendations, Halstead Trinity and Halstead St Andrew's wards are forecast to have equal to and 5% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2019, respectively.

Witham

75 Witham is a town on the south-eastern boundary of Braintree district, formed from a combination of older housing and post-war developments. Under our draft recommendations we proposed the four two-member wards of Witham Central, Witham Maltings, Witham North and Witham West.

76 We received 33 submissions commenting on our draft recommendations for Witham. Submissions were made by three district councillors, five political groups, one town councillor, one parish council, one local organisation and 22 members of the public.

77 All 33 submissions that commented directly on the draft recommendations for Witham opposed the warding pattern that was proposed. Most of the objections were based on the premise that the town was underrepresented under our draft recommendations. Fairness at local elections – that is, any elector's vote being worth approximately the same as another's – is a fundamental democratic principle and one of the Commission's objectives is to provide warding arrangements that 'are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters'. When formulating our recommendations, we seek to achieve ratios of electors per councillor as close to the authority average in

every ward. In Witham, all four wards are comfortably within 10% of the average number of electors per councillor across the district. We are therefore satisfied that we achieved good electoral equality for Witham under our draft recommendations and that there is no evidence to amend them on the basis of electoral equality.

78 Of the 33 submissions received, nine submissions voiced their support for the proposals of Braintree & District Labour Party made during the previous consultation stage on warding arrangements. The Labour Party itself also made a submission reiterating its previous proposed warding arrangements. We do not consider that any substantive new evidence was provided during the consultation on our draft recommendations and consider that our draft recommendations provide the best balance between the statutory criteria for Witham.

79 A submission from Witham Town Council stated that the ward name Witham Maltings and the parish ward names of Maltings and Hatfield were ‘inappropriate’. The Town Council stated that the Maltings estate for which Witham Maltings ward was named is still under development and that there are more established communities within the ward. The Town Council proposed that the name of the ward should be Witham South, a name already in use in the area. We are content that this is more reflective of the area and we therefore propose that the ward be renamed Witham South under our final recommendations, and that the parish ward be renamed South. The Town Council did not suggest an alternative name for Hatfield parish ward and we therefore confirm that name as final.

80 Under our final recommendations, Witham Central, Witham North, Witham South and Witham West wards would have 2% more, 7% more, 1% more and 8% more electors per councillor respectively than the average for the district by 2019.

Conclusions

81 Table 1 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, based on 2013 and 2019 electorate figures.

Table 1: Summary of electoral arrangements

	Final recommendations	
	2013	2019
Number of councillors	49	49
Number of electoral wards	26	26
Average number of electors per councillor	2,275	2,385
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	1	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	0	0

Final recommendation

Braintree District Council should comprise 49 councillors serving 26 wards as detailed and named in Table A1 and illustrated on the large map accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

82 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

83 Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make changes to parish electoral arrangements where these are as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Braintree District Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

84 To meet our obligations under the 2009 Act, we propose consequential parish warding arrangements for the parish of Halstead.

Final recommendation

Halstead Town Council should return 12 parish councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Holy Trinity North (returning three members), Holy Trinity South (returning three members), St Andrew's North (returning three members) and St Andrew's South (returning three members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 1.

85 To meet our obligations under the 2009 Act, we propose consequential parish warding arrangements for the parish of Witham.

Final recommendation

Witham Town Council should return 16 parish councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Central (returning two members), Hatfield (returning two members), South (returning four members), North (returning four members) and West (returning four members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 1.

3 What happens next?

86 We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for Braintree District Council. A draft Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements which will come into force at the next elections for Braintree District Council in 2015.

Equalities

87 This report has been screened for impact on equalities, with due regard being given to the general equalities duties as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. As no potential negative impacts were identified, a full equality impact analysis is not required.

4 Mapping

Final recommendations for Braintree

88 The following map illustrates our proposed ward boundaries for Braintree District Council:

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Braintree District Council.

You can also view our final recommendations for Braintree District Council on our interactive maps at <http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk>

Appendix A

Table A1: Final recommendations for Braintree District Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Bocking Blackwater	3	7,460	2,487	9%	7,561	2,520	6%
2	Bocking North	2	4,183	2,092	-8%	4,371	2,186	-8%
3	Bocking South	2	4,484	2,242	-1%	4,780	2,390	0%
4	Braintree Central & Beckers Green	3	6,337	2,112	-7%	6,759	2,253	-6%
5	Braintree South	2	4,346	2,173	-4%	4,755	2,378	0%
6	Braintree West	2	4,537	2,269	0%	4,804	2,402	1%
7	Bumpstead	1	2,341	2,341	3%	2,414	2,414	1%
8	Coggeshall	2	4,625	2,313	2%	4,791	2,396	0%
9	Gosfield & Greenstead Green	1	2,202	2,202	-3%	2,255	2,255	-5%
10	Great Notley & Black Notley	3	7,164	2,388	5%	7,293	2,431	2%
11	Halstead St Andrew's	2	4,341	2,171	-5%	5,006	2,503	5%

Table A1 (cont.): Final recommendations for Braintree District Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12	Halstead Trinity	2	4,631	2,316	2%	4,755	2,378	0%
13	Hatfield Peverel & Terling	2	4,735	2,368	4%	4,830	2,415	1%
14	Hedingham	2	4,128	2,064	-9%	4,673	2,337	-2%
15	Kelvedon & Feering	2	4,369	2,185	-4%	4,458	2,229	-7%
16	Rayne	1	2,211	2,211	-3%	2,240	2,240	-6%
17	Silver End & Cressing	2	4,706	2,353	3%	4,840	2,420	1%
18	Stour Valley North	1	2,302	2,302	1%	2,365	2,365	-1%
19	Stour Valley South	1	2,434	2,434	7%	2,465	2,465	3%
20	The Colnes	2	4,462	2,231	-2%	4,635	2,318	-3%
21	Three Fields	2	4,548	2,274	0%	4,676	2,338	-2%
22	Witham Central	2	4,321	2,161	-5%	4,854	2,427	2%
23	Witham North	2	4,959	2,480	9%	5,094	2,547	7%

Table A1 (cont.): Final recommendations for Braintree District Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2013)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
24	Witham South	2	4,389	2,195	-4%	4,803	2,402	1%
25	Witham West	2	5,132	2,566	13%	5,135	2,568	8%
26	Yeldham	1	2,146	2,146	-6%	2,232	2,232	-6%
	Totals	49	111,493	-	-	116,844	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,275	-	-	2,385	-

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

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

Appendix B

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve on a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever division they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral fairness	When one elector's vote is worth the same as another's
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. For the purposes of this report, we refer specifically to the electorate for local government elections

Local Government Boundary Commission for England or LGBCE	The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is responsible for undertaking electoral reviews. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England assumed the functions of the Boundary Committee for England in April 2010
Multi-member ward or division	A ward or division represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	The 13 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and can be found at www.nationalparks.gov.uk
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents
Parish council	A body elected by electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town council'
Parish (or Town) council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward

Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by the Boundary Commission for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England
Political management arrangements	The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enabled local authorities in England to modernise their decision-making process. Councils could choose from two broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet or a cabinet with a leader
Town council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at www.nalc.gov.uk
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or district, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the borough or district council

