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Local Elections - Proposals for Reform

This Paper looks at the background to the different cycles which operate for the elections of English local authorities. It examines the role of the Local Government Commission for England in undertaking periodic electoral reviews. The Labour Government have produced proposals to introduce a system of annual elections for all types of councils and to reform electoral administration. The implications are considered in this Paper, but other Government proposals on new models of governance for local government are beyond its scope. Research Paper 98/38 *Cabinets, Committees, and Elected Mayors* provides background in this area. A forthcoming Research Paper will provide a summary of results after the latest round of local elections on May 6 1999.

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Summary of main points

Understanding the cycle of elections for local authorities can be a complicated process for the elector. Some authorities, such as metropolitan districts, elect one third of the council each year. Others, such as county councils and London boroughs, elect the whole council every four years. There are varying numbers of councillors per ward, even in the same local authority. In contrast, all authorities in Scotland and Wales elect the full council on a three or four year cycle. This diversity stems mainly from the accidents of history, but the review of the structure of English local government undertaken by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) in the 1990s did not seek to impose a uniform system of election- 17 of the 46 unitary authorities created by the review chose to elect by thirds, for example.

The LGCE is also required to undertake periodic electoral reviews (PER), and make recommendations on the overall number of councillors, and the number and boundaries of wards/electoral areas. It began a PER in 1996, which is still continuing. Once its final recommendations are made, the Secretary of State may implement them by order, with or without modifications. An extra round of elections may be necessary to implement the recommendations, as set out in a recent parliamentary answer.

Turnout in local authority elections in England has always been lower than for Westminster elections; it does not compare favourably with other European countries. Turnout in the 1998 elections was at a twenty year low for both metropolitan areas and London boroughs, and this has prompted concern about the state of local democracy. There have been calls to introduce proportional representation as a way of stimulating interest.

The Labour government manifesto contained a commitment to the introduction of annual elections for all types of authorities. A Green Paper was issued in February 1998, followed by a White Paper in July 1998. These made more detailed proposals in this area and also set out proposals to improve the administration of local elections and increase turnout. Unitary authorities would have elections by thirds every four years, with the fallow year being used for other elections (such as the Greater London Authority). In two tier areas half the council in each tier would be elected in alternate years. Commentators on local elections have cast doubt on the value of annual elections as a way of increasing turnout, although this does not detract from the possible enhancement in accountability to the local electorate of frequent polls. The draft bill on new models of local governance, contained in a Command Paper of March 1999, does not attempt to implement annual elections, but does provide for the election of mayors by a new electoral system - the Supplementary Vote. The timescale for a change to annual elections therefore remains uncertain.

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I The electoral cycle for local authorities

A. Introduction

The early history of local elections is conveniently summarised in a recent academic study *Local Elections In Britain*.¹ Modern local government dates from the *Municipal Corporations Act 1835* and this study has found that the Act was passed at a time when interest in annual elections was high - supporters included Jeremy Bentham, the inspiration behind the *Poor Law (Amendment) Act 1834*. The 1835 Act reflected a policy compromise; local councillors would be elected every three years but one third of the council would have to seek election every year. Amendments in the House of Lords however ensured that one third of the council should be aldermen, elected by the councillors themselves, and given a six year term. *The Local Government Act 1888*, which created county councils, introduced triennial elections for the entire county council, with selected aldermen. Rallings and Thrasher comment:

The need to appease diverse opinion thus delivered a local electoral system which contained contradictory elements. While the towns and cities were elected by thirds on an annual basis, the new county councils were to be elected *en masse* every three years. An element would not be elected, but rather selected, by the remaining councillors. Such inconsistencies were to remain in place until the 1972 local government reorganisation, and, in the case of different electoral cycles, would survive to the present day. The earlier faith in annual elections had taken a pounding in the middle part of the nineteenth century. Violence and corruption were common at local elections and it was argued that their increased frequency would simply exacerbate the problem. The middle classes' fear of Chartism and growing working-class radicalism quelled the urge for more frequent testing of public opinion. While these factors were undoubtedly present they were seldom expressed publicly. Instead, the debate fixed on three main issues. First, there was the need to maintain continuity of council membership. Second, reformers were concerned that too much turnover amongst council members would be bad for consistent policy making. Third, and not least, was the fear that suitably qualified councillors, able to take on the expanded administrative responsibilities of county government, would be dissuaded from seeking office if they had to place themselves regularly before the electorate. With hindsight, it seems that debates about the breadth and frequency of local elections were driven more by views about the electorate, actual and potential, than the advantages and disadvantages of differing electoral systems.

¹ Colin Thrasher, Michael Rallings 1997

B. Wards²

The system of dividing councils by wards dates back to the 1835 Act. Keith-Lucas has suggested that warding was introduced under pressure from Conservatives who were fearful that 'if elections were held at large over the whole town, they might fail to win any seats at all. If however, the towns were divided into wards, some predominantly middle class, others working class, they should win some seats at least in the former'.³ Towns of over 6,000 were so divided, with attention paid to the rateable value in each ward.

Wards are important for parliamentary elections, as the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions (PBCs) use them as 'building blocks' for parliamentary constituencies, and will not normally split wards between constituencies. The most recent review by the English PBC commented that the use of wards caused some problems where large wards, common in some metropolitan counties and London boroughs, reduced flexibility in constructing new boundaries.⁴ In addition, the size of wards can vary considerably, meaning that one councillor can be elected on a much smaller number of votes than another.⁵ In 1989 the average electorate in each single-member county council division was 7,589, with a range between 1,505 and 19,313.⁶

Although variations in the size of wards can be defended as necessary to ensure that the community of local interest is represented, large discrepancies in size can mean that some votes have more weight than others for the same election. Single member wards are more common in rural areas, reflecting the low population densities, but over two thirds of wards in England are multi member with typically three members per ward. The general characteristics are as follows:

- **Metropolitan districts** A number divisible by 3- in practice 3 councillors per ward
- **London boroughs** 1-3 councillors per ward
- **Unitary Councils and Shire districts**⁷ No limit, occasionally over three councillors per ward, but can be just one
- **County Council** 1 councillor per electoral division

² wards are used in English districts and parishes, but the term electoral division is used for county councils

³ *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* 1978 Bryan Keith-Lucas and Peter G Richards pp 20-21

⁴ *Boundary Commission for England: Fourth Periodical Report* HC 433 para 2.26. See also Appendix E Summer 1993 Newsletter 'The use of wards as constituency building blocks'

⁵ Rallings and Thrasher point out that in London in 1986 the largest three member ward had an electorate of 13,233 and the smallest just 4,419 (p 192)

⁶ see Rallings and Thrasher p 192

⁷ the Isle of Wight is a unitary council, but is also a county council returning one member per division

In districts which have partial elections some wards can have varying numbers of councillors. The result is that in any one year of the electoral cycle there can be some proportion of the local electorate which does have the opportunity to vote and those which do not. The current cycle of elections in English local government can be characterised as unnecessarily complex. Reorganisation of local government in Scotland and Wales from the 1970s has produced a relatively simple system of four yearly elections on a whole council basis.

C. The 1972 Local Government Act and afterwards

As originally introduced, the *Local Government Act 1972* provided for elections by thirds in every district ; however during the passage of the bill three member wards were strongly opposed for sparsely populated rural areas and amendments were made to provide that non-metropolitan districts need not have elections by thirds and that a council could opt for either whole councils or elections by thirds. There was one 'fallow' year without elections in areas which elected by thirds, as each councillor was to serve for four years. This year was to be used for election to county councils which were to take place on a whole council basis, with one councillor for each electoral division. The office of alderman was abolished. Since the 1970s some districts have moved from partial to whole council elections and currently approximately one third operate a system of partial elections. Rallings and Thrasher found evidence that those shire districts which hold annual elections for a part of the council have historically attracted a higher rate of party competition than those with whole council elections (pp 93-94).

The 1972 Act contained a power for the Secretary of State to alter the timing of London borough elections by affirmative resolution order. This power was used in 1976 to extend the period between elections from three years to four, to bring London authorities into line with the four year term used elsewhere in Great Britain.⁸

An initial electoral review of the new authorities established under the 1972 Act was conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC). It considered that only in exceptional circumstances should wards contain more than three councillors.⁹

⁸ the *London Government Act 1963* had created three year whole council elections for both London boroughs and the new Greater London Council. the background is set out in *Periodic Electoral Review: A Consultation Paper* issued by the Local Government Commission for England in 1995. For more information on the cycle of elections to the GLC see Research Paper 98/118 *The Greater London Authority Bill: Electoral and Constitutional Aspects*

⁹ LGBC Report no 6 HMSO 1973

Later recommendations from the Widdicombe report into the conduct of local government of 1986¹⁰ that there should be a universal adoption of single member wards and whole council elections every four years were not implemented. The Widdicombe recommendations were as follows:

The need for a simple uniform system

7.15 As we have seen in Chapter Two, local electoral turn out is poor—about 40%. While we do not believe that the current electoral arrangements are a primary cause of this, a system which is as complex and inconsistent as the present one is hardly calculated to encourage electoral participation. Citizens have a reasonable expectation that the electoral arrangements should be simple, and that when they move from one area to another that the arrangements should be the same unless there is a clear case to the contrary. We cannot see such a case. The current differences seem to be almost entirely a matter of historical accident, relating to the electoral fashion at the time the antecedents of the current authorities were created. There should in future be a simple uniform system applying throughout Great Britain.

Single member wards

7.16 The main principle guiding this uniform system should be that every ward or division should be represented by only one member. Multi-member Parliamentary seats were abolished in the 19th century, and rightly so. Single member seats, whether at national or local level, provide a strong link between the member and his or her constituents. The electorate have a single person to whom they can go with any problems. There is no danger of members shuffling difficult problems onto each other or alternatively of seeking to compete with each other for kudos. Single member seats, because they are smaller, also increase the chance of independents and candidates from third parties being elected; and there is some evidence that they encourage higher turn-out. The critics of the first past the post electoral system concede that, whatever its weaknesses, it does have the advantage—unlike the single transferable vote—of allowing single member seats to continue. It seems perverse for local government to have the first past the post electoral system, but at the same time to have multi-member wards. Multi-member wards should be abolished. We recognise that this would require reviews by the Local Government Boundary Commissions for England and Wales to divide up current multi-member wards, and that this process might require the change to be phased.

¹⁰ *The Conduct of Local Authority Business Cmnd 9797* 1986 para 167 Both the Maud (1967) and Redcliffe Maud Commissions (Cmnd 4040 1969) had also supported a uniform system of single member wards and whole council elections

(iii) Conclusion

7.28 The close balance of argument above is reflected in public opinion. In our attitude survey 47% of electors said they would prefer whole council elections and 44% election by thirds. The figures were much the same in Scotland where all elections are on a whole council basis. While the arguments are much more balanced than those for and against single member wards, there is an equally great need to have a clear decision in favour of one system or the other so that the same arrangements apply throughout Great Britain. In our view the arguments for whole council elections carry the more weight. We are also influenced by the fact that Scotland has only recently adopted a uniform system of whole council elections, and that there has been no apparent difficulty with these arrangements. They could not reasonably be expected to switch to elections by thirds. While it would be feasible to have elections by thirds throughout England and Wales and whole council elections throughout Scotland, this would not be desirable. The simplest arrangement is to have whole council elections throughout Great Britain.

The Government response to Widdicombe concluded that change was not justified.¹¹

1.16 The present arrangements, both as to the existence of county and district councils in the non-metropolitan areas, and as to the size and electoral arrangements in England and Wales, are not yet fifteen years old. They were reached after prolonged discussion. In particular, the variations between elections of councils as a whole, and elections by thirds were the result of strongly expressed local feelings. The response to the Widdicombe Committee's report has shown that these feelings are no less strongly held now.

1.17 The Government can see no evidence which shows clearly that changes in either of these aspects would result in more effective local government. The Government therefore have no proposals for change. They believe that the emphasis should be firmly upon making the existing local authorities efficient and responsive to the electors. Nevertheless, the Government will keep under review the need for research to establish how the different types of arrangements are working, including the question of council size.

¹¹ *The Government Response to the Widdicombe Committee of Inquiry* Cm 433 July 1988 paras 1.16-7

D. The Role of the Local Government Commission for England

The review of local government, which began with the appointment of Michael Heseltine as Secretary of State for the Environment in 1990, resulted in the creation of the Local Government Commission for England in 1992.¹² As well as its role in recommending structural change for local authorities in England, the Commission also took on the role of reviewing electoral arrangements¹³ from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.¹⁴

The work of the Local Government Commission resulted in the creation of 46 unitary authorities in the 1990s¹⁵. The general policy was to provide for all-out elections to shadow unitary authorities in the May preceding the April start-up date, and this extended to so-called 'continuing authorities' who assumed unitary status.¹⁶ 17 unitary authorities chose to elect by thirds thereafter¹⁷. Large parts of shire England retained a two tier system.

S13(3) of the 1992 Act specified that, as far as reasonably practicable, the first periodic electoral review for an area should be conducted between ten and fifteen years after the Local Government Boundary Commission had last conducted a review there. The Act was silent on the timetable for Greater London, but the Commission decided to include the area in its review. In May 1995 the Local Government Commission published a consultation paper setting out its proposed approach to the periodic reviews.¹⁸ It sought views on whether single member wards should be recommended where practicable, number of councillors appropriate to different types of authority, and whether all councils with one or two member wards should have whole council elections. During the course of the structural reviews the Commission had not taken a prescriptive approach and had produced a mix of single and multi-member ward recommendations.¹⁹

¹² under Part II of the *Local Government Act 1992*

¹³ this term covers number of councillors for the area, number and boundaries of electoral areas, number of councillors to be elected, and the number of years in which they are to be elected (s 14 of the 1992 Act)

¹⁴ The Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales and the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland remain responsible for electoral arrangements

¹⁵ for background see Research Paper 95/84 *The Local Government Review for England and Local Government Reorganisation: The Review and its Aftermath* (1998) ed Steve Leach

¹⁶ HC Deb 2 November 1994 vol 248 c 1150W

¹⁷ *Modernising Local Government: Local Democracy and Community Leadership* DETR February 1998 para 3.8

¹⁸ *Periodic Electoral Review: A Consultation Paper* LGCE 1995

¹⁹ *Reviewing Local Government in the English Shires: A report on the 1992-5 Structural Review* Local Government Commission for England March 1995 HMSO paras 127-134

In March 1996 the Commission published guidance on its approach to Periodic Electoral Reviews (PERs).²⁰ The Guidance expressed a preference for single member wards in line with the Widdicombe recommendations, noting 'single member wards have considerable advantage in terms of their clarity of accountability and, where they are appropriate and enjoy local support, [the Guidance] will seek to promote them'²¹; however the Guidance did not advocate a uniform approach to the electoral cycle. A second edition of the Guidance was issued in March 1998 and offered a less explicit policy line:

Single and multi-member wards/divisions

47 There are some legislative constraints on whether local authorities may have single and/or multi-member wards or divisions. They vary depending on the type of authority. The provisions relating to the different types are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Single/multi-member electoral areas - statutory provisions

Authority Type	Council Size
Metropolitan District	No limit, but the number of councillors returned must be divisible by three
London Borough	No limit
Shire unitary authority	No limit*
County Council	One councillor
Shire District	No limit

* *With the exception of the Isle of Wight Council, which is a unitary county council returning one councillor from each division.*

48 In practice, however, all wards in metropolitan districts return three councillors and all wards in London boroughs between one and three councillors. Virtually all shire district and shire unitary authorities also return between one and three councillors; only three district councils in England have wards which return more than three councillors (from a total of five wards).

49 During our reviews, we have heard a great deal about the advantages and disadvantages of both single-member and multi-member patterns. In practice, however, we have not been prescriptive and have generally made recommendations which provide for a combination of single and multi-member wards. Our recommendations have tended to reflect the present

²⁰ *Periodic Electoral Reviews: Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* March 1996

²¹ para 2.27

pattern of multi-member wards in most urban areas and single-member wards in many rural areas. We will continue to put forward schemes which best meet the need for electoral equality and reflect the statutory criteria.

50 Proposals for single-member wards in district council areas which are parished will need to have particular regard to their effect on parish boundary and warding arrangements. Proposals should also relate to the proposed electoral cycle. Three-member wards may create sharper accountability in authorities where there are to be elections by thirds.

51 In circumstances where our recommendation is for multi-member wards, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. We have not, in any of our reviews to date, found such circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate.

Electoral cycles

52 Current legislation provides that English county councils and London boroughs must have whole-council elections once every four years, while metropolitan districts must have elections by thirds. Under the election by thirds system, one third of the councillors in each ward retires or seeks re-election in Years One, Two and Three; there is no election in Year Four. In two-tier areas, Year Four is the year in which county council elections are held. However, many local authorities which are subject to elections by thirds have a mix of three, two and single-member wards. In such circumstances, the local elections for councillors take place, for two-member wards, in two years out of four, and for single-member wards, one year out of four.

53 Shire district councils (including shire unitary districts) may have either whole-council elections or elections by thirds. There are two ways in which they can seek to change their existing arrangements: through a recommendation from the Commission arising from an electoral review; or by a request to the Secretary of State following a resolution passed by a two-thirds majority of members. Currently, approximately 40 per cent of shire districts have whole-council elections.

54 There are champions both for elections by thirds and for whole-council elections every four years. However, the Government's General Election Manifesto contained a commitment that, "to ensure greater accountability, a proportion of councillors in each locality will be elected annually". This commitment has been taken forward through the publication of the consultation paper *Modernising Local Government – Local Democracy and Community Leadership*. Interested parties may wish to bear this intention in mind when preparing proposals in the course of an electoral review.

The current electoral cycles of county councils(whole council) and metropolitan districts (elections by thirds) are therefore fixed, and can only be altered by primary legislation.

A review of the Local Government Commission was published in July 1998 as part of the Financial Management and Policy Review of the Commission²²; one of the conclusions was that electoral reviews should be carried out on a rolling basis and not on the basis of the current 10-15 year programme; a longer term option, also recommended, was that the LGCE should merge with the Parliamentary Boundary Commission. In response to the report Hilary Armstrong said that the Government was 'minded, at the next legislative opportunity, to amend the 10-15 periodic requirement, to enable the LGC to plan their programme better, addressing the worst electoral imbalances first and having regard to the work of the PBC.' She also announced that the Government would consult widely on the proposal for merger²³

The timescale for implementing the PER recommendations were set out in a recent Parliamentary Answer:²⁴

Electoral Review

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes next to implement the periodic electoral review recommendations which he has received from the Local Government Commission for England; what is his policy for implementing future reviews; and if he will make a statement.

Ms Armstrong: Where we accept the LGC periodic electoral review recommendations our intention is to implement them as soon as practicable on a normal election day whilst ensuring that no council holds whole council elections in consecutive years.

Accordingly we are now proposing, for those district councils and county councils where final recommendations are received no later than July 2000, and where we accept them, that implementation should be on the normal election day in May 2001. For those district councils and county councils where final recommendations are received between August 2000 and July 2002, and where we accept them, implementation should be on the normal election day in May 2003.

This means that in May 2001, the normal election day for all county councils in England, there will be additional whole council elections for certain district councils. In May 2003, the normal election for all whole council

²² *Quinquennial Review of the Local Government Commission: Prior Options Study* Robert Hazell DETR 1998

²³ HC Deb 1 July 1998 c 193-3W

²⁴ HC Deb 10 March 1999 c 244W

district council elections, there will be additional elections for certain county councils.

We are not making any special proposals for implementing the Commission's reviews of London boroughs. We envisage their implementation on the next normal election day for the boroughs in May 2002, a timetable consistent with the Commission's recommendations being received between June 1999 and January 2000.

We are now consulting the Local Government Association, the National Association of Local Councils, the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Local Government Commission, the Parliamentary Boundary Commission and the main political parties on the proposals. Following this consultation we will decide how to proceed.

Thus to avoid undue delays in implementation the proposed timetable involves certain county councils and district councils holding additional whole council elections half way through the normal four year cycle. No final decision has yet been taken however, and the prospect of additional elections has met some resistance. The cycle of elections in some areas where structural change has occurred has already been affected by transitional arrangements following ward boundary revisions. 52 orders implementing PERs had been made by April 1999. The legislative framework for PERs is further considered in Appendix 1.

E. The current position

Current electoral arrangements in English local authorities are conveniently summarised in an extract from the Government's Green Paper²⁵ of February 1998:

3.6 There is no standard electoral system in local government in England. Depending on where they live, voters may vote once, twice or three times in local government elections for a particular council over a four year period. There are relatively few voters who have the opportunity to vote every year, but not for members of the same authority.

3.7 The normal term of office for members of all councils is four years. Leaving aside some technical arrangements the pattern of elections is as follows. County, London Borough, some unitary and shire district councils and all parish councils have whole council elections every four years. In each of the three years between the county council elections, all Metropolitan districts, some unitary authorities and some shire districts elect a third of their members, each member serving for four years.

²⁵ *Modernising Local Government: Local democracy and community leadership* DETR February 1998

3.8 All wards in Metropolitan district councils, and in 12 of the 17 unitary authorities created by the recent local government review that elect by thirds, have three members. In these areas, the whole electorate can therefore be involved each time there are elections for the council. But there are no county councils in these areas so the electorate votes three years in four. In shire districts and the other unitary authorities which elect by thirds, a number of electors will vote less frequently than this as there are fewer than three councillors in most shire district and unitary authority wards. However, if they live in an area with two tier local government, they can also vote once every four years in the county council election. These arrangements are summarised in the following table:

Electoral arrangements in English local authorities

Type of authority	Electoral cycle and warding arrangements	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
County councils	Full council elections. Single member electoral districts.				FC	
London Boroughs	Full council elections. 1-3 members per ward.	FC				FC
Metropolitan Districts, 6 unitary authorities and 21 shire districts	By thirds. Almost all wards have between 1-3 members.	$\frac{1}{3}$	$\frac{1}{3}$	$\frac{1}{3}$		$\frac{1}{3}$
67 Shire Districts and 5 unitary authorities	By thirds. Almost all wards have 1 -3 members.	$\frac{1}{3}$	$\frac{1}{3}$	$\frac{1}{3}$		$\frac{1}{3}$
149 Shire Districts and 28 unitary authorities	Full council elections. All wards have three members.		FC			
Parishes	Full council elections. Some parishes warded, others not.		FC			

This table excludes transitional arrangements in recently-created unitary authorities.

Rallings and Thrasher have concluded in a recent article²⁶ that the local electoral cycle had become more complex. This was due to the piecemeal approach to structural change, to the difficulty of implementing new electoral arrangements consequent on the change-and to the necessary re-warding being carried out by the LGCE.

²⁶ *Parliamentary Affairs* January 1999 'An Audit of Local Democracy in Britain'

II Turnout

Turnout in local elections has always been variable. Rallings and Thrasher cite studies in the 1920s and 1930s with turnout rates of less than thirty per cent for counties and around fifty per cent for boroughs with frequent unopposed returns of councillors. Evidence to the Widdicombe Committee noted that local election turnout in Great Britain was almost at the bottom of the international league table, and this was despite hopes that the 1972 reorganisation would increase turnout and improve accountability. It found that typical turnout had stabilised at around 40 per cent by the mid 1950s²⁷ Nevertheless turnout in British elections appears to be less than in other comparable European states.

A table from the 1998 Green Paper summarised available data on turnout in other European countries:²⁸

Average Turnout in sub-national elections in the European Union

	%
Turnout	
Luxembourg*	93
Italy*	85
Belgium*	80
Denmark	80
Germany	72
France	68
Spain	64
Ireland	62
Portugal	60
Netherlands	54
Great Britain	40

- These countries use compulsory voting in at least some areas.

Thrasher and Ralling's study suggests that local party activity had a critical role to play in promoting the competitiveness of local elections and in stimulating turnout (p 58). Moreover, small communities appeared to have a better voting record than larger ones but there was no clear relationship between size of ward and turnout in the metropolitan areas, including London. (p 60) Ward marginality did, however, have a major influence on turnout. Their conclusions were as follows:

²⁷ *Cmnd 9800* June 1986 Research Volume III, Chapter 3

²⁸ the source was *Enhancing Local Electoral Turnout - A Guide to Current Practice and Future Reform* Rallings, Thrasher and Downe 1996

CONCLUSION

We have analysed local electoral participation from a number of different perspectives. First, we reviewed the findings from survey data which gave an insight into what sorts of individual voted or did not vote in elections. Next, we used actual turnout data to assess the impact of a wider set of variables, ranging from national influences down to ward level characteristics. Combining these approaches what can we conclude?

The evidence from survey data suggested that age, residential mobility and housing tenure were significant factors in determining the propensity to vote. In addition an individual's psychological investment in the political process also appeared critical. Miller's later two-wave panel survey confirmed many of these earlier findings with the additional observation that council tenants were more likely to vote than owner-occupiers. Arguably, the most important finding of the survey data is that there do not appear to be electors who habitually abstain from voting in either national or local elections. There does not appear to be any significant element of the electorate which is alienated from the voting experience. That suggests that if the circumstances are propitious then people who abstained in one cycle of local elections could be persuaded to vote in another.

Next, we analysed the data from local elections over a period of more than twenty years. Over time turnout in local elections appears to have increased slightly, although issues concerning the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the electoral register mean that the data should be treated with caution. The examination of the link between party competition, marginality and turnout showed that a healthy local democracy (judged in terms of local turnout) is most likely to exist where party competition is high and where no seat can be adjudged safe. By contrast the existence of local authorities and wards where one party has a secure majority has a negative effect on turnout. Depending on local context such political factors tend either to reinforce or cancel out the impact of the socioeconomic character of an authority or ward on turnout levels.

There were also a number of external political factors which seemed to have a significant effect upon turnout. Unsurprisingly, the holding of a general election in 1979 on the same day as the local elections had an obvious and positive effect on turnout. In Sweden, for example, it is commonplace to hold elections for the national and local tiers of government simultaneously. Even the proximity of general elections appears to galvanise the local electorate - perhaps by way of enhanced party activity and media coverage - and persuade more to vote than otherwise might be the case. Equally, there is a sense of election weariness with turnout falling in the set of local elections which follow a general election. Political controversy also appears to have a beneficial effect on turnout. As a general case the 1990 elections proved beyond doubt that the electorate will vote if stimulated, or perhaps

provoked would be a better description²⁹. Localised examples of the same kind of stimulus can also be found in authorities such as Liverpool, Westminster, Bradford and Basildon. In the last mentioned case the turnout rose dramatically in 1992 as the electors appeared to celebrate their newly discovered status as the touchstone of Conservative fortunes within the country as a whole.

This still leaves those authorities and wards which either defy the trends or whose turnout differs markedly from that in similar areas. Regardless of socioeconomic status, regardless of the scale of party competition, regardless of the state of council and ward marginality voters in authorities such as Rossendale, Richmond upon Thames and Stockport appear to turn out in greater numbers than we might expect. At the other extreme the particular reluctance of voters in Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Wigan, Sandwell, Stoke on Trent and Hull to go to the polls cannot satisfactorily be explained with reference to those variables. Analysis of quantitative data, we suspect, can only take us so far in answering questions about which factors serve to encourage or discourage local electoral turnout. The next stage is the detailed examination of electoral and political processes in those authorities to try to determine if they provide the clue (see Rallings *et al.* 1996).

Although the influence of national political parties on local elections is often deplored, over the last two decades, note Rallings and Thrasher, 'greater party competition has brought a new impetus to the conduct of local elections, has helped loosen the stranglehold exerted by the two main parties in many authorities and has resulted in new ways of administering local authority business. Party politicisation of local government, therefore, has often brought variety and not drab uniformity to local electoral outcomes' (p 120).

However the low turnout in the 1998 local elections has led to renewed concern. The overall turnout for English local authorities was 30 per cent, ranging from 25 per cent in metropolitan and unitary authorities to 35 per cent in London.³⁰ These figures marked a 20 year low for metropolitan London areas, and did not inspire confidence in the validity of one of the main intentions behind the structural change of the 1990s - that new unitary authorities would attract greater local support and interest. Rallings and Thrasher found that the general pattern in 1998 was of widespread lack of interest which might be a function of the difficulties of understanding the operation of the electoral system, of the tendency of the first past the post voting system to skew distribution of seats to the dominant party and of simple voter fatigue.³¹

²⁹ this is a reference to the high turnout in 1990 seemingly prompted by controversy over the poll tax or community charge

³⁰ *Local Elections Handbook 1998*, Rallings and Thrasher Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre for details of the results, and a list of those authorities which had elections, see Research Paper 98/59 *The Local Elections of 7 May 1998 and the London Referendum*

³¹ *Parliamentary Affairs* January 1999 'An Audit of Local Democracy in Britain'

It has been noted that the introduction of universal postal voting in New Zealand in 1990 combined with extensive local government reorganisation resulted in a doubling of the turnout from 30 to 60 per cent.³² The most comprehensive study of the impact of proportional representation on turnout concluded that it produced an impact of between 5-7 per cent.³³ However caution should be used when applying international examples to the English local government context.

III The Labour Government Proposals

A. Annual Elections

The Labour Party manifesto for the 1997 election included a commitment to the introduction of annual elections: 'To ensure greater accountability a proportion of councillors in each locality will be elected annually.' Earlier policy papers in the 1990s had recommended annual elections as a mechanism to increase turnout.³⁴

In February 1998 the Green Paper *Modernising Local Government: Local Democracy and Community Leadership* was published. It invited views on the feasibility of moving to a system of annual elections. The subsequent White Paper of July 1998 *Modern Local Government: In touch with the People*³⁵ noted that there had been a mixed response to this proposal but concluded that it would build on the system of electing by thirds used in all metropolitan district councils and a number of unitary councils as well as district councils in two tier areas. The government would make this the standard practice of election for all unitary councils in future, including London boroughs. (para 4.10) There would be one 'fallow year' since elections were for a four year term. The detailed proposals were set out as follows:

4.10 In introducing annual accountability, the Government will therefore build on this well-supported system which is already in place in many councils. All the metropolitan district councils elect by thirds in this way, as do a number of the shire unitary district councils and district councils in two-tier areas. The Government will make this the standard pattern of elections for all unitary councils in future, including London Boroughs.

4.11 The 'fallow' year in which there would be no election for councillors would be used for other elections. In unitary councils (including London Boroughs) which had moved to a model with a directly elected mayor, the

³² cited in *Local Democracy - Representation and Elections: Belgrave Papers no 1* Local Government Management Board 1991 p 18

³³ *European Journal of Political Research* 1990 'Does PR foster voter turnout?' This study was related to the effect on national elections

³⁴ see for example, *Renewing Democracy, Rebuilding Communities* p 14, under the heading 'Getting more people to the polls' p14 Labour Party 1995

³⁵ Cm 4014 July 1998

mayoral election would take place in the fallow year. So would the elections for the mayor and assembly of the Greater London Authority.

4.12 In two tier areas, the Government is equally committed to giving voters an annual opportunity to pass judgement on their local representatives. But it is also preferable to avoid having annual elections for councils in both tiers.

4.13 In these areas, the Government will therefore introduce a pattern in which both the districts and counties would elect by halves in alternate years; i.e. in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half of the county council would be elected, and so on. Such a pattern will be readily understood by local electors.

4.14 Currently most district (lower-tier) councils and the biggest spenders, the counties, have elections only every four years while some district councils are elected by thirds. The Government's proposal will therefore reduce the frequency of elections in some district councils but increase the frequency of elections in most councils. Parishes will continue to hold all out elections every four years alongside local district council elections.

4.15 The Local Government Commission (LGC) will continue to review electoral boundaries in the light of the existing criteria of reflecting local communities and providing for effective local government. But local accountability is maximised where the whole electorate in a council's area is involved in elections each time they take place. This requires the same number of councillors in a ward or electoral division as there are elections for the council in any four year period. The Government will therefore take a power to direct the Commission to take this criterion into account when reviewing a council's electoral areas.

4.16 That means that the LGC could, where possible, and over time, be asked to redefine electoral boundaries to increase the proportion of the electorate involved in each local election. But there is no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas. These would fail to reflect local communities and place additional burdens on those councillors attempting to represent those who elected them. Single member wards or electoral divisions will continue in many authorities.

Therefore, in a two tier area the pattern would be that districts and counties would both elect half their council members in alternate years; however unless two member wards are created through two tier areas, it is unlikely that more than half the electorate would be involved in each election. The main effect would be felt in London where a new system of three member wards would be necessary.

In October 1998 the Local Government Commission issued a letter to Chief Executives on the Commission's approach:

10. It has been suggested that, in the light of the Government's legislative proposals, the Commission's PER programme should be put on hold since its

recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements, particularly in relation to the number of councillors returned from wards, will be quickly overtaken. However, as discussed above, this is a misconception; in most local authority areas the prevailing pattern of wards is likely to continue for some considerable period. Consequently, it is as important now as it was previously for the Commission to maintain the impetus of its PER programme, addressing the significant electoral imbalances which exist in many local authority areas.

11. In proceeding with its PER work the Commission will maintain the general approach set out in its March 1998 Guidance. Until such time as the Secretary of State directs otherwise, the Commission is not required to have regard to the Government's White Paper proposals. Nor can it insist that others do so. However, the proposals are clearly a consideration which it would not be sensible to ignore. Accordingly, the Commission believes it to be in the interests of local government for interested parties to PERs, particularly local authorities, to have regard to the Government's legislative intentions in the preparation of their electoral schemes.
12. Different considerations apply depending on the type of authority.

London boroughs

13. In June 1998 the Commission commenced PERs of the London boroughs. In discussions and briefing meetings with chief officers and members, the Commission has consistently advised that, in preparing their electoral schemes, London boroughs and political groups would be well-advised to have regard to the (then) Green Paper proposals for elections by thirds and three-member wards.

14. The Commission sees no reason to alter this advice. Indeed, the content of the White Paper only serves to confirm its view that, as either a first or second preference, London boroughs and political groups should consider the preparation of schemes which reflect the Government's proposals for electoral arrangements in the capital.

Shire unitary districts

15. Similar considerations apply to the majority of single-tier shire districts as do to London boroughs. While in many of its electoral reviews of shire unitary authorities to date the Commission has built on, and tended to reinforce, the existing pattern of warding arrangements, single-tier districts will wish to consider and take into account the Government's proposals for elections by thirds.

Two-tier district councils

16. The Commission recognises that many authorities whose PERs have started, or are about to start, will have spent considerable time and resources

in developing electoral schemes which may not accord with the Government's White Paper proposals.

17. However, as previously indicated, a move to elections by halves does not necessarily mean that all wards must return two members; a pattern of one-, two- and three-member wards is likely to be a feature in many two-tier districts for some time to come. Nevertheless, and quite understandably, a few authorities whose PERs are currently in Stage One (initial consultation phase) have requested an opportunity - and a short extension to their review timetable - to give further consideration to the schemes they intend to submit to the Commission.

18. Where this has occurred, the Commission has been prepared to extend Stage One of the review to give the authorities concerned sufficient time to consider whether they wish to modify their schemes in order to reflect the Government's proposals. However, the PERs of some or all of the districts in a county are conducted to the same review timetable. In granting any extension the Commission would wish to be satisfied that all districts whose reviews were being conducted to the same timetable were prepared to accept a potential delay in the completions of their PERs.

19. Of course, it is open to authorities whose PERs are further advanced, say in Stages Two (consideration of Stage One submissions by the Commission) or Three (Commission consultation on draft recommendations), to also consider whether to modify their proposals to the Commission. In such circumstances, the Commission would expect any modified scheme to be submitted during Stage Three. It may also agree to an extension to Stage Three should this prove necessary. However, as with any Stage One extensions, all districts whose reviews were being conducted to the same timetable would need to be prepared to accept a potential delay in the completion of their PERs.

20. If necessary, the Commission may undertake further rounds of consultation on any modified electoral schemes, either by way of a local public meeting or by publishing revised draft recommendations.

Two-tier county councils

21. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972, each county council electoral division may only return one member. Accordingly, until such time as new legislation is introduced and commenced, in conducting PERs of county council electoral arrangements, the Commission may only recommend one member per division.

22. In the event, it seems unlikely that the Government's proposals for two-member divisions will be a feature in other than the more urban parts of county council areas. Both the Government and the Commission recognise the particular difficulties which would arise by the creation of large two-member divisions in sparsely populated rural areas.

23. As previously indicated, the Commission can only recommend single-member divisions in PERs of county council areas. However, pending new legislation, in developing their schemes county councils are advised to at least have regard to the Government's proposals insofar as they may apply to urban areas. In practice, this means considering patterns of electoral divisions which might facilitate the creation of two-member divisions in urban areas in due course.

The March 1999 draft *Local Government (Organisation and Standards) Bill*³⁶ did not contain any proposals to move to a system of annual elections, but concentrated on new forms of local governance. There is some considerable uncertainty, therefore, as to the timescale for the introduction of annual elections. No new statutory direction has been issued to the LGCE. There is some evidence however that the schemes being developed for London are including more three member wards than would have been expected otherwise. The Government's proposals for new forms of governance in local councils, such as elected mayors, do not envisage a reduction in the number of councillors, despite a proposed new scrutiny role.

The Local Government Association produced *Making a Difference: A White Paper for Local Government* in response to the Government proposals.³⁷ It noted that the Government commitment to annual elections might not necessarily improve turnout but it would increase the opportunity to hold local authorities to account. An assessment from the independent Constitution Unit set out the main advantages and disadvantages of annual elections as follows:³⁸

In summary, the main advantages of annual elections are that:

- they could lead to increased accountability, with councils continually focused on their constituents' needs
- they reduce the opportunity for shirking difficult decisions or timing them around the electoral cycle.

The main disadvantages of annual elections are that:

- they might encourage short-termism amongst councillors
- they appear to depress turnout and might frustrate voter choice
- they are incompatible with some alternative electoral systems.

³⁶ *Local Leadership, Local Choice* Cm 4298 March 1999

³⁷ 1998 Local Government Association

³⁸ *A Panacea for Local Government? The Role of PR* Constitution Unit October 1998 p13

Rallings and Thrasher have expressed some scepticism as to the likely effect on turnout of the introduction of annual elections:³⁹

Driving these proposals is the government's desire to improve local accountability. It is assumed that increasing the frequency of elections will make elected members more sensitive to the needs and demands of local taxpayers. This may or may not be true, but what is the likely effect of this reform upon levels of participation? Analysis of turnout in local elections suggests that voters are more likely to participate in quadrennial than in annual elections. Comparing those district authorities which elect the entire council every fourth year with those where a proportion of councillors are elected annually shows the former to enjoy a consistently higher turnout than the latter. This is also true when we control for the election year. In 1991, for example, the average turnout in wards where an election was taking place for the first time since 1987 was 52%, while the comparable figure for wards which had had an election in the previous year was just 45%. Another approach is to compare turnout in the metropolitan and London boroughs. Periodically, the electoral cycles in these authorities coincide and on such occasions the turnout in London, where the whole council is elected, has been higher. Interestingly, at general elections the reverse is the case, with the metropolitan areas consistently having a higher turnout than London. Universal whole-council elections would do more for participation than a more frequent electoral cycle. Under the former, the electorate have the attraction of being able to change their council lock, stock and barrel if they so wish. With the latter, they will often find that the election outcome is predetermined before a single vote has been cast.

Another consequence of the move towards annual or biennial elections would be the rationalisation of ward boundaries to create, wherever possible, a pattern of two and three-member wards. Given a general reluctance to increase the overall number of councillors, this would involve, in most cases, enlarging existing wards. Although this would promote greater electoral equality, it might also have a dampening effect on turnout. Other things being equal, turnout tends to be higher in wards with smaller electorates.

B. New Electoral Procedures and Turnout

For some time there has been concern about the relevance of the current law governing electoral administration to modern conditions. The system of annual registration has drawbacks when applied to an increasingly mobile population, and the requirement to vote in person at a particular polling station dates from a time when centralised databases of voters did not exist. The Hansard Society Commission on Election Campaigns *Agenda for Change*⁴⁰ noted that a review of Britain's electoral

³⁹ *Parliamentary Affairs* January 1999 'An audit of local democracy in Britain'

⁴⁰ September 1991

arrangements was long overdue and that current laws on electoral administration dated largely from 1918. It made a number of recommendations to update electoral law, and to devote greater resources to registration and it called for an independent Electoral Commission to supervise and streamline arrangements for elections, taking over responsibility from the small elections unit in the Home Office. Many of these arguments were repeated in *The Case for an Electoral Commission* in a King Hall Paper for the Hansard Society in 1998. The Home Affairs Committee report on electoral administration⁴¹ recommended an electoral commission in September 1998 and the creation of an election commission was one of the recommendations of the Neill Committee report⁴² on the funding of political parties in the UK. These recommendations have been accepted by the Government and a draft bill is expected in the summer of 1999. For further details see Appendix 2 of Research Paper 99/30 which discusses current proposals for a commission.

Following the 1997 general election there were renewed calls for an overhaul of electoral administration and a new working party was set up under George Howarth, junior minister at the Home Office with responsibility for elections. This reported on progress in August 1998⁴³ and recommended the adoption of two packages of proposals:

This significant body of work has been carried forward in a spirit of co-operation and with strong degree of consensus. While there is still a large amount to be done the Working Party took the view at its meeting this week that sufficient progress has been made in a number areas to justify recommending the adoption now of two packages of proposals.

The two packages build in particular, but not exclusively, on the consideration of the response to the DETR consultation exercise. The first package, which does not require legislation provides for the consolidation, development and enhancement of guidance and advice in the areas of

maximising electoral registration and encouraging voter participation;

flexibility and good practice in the use of official poll cards;

co-ordination of publicity activity;

consolidation and improving advice on disability issues; and a commitment to progressively review and simplify electoral forms

⁴¹ HC 768 1997-8 para 160

⁴² Cm 4057 October 1998

⁴³ *Working Party on Electoral Procedures: Interim Report* August 1998

We propose to produce and distribute material on each of these issues during the summer and early autumn.

Almost every other part of the electoral process is prescribed in statute. Changes can only be made following amending legislation, which in most cases would be primary legislation. The second package of proposals which the Working Party has recommended involves a commitment (subject to suitable legislative opportunities) to

introduce a system of rolling electoral registration;

provide for the introduction of polling aids for the disabled; and

allow the Secretary of State to approve pilot schemes to explore alternative electoral procedures including

- voting anywhere in an electoral area
- mobile polling
- early voting
- changes to voting hours/days
- all postal ballots
- electronic voting

The DETR was enthusiastic about a possible increase in turnout once electoral administration had been updated. The Green Paper expressed concern about turnout in British local elections:

ENABLING MORE PEOPLE TO VOTE

3.10 Elections are the prime way in which the political will of a community is expressed on the policies and services which will directly affect their daily lives. The more people vote, the greater the democratic legitimacy of the actions taken by those elected. Participation in elections is therefore both crucial to, and a good barometer of, the health of democracy.

3.11 It has been estimated that there are between two and four million people absent from the electoral register. These are people who take no part at all in decisions which affect them. But even amongst those who are registered, turnout in local government elections in Great Britain is at the bottom of the European Union league table and below turnout in almost all industrialised nations. A number of seats are uncontested. A few local authority by-elections in recent years have achieved turnouts of only 10% or less and there have been cases where such a turnout has led to a change in the political control of the authority concerned.

The Green Paper considered ways to improve the completeness of the electoral register, and the possibility of anonymous registration and of creating a rolling register which would allow names to be deleted or added at any time. It also criticised as inflexible the requirement on voters to attend the local polling station to cast their vote and suggested that people could vote at any polling station in their council area, or that mobile polling stations could operate in supermarkets, workplaces etc. It also raised the possibility of voting in advance, changing the day of voting to the weekend, or allowing postal voting on demand. Electronic voting was discussed as a possibility, following precedents in the Netherlands. Other strategies such as redesign of the polling card and improving publicity were considered but noted that it was not inclined to pursue the option of compulsory voting.

Finally the Green Paper noted that changes to the voting system were not a panacea for current weaknesses in local government, while acknowledging that the First Past the Post voting system could sometimes lead to virtual one party rule in some areas (paras 3.45-7).

The White Paper noted that the majority of responses welcomed new initiatives with over 80 per cent supporting early voting and electronic voting, and 90 per cent a move to rolling registration. The government would 'work with expert practitioners to consolidate, develop and improve guidance to reflect best practice':

4.19 The Home Office Working Party on Electoral Procedures, including representatives of local government, central government and the political parties, has considered these responses. In the light of the responses and the advice of the Working Party, the Government has concluded that it should work with expert practitioners to consolidate, develop and improve guidance to reflect current best practice on:

maximising registration; encouraging voter participation in elections - particularly among the young; improving access for people with disabilities; improving the effectiveness of the official poll card; and the role of publicity in achieving many of these objectives.

4.20 The Government will also legislate to enable councils to experiment in the way local elections are conducted. Such experiments could include:

electronic voting; mobile polling stations; voting at any polling station in the authority, or for example, at specified places in a nearby authority; voting in different hours, on different days, or over a number of days; entire elections by postal vote; changes in the procedures for postal voting; and electronic or mechanical counting of votes.

4.21 The Government must safeguard the integrity of elections and ensure that any experiments do not lead to an increase in electoral fraud. Experiments would therefore have to be sanctioned by the Government. In some cases it would work directly with chosen councils to develop the rules for an experiment. In all cases it will be important that potential local voters

have full confidence in the change being piloted - for example, electronic voting.

The White Paper saw rolling registration as suitable for introduction on a national scale and stated: 'The government will therefore develop proposals for a move to rolling registration and to allow aids to assist disabled people to vote in polling stations'. It would also review other aspects of electoral administration (para 4.23). The Command Paper *Local Leadership, Local Choice*⁴⁴ did not contain any proposals in this area. The Howarth committee is due to report in the summer of 1999. The Government has announced plans to use electronic voting in the elections for the new Greater London Authority in May 2000.⁴⁵ The Local Government Association have called for legislation to allow councils to pilot weekend voting and postal or telephone voting.⁴⁶ However the current emphasis on promoting new forms of governance, such as elected mayors, may delay the introduction of annual elections, as there is only a limited amount of parliamentary time available for local government legislation.

C. New Voting Systems

Electoral reform was considered briefly in the White Paper, but there are no immediate plans for its introduction, except for the possibility of using the Supplementary Vote for the election of directly elected mayors:

Voting systems

4.24 As the Government explained in its consultation paper on local democracy and community leadership, the tradition in this country is for there to be a close link between constituency representatives and those they represent. Our local government voting system delivers just this result, with each councillor being elected by the people of the ward or electoral district which he or she represents. Close links between councillors and the people they represent are vital to ensuring councils engage effectively with their local communities.

4.25 This voting system can sometimes result in virtual one-party rule. Some authorities with an overwhelming majority for one party can be extremely effective and responsive to the needs of those they serve. But this situation can also lead to councils becoming complacent and out of touch.

⁴⁴ Cm 4298 March 1999

⁴⁵ HC Deb 11 March 1999 vol 327 c 361

⁴⁶ Making a Difference: A White Paper for Local Government Local Government Association 1998 p 10

4.26 The Government does not propose to change the local government voting system other than the possible introduction of the supplementary vote for the election of directly elected mayors. It does not view changes to the voting system as a panacea for the current weaknesses in local government. Local government modernisation is more fundamental than simply changing how people cast their vote. The Government favours a wider and more radical reform programme, encompassing electoral arrangements, political management, finance, service provision and consultation as set out in this White Paper.

4.27 However, the Government has established an Independent Commission on Voting Systems, chaired by Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, to recommend an alternative to the first-past-the-post system for elections to the Westminster Parliament. Once this Commission has reported, and the people have decided which alternative they prefer, the Government will wish to assess the implications for local government.

The SV is to be used for elections for the Mayor for London and the White Paper considered that it was simple and easy to use and would result in a clear winner:

3.37 Under the SV system voters simply mark the ballot paper using an 'X', as is usual in other elections. The ballot paper has separate columns in which voters may register their first and second choices. Voters are not required to vote twice if they do not wish to do so.

3.38 Counting under the SV system is also simple. Assuming there are more than two candidates, voters' first preferences are counted and if one candidate gets 50% or more of the vote, he or she is elected. If no candidate polls 50% of the vote, all of the candidates are eliminated from the ballot except the two who received the highest number of votes. The second preferences on the ballot papers of the eliminated candidates are then examined and any second votes which have been cast for the remaining candidates are awarded to them. Whoever has the most votes at the end of that process is declared the winner.

SV is a modified version of the Alternative Vote used in elections in Australia. It was the preferred option of the Labour Party's Plant Commission on electoral reform for the House of Commons in 1993. Its supporters favour it above the Alternative Vote as it restricts the voter to two preferences so as to prevent the very weak preferences at the bottom of the ordering scale influencing the result unduly. On the other hand the votes of those using both votes for eliminated candidates are 'wasted'. A version is used in Presidential elections for Sri Lanka. The Dunleavy report,⁴⁷ which was prepared for the DETR on possible electoral systems for London, noted that the "SV elimination method favours the existing major parties (Conservatives and Labour)..but the second

⁴⁷ *Report to the Government Office for London: Electing the London Mayor and the London Assembly* Professor Dunleavy and Dr Helen Margetts 20 January 1998

preferences of Liberal Democrats and other voters will be critically important in determining the final result." (para 2.24) Vernon Bogdanor has argued that SV can have capricious effects in a four party system.⁴⁸ Dunleavy and Margetts noted:

2.26 Our existing research into AV and SV in British parliamentary elections has demonstrated conclusively that whether we use AV or SV there are very small differences in outcome, in that particular context of local constituency elections with a restricted candidate list. In that same context, any modified -AV procedure would probably produce outcomes virtually identical to normal AV. However, for the London-Mayor elections we would expect candidate lists to be much more extended, with 4 or 5 candidates attracting significant vote shares, and their supporters second and subsequent preferences having an important influence upon the election results. In these circumstances the differences between AV and SV could become much more significant since SV guarantees that only the top two candidates on the first round can emerge as a winner and restricts voters' abilities to mark preferences, while under AV a third-placed or even fourth-placed candidate on first preferences could conceivably win. Wherever AV and SV would operate differently, modified AV procedures are likely to produce outcomes which lie between their two sets of outcomes.

Pressure to introduce proportional representation, most commonly in the form of the Single Transferable Vote, has been felt intermittently in the twentieth century. Following the 1910 Royal Commission⁴⁹ which suggested that it be tried for municipal elections Keith-Lucas notes that a Bill to allow local authorities to adopt the system if they wanted to was passed three times by the Lords but defeated in the Commons in 1923, despite support from the London County Council.⁵⁰ Interest thereafter waned, with the Maud Committee⁵¹ dismissing PR as unsuitable and inappropriate if not adopted for Parliament. It was introduced for Northern Ireland local elections in 1972 however.

Rallings and Thrasher noted the spectacular instances of parties winning many more seats than their share of vote:

ELECTORAL UNFAIRNESS

Many councils in Britain are demonstrably unrepresentative of their local electorate. Such a fact sits uneasily with a system that was intended to be democratic in the sense of reflecting the wishes and needs of the population. Over the years there have been some spectacular instances of parties winning many more seats than their share of the poll could possibly justify. One of

⁴⁸ *Power and the People* 1998 p 69

⁴⁹ Cd 5163

⁵⁰ *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* p 22. Further detail is given in *Proportional Representation* 1992 by Jennifer Hart pp 216-7

⁵¹ *Management of Local Government* 1967 para 335

the principal reasons for an electoral imbalance arises when a single party achieves a sizeable share of the overall vote. Some of the worst examples of this occur amongst the metropolitan boroughs where the Labour party, particularly in recent years, has exercised a strong grip. Knowsley, for example, has become virtually a one-party authority through a combination of the operation of the electoral system followed by an understandable decline in party competition. In the mid-1970s a majority of wards were contested by the three main parties.

Although the Conservatives enjoyed a reasonable level of support this was rarely translated into seats. In 1978 the party won some 43 per cent of the vote across the borough but for that it was rewarded with just 2 seats out of a total of 14. Despite winning one in twelve votes cast the Liberals went away empty-handed in terms of seats. From that time onwards the opposition to Labour has all but evaporated within the borough. In 1990 Conservative candidates contested just 8 out of 21 wards; less than 40 per cent of Knowsley's electorate was able to vote for a Conservative if they so wished, The Liberal Democrats for their part had been reduced to fighting in just three wards. Most seats went to Labour without need of an election. This is, of course, not the fault of the Labour party but rather of an electoral system which rewards only winners. The collapse in Conservative local government Support since 1992 has only served to exacerbate the problem, In 1995 the Conservatives won no seats at all in 17 metropolitan councils, including Tameside where their vote was in excess of 20 per cent.

Neither is the problem restricted to Labour strongholds amongst the metropolitan boroughs. In Bracknell Forest, for example, the Conservatives won 54 per cent of the vote at the 1987 local elections and took all 40 seats. The London borough elections of 1990 produced some similarly striking examples of electoral unfairness. In Islington, Labour polled 48.9 per cent of the vote and won all but 4 of that borough's wards. In Richmond on Thames, the Liberal Democrats, so often the victims of the present electoral system, won 92 per cent of the seats with 46.4 per cent of the vote.

The introduction of more proportional representation would be likely to make a substantial difference to the pattern of party control of local authorities. If seats won had been proportional to votes cast in the metropolitan district elections (where elections are by thirds) from 1994 to 1996, for example, as many as ten councils which in fact were Labour controlled in 1996 would have had no overall control. Overall in the metropolitan districts, Labour would have had some 500 seats fewer than in reality, the Conservatives 300 more and the Liberal Democrats 120 more.⁵² These were years in which Labour had conspicuous success in local elections. In the 1994 elections in Greater London, a proportional system would have led to ten Labour, three Conservative and two Liberal Democrat boroughs having no overall

⁵² In the calculations underlying these estimates, other parties have been lumped together which has the effect of exaggerating the number of seats they would win under a proportional system

control; Labour would have won 230 seats fewer, the Conservatives 60 more and the Liberal Democrats nearly 100 more.

In the county council elections of 1993,⁵³ a proportional system would have meant nine Labour, one Conservative and one Liberal Democrat council having no overall control. Labour would have won nearly 190 seats fewer than they did, while the Conservatives would have won 120 more and the Liberal Democrats 40 more.

Rawlings and Thrasher noted that there was no evidence that the electoral system is biased for or against any particular main party, citing the Conservative record in 1977, when it received 75 per cent of seats in English county council elections with 58 per cent of the vote, and in 1993 31 per cent of the seats on a 36 per cent share of the vote. They concluded:

A PROGRAMME OF REFORM?

The arguments for introducing some form of proportional representation for local government surely mirror those used in Northern Ireland, where protection of minorities is uppermost, rather than those adopted by proponents of PR for the UK parliament, where equality of representation is the driving force. The simple point is that in many parts of the country there are perpetual minorities unable either to vote their party into power locally or even to obtain a fair representation of their opinion on the council. Accountability currently fails by allowing too many local parties to believe they will enjoy a permanent majority on the council regardless of the quality of services they deliver. Such an atmosphere leads to complacency by the governing party, disillusion on the part of the hopelessly under-represented and outnumbered opposition, and encourages apathy amongst the electorate.

As we saw in Chapter 4 local electoral turnout in Britain is the lowest of any European Union nation. One characteristic which our better-participating partners share is a system of election enshrining a degree of proportionality. Local turnout among them can rival the 75 per cent plus level expected in British general elections. Such a figure in Britain is remarkable in individual wards and unheard of across an entire local authority. Even in the politically charged 'poll tax' election of 1990, average turnout across the country was just 48 per cent. Electors are more reluctant to turn out and vote in local elections the less they feel their vote has a chance of affecting the result in their own ward or local authority. Many electors in safe seats simply prefer to stay at home. A system which ensured that each vote was of equal worth in determining the outcome must surely encourage higher turnouts (Blais and Carty 1990).

⁵³ These include elections to councils that were subsequently abolished and replaced by unitary authorities

Just as 'first past the post' under certain conditions dampens the electorate's enthusiasm it can also have an impact on political parties. This is shown to best effect in the campaigning tactics embraced by the Liberal Democrats, which have resulted in that party deliberately turning its back on some wards deemed as out of reach. As the costs of mounting local election campaigns rise, more local parties may feel the need to trim their presence and other parties' safe wards will be the first affected. Indeed, during their recent period of local electoral unpopularity, the Conservatives have also put forward fewer candidates in hopeless wards - contesting 30 fewer metropolitan and 300 fewer district wards in 1995 than in 1991. Such actions, of course, deprive electors of choice and depress turnout among committed supporters of the parties not represented.

One suggestion for increasing the accountability of councils to their electorates and perhaps encouraging greater participation is the introduction of annual elections for at least a third of each council. Certainly such a reform would concentrate elected members' minds on the likely electoral reaction to policies. But this system already exists in the metropolitan areas and across a large slice of the English shires, and whilst it may discourage excesses of policy, it does not in itself make local authorities any more representative. Indeed, it is frequently the case that although the electorate may wish to express displeasure with the ruling party, the party's numerical majority is larger than the number of seats it has to defend in any one year. In 1996, for example, the Labour majority on 24 of the 30 metropolitan boroughs which the party controlled was sufficient for the party to retain office even if it won no seats at all in the elections for those authorities. Unless councillors were to be made to seek re-election each year or wards with very large numbers of electors and councillors were to become the order of the day, annual elections would seem to imply a single member being elected on each occasion. Under such circumstances only the alternative vote system would prove practical and even that would not guarantee a better degree of representativeness than at present (Bogdanor 1984).

A more proportional system would require multiple-member seats, such as already exist in London and many of the English and Welsh shire districts. Sacrificing annual elections on grounds of practicality, at least three compensating benefits might be reaped. First, voters might be encouraged to pick and choose among candidates from the same party to a greater extent than they do currently. Second, there is some evidence from other countries that the representation of women, who currently comprise just over a quarter of all councillors in Britain, and minority groups is improved wherever parties have the opportunity to field multiple candidates in the same seat. Third, and most important, the parties winning seats in say three-, four- or five-member wards would be a more accurate reflection of the way the votes had been cast.

They favoured STV as the electoral system for local government, and argued that fears about minority administrations were misplaced given that coalitions in local government had become common under First Past the Post- with one in ten

authorities having a formal coalition in 1995 with a further four in ten in some form of power-sharing arrangement.⁵⁴

The Commission for Local Democracy, an independent think tank, supported the Single Transferable Vote (STV) as one of its recommendations in 1995⁵⁵:

3.19 In Europe it appears that countries which use a system of proportional representation in voting at local elections secure a higher turnout. Britain appears to get none of these advantages of proportional representation, while experiencing precisely the uncertain "coalition government" on local councils so deplored by opponents of such electoral reform.

The Commission supported the introduction of STV on the model used for local government in Northern Ireland. More recently Andrew Adonis and Stephen Twigg have outlined the arguments for STV in multi member wards:⁵⁶

Press reports have indicated growing interest in introducing PR to English local government. The Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott is reported to oppose interest in PR shown by the No. 10 Policy Unit.⁵⁷ The Local Government Association has cautiously supported PR as a way of increasing turnout in local elections, commenting 'careful consideration could also be given to the case for introducing an element of proportionality into local elections'.⁵⁸ There was a Lords debate on the subject on 25 February 1998 in which the government spokesperson, Baroness Farrington, said that the issue would be addressed in due course, but emphasised the need for small wards and links with the local community.⁵⁹

The report from the independent Constitution Unit considered that PR would make councillors more responsive to the needs of their electorate, but would be unlikely to significantly increase turnout.⁶⁰ STV would be incompatible with the proposal in the White Paper for annual elections, because it would require too large an increase in ward size if one third of councillors had to be elected annually. Serious consideration of the case for PR in local government should therefore be made before annual elections were introduced. If SV were used for mayors, it would presumably limit the choices of PR systems for the council, as voters might be confused by radically different ballot papers. SV typically uses an 'x' voting system, and so might cause confusion if voters were required to number preferences in an STV system for electing local councillors.

⁵⁴ *Policy and Politics* 1995 'Coalitions in Britain: Administrative Formation in Hung Councils'

⁵⁵ *Taking charge: the rebirth of local democracy*

⁵⁶ *The cross we bear - electoral reform for local government* Fabian Society 1997

⁵⁷ *Financial Times* 25.7.98 'Prescott resists pressure for local poll vote reform' and *Independent* 15.4.99 Prescott and Blair clash on PR elections'

⁵⁸ *Local Government Association* Making a Difference : A White Paper for Local Government July 1998 p 10

⁵⁹ HL Deb 25 February 1998 vol 586 c 717-721

⁶⁰ *A Panacea for Local Government? The Role of PR* David Sinclair October 1998 Constitution Unit

The Local Government Association commented that ' careful consideration could also be given to the case for introducing an element of proportionality into local elections.

There are suggestions that the Scottish Parliament may introduce PR for local elections in Scotland.⁶¹ The Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament (the McIntosh Commission), which was appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland, issued a consultation paper on the future of local government after devolution which included comments on the low turnout at local elections.⁶² The Commission issued a second report⁶³ which adopted a positive tone towards electoral reform:

115. We found substantial and widespread support for the view that a move to some form of proportional representation (PR) would be beneficial for local government. It was seen as especially desirable in councils where one party has an overwhelming dominance which does not in fact reflect the proportion of the total vote given to it. We have taken into account too that the Scottish Parliament will be elected, in part, by a PR system. For these two main reasons, we are minded to recommend to the Scottish Parliament that a form of PR be introduced for local government elections.

117. A note on various systems, and some commentary on them, is in the Appendix to this paper. We invite views on the criteria which should be applied, and their relative weight; and on the various voting systems as means to achieving them.

It is due to present its final report to the First Minister of the Scottish Parliament, when that person takes office.

The Command Paper *Local Leadership, Local Choice*⁶⁴ was issued in March 1999 and contains the draft *Local Government (Organisation and Standards) Bill*. This paper brings forward many of the 1998 White Paper proposals on new forms of local governance. In clause 19 and schedule 2 the proposed voting system for directly elected mayors is the Supplementary Vote. There are no proposals to introduce new forms of election for local councillors.

⁶¹ see *Proportional Representation and Local Democracy* by Mark Lazarowicz Centre for Scottish Public Policy January 1998

⁶² *The Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament Consultation Paper no 1* April 1998

⁶³ *The Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament Consultation Paper no 2* November 1998

⁶⁴ *Cm 4298* March 1999

Appendix 1 The Local Government Commission for England - Procedures for Periodic Electoral Reviews

The LGCE began its review in the metropolitan county areas, but has now tackled most shire districts and has begun reviews of the London boroughs. It is required under s13(5) of the 1992 Act to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for any changes to the electoral arrangements within the areas of English principal authorities as appear desirable to it, having regard to the need to:

- (i) 'reflect the identities and interests of local communities' and
- (ii) 'secure effective and convenient local government'

The Commission is required under s27 of the 1992 Act to comply, so far as practicable, with the rules in schedule 11 to the *Local Government Act 1972* for the conduct of electoral reviews. These are set out in an extract from the Commission's website:⁶⁵

15 In relation to county councils, the Rules provide that, having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the county likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the start of the review:

(a) the number of local government electors shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every electoral division of the county;

(b) every electoral division shall lie wholly within a single district so that electoral divisions should not cross district administrative boundaries;

(c) every ward of a parish having a parish council, whether separate or common, shall lie wholly within a single electoral division. No ward of a parish or town council should be divided by an electoral division boundary; and

(d) every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single electoral division.

Subject to (a)-(d), the Rules provide that regard should be had to:

(e) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable;

⁶⁵ www.lgce.gov.uk. The website gives details of the areas currently under review

(f) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular boundary; and

(g) the boundaries of the wards of the districts in the county.

16 In relation to districts (metropolitan, shire or unitary) and London boroughs, the Rules provide that, having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the district or London borough likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the start of the review:

(a) the number of local government electors represented by each councillor shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district/borough;

(b) in a district, every ward of a parish having a parish council shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district. No ward of a parish council should be divided by a district ward boundary;

(c) in a district, every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district.

The Rules also provide that, subject to (a)-(c) above, regard should be had to:

(a) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(b) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

17 In relation to parish and town councils, the Rules provide that, in considering whether a parish should be divided into wards, regard shall be had to whether:

(a) the number or distribution of electors for the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and

(b) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

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

(a) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the start of the review;

(b) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(c) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

19 In addition, the Rules provide that where it is decided not to divide a parish into parish wards, in determining the number of councillors to be elected for each parish, regard shall be had to the number and distribution of electors of the parish, and any change which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the fixing of the number of parish councillors.

Electoral equality

20 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector having a vote of equal weight, is a fundamental democratic principle. Yet the balance this principle implies between electoral areas within a local authority can never be maintained on a basis that is mathematically exact, because local populations change over time. Hence our task is to rectify imbalances that have developed, having regard to a five-year forecast of electorate, and to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, equality of representation across the whole of a principal local authority's area.

21 There is some circularity in the legal structure under which the Commission works. There is a clear rule as to electoral equality: that the number of electors represented by each councillor to be elected to the authority must be, "as nearly as may be" the same in every ward. This requirement was described by Lord Denning in 1979 as a "mathematical test"⁶⁶. However, for the following reasons, our task is not merely arithmetical, for the following reasons:

(a) our recommendations are not to be based purely on current electorates. We must also have regard to forecasts of changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the following five years;⁶⁷

(b) we have to have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable electoral area boundaries, and to local ties which might be broken by those boundaries. An approach which is too rigorously mathematical could harm both of these interests. These are issues which are also clearly relevant to our

⁶⁶ In *London Borough of Enfield v Local Government Boundary Commission for England* [1979] 1 All ER 950, 953, later upheld in the House of Lords [1979] 3 All ER 747

⁶⁷ this is in contrast to the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions who are required to have regard only to the electorate at the start of their review (schedule 2 of the *Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986*)

statutory criteria under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, of having regard to the need to reflect the interests and identities of local communities; and

(c) we must have regard to the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

1. In *London Borough of Enfield v Local Government Boundary Commission for England* [1979] 1 ALL ER 950, 953 (upheld in the House of Lords [1979] 3 ALL ER 747).

A further extract from the Commission's website sets out its general approach and timetable:

The Commission gives priority to reviewing county areas which are most overdue, taking into account the degree of electoral imbalance. It generally examines all of the districts in a county concurrently before examining the county council itself.

Following the review, the Commission may recommend an increase or decrease in the number of councillors to be elected in any area and a change in the number of wards and their boundaries. The Commission can also recommend changes to the electoral cycle, that is whether elections should be held annually for a third of councillors or once every four years for all of the councillors. When reviewing districts the Commission can also consider the electoral arrangements of town and parish councils.

The Commission's recommendations are considered by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions who decides whether to implement them.

Under s17, the Secretary of State may 'if he thinks fit, by order give effect to all or any of the recommendations, with or without modifications'. The order is to be made by statutory instrument and if relating only to electoral arrangements is not subject to the negative resolution or the affirmative resolution (s26(1)(c)). Section 17 was the subject of a number of legal challenges concerning the outcomes of the LGCE's structural reviews. The outcome of these cases was to establish the large degree of discretion given to the Secretary of State. These are summarised in an extract from Sweet and Maxwell's *Encyclopaedia of Local Government Law*;

In *R. v. Local Government Commission for England, ex p. Cleveland County Council*, *The Times*, July 4, 1994, the Divisional Court held that where the Secretary of State gave effect to the Commission's recommendations by order under section 17, he was not precluded from making further changes under sections 17(4), 19 and 26(4); it was difficult to imagine wider powers than those conferred on the Secretary of State. In *R. v. Secretary of State for the Environment, ex p. Berkshire County Council*, *The Times*, January 25, 1996, the Court of Appeal held that the Secretary of State's power of modification under section 17 was

sufficiently broad to enable him to change the Commission's proposal that five new unitary authorities be established in Berkshire, including the combination of two borough councils into one authority, by rejecting this last element and thereby establishing six authorities. In *R. v. Secretary of State for the Environment, ex p. Wycombe District Council* [1996] C.O.D. 73, Laws J. held that the Secretary of State was entitled to accept a recommendation that one authority become a unitary authority while rejecting the others; he was entitled to regard it as a discrete recommendation.

S17 was modelled on s51 of the *Local Government Act 1972*, relating to the implementation of recommendations from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.⁶⁸ The general practice has been for Secretaries of State to accept recommendations relating to electoral matters without modification. In December 1996 the then Government indicated in response to a PQ that it would not 'modify the substance of electoral recommendations from the Local Government Boundary Commission'.⁶⁹ The new Labour Government have indicated that this remains the policy.⁷⁰ This was the approach followed in the 1998 local government boundary reviews in Scotland, despite some decisions of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland which were seen as controversial. However the wording of s17 does not prevent the Secretary of State from making modifications.

⁶⁸ the LGBCE was the body responsible for recommending boundary and electoral changes before the establishment of the Local Government Commission for England

⁶⁹ HC Deb 17 December 1996 vol 287

⁷⁰ information from the DETR

Appendix 2 Local Elections in England in May 1999

238 Shire districts

Adur **	Dartford	Lincoln **
Allerdale	Daventry **	Macclesfield **
Alnwick	Derbyshire Dales	Maidstone **
Amber Valley **	Denventside	Maldon
Arun	Dover	Malvern Hills
Ashfield	Durham	Mansfield
Ashford	Easington	Melton
Aylesbury Vale	East Cambridgeshire	Mendip
Babergh	East Devon	Mid Bedfordshire
Barrow- in-Furness	East Dorset	Mid Devon
Basildon **	East Hampshire	Mid Suffolk
Basingstoke and Deane	East Hertfordshire	Mid Sussex
Bassetlaw	East Lindsey	Mole Valley
Bedford **	East Northamptonshire	New Forest
Berwick-upon-Tweed	East Staffordshire	Newark and Sherwood
Blaby	Eastbourne	Newcastle-under-Lyme
Blyth Valley	Eastleigh	North Cornwall
Bolsover	Eden	North Devon
Boston	Ellesmere Port and Neston **	North Dorset
Braintree	Elmbridge **	North East Derbyshire
Breckland	Epping Forest	North Hertfordshire **
Brentwood	Epsom and Ewell	North Kesteven
Bridgnorth	Erewash	North Norfolk
Broadland	Exeter **	North Shropshire
Bromsgrove	Fareham	North Warwickshire
Broxbourne	Fenland	North West Leicestershire
Broxtowe	Forest Heath	North Wiltshire
Bumley **	Forest of Dean	Northampton
Cambridge	Fylde	Norwich **
Cannock Chase	Gedling	Nuneaton and Bedworth **
Canterbury	Gloucester	Oadby and Wigston
Caradon	Gosport **	Oswestry
Carlisle	Gravesham	Oxford **
Carrick	Great Yarmouth	Pendle **
Castle Morpeth	Guildford	Penwith **
Castle Point	Hambleton	Preston **
Charnwood	Harborough	Purbeck **
Chelmsford	Harlow **	Redditch **
Cheltenham	Harrogate	Reigate and Banstead **
Cherwell	Hart **	Restormel
Chester **	Hastings **	Ribble Valley
Chesterfield	Havant **	Richmondshire
Chester-le-Street	Hertsmere **	Rochford **
Chichester	High Peak	Rossendale **
Chiltern	Hinckley and Bosworth	Rother
Chorley	Horsham	Rugby **
Christchurch	Huntingdonshire **	Runnymede **
Colchester	Hyndburn **	Rushcliffe
Congleton	Ipswich **	Rushmoor **
Copeland	Kennet	Ryedale
Corby	Kerrier	Salisbury
Cotswold	Kettering	Scarborough
Craven **	King's Lynn and West Norfolk	Sedgefield
Crawley **	Lancaster	Sedgemoor
Crewe and Nantwich	Lewes	Selby
Dacorum	Lichfield	Sevenoaks

Local Elections in England in 1999 (continued)

Shepway	West Lancashire **	34 Unitary authorities
Shrewsbury and Atcham **	West Lindsey **	Bath & North East Somerset
South Bedfordshire **	West Oxfordshire **	Blackburn **
South Bucks	West Somerset	Bournemouth
South Cambridgeshire **	West Wiltshire	Brighton & Hove
South Derbyshire	Weymouth and Portland **	Bristol **
South Hams	Winchester **	Darlington
South Holland	Woking **	Derby **
South Kesteven	Worcester **	East Riding of Yorkshire
South Lakeland **	Worthing **	Halton **
South Norfolk	Wychavon	Hartlepool **
South Northamptonshire	Wycombe	Kingston upon Hull **
South Oxfordshire	Wyre	Leicester
South Ribble	Wyre Forest **	Luton
South Shropshire		Middlesbrough
South Somerset	36 Metropolitan Districts	Milton Keynes
South Staffordshire	Barnsley **	North East Lincolnshire
Spelthorne	Birmingham **	North Lincolnshire
St Albans **	Bolton **	North Somerset
St Edmundsbury	Bradford **	Peterborough
Stafford	Bury **	Poole
Staffordshire Moorlands	Calderdale **	Portsmouth **
Stevenage **	Coventry **	Reading **
Stratford-on-Avon **	Doncaster **	Redcar & Cleveland
Stroud **	Dudley **	Rutland
Suffolk Coastal	Gateshead **	Slough **
Surrey Heath	Kirklees **	South Gloucestershire
Swale **	Knowsley **	Southampton **
Tamworth **	Leeds **	Southend-on-Sea **
Tandridge **	Liverpool **	Stockton-on-Tees
Taunton Deane	Manchester **	S toke-on-Trent **
Teesdale	Newcastle upon Tyne **	Swindon **
Teignbridge	North Tyneside **	Thurrock **
Tendring	Oldham **	Wokingham **
Test Valley	Rochdale **	York
Tewkesbury	Rotherham **	
Thanet	Salford **	
Three Rivers **	Sandwell **	
Tonbridge and Malling	Sefton **	
Torridge	Sheffield **	
Tunbridge Wells **	Solihull **	
Tynedale	South Tyneside **	
Uttlesford	St Helens **	
Vale of White Horse	Stockport **	
Vale Royal	Sunderland **	
Wansbeck	Tameside **	
Warwick	Trafford **	
Watford **	Wakefeld **	
Waveney **	Walsall **	
Waverley	Wigan **	
Wealden	Wirral **	
Wear Valley	Wolverhampton **	
Wellingborough		
Welwyn Hatfield **		
West Devon		
West Dorset		

** indicates elections by thirds