

Cllr. Bob Lane
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Chairman, Shorne Parish Council

By email to reviews@lgbce.org.uk
And via consultation website portal

The Review Officer (Gravesham)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
PO Box 133
Blyth
NE24 9FE

10th January 2022

Dear Sir

Gravesham Ward Boundary Review Consultation Submission

Introduction

On 31st July 2021, I submitted my proposals with particular regard to Shorne, Cobham, Luddesdown, Riverview, Westcourt, and Chalk, in my personal capacity and as one of the two existing Gravesham Borough Councillors for Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown Ward. However, it does not appear that any of my proposals have been taken into consideration in the LGBCE analysis and draft recommendations.

For example, in paragraphs 49 & 50 covering Riverview, LGBCE has given consideration to submissions made by Gravesham Borough Council, the Conservatives, and an unidentified resident, but my proposals do not appear to have been taken into account.

Similarly, in paragraphs 51 – 53 covering Shorne, LGBCE has given consideration to proposals put forward by Gravesham Borough Council, Shorne Parish Council, Vigo Parish Council, Cllr Steve Dyer of Cobham Parish Council, and the Conservatives, whereas my submission appears to have been disregarded.

I therefore request that my proposals are given equal weight and consideration to those submitted by other parties. Because I do not believe that my earlier submission was taken into consideration, and as my concerns regarding the source and validity of the forecast elector numbers have not been addressed, I have repeated extracts from my earlier submission where appropriate.

General Comments on LGBCE's Draft Recommendations

I have no objections to LGBCE's proposal to reduce the overall number of Councillors from 44 to 39, although there is no justification provided on how LGBCE arrived at this number, rather than 38 or 40 for example. With population numbers forecast to increase significantly and voter expectations increasing, it is difficult to understand the justification.

In broad terms, the draft recommendations put forward by the LGBCE appear to be reasonable, although there is scope for improvement, particularly in terms of quality and accuracy in reflecting the interests of the communities.

The two principal objectives of boundary reviews are (1) to reflect the identity and interests of local communities, and (2) to provide equality of representation. It is not always possible to achieve both

these objectives. However, I would suggest that the LGBCE is putting too much emphasis on achieving as close to equality of representation as it can, at the expense of reflecting the identity and interests of local communities. This is wrong.

It is not necessary to obtain exact equality of representation. Provided the voter/councillor balance is within 5% to 10%, then the community identity and interests must take priority over achieving closer equality. I would rather see a ward which is within 5% to 10% equality and reflects the identity and interests of the community, than one which is within 1% or 2% equality but fails to reflect the identity and interests of the community.

Similarly, LGBCE seems to be intent on reducing the number of Wards, which has the effect of making them larger and not necessarily representative of the communities. There is no reason to create artificially large 3-member wards when single or 2-member wards more accurately reflect the communities. There is no increase in administration by having a larger number of smaller wards. I can fully understand LGBCE's reticence in recommending 4-member wards, but I cannot understand their apparent reticence for single member wards.

However, before focussing on the wards, I feel obliged to repeat my concerns about the source and accuracy of the forecast elector numbers for 2027 included in LGBCE's consultation spreadsheet, and how they are reflected across individual wards.

In the 20 year period between the previous boundary review in 2001 and the current boundary review in 2021, the number of electors in Gravesham increased from 70,312 to 76,069, an increase of 8.19%. But in the 6 year period up to 2027, the number of electors is forecast to increase by a further 13.05% to 85,994. There is nothing in our demographics which would suggest that the number of electors is likely to increase by almost 10,000 in the next 6 years, and I therefore must question these forecasts.

The boundary review has far-reaching consequences for the voters of Gravesham, and the results will be set in stone for the next 20 years. It is therefore essential that the forecasts on which the number of councillors and the ward boundaries are determined are realistic and accurate. **I call upon the LGBCE to investigate the source and validity of the forecasts as a matter of urgency.**

The elector numbers given in the Gravesham Borough Council Electoral Data spreadsheet published as part of the current LGBCE consultation are broken down into polling areas only. I have used an anonymised version of the electoral roll to estimate the number of electors for individual streets. However, this is extremely difficult and time-consuming, and in any event this information has not been provided on the LGBCE website, and is not readily available to members of the public. This puts members of the public at a serious disadvantage when proposing wards or determining the impact of transferring a street or streets from one ward to another. It is regrettable that my request for this information to be provided on the consultation website has been disregarded.

I must therefore leave it to LGBCE to determine the impact of any changes I have proposed in my comments below.

I trust that you will find the comments I have made to be relevant and useful. If you require any clarification or further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Bob Lane

COMMENTS & PROPOSALS ON THE DRAFT WARDING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Chalk & Westcourt

This is an example of where the existing separate Chalk and Westcourt Wards better reflect the distinctly different communities than a combined Ward.

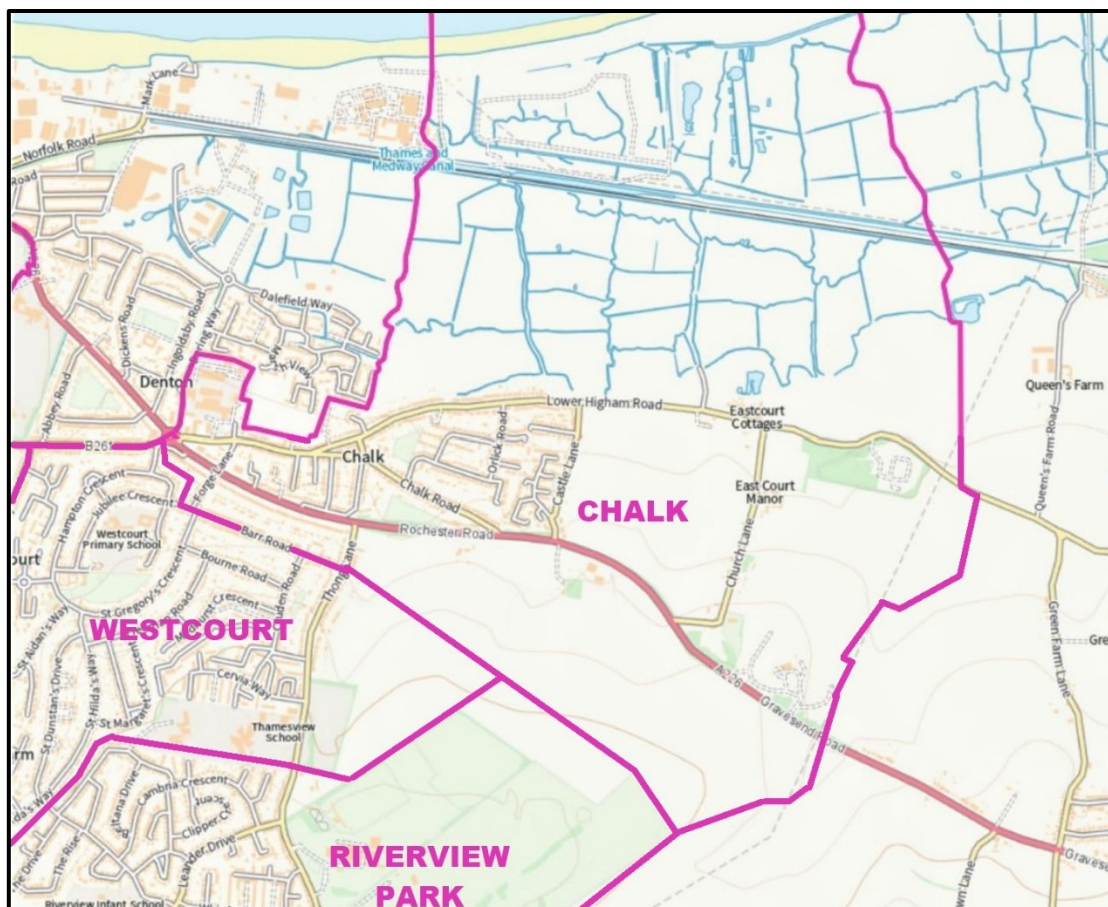
Consideration should therefore be given to retaining these as two separate wards.

1.1 Chalk

In order to achieve better electoral equality whilst reflecting the community identity and interests, the existing Chalk Ward could be enlarged to include the following:

	Addresses	2020	2027
P	Existing 2021 Chalk Ward	1773	1797
R	236 – 388 Rochester Road (south side)	149	149
R	Polperro, Rochester Road	3	3
R	Horseshoes, Rochester Road	5	5
R	1 – 9 Forge Lane	16	16
R	2 – 14 Forge Lane	14	14
R	1 – 147 Barr Road (north side)	145	145
R	2 – 14A Thong Lane	14	14
R	1 – 19 Thong Lane	4	10
	Estimated revised total voters	2123	2153

The revised boundary of Chalk Ward would be as shown:



1.2 Westcourt

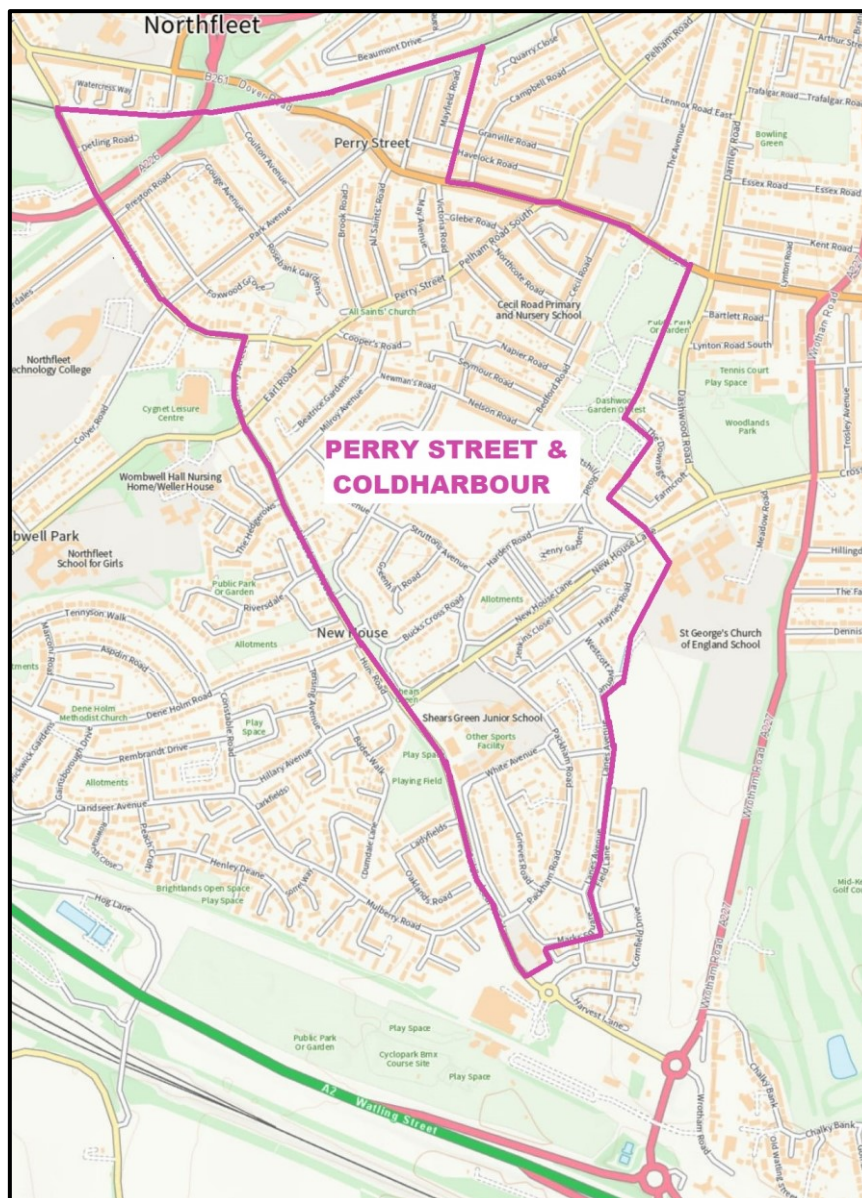
Westcourt would lose those addresses transferred into Chalk Ward (approximately 350 voters). It would also lose Cerne Road, Dorset Crescent, Beltana Drive, and part of St Francis Avenue, which would be transferred to Riverview Park as proposed by LGBCE. However, it would be entirely logical for St Patricks Gardens, and those parts of St Hilda's Way, St Dunstan's Drive, and Valley Drive which LGBCE proposes to transfer into Riverview Park to remain in a 2-councillor Westcourt ward.

2. Coldharbour* (proposed to be renamed Perry Street & Coldharbour)

There is merit in the Conservatives' proposal, and there should be consideration to obtaining a hybrid between the LGBCE proposal and the Conservatives. This would transfer much of polling districts BE and BF into this ward, making it a 3-councillor ward, and better reflecting the communities within it.

Farmcroft, The Downage, Barnfield, and all properties on the west side of Dashwood Road should be also be moved into Woodlands & Kings Farm Ward, since they are not part of Coldharbour or Perry Street and share common issues with the Woodlands Park community.

** If this proposal is adopted, it is suggested that the ward should be titled **Perry Street & Coldharbour**.*



3. Denton

No comments, this appears to be a logical proposal.

4. Istead Rise, Cobham, & Luddesdown

Whilst Cobham and Luddesdown have little in common with Istead Rise, this does seem to be the only reasonable method of achieving some degree of electoral equality. The realistic outcome is that one Councillor will probably serve the more heavily-populated Istead Rise area, whilst the other Councillor will serve the geographically more dispersed Cobham and Luddesdown communities.

5. Meopham North

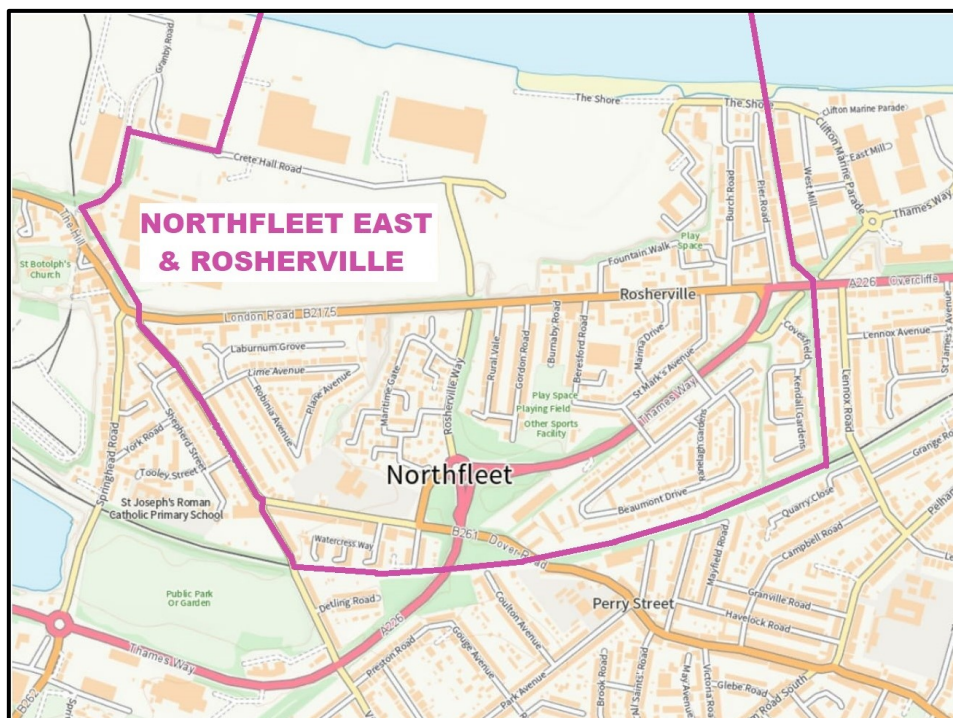
Whilst I agree with the proposal to have Meopham North as a 2 Councillor Ward, I have serious misgivings regarding the forecast increase in the electorate from 2,773 to 4,328 during the period 2021 to 2027. There are no developments planned that would justify this increase. LGBCE should investigate this and satisfy themselves that this is a reasonable forecast. If not, then consideration should be given to adjusting the boundary between Meopham North and Meopham South & Vigo, to maintain a better balance of voters to councillors.

6. Meopham South & Vigo

Other than the possible need to adjust the boundary to Meopham North (see above), I have no other comments.

7. Northfleet East & Rosherville

There is merit in the Conservatives proposal to extend this ward to the west, rather than to the south as proposed by LGBCE, to better reflect the identity and interests of the communities concerned. This could be achieved by including all of London Road, Northfleet, and following the line of Dover Road and Vale Road to the railway line, and using this barrier as the southern boundary. This would also reduce its representation from 3 to 2 councillors.



8. Northfleet West & Springhead

Whilst this could remain a 3 councillor ward, it would lose the addresses to the east of the junction of London Road and Dover Road. This would include London Road, plus Lime Avenue, Plane Avenue, Robinia Avenue, Laburnum Grove, and the eastern side of Dover Road.

9. Painters Ash

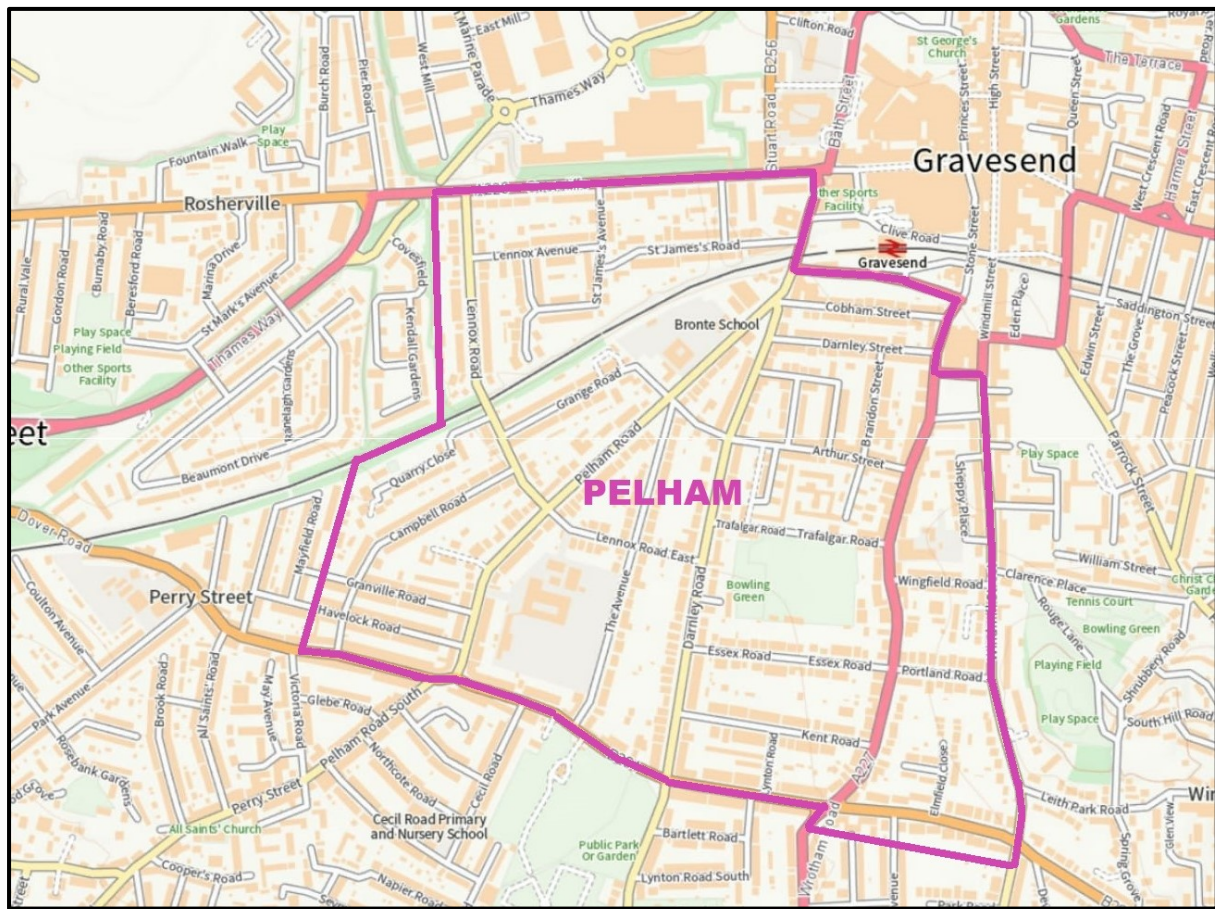
Whilst not making any significant difference to voter numbers, the southern boundary should logically be extended south to follow the line of the A2, which has been realigned since the previous boundary review.

10. Pelham

It would be more appropriate to adjust the northern boundary to follow the line of the A226 one-way system along Woodville Place, Wrotham Road, and Rathmore Road, so that the Civic Centre and the railway station are logically within Town Ward.

To the south, it is logical that the ward should include all those parts of Granville Road and Havelock Road that lay within the old Gravesend Boundary.

In the south-west corner, consideration could be given to following the old boundary between Gravesend and Northfleet, to include Quarry Close and Campbell Road within Pelham, whereas Mayfield Road, Stanbrook Road, Five Ash Road, and possibly the Northfleet section of Havelock Road could be included in a new Perry Street & Coldharbour ward.



11. Riverview Park

This is one ward where the identity and interests of the community appear to have been disregarded by LGBCE in the pursuit of electoral balance, to the detriment of the communities affected.

The proposal to include St Patrick's Gardens, and parts of St Hilda's Way, St Dunstan's Drive, and Valley Drive into Riverview is flawed and must be reversed. These roads do not form part of the Riverview Park community in any way, shape, or form, and should be retained within a new 2-councillor Westcourt Ward.

The proposal to include Cerne Road, Dorset Crescent, Beltana Drive, and part of St Francis Avenue is strongly supported. It is also strongly recommended that The Drive, The Rise, and The Warren are included in Riverview Park Ward. The residents of all these roads strongly identify with Riverview Park and share the same facilities. The boundary to Riverview Park should logically be where St Francis Avenue meets St Hilda's Way, so that the whole of St Francis Avenue and all roads leading off St Francis Avenue are contained within Riverview Park ward.



12. Shorne & Higham

No objection. Whilst I would have preferred to see Shorne as a self-contained single-member ward, this appears to be only way to achieve electoral balance in Higham, and the two communities are geographically adjacent.

13. Singlewell* (proposed to be renamed Christian Fields & Ifield)

** Consideration should be given to renaming this ward **Christian Fields & Ifield**. This better identifies the two communities in this ward, very few of whom would consider themselves as living in Singlewell.*

The Rise, The Drive, and The Warren should be transferred to Riverview Park Ward, since they consider themselves part of this community and share the same facilities.

Whilst having little impact on the number of voters, it is logical that the southern boundary should be extended south to follow the line of the A2, which has been realigned since the previous boundary review.

14. Town

It would be appropriate for the boundary with Pelham Ward to be adjusted to follow the line of the A226 one-way system along Woodville Place, Wrotham Road, and Rathmore Road, so that the Civic Centre and the railway station are within Town Ward.

Consideration should also be given to adjusting the boundary with Whitehill & Windmill Hill Ward so that Homemead, Gravesham Court, Clarence Row, South Street, and all addresses north of William Street are in Town Ward. It is entirely logical that Bronte View should be moved out of Town Ward into Whitehill & Windmill Hill Ward.

15. Whitehill & Windmill Hill

The northern boundary should be at the junction of Wellington Street and Parrock Street, to follow the line of William Street so that Homemead, Gravesham Court, Clarence Row, South Street, and all addresses north of William Street are in Town Ward. Bronte View should logically be in Whitehill & Windmill Hill Ward. The proposed northern boundary is shown below.



16. Woodlands & Kings Farm* (proposed to be renamed Woodlands & Singlewell)

** Consideration should be given to naming this ward **Woodlands & Singlewell Ward**. Residents of Singlewell Road, Harman Avenue, Brenchley Avenue, Orchard Avenue, Westfield Close, Sandown Road, Goodwood Crescent, etc, strongly identify themselves as being part of Singlewell.*

Farmcroft, The Downage, Barnfield, and all properties on the west side of Dashwood Road should be transferred into Woodlands & Kings Farm ward, since they are not part of Coldharbour and share common issues with the Woodlands Park community.

Whilst having little impact on the number of voters, the southern boundary should be extended south to follow the line of the A2, which has been realigned since the previous boundary review.

Summary of Ward Proposals

	PROPOSED WARD NAME	No. of Cllrs	Estimated Electorate *	
			2021	2027
1	Chalk	1	2120	2150
2	Westcourt	2	4200	4300
3	Perry Street & Coldharbour	3	6500	7000
4	Denton	2	3666	4294
5	Istead Rise, Cobham & Luddesdown	2	4070	4792
6	Meopham North	2	2773	4328
7	Meopham South & Vigo	2	4161	4235
8	Northfleet East & Rosherville	2	3750	4500
9	Northfleet West & Springhead	3	5000	6578
10	Painters Ash	2	4334	4484
11	Pelham	2	4200	4400
12	Riverview Park	2	3841	4300
13	Shorne & Higham	3	5154	5933
14	Christian Fields & Ifield (<i>formerly Singlewell</i>)	2	4400	4500
15	Town	3	5500	6600
16	Whitehill & Windmill Hill	3	6200	6400
17	Woodlands & Singlewell (<i>formerly Woodlands & Kings Farm</i>)	3	6200	7200
	Total	39	76069	85994

* Please note that all figures are estimates only. As consultees are not provided with detailed or easy-to-use information on voter numbers, it will be necessary for LGBCE to ascertain the precise voter numbers.