

UNFINISHED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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MEMBERS WILL RECALL that the Local Government Commission recommended that Kent County Council and existing District Councils should survive, the view which the Dover Society itself supported. We protested against the Government's appointment of a new Commissioner and the changing of the rules in favour of Unitary Authorities in North-west Kent, as reported on p. 121 of *Newsletter* 24 of December 1995. The new Commission has recommended that Gillingham-Chatham-Rochester should become a unitary authority outside the KCC. This is what we have said in reply to John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment, who has to make the decision:

Although Dover, which retains its two-tier structure under the County Council, is not directly affected by the revised findings of the Local Government Commission, the view of the Dover Society has been and remains that Kent is an integrated peninsula needing strategic unity, from which the exclusion of Gillingham-Chatham-Rochester, as "peripheral", is arbitrary and absurd.

We have already pointed out that the government was intent on promoting unitary authorities (for political advantage) and sacked the Commissioner and re-wrote the rules to get what it wanted, despite the overwhelming public endorsement of the status quo in Kent.

The government wanted two Unitary Authorities in N. Kent (Dartford-Gravesend and Gillingham-Rochester-Chatham) and the Commission has now rejected the former but accepted the latter.

The proffered criteria are geography and history, economics (both past and prospective) and local preferences.

Dartford-Gravesend survives because of past differences and present antagonisms, ratified by opinion surveys. Gillingham-Rochester are patronisingly joined despite hostile opinion surveys because it would be good for them. This is palpably inconsistent.

The Dover Society trusts that self-evident common sense will prevail.

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The Dover Society very much welcomes the establishment of a Parish Council for Dover and is pleased to distribute the enclosed information leaflet from the Kent Association of Parish Councils. Two members will be chosen by each of the eight wards and if there are more than two nominations per ward there will be elections on May 2nd.

IT IS VERY MUCH TO BE HOPED THAT ONE OR MORE MEMBERS OF THE DOVER SOCIETY WILL BE NOMINATED AND ELECTED.

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Mr Gummer can now decide, but the pressure is off because there is no longer time for the projected elections to the new authorities this year. They are postponed to 1997, with re-organisation from 1998, before which much may happen. If, however, Mr Gummer does have time to decide, he is presumably likely to opt for the Commission's suggestion, despite our good advice.