

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland



NEWS RELEASE

BOUNDARY COMMISSION ANNOUNCES FURTHER PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland has today (Tuesday 31 January) published all of the responses it received regarding its provisional proposals for the 6th review of new parliamentary constituencies. The proposals, which were published last October, were subject to a 12 week public consultation period.

In addition to the consultation responses, the Commission will also publish the full transcripts from the three public consultation hearings that were held in October in Belfast, Omagh and Ballymena on its website, www.boundarycommission.org.uk.

This action will trigger a four-week consultation period; ending on **27 February 2012** - during this time the Commission is inviting stakeholders to offer their views on the comments and proposals the Commission has received to date.

A spokesperson for the Commission said, **“Our original proposals generated comment on a number of issues, including the number of seats proposed for Belfast and the configuration of the Antrim constituencies and the new western constituencies.**

“This is a further important opportunity for the public to have their say. We want to hear their views on the representations we have received so far, to help us decide whether we should change our original proposals”

You can email your views to review@boundarycommission.org.uk or write to the Commission at BCNI, Forestview, Purdy’s Lane, Belfast, BT8 7AR.

-ENDS-

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Notes for Editors

1. The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland is an independent and impartial public body which is responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland and making recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland every 5 years.
2. The Chairman of the Commission is the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP. The Deputy Chairman is the Hon Mr Justice McLaughlin, a Judge of the High Court of Justice in Northern Ireland. The other members of the Commission are Mr Richard Mackenzie CB and Dr Bill Smith.
3. There are four Boundary Commissions in the United Kingdom: one each for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The current review is being carried out simultaneously by each of the four Commissions and each is required to submit its report before **1 October 2013**.
4. By virtue of section 33 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the boundaries of the Northern Ireland Assembly constituencies are the same as the parliamentary constituencies, with each constituency returning six Assembly members.
5. More information about the Commission and the current review is available on its website: www.boundarycommission.org.uk
6. **Annex A** summarises the main features of the Commission's proposals
Annex B sets out the main issues emerging from the public consultation.
Annex C provides details of the public consultation process.
Annex D provides details of the rules and powers set out in the legislation.

THE COMMISSION'S PROVISIONAL PROPOSALS

1. Between March 2011 and September 2011, we modelled a number of combinations of 16 constituencies:
 - all were within 5% of the UK electoral quota;
 - none involved the splitting of wards other than one ward (Derryagh) that had already been split at the 5th Review;
 - none involved the use of Rule 7 because we were not convinced that meeting the 5% target would “*unreasonably impair*” our ability to take into account the discretionary factors set out in the legislation (see Annex D, paragraph 2).
2. Irrespective of starting point and direction of travel, the models produced a similar overall pattern, with a reduction of one seat west of the River Bann and one seat east of the river.
3. We selected our preferred option and refined it for publication as our Provisional Proposals on 13 September 2012 for a statutory 12-week consultation period.
4. The reduction in the number of constituencies from 18 to 16 required substantial changes to some of the existing constituencies, although 9 constituencies continued with only incremental adjustments (i.e. the transfer of 7 or fewer electoral wards).
5. We recommended that the number of seats in Belfast should be reduced from 4 to 3.
6. We delineated 4 western constituencies, namely Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mid Tyrone, Glenshane and Foyle.

ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

1. The majority of the representations we received related to the areas most affected by our proposals:
 - some opposed the reduction in the number of constituencies in Belfast from 4 to 3, arguing for the outward extension of the existing boundaries to achieve the required electorate;
 - others supported the proposed 3-seat Belfast but with some changes, particularly along the boundary between Belfast South West and Belfast South East (e.g. in relation to the Shaftesbury and Stranmillis wards); Belfast North and South Antrim; Belfast South East and Strangford; and Belfast South East and North Down;
 - a number of representations offered alternative configurations of the Antrim constituencies, particularly Mid Antrim and South Antrim;
 - others focussed on the reconfiguration of the 5 western constituencies into 4 seats – Foyle, Glenshane, Mid Tyrone and Fermanagh & South Tyrone. Only one representation opposed the reduction by one seat, but several proposed alternative boundaries for the 4 new constituencies;
 - several representations proposed transfers of one or two wards e.g., Broughshane, Portglenone, Carnlough, Mallusk, Burnthill, Shaftesbury and Stranmillis, Crossgar, Loughbrickland and Killyleagh, Aghagallon, Magheralin, Sixmilecross, Omagh and Drumquin, Altmore and Donaghmore, Coagh and Ardboe, Claudy and Bannagher, Lissan, Eglinton, and Macosquin.
2. All the representations and the transcripts of the public hearings have been published on our website for a 4-week secondary consultation period (from **31 January to 27 February 2012**) during which views are invited on the comments and proposals we have received so far.
3. We will consider all the representations received and their repercussions before deciding whether to propose any modifications to our original proposals. It is our intention to publish any revised proposals by this autumn for a further 8-week consultation period.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

1. On 13 September 2011, the Commission published its Provisional Proposals Report on its website and placed it on display at district council headquarters, public libraries, Area Electoral Offices and the offices of the Electoral Commission and Boundary Commission, for a 12-week public consultation period. As part of the consultation, 3 public hearings were held in Belfast, Omagh and Ballymena respectively, conducted by independent Chairs.
2. By the close of the consultation, we had received 38 written representations as well as the submissions made at the public hearings. We are now required to publish all representations, including the records of the public hearings, for a 4-week secondary consultation, during which views are invited on the comments the Commission has received so far. These documents will be available on our website from **31 January 2012**. The secondary consultation will end on **27 February 2012**.
3. We will then consider all representations received the records of the public hearings, any comments made during the secondary consultation and any other relevant information. We may then make changes to the Provisional Proposals and publish Revised Proposals for a further 8-week public consultation period. There will not be any further public hearings.
4. We will take account of any representations we receive regarding our Revised Proposals and decide whether any further modifications are required. We are not required to publish the modifications for further consultation but we will publish our final report for information.
5. At the end of the review, we will submit our recommendations in a report to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. When reports have been submitted by all four Boundary Commissions, a draft Order in Council will be introduced to Parliament giving effect to their recommendations from the next general election.

THE RULES AND DISCRETIONARY POWERS

1. For the current review, the legislation requires that:
 - there will be a total of 600 parliamentary constituencies;
 - the number of constituencies allocated to Northern Ireland will be 16;
 - constituencies must be constructed using a UK electoral quota of 76,641, based on the parliamentary electoral register of 1 December 2010.
 - with a few exceptions relating to Scotland and the Isle of Wight, every constituency must have an electorate that is within 5% of the UK quota i.e. within a range of 72,810 to 80,473 electors;
 - however, the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland may define constituencies with electorates as low as 70,583, where the application of the quota would unreasonably impair its ability to apply its discretionary powers (see paragraph 2 below) or jeopardise its reporting deadline.

2. The Commission may also take into account other factors. The factors are:
 - special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
 - local government ward boundaries as at the council election prior to the review date specified in the legislation;
 - boundaries of existing constituencies;
 - any local ties which would be broken by changes in constituencies; and
 - the inconvenience attendant on such changes.

This last factor does not apply to the current review but will apply to future reviews. These powers give the Commission some discretion in how to configure constituencies.