

Democratic Unionist Party submission to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland on their Provisional Proposals.

Introduction

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) wishes at the outset to express its deep unhappiness with the set of proposals the Boundary Commission has produced. The decision to cut Northern Ireland to 16 seats was not in the Commission's hands but these are simply the wrong 16.

The DUP opposed this legislation from the outset. It made clear that the primacy given to numbers, a break from past reviews, would result in very poor boundaries. Thus, the set of proposals produced for Northern Ireland are of no surprise to the DUP. No satisfaction is drawn from the fulfilment of DUP prophecy on this matter and the set of atrocious proposals produced.

The clearest examples of very bad boundaries are in the proposed South-East Belfast and around the towns of Ballymena, Coleraine and Carrickfergus. The term 'gerrymander' is one that should not be quickly or lightly thrown about by anyone. However, in terms of the proposed South-East Belfast the DUP feels that it can be legitimately used both in terms of the boundary with South-West and Strangford. Overall, the Commission's proposals have a disproportionately negative impact upon Unionism. The effect permeates the proposals leading to the conclusion that it is no accident.

As regards Ballymena and Coleraine the proposals cut them off from their natural hinterland. The orientation of the surrounding wards and everyday linkages is unquestionably towards these towns. However, the Commission's proposals scythe through those relationships with no thought whatsoever.

The DUP believes that the legislative basis of this Boundary review is fundamentally flawed. In addition, the truncated and weakened public consultation process offers next to no opportunity to effect genuine, positive and far-reaching change to the Commission's proposals. Therefore, with the utmost reluctance the DUP will not be submitting proposals seeking wholesale changes even though this means it cannot address some of the issues it has identified above e.g. the brutal division of Ballymena. The expectation is that the changes we seek will not produce a set of good boundaries for Northern Ireland rather it will be making an atrocious situation into a bad situation.

Alternative proposals

In our alternative proposals we have tried to maintain a consistency in approach across the constituencies as much as is possible, unlike the Commission's proposals. The DUP notes the Boundary Commission's proposal to make the larger physical constituencies also the largest numerically. The DUP believes this coincidence is not the approach that should be followed. In our proposals it tries to shift the size balance more towards the constituencies with larger urban populations (as far as is possible).

This approach has two advantages. First, such constituencies are easier to canvas and canvassing is a key tool in retaining or improving voter turnout something which is

developing as an issue of concern in Northern Ireland. Second, large urban centres are easier to service with a network of Westminster and Assembly constituency offices of the larger parties or strategically placed single office for smaller parties than large rural constituencies.

Our proposals have also tried to utilise District Electoral Areas as a building block for new constituencies. The DUP is conscious that wards are the basic building blocks of the Commission's work however it believes DEAs can be an additional useful tool. When followed they make changes more comprehensible to the general public and local linkages, identification and strength of boundaries have played a role in their development.

Utilisation of full powers

The DUP fundamentally disagrees with the Commission on and the strict adherence to the 5% rule on constituency size. The DUP is utterly unconvinced by the arguments for or value of this decision. Our reasons are threefold:

1. The DUP opposed the original legislation partially because it believed that giving numbers primacy to such a degree would result in poorer constituency boundaries. Therefore, it equally opposes the decision of the Commission to not utilise its full powers.
2. The legislation dealt with Northern Ireland in a separate section. This recognised the particular difficulties in applying the new model for constituencies here and provided the Commission with greater flexibility than elsewhere. It is going against the spirit and beyond the letter of the law.
3. The DUP believes that the expectation of the Commission that submissions should try and follow this additional rule further weakens an already anaemic consultation process. This is already a truncated and less rigorous consultation process in comparison with previous reviews. This rule reduces significantly the scope for alternative proposals. Insistence on this rule could potentially lead to a challenge to the work of the Commission.

The DUP insists that the Commission should utilise its full powers of discretion in terms of constituency size and accordingly its proposals do not follow the 5% rule but the legal limits. This will allow some small improvement to a dire set of proposals.

Constituency changes

1. North Belfast

The decision to add the three Shankill wards of the Court DEA was the natural and sensible course of action. The proposed boundary between North Belfast and South West Belfast is very strong based on the peace wall and major roads. Thus to fit with our aim of creating larger urban seats the scope for expansion lies at the Newtownabbey end of the constituency.

5 of the 7 wards of Antrim Line are presently within the old and proposed North Belfast constituency. This should increase to 6 with the transfer of Burnthill ward to North Belfast from South Antrim. The Burnthill ward is of a comparable character and similar patterns of service linkages and orientation to Newtownabbey/Glengormley as the other 5 Antrim Line

wards. Therefore, it is a natural choice for extension of North Belfast. The new boundaries would be as strong as the Commission's proposals. The size of the Mallusk ward and the difficult knock-on consequences it would create makes it unsuitable for consideration.

2. South West Belfast

The DUP reiterates its deep concerns about the Commission's proposals and their impact. The DUP reiterates it considers this boundary and that of South-East Belfast to be a gerrymander.

The present Commission proposals cut the Laganbank DEA. Only 1 ward of this DEA Shaftesbury is proposed to be in South West. The result of this creates a very weak boundary between South West and South East Belfast. The Commission proposals become startlingly dubious when you consider a readily identifiable and strong boundary is a mere few hundred metres from their proposed line, namely the River Lagan. The River Lagan is already used as part of the boundary between South East and South West. There is no valid reason why the river Lagan is used then abandoned then used again. A natural feature such as a river simply cannot be compared in terms of strength with a residential or commercial street. It is simply the clear and obvious boundary and the decision not to utilise it incomprehensible.

This will involve the transfer of Stranmillis and Botanic wards to South West from the proposed South East. These two wards are naturally orientated to the rest of South West with shared services such as schools (Methody, Hunterhouse College, Malone Integrated College) and transport links e.g. Malone, Stranmillis and Ormeau Roads.

3. South East Belfast

The DUP believes the undesireability and questionability of the Commission's proposals are equally evident here. The divisions on the urban periphery between Strangford and South East Belfast exemplify this. Again it is an area the party would have preferred significant and wholesale changes.

With the proposed transfer of Stranmillis and Botanic South East would be left outside the legal limits. The DUP believes there are three wards that fall naturally into South East Belfast that should be added to it. These are Minnowburn, Beechill and the Upper Braniel. The inclusion of these wards would place the entirety of Castlereagh West and Castlereagh Central DEAs within the South East constituency. Their inclusion in the same DEAs demonstrates their linkages with the broader area and into the South East of the city making their inclusion sensible and natural. They are not orientated in any meaningful way with the major population centres of Strangford. Their transport, social and service ties lie with the south east of Belfast.

4. North Down

No changes sought to the Commission's recommendations.

5. Strangford

In addition to the loss of the three wards identified above to South East Belfast the DUP proposes that the Crossgar ward be included in Strangford constituency. The development of the village now extends out beyond the ward boundaries and thus a part of Crossgar is already within the proposed Strangford constituency. This change would end the needless division of the town across two constituencies and bring the entirety of Rowallane DEA within Strangford. Crossgar has developed as something of a commuter town for Belfast giving it a stronger northern rather than southern orientation in terms of its linkages.

6. South Down

Apart from the transfer of Crossgar ward to Strangford the DUP does not seek any other changes to the Commission's proposals for South Down.

7. Newry & Armagh

No changes sought to the Commission's recommendations.

8. Upper Bann

The DUP agrees with the proposed transfer of Tandragee ward to Upper Bann from Newry and Armagh. As regards the re-ordering of the boundary between Upper Bann and Lagan Valley the DUP does not agree with the transfer of Aghagallon. Aghagallon lies more naturally with Lurgan and the other wards on the Lough shore.

If Lagan Valley is to extend then there are two more obvious and natural wards to choose from, Magheralin and Donaghcloney wards. However, the manner in which Donaghcloney ward is drawn with a long deep tail into the Upper Bann constituency that would almost sever Banbridge from the rest of the constituency means it is unacceptable and simply not viable. Therefore Magheralin is the obvious choice. The river Lagan originates in the ward. Magheralin Primary School would be utilised by some from the existing Lagan Valley constituency. It has clear road links into Lagan Valley and the development of a commuter based population has orientated it in a more easterly direction.

No other changes are sought.

9. Lagan Valley

In keeping with the proposals above the addition of Glenavy ward is accepted. However, Aghagallon ward should remain in Upper Bann with the addition of Magheralin ward instead.

10. South Antrim

In keeping with the proposals and reasons above the DUP proposes the transfer of Burnthill ward to North Belfast.

11 & 12 Mid-Antrim and North Antrim

The DUP will deal with these constituencies together as they symbolise much of what is wrong with the Commission's proposals. The severing of linkages around Carrickfergus and Ballymena is one that DUP disagrees with in the strongest terms. They simply make no sense in their respective localities. It will be the source of much legitimate local public anger. The flawed nature of the legislation and consultation process prevents change to this ridiculous situation from being achievable. However, this should **not** be viewed as contentment on the DUP's behalf about these proposals.

13. Glenshane

The DUP considers the redistribution of the 3 Antrim seats and the former East Londonderry seat has the stench of gerrymander. The option chosen will most likely facilitate Sinn Fein and its sectarian 'greening' of the West agenda.

The DUP proposes two changes to the boundary of Glenshane. First, it believes the Claudy and Banagher wards should return to Foyle. The DUP opposed their transfer in the previous review and thus seeks to rectify a mistake with this review.

This proposal is also in keeping with the DUP's stated desire to reduce the size of rural constituencies and increase those with significant urban centres. This would make the constituency boundary contiguous with the local government boundary and end the needless division of the Rural DEA. Furthermore, Claudy and Banagher are clearly orientated towards Londonderry in terms of their services and transport linkages rather than Limavady.

Second, the DUP would propose the transfer of the Coagh and Ardboe wards to Glenshane. This DEA is already divided across the two constituencies and we believe on balance that majority of the DEA should be within Glenshane constituency. The physical linkages between Coagh and Ardboe make their joint transfer the most natural proposal. This would fit with the DUP's stated desire to reduce the size of the rural constituencies.

14. Foyle

In keeping with the proposals and reasons outlined above the DUP proposes the transfer of Claudy and Banagher wards into Foyle.

15. Fermanagh and South Tyrone

In keeping with our desire to reduce the size of rural constituencies the DUP proposes that Sixmilecross should be transferred to Mid-Tyrone. This will end the needless division of the Mid-Tyrone DEA. The road and other linkages of Sixmilecross lie primarily towards Omagh rather than Enniskillen so fits more naturally in the Mid-Tyrone constituency.

16. Mid-Tyrone

In keeping with our desire to reduce the size of rural constituencies, to counteract the addition of Sixmilecross and for the reasons detailed above, the DUP proposes the transfer of Coagh and Ardboe wards into the Glenshane constituency.

Table of Constituency size under DUP alternative proposals

Ranking by size	Name	Electorate
1	South West Belfast	79841
2	Foyle	77745
3	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	77108
4	North Belfast	76635
5	Mid Tyrone	76046
6	North Antrim	75648
7	North Down	74288
8	Newry and Armagh	73872
9	Lagan Valley	73522
10	South East Belfast	73472
11	Mid-Antrim	73187
12	Upper Bann	72666
13	South Antrim	72122
14	South Down	71816
15	Glenshane	71532
16	Strangford	71135