

Margaret Hoben

Response to Public Consultation on proposed new 16 Westminster Constituencies.
December 2011

I wish to send you this second submission to support my proposal, given at Belfast's public hearing, that Belfast should have four Westminster Constituencies, instead of three as you have indicated in your booklet.

I request that you use from the Parliamentary Voting system Act 2011, the regulation from Paragraph 7 which states that the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland can recommend constituencies with electorates with the minimum 70,583. This is the only Region in the UK that has been given any freedom of choice to divert from the UK average, except for the 'protected constituencies' of Scotland and the Isle of Wight which has been allowed 2 MPs for only 110,000 electors, presumably because they are islands and like Northern Ireland, are not part of mainland Britain. This is a generous allowance for Northern Ireland and should be used, as it was intended, in fairness to the electorate of Northern Ireland.

I refer to your proposal to reduce the four existing Constituencies of Belfast to three new Constituencies. You state you did this because the total electorate for the existing four constituencies in Belfast divided by the UK average only came to 3.2 seats (which rounds off to 3 new seats). My proposal for four Constituencies could be met by using four Belfast constituencies with the lower average of 70,583, (Rule 7) which gives a total Belfast electorate on 1 December 2010 of 248,121. Divided by 70,583, this gives Belfast a total electorate for 3.52 seats which rounds off to 4 new constituencies for the Belfast area, instead of only three as proposed in your report. These figures are:

Electorate 1 December 2010	Difference from Lower Northern Ireland minimum electorate (70,583)
Belfast North 66825	$70,583 - 66,825 = 3,758$ electors needed for new constituency
Belfast South 60726	$70,583 - 60,726 = 9,857$ electors needed for new constituency
Belfast West 60520	$70,583 - 60,520 = 10,063$ electors needed for new constituency
Belfast East 60050	$70,583 - 60,050 = 10,063$ electors needed for new constituency
Total 248,121	divided by 70,583 would mean Belfast has a total electorate for 3.52 seats which rounds off to 4 new Constituencies for the Belfast area.

Method of allocation of Constituencies across the UK Regions

Page2/3

The method of allocation of Constituencies across the UK Regions required, is set out clearly in the "Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011" (Schedule 2) which is used for the Sixth Periodic Review of Westminster Constituencies across the UK.

I quote the Parliamentary Voting system and Constituencies Act 2011, c.1 pages 2 and 3/259:

"The allocation method

paragraph 8 (1), The allocation method referred to in rule 3(2) is as follows:

(2) The first constituency shall be allocated to the part of the United Kingdom with the greatest electorate.

(3) The second and subsequent constituencies shall be allocated in the same way except that the electorate of a part of the united kingdom to which one or more constituencies have already been allocated is to be divided by $2C+1$ where C is the number of constituencies already allocated to that part."

The House of Commons Library Paper 'Sizes of Constituency Electorates ranks all the existing 650 UK Constituencies according to electorate size on 1 December 2010. This shows, according to electorate size, how many of the 650 Parliamentary constituencies are within + or - 5%, the required(England, Scotland, and Wales) UK electoral quota of 76,641. This was used as a basis to find out how many constituencies each region of the UK was entitled to. The Northern Ireland Constituencies list read as follows;

Constituency	Rank within UK	Electorate	Difference from
N.I.	average 76,641	1 Dec 2010	electorate average of 70,583
Upper Bann	29	76,209	+5,626 electors
Newry & Armagh	52	75,856	+5,003
North Antrim	147	74,074	+3,491
South Down	255	72,092	+1,509
Fermanagh /			
South Tyrone	388	68,979	-1,604
Foyle	419	67,810	-2,773
Belfast North	458	66,825	-4,025
Lagan Valley	481	66,327	-4,526

Mid Ulster	505	65,655	-4,928
East Londonderry	536	64,546	-6,037
South Antrim	542	64,330	-6,253
West Tyrone	578	62,258	-8,325
North Down	594	61,615	-8,968
Strangford	595	61,566	-9,017
East Antrim	598	61,253	-9,330
Belfast South	603	60,726	-9,854
Belfast West	606	60,520	-10,063
Belfast East	609	60,050	-10,533

Page 3/3

I contend that the 16 N. Ireland Westminster Constituencies with the highest electorate should be retained as the new Westminster Constituencies. In Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland, the constituencies with lowest electorates were amalgamated into the higher electorate constituencies so the number of constituencies could be reduced as dictated in law. This, unfairly, is not what is being proposed in Northern Ireland. To divide South Belfast - one of the top 16 highest constituencies into three constituencies, without giving a valid reason to justify this in Law is unacceptable. East Belfast, because it ranks 609th in the UK and has the lowest electorate out of the 18 old constituencies in Northern Ireland, should be the constituency which is split between neighbouring Constituencies - if your proposal to have only three constituencies in the Belfast metropolitan area is pursued. I propose, therefore, that you have four constituencies in Belfast by including the necessary electorate from surrounding wards from Antrim, North Down, Castlereagh, Strangford and Lisburn, whose communities have local ties and would identify themselves as being part of the greater Belfast area anyway.

In conclusion, the above Parliamentary Voting system and Constituency Act 2011, paragraph 8(1) and 9(2) which applies to N. Ireland, determines the allocation method to be used, which says the delineation of the new Westminster Constituencies must start with the constituency with the biggest electorate. In Northern Ireland, that is Upper Bann; then, the 2nd biggest electorate (Newry and Armagh) and so on. Why was this method not used in Northern Ireland for the proposed new 16 Constituencies? For the first time in many years Westminster wants electoral equality across the UK. They have given a concession to Northern Ireland that each Constituency electorate can have a minimum quota of 70,583. This has to be used to full advantage in a fair, open, and transparent way by using the 'method of allocation' as dictated by Law.

Thank you.