

Elizabeth Benson
Secretary to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland
Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland
Forestview
Purdy's Lane
Belfast
BT8 7AR

28 November 2011

Dear Elizabeth,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Inner South Neighbourhood Partnership Board in response to the Boundary Commission's Provisional Proposals Report of the Sixth Periodical Review of Parliamentary Constituencies. Although we understand the need to review existing constituency boundaries in order to reduce the number of Northern Ireland constituencies from 18 to 16, we are concerned that the proposals set out in relation to Belfast fail to take account of the local geography and identity of communities.

Under Paragraph 27 on page 12 of your report, it states that "the Provisional Proposals take account of both special geographical considerations and their potential impacts on identifiable local ties." However, in the case of South Belfast, we believe that the proposals fail to acknowledge both natural/physical boundaries and local identity.

The River Lagan has always provided a natural boundary for local communities on the ground, drawing a distinction between East and South Belfast. However, under the current proposals, wards both east and west of the River would be part of the Belfast South East constituency. Similarly the A1 Motorway/Westlink continues to provide a perceived demarcation between South and West Belfast. However, the revised constituency of Belfast South West includes wards either side of this physical barrier.

The presence of these 'natural' boundaries on the ground have also served to increase the sense of local identity felt by communities living in South Belfast. To suggest that a resident living in Stranmillis or Botanic is part of East Belfast, or that communities living in Malone and Finaghy are part of West Belfast fails completely to reflect local perceptions of strong cultural identities.

This issue is brought to bear in a number of examples within South Belfast. On the Malone Road, for example, one side of the street will fall within the Belfast South West constituency, whilst the other side is with the Belfast South West constituency. On the Ormeau Road, we are currently working with local business communities who draw representation from the whole Road, stretching from Forestside and the outer ring road to the City Centre. Under the provisional proposals, the Ormeau Road would also be divided between two constituencies, weakening their collective voice and representation.

Local identity is also of particular importance to the distinctive inner city communities of South Belfast, such as Donegall Pass, Sandy Row, the Markets and the Village. Politically, the predominantly loyalist communities resident in the Village and Sandy Row, which are two of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland, would become a minority voice within the broader Belfast South West constituency, as would residents of the Markets and Lower Ormeau

within the Belfast South East constituency.

We would urge the Boundary Commission to reconsider the need for a 3 Belfast constituency model, as opposed to the existing 4 constituencies. We understand that this may result in the Commission needing to look once again at the extension of existing Belfast constituency boundaries into adjacent areas and settlements outside of the city, but feel this would be more coherent given the social, economic and political context on the ground.

Over the past 10-15 years, many of the surrounding settlements have coalesced within the 'Greater Belfast' area, with many smaller settlements surrounding Belfast now functioning as commuter towns. This means the wards within the surrounding Belfast Metropolitan Area are now more closely aligned to the political, economic and social context of Belfast than ever before. We therefore believe that this alternative solution, based on an extension of the existing 4 constituency model for Belfast would better reflect the geographic context and perceptions of local identity, as well as reflecting Belfast's development from a 'city in isolation' to a city at the centre of a broader 'Belfast Metropolitan Area'.

Yours Sincerely,

Ronan McKenna – Chairperson
Inner South Neighbourhood Partnership Board