

North Belfast SDLP Submission to the Boundary Commission, December 2011

The Boundary Commission's provisional proposals for the new constituencies in September 2011 proposed the transfer of the wards of Glencairn, Highfield and Shankill from West Belfast to North Belfast, giving North Belfast an electorate of 74,783 which is 2.4% below the quota.

In the 5th Periodical Review Revised Recommendations, of 18 May 2006, the Commission supported the assistant Commissioner who held a Local Inquiry in Belfast which "supported the Commission's Provisional Recommendations to extend the existing four constituencies in a radial fashion. The assistant Commissioner considers it an unnecessary constraint to regard Belfast as being bound by the historic designation of the local government boundary, which no longer recognises the suburbanisation of Belfast and close ties and links with the City. Accordingly, the assistant Commissioner recommends the retention of four Belfast borough seats."

Further to this the Commission recommended, "the Newtownabbey wards of Ballyhenry, Collinbridge, Glebe, Glengormley and Hightown should transfer from the South Antrim to the Belfast North constituency and the Newtownabbey LGD ward of Cloughfern should transfer from the East Antrim to the Belfast North constituency. **The assistant Commissioner considers that their transfer would recognise the movement of the electorate from Belfast into these wards and local ties, and be broadly acceptable as well as necessary to maintain the size of the electorate of the Belfast North constituency. The transfer of the wards would also respect the integrity and cohesion of Glengormley Village.**"

In light of these previous recommendations it does not make sense for the Boundary Commission to recommend that Belfast be reduced from four seats to three. The four existing constituencies of North, South, East and West Belfast reflect the distinct communities which exist in the City and take account of the outward expansion of Belfast which has occurred in recent years.

The reduction from four seats to three would impact for both future Westminster and Assembly elections. As well as having Belfast's representation at Westminster reduced from three to four it would also mean that Belfast would return eighteen MLA's instead of the current twenty-four. This will severely reduce the impact that Belfast, as the economic driver and the largest city in the north of Ireland has, and goes against previous Boundary Commission recommendations which ensured that Belfast retain its four seats.

For Belfast to retain its four seats the Boundary Commission should continue with its previous decisions and expand the boundary of Belfast outwards. For North Belfast this would mean that instead of the three wards of Glencairn, Highfield and Shankill coming in from Court DEA it would make sense for the two Antrim Line wards of Burnthill and Mallusk to move from South Antrim in to North Belfast. This would mean that all seven Antrim Line wards would be in the North Belfast and would remove the anomaly of having a split in the greater Glengormley area. This would be in line with previous Boundary Commission rulings to expand the North Belfast constituency northwards in to the Newtownabbey Council area.

In terms of population change the deviation from the draft Boundary Commission suggestion would be minimal. The proposed total constituency electorate is 74,783, which is 2.4% below the quota. If we remove the three Court wards of Glencairn, Highfield and Shankill and add in the Antrim Line wards of Burnthill and Mallusk we have a new total constituency electorate of 73,782 which is only 3.7% below the quota.