

Dear Ms Benson,

Firstly we would like to state that as a community which will be greatly effected by this change we would take issue with the limited amount of public awareness within our community on this issue. Whilst we appreciate that the review was launched in March - there has been no substansial media campaign around this which has left us in the dark up until last week and now under pressure to respond with no real technical cognisence of the implications of the proposed changes.

Members of our committee who where around at the last review stated that at that time there was a real process of engagement with local communities and they feel let down by this process. We have taken this proposal out to local residents and it is very clear that none of them were aware of this and a community, which already is disenfranchised in realtion to political representation, spoke of a political carve-up and joint gerrymandering!

It has obviously came as a shock that the parliamentary constituency of South Belfast is to be split in 2 with our portion being moved back into West. It would seem that this has been actioned without any due regard for what would be natural boundaries eg River Lagan and the man-made boundary of the Westlink. Particularly in relation to the South West area it would seem ludicrous to have a constituency which is 'carved' in half by 4 lane motorway!

As a community Sandy Row has worked hard to build community relations with the Markets, Lower Ormeau, Donegall Pass & the Village Area also we have through the South Belfast Partnership Board worked hard to establish a relationship with the broader constituency and the drawing of this boundary line would dilute any relationship at a political level and years of community development work damaged on the brush of a pen.

For Sandy Row the issue of identity is very important and we have been working very hard to address the negative side to this in the context of loyalist working class areas. A move to a West Belfast Constituency could potentially negate any previous work done as West Belfast has a very strong identity of its own which would not be representative of the community of Sandy Row.

It would appear that an opportunity has been missed here to consolidate the extension of Belfast and 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'

This is the option that we feel the commission should consider and not drive through a political carve up which will only serve to benefit local political parties and not citizens. We also ask that the Commission extend their review deadline so that we have the opportunity to properly discuss the implications of this with local residents and polittcal representatives.

We hope that you take note of our points and welcome any further discussion around the issues we have raised.

As an umbrella organisation for the community groups of Sandy Row/Mid-Donagall Road the signatory organisations to the submission are Sandy Row Community Forum Revitalise Partnership - Sandy Row/Mid-Donagall Road Local Business Association Sandy Row Womens Group Sandy Row Residents Group Belfast South Community Resources Sandy Row Community Festival Sandy Row Community Health & Well-being Advisory Group Sandy Row Community Centre Committee