

Liz Benson
Secretary to the Commissioner
Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland
Forestview
Purdy's Lane
BELFAST
BT8 7AR

Friday, December 2, 2011.

Dear Liz,

Please find attached the SDLP response to the consultation in relation to the Sixth Parliamentary Boundary Review NI 2011.

Our response emphasises our strong view that Belfast should retain four Parliamentary Constituencies and that serious consideration must be given to the impact on the sense of belonging and community in rural constituencies, particularly those west of the Bann.

Given the radical and complex nature of the proposals, the SDLP believe that insufficient time and resources have been allocated to political parties to enable them to provide the Boundary Commission with more detailed responses. This consultation period had been timed to coincide with the party conference season when the SDLP and other political parties normally hold their annual conferences and therefore their focus is both diluted and diverted. Evidence of this can be seen in the poor attendance at the public hearings. Additionally political parties did not have access to mapping software to enable them to effectively analyse, plan and address the 'ripple effect' of any proposed changes they wished to make. Yet at the hearings, when political parties put forward suggested amendments, they were asked whether they had they considered the 'ripple effect' throughout the whole of Northern Ireland.

The SDLP believes that Northern Ireland is significantly disadvantaged due to the high level of people over 18 years of age who are eligible to vote but not registered – the highest level in the UK. We have elaborated further on this in our submission.

Yours Sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Michael Savage.

Michael Savage
Chief Executive Officer
SDLP

SDLP RESPONSE TO THE SIXTH PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY REVIEW NI 2011

FOUR CONSTITUENCIES IN BELFAST

The SDLP is of the strong view that Belfast should retain four Parliamentary Constituencies and this should have been the starting point for the Commission's review in Northern Ireland.

Belfast is the most significant and important urban sprawl in Northern Ireland and is the Metropolitan Centre of Northern Ireland. All major strategic development plans across many Government Departments point towards developing Belfast as the Metropolitan Centre of Northern Ireland.

The SDLP believes that Belfast, as with other major cities in the UK, should have constituencies which are representative of its size, geographical location and demography, and that its boundaries be defined as wholly inclusive of the Belfast City Council area and the greater Belfast urban area.

Planning and regional development is based around the greater Belfast area model and the SDLP believe that the Boundary Commission need to take this into consideration rather than use one of the Belfast Constituencies to fill out the numbers in adjacent constituencies. This Boundary Review needs to be more reflective of identity and community rather than just a numerical balancing exercise.

The SDLP view is that the current proposals are seriously flawed in that voters living in huge swathes of the city, some of which are only 2.5 miles from Belfast city centre are being cut off from the city they belong to, just to make up the numbers in more rural constituencies such as Strangford, Lagan Valley and South Antrim (which are more rural and regional town constituencies).

See Sample Map Attached:

See Appendix 1

This argument clearly demonstrates that the three Belfast model does not take due cognisance of the sense of belonging which the voters living in these areas have in their relationship with the greater Belfast area and therefore breaches the key criteria relating to sense of place and belonging.

The use of the peace lines in Belfast as boundary lines also causes the SDLP deep concern as this flies in the face of the need to develop a Shared Future/Society in Northern Ireland. The practice of using peace lines as boundaries as has been done between the proposed constituencies of Belfast South West and Belfast North, defines and institutionalises community differences and as a result will perpetuate divisions within our society and reduces the opportunity to create a more inclusive and shared society in Northern Ireland.

REGISTRATION

Northern Ireland is the only area within the UK that currently uses the Individual Registration System which is due to be implemented soon in GB.

As a result, Northern Ireland currently has the highest number of void households and eligible people not on the electoral register than anywhere else in the UK. It has been estimated that up to 10% of people came off the electoral register following the introduction of Individual Registration. This raises an issue of parity in that if the NI experience is anything to go by, then when Individual Registration is implemented in GB it could lead to a similar decrease in the number of voters registered.

As a direct result of this, it is likely that Northern Ireland would have an increased percentage of the UK electorate and would the number of constituencies would then have to be reassessed at between 17-18 seats out of the 600 Westminster Constituencies.

The Commission should therefore look at the significant implications of this when agreeing the current number of Constituencies in Northern Ireland. Provision should be made for this now rather than having to put the electoral and political system in Northern Ireland through further unnecessary major upheaval after the 2015 Electoral Cycle. There is therefore a strong argument to leave Northern Ireland with the current 18 Constituency model until there is a consistency of assessing the criteria used to measure the size and eligibility of the electorate.

See Appendix 2.

IMPACT WEST OF THE BANN

The SDLP believes that the proposals devastate the well-established sense of community in the four current rural constituencies west of the Bann, namely Mid-Ulster, West Tyrone, Fermanagh and South Tyrone and East Derry.

Under the proposals these four constituencies will be reduced to three new constituencies, namely Glenshane, Mid Tyrone and Fermanagh & South Tyrone which are sprawling and unconnected in their nature.

The new Mid Tyrone constituency runs from Killeter on the Donegal Border across the full length of County Tyrone, across the three council districts of Stabane, Omagh and Cookstown, to the shores of Lough Neagh. There are no community ties or connections between these three areas. Communities on the shores of Lough Neagh have no sense of attachment with the community living on the Donegal Border.

The SDLP feels that insufficient consideration has been given to local relationships and sense of belonging which are extremely important in the rural west of Northern Ireland. While the Boundary Commission must find ways and means of creating constituencies that conform to a numerical model, to ignore the unique circumstances and geography of Northern Ireland and in particularly the rural west, will only lead to disenfranchised areas which has the potential to render sectarian politics rather than social progress.

It must be noted that these factors were considered at length when the Boundary Commission made changes to the constituencies in 1995. Prior to this Mid Ulster and East Derry covered similar areas to the proposed Mid Tyrone and Glenshane, but it was viewed by the Boundary Commission at the time that the sprawling and unconnected nature of these constituencies was not considered to be the best boundaries and so West Tyrone was created and the current constituencies of Mid Ulster and East Derry were settled upon.

A return to the proposals first considered in 1995, as the proposal suggests, does not take into consideration the social, economic and geographic make up of the rural west, and would only appear to be supported by meeting the necessary numbers required to create a constituency, rather than meeting the numbers required through matching areas where there is genuine connectivity.

The potential for Northern Ireland to have between 17-18 constituencies allocated under the next review due to GB adopting the Individual Registration model currently operational in Northern Ireland, as outlined earlier, adds further weight to the argument that the number of constituencies west of the Bann should remain at current levels in order to mitigate for the impact of the GB adoption of Individual Registration and also to retain the sense of belonging that is now well established in the four current rural constituencies west of the Bann.

The concerns of voters in the rural constituencies of Mid Ulster, West Tyrone and Fermanagh South Tyrone are attached.

See Appendices 3, 4 and 5.

NORTHERN IRELAND GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL DIVISION

The SDLP believe that this Boundary Review cannot have a 'one rule fits all' approach to political representation across the UK.

The SDLP request that the Boundary Commission take into consideration the very diverse and unique issues that exist in Northern Ireland.

It is appreciated that exceptions have been made both, in the Highlands of Scotland and the Isle of Wight.

The SDLP believes that Northern Ireland should also be allocated as an exceptional area.

Our geography west of the Bann coupled with our historical and current divided communities creates identity and political representation difficulties.

The Boundary Commission's proposals have already shown that they have a difficulty with this as evidenced by proposing a constituency boundary along a sectarian and political peace line. Northern Ireland cannot afford the perpetuation of such statutory defined divisions in our society. Proposals such as this impacts directly on all attempts at Government level to move towards a Shared Future/Society in Northern Ireland.

REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (RPA):

Under the Review of Public Administration the Assembly has agreed in principle in the Programme for Government to significantly reduce the number of Local Councils in Northern Ireland.

This will involve widespread changes to Council, District Electoral Area and Ward boundaries.

If the previous Local Government Boundary Review is anything to go by a number of wards are likely to change in shape and size – yet these wards are the building blocks of the Parliamentary Boundary Review.

If they do change then a number of wards would be split between constituencies and impact on several elements of the criteria that the Boundary Commission has set out as its guide for these proposals.

It is the SDLP's view that because a significant Local Government Boundary Review is about to take place then the Westminster Boundary Review for Northern Ireland should be deferred and both boundary reviews should be undertaken together to create a synergy of effort, analysis and input, along with a real appreciation of sense of local identity and belonging.

There is a possibility that in the absence of such co-operation between the two boundary reviews that the co-terminosity between the Assembly and Westminster Constituencies may change to create a co-terminosity instead between Assembly Constituencies and the new Local Government Districts and their District Electoral Areas.

At a time of economic austerity and budgetary constraints the SDLP believe that the public would be better served by reviewing both Westminster and Local Government Boundaries at the same time, thus potentially preventing a further drain on the public purse and to the taxpayer.

It should be noted that in GB both the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly have separate Constituency Boundaries to Westminster.

ADDITIONAL CONSTITUENCY SUBMISSIONS:

FOYLE CONSTITUENCY:

See Appendix 6

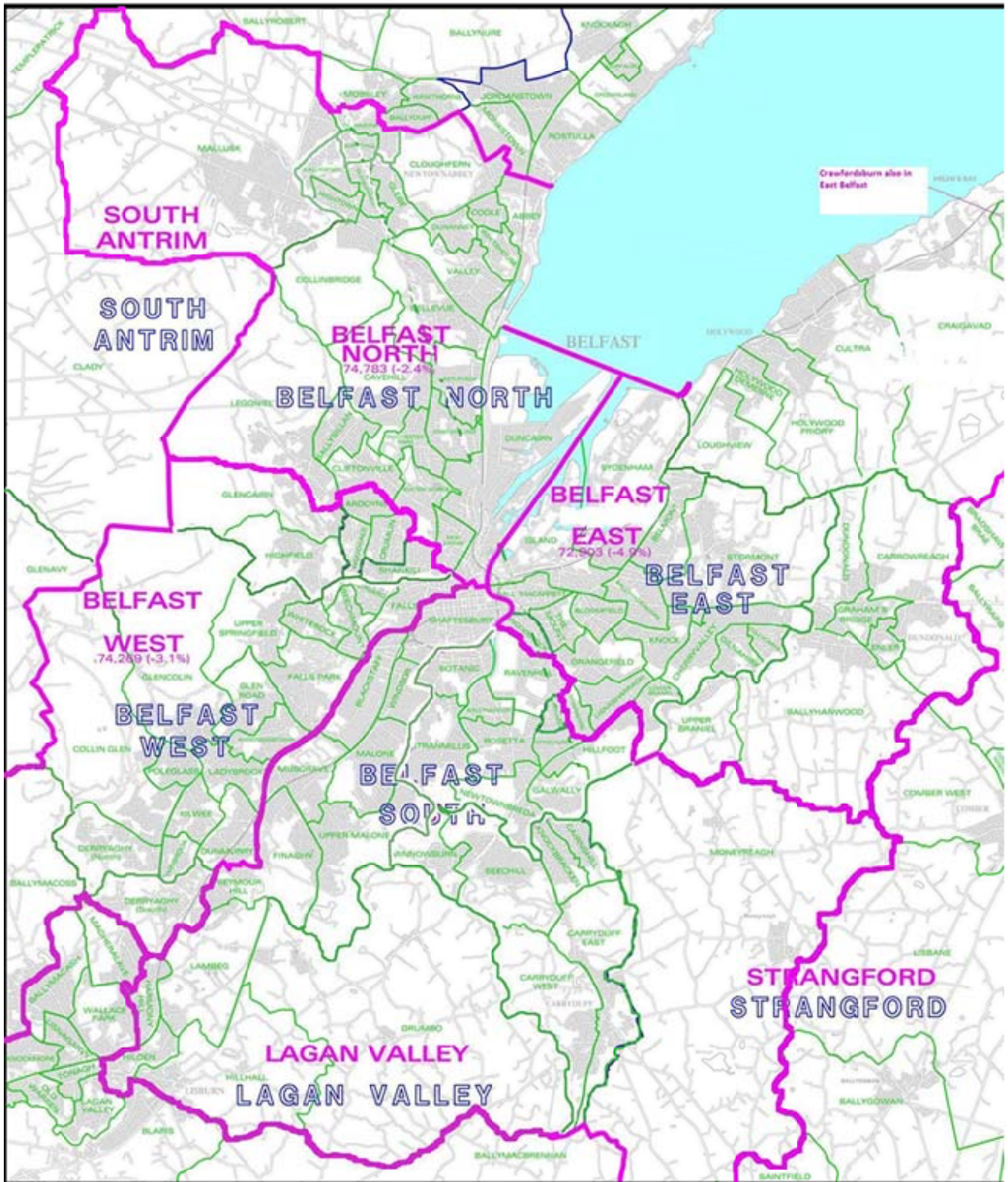
UPPER BANN CONSTITUENCY:

See Appendix 7



Michael Savage
SDLP Chief Executive
December 2, 2011.

BELFAST



SCALE 1:100,000

Constituency	Total Electorate	Properties with at least one person registered	Electorate per Household	Void Properties	Total Properties	%age Void Properties	Estimated No. Missing from Electorate from Void properties
Belfast East	60,742	33,973	1.8	9,688	43,661	22.2	17,322
Belfast North	67,422	37,555	1.8	10,897	48,452	22.5	19,563
Belfast South	61,712	34,378	1.8	13,114	47,492	27.6	23,541
Belfast West	61,058	31,579	1.9	7,571	39,150	19.3	14,639
East Antrim	61,364	31,446	2.0	7,670	39,116	19.6	14,967
East Londonderry	64,709	31,702	2.0	10,648	42,350	25.1	21,734
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	70,850	32,536	2.2	9,553	42,089	22.7	20,802
Foyle	67,765	32,674	2.1	8,038	40,712	19.7	16,671
Lagan Valley	67,047	34,000	2.0	7,464	41,464	18.0	14,719
Mid Ulster	66,951	29,434	2.3	7,089	36,523	19.4	16,125
Newry & Armagh	77,911	34,954	2.2	7,706	42,660	18.1	17,176
North Antrim	74,501	36,713	2.0	7,887	44,600	17.7	16,005
North Down	62,555	32,699	1.9	8,761	41,460	21.1	16,760
South Antrim	64,638	32,133	2.0	7,162	39,295	18.2	14,407
South Down	73,449	33,430	2.2	11,729	45,159	26.0	25,770
Strangford	61,761	30,964	2.0	6,518	37,482	17.4	13,001
Upper Bann	78,417	38,686	2.0	10,523	49,209	21.4	21,330
West Tyrone	63,204	28,822	2.2	7,332	36,154	20.3	16,078
NI TOTAL	1,206,056	597,678	2.0	159,350	757,028	21.0	321,553

4 Belfast Constituency Summary	250,934	137,485	1.8	41,270	178,755	23.1	75,064
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Estimated No. missing from electorate but residing in house where others are registered	
10%	20%
3,397	6,795
3,756	7,511
3,438	6,876
3,158	6,316
3,145	6,289
3,170	6,340
3,254	6,507
3,267	6,535
3,400	6,800
2,943	5,887
3,495	6,991
3,671	7,343
3,270	6,540
3,213	6,427
3,343	6,686
3,096	6,193
3,869	7,737
2,882	5,764
59,768	119,536

13,749	27,497
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Estimated No. missing from electorate using:	
10%	20%
20,719	24,116
23,319	27,074
26,979	30,417
17,796	20,954
18,112	21,257
24,905	28,075
24,056	27,310
19,938	23,205
18,119	21,519
19,068	22,012
20,672	24,167
19,676	23,348
20,030	23,300
17,620	20,834
29,113	32,456
16,097	19,194
25,199	29,067
18,961	21,843
381,321	441,088

88,813	102,561
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Estimated total No. Of eligible electorate using:	
10%	20%
81,461	84,858
90,741	94,496
88,691	92,129
78,854	82,012
79,476	82,621
89,614	92,784
94,906	98,160
87,703	90,970
85,166	88,566
86,019	88,963
98,583	102,078
94,177	97,849
82,585	85,855
82,258	85,472
102,562	105,905
77,858	80,955
103,616	107,484
82,165	85,047
1,587,377	1,647,144

339,747	353,495
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Estimated %age of eligible electorate missing using:	
10%	20%
25.4	28.4
25.7	28.7
30.4	33.0
22.6	25.6
22.8	25.7
27.8	30.3
25.3	27.8
22.7	25.5
21.3	24.3
22.2	24.7
21.0	23.7
20.9	23.9
24.3	27.1
21.4	24.4
28.4	30.6
20.7	23.7
24.3	27.0
23.1	25.7
24.0	26.8

26.1	29.0
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Note:

There are a number of properties where there is at least one person registered, and also have other at least one other eligible resident not registered. This is estimated to be between 10% and 20% of properties, depending on the area.

For the purposes of this exercise, it has been estimated as being 1 and 2 people per household

This therefore has the effect of increasing the total number of eligible people not on the register towards the 30% total for Belfast, and up to 1 in 3 people in South Belfast.

Void properties are residential properties where no-one is registered to vote.

Data extracted from March 2011 Northern Ireland Electoral Register

APPENDIX 3

SDLP Mid Ulster – November 2011

Response to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's proposals for the Sixth Periodical Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

The proposals for boundary changes to the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland including a reduction in the number of seats from 18 to 16 will have a dramatic effect upon the make-up of the constituencies. It is important to respect the geographical, social and economic factors right across the North, and due consideration must be given to the implications of division of these relationships by the boundaries.

Concerns about the overall proposals

We have concerns about the timing of the review, given the current discussions relating to the Review of Public Administration. While the boundaries for the new council areas and the parliamentary constituencies do not need to be the same, dependent upon the final versions of the council areas it would make practical sense to, where possible, use similar boundaries, which would be advantageous to the administration of services as well as elections.

In addition we feel that insufficient consideration has been given to the local relationships, which are extremely important, particularly in the rural west of the North. While the Boundary Commission must find ways and means of creating constituencies that conform to a numerical model, to ignore the unique circumstances and geography of the North will only lead to disenfranchised areas and has the potential to render sectarian politics rather than social progress.

Mid Ulster

The proposals as they stand remove the Mid Ulster Constituency, splitting it between the new constituencies of Glenshane, made mostly of the East Derry Constituency, and Mid Tyrone, which is made up mostly of West Tyrone.

It must be noted that the Boundary Commission made changes to the constituencies in 1995, prior to this Mid Ulster and East Derry covered similar areas to the proposals for Mid Tyrone and Glenshane, but the sprawling, unconnected nature of these constituencies was not considered to be the best boundaries, and so West Tyrone was created, and the current make up of Mid Ulster and East Derry settled upon. A return to these boundaries, as the proposal suggests, does not take into consideration the social, economic and geographic make up of the rural west, and would only appear to be supported by meeting the necessary numbers required to create a constituency, rather than meeting the numbers required through matching areas where there is a genuine connectivity. We see no clear argument how the people of Mid Ulster will in any way benefit from these proposals, and we feel that these vast rural areas in the proposals will increase isolation and neglect for many areas.

Considerations



The powers of the Commission include clear factors which can be taken into account in the drawing and redrawing of boundaries, which includes special geographical considerations, local government boundaries, existing boundaries and any local ties that would be broken as a result of changes to constituencies. In this context there is considerable merit for Mid Ulster remaining largely as it is presently.

Mid Ulster, comprising of the Council areas of Magherafelt, Cookstown and the Torrent District Electoral Areas of Dungannon & South Tyrone Council, has strong cases for each of these arguments, and while as it currently stands it may not meet the numerical threshold required for a parliamentary constituency, more considered redrawing of the boundaries could both expand the constituency while reflecting the close socio-economic factors that Mid Ulster has.

Geographic considerations

While Mid Ulster has a varied topography, varying from the shores of Lough Neagh to the Sperrins, the mountains and rural lands to the west and north west clearly mark Cookstown and Magherafelt as one distinctive area, separated from the northern part of County Derry and the western land of Tyrone by these natural land features. This geographical separation has a clear influence in the further socio-economic factors which bring Cookstown and Magherafelt together and separate Mid Ulster from the towns and villages of East Derry and West Tyrone.

The towns of Cookstown and Magherafelt, both being the largest and main towns in their respective districts, are only 10 miles apart, and each has a natural hinterland to make up the district. There is connection between these areas on a daily basis in many areas.

Road network

The Road network in Mid Ulster links the main towns of Cookstown and Magherafelt, with all smaller villages and townlands feeding into either or both towns. There is a clear north-south link in this area, allowing traffic to easily travel between both ends of the North. The ease of travel in the Mid Ulster area will be even easier when the proposed bypasses for both Cookstown and Magherafelt are given the go-ahead.

In respect of the proposals for Mid Tyrone and Glenshane constituencies, the road network between these areas is inferior. The main Cookstown – Omagh road is poor, but is the only main one that links the constituencies without taking major detours. The links between the South Derry end of Mid Ulster and East Derry are also poor, with the main road, the Glenshane Pass, mainly used to link Belfast with Derry.

Schools & Health

Mid Ulster has a number of primary and post primary schools, spread from Donaghmore to Maghera, each of which draws pupils from a considerable range across both districts. The Post Primary schools in Magherafelt in particular (St Pius X, St Mary's, Rainey Endowed, Magherafelt High and Sperrin Integrated) all take pupils from well into Cookstown District, which builds a strong bond between the main towns and the surrounding areas, which would only be detrimentally affected by political and administrative separation of constituencies. The campuses of the Further Education

colleges in Magherafelt and Cookstown also draw students from right across the constituency dependent upon which course they are pursuing.

In regards to health, both Cookstown and Magherafelt fall under the Northern Health trust, and many of the local services are managed between the two areas. Additionally, a number of local charities, particularly health charities, organise themselves across the 2 areas given the geographical nature of Mid Ulster.

Socio-economic considerations

The geographic, network, health and educational links between south Derry and East Tyrone are extrapolated further in both social and economic links. Shops and businesses attract customers from right across the constituency, and a number of small businesses have locations in both of the main towns.

Similarly many of the sporting and social groups draw their membership from a wide area across Mid Ulster, as well as the previously mentioned charitable organisations.

Conclusion

The links between the areas that make up Mid Ulster across each of the areas which the Boundary Commission can give consideration, and furthermore there is a clear disconnect with the Mid Ulster area and those with which the proposals re-align the constituency. There is a real danger of risking further social and economic alienation for much of this area if they are tagged on to constituencies with which they have no bond, and this will lead to further losses in political participation, at a time when we all must be encouraging people to vote and exercise their democratic rights.

The North-south connection of this area is far stronger than the east-west connection, a fact not only supported by the socio-economic links, but also by the RPA proposals, and we strongly feel that in terms of parliamentary constituencies Magherafelt and Cookstown should remain linked.

APPENDIX 4

SDLP West Tyrone – November 2011

Response to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's proposals for the Sixth Periodical Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

The proposals for boundary changes to the parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland including a reduction in the number of seats from 18 to 16 will have a dramatic impact on the lives of voters west of the Bann.

The Boundary Commission, in its deliberations must respect the geographical, social and economic factors right across the North, and due consideration must be given to the implications of division of these relationships by the boundaries.

Concerns about the overall proposals

We believe more consideration should be given to the potential impact of the proposed new boundaries for Local Government under RPA and how they impact on the administration of services and local relationships in the West Tyrone area.

We believe that insufficient consideration has been given to the local relationships, which are extremely important, particularly in the rural west of the North. While the Boundary Commission must find ways and means of creating constituencies that conform to a numerical model, to ignore the unique circumstances and geography of the North will disenfranchise communities and potentially increase sectarian divide rather than promote social progress

West Tyrone

The proposals as they stand remove the West Tyrone Constituency, splitting it between the new constituency of Mid Tyrone and a reconfigured Fermanagh South Tyrone and Foyle.

It must be noted that the Boundary Commission made changes to the constituencies in 1995, prior to this Mid Ulster and East Derry covered similar areas to the proposals for Mid Tyrone and Glenshane, but the sprawling, unconnected nature of these constituencies was not considered to be the best boundaries, and so West Tyrone was created, and the current make up of Mid Ulster and East Derry settled upon. We firmly believe that the current configuration of four rural constituencies west of the Bann is the most representative model of sense of belonging for communities west of the Bann.

A return to these boundaries, as the proposal suggests, does not take into consideration the social, economic and geographic make up of the rural west, and would only appear to be supported by meeting the necessary numbers required to create a constituency, rather than meeting the numbers required through matching areas where there is a genuine connectivity.

We see no clear argument how the people of West Tyrone will in any way benefit from these proposals, and we feel that these vast rural areas in the proposals will increase isolation and neglect

for many areas. The stretching of Mid Tyrone from Killeter on the Donegal border to the shores of Lough Neagh at Ardboe makes no sense at all in relation to sense of belonging. There is no correlation between these two far-flung communities. In addition there appears to be no regard given to the mountain ranges west of the Bann and how they, as key elements of the boundary criteria, actually act as natural boundaries within the current make-up of the four rural constituencies west of the Bann.

Considerations

The powers of the Commission include clear factors which can be taken into account in the drawing and redrawing of boundaries, which includes special geographical considerations, local government boundaries, existing boundaries and any local ties that would be broken as a result of changes to constituencies. In this context there is considerable merit for West Tyrone remaining largely as it is presently.

West Tyrone, comprising of the Council areas of Omagh and Strabane, has strong cases for each of these arguments, and while as it currently stands it may not meet the numerical threshold required for a parliamentary constituency, more considered redrawing of the boundaries could both expand the constituency while reflecting the close socio-economic factors that West Tyrone has.

Geographic considerations

Bringing the town of Cookstown into a new Mid-Tyrone Constituency does not make sense given that there already strong links between Cookstown and Magherafelt and the geographical separation of these two towns has a clear influence in the further socio-economic factors which bring Cookstown and Magherafelt together and separate Mid Ulster from the towns and villages of East Derry and West Tyrone. In West Tyrone terms this would represent a similar geographical separation of Omagh and Strabane, links which are further emphasised by the excellent work the two local councils have been doing in identifying public service provision savings through the ICE scheme through increased collaboration.

Road network

The Road network in West Tyrone links the main towns of Omagh and Strabane as part of the North West Corridor and then runs eastwards to Ballygawley where it connects with the new dual carriageway leading to the M1 to Belfast. With all smaller villages and townlands feeding into either or both towns of Omagh and Strabane. There is a clear north-south link in this area, allowing traffic to easily travel between both ends of the North.

In respect of the proposals for Mid Tyrone and Glenshane constituencies, the road network between these areas is inferior. The main Cookstown – Omagh road is poor, but is the only main one that links the constituencies without taking major detours. The links between the South Derry end of Mid Ulster and East Derry are also poor, with the main road, the Glenshane Pass, mainly used to link Belfast with Derry.

The transport and road network further underscores the separation of communities and their clear distinction from others that they are being clustered with in order to make up the numerical requirements for this review.

The expanse of the rural area west of the Bann, its limited roads infrastructure and the density of

the population points to the need for the Boundary Commission to explore the possibility of exceptional status for the west of the Bann in Northern Ireland as per the Highlands of Scotland and the Isle of Wight where similar community identity, geographical and road infrastructure issues apply.

Schools & Health

In terms of West Tyrone, the two provincial towns of Omagh and Strabane enjoy a very strong social and educational connectivity due to the existence and history associated with having 6 big secondary/grammar schools in Omagh, and 3 big secondary/grammar schools in Strabane . In terms of Omagh the post primary catchment area comprises up to a 20 mile radius of Omagh town and in Strabane the post primary catchment area comprises a 10 to 15 mile catchment area. The Cultural Educational and Social patterns associated with these schools is deeply embedded within the communities of Omagh and Strabane districts. The connecting A5 road running through West Tyrone acts as the backbone of connectivity within the constituency, and is part of a national primary route way for the Northwest. West Tyrone has a strong geographic and spatial existence and clearly earmarked boundaries reflecting the social and community ties and connections.

The South West College main campus in Omagh has a large student population in the age range of 16-65+ for both full time and part time courses. Many professional and higher education courses are delivered in Omagh, with a student catchment population from across the two districts of Omagh and Strabane.

The Hospital services delivered in Omagh have traditionally served the patient needs of the Omagh district and a large proportion of Strabane District. This continues today in the range of outpatient services as delivered through Omagh Hospital.

Mid - Ulster has a number of primary and post primary schools, spread from Donaghmore to Maghera, each of which draws pupils from a considerable range across both districts.

The Post Primary schools in Magherafelt in particular (St Pius X, St Mary's, Rainey Endowed, Magherafelt High and Sperrin Integrated) all take pupils from well into Cookstown District, which builds a strong bond between the main towns and the surrounding areas, which would only be detrimentally affected by political and administrative separation of constituencies. The campuses of the Further Education colleges in Magherafelt and Cookstown also draw students from right across the constituency dependent upon which course they are pursuing.

In regards to health, both Cookstown and Magherafelt fall under the Northern Health trust, and many of the local services are managed between the two areas. Additionally, a number of local charities, particularly health charities, organise themselves across the 2 areas given the geographical nature of Mid Ulster.

Socio-economic considerations

West Tyrone has a unique and strong sense of Community based on economic as well as Social and educational ties. Both main towns have a range of manufacturing and service industries as well as public sector offices which employ workers primarily within West Tyrone. Again this degree of connectivity and attachment is largely reflective of the spatial patterns emanating from the post

primary schools situation and catchment patterns. The strong sporting and cultural provision again reflect the same degree of community connection and affinities.

The constituency of West Tyrone does have natural geographical and border boundaries, the Sperrin mountains, the border with Donegal and the upper 2/3 of the Foyle basin and is associated as connecting rivers and valleys.

The geographic, network, health and educational links between south Derry and East Tyrone are extrapolated further in both social and economic links. Shops and businesses attract customers from right across the constituency, and a number of small businesses have locations in both of the main towns.

Similarly many of the sporting and social groups draw their membership from a wide area across Mid Ulster, as well as the previously mentioned charitable organisations.

Conclusion

The links between the areas that make up Mid Ulster across each of the areas which the Boundary Commission can give consideration, and furthermore there is a clear disconnect with the Mid Ulster area and those with which the proposals re-align the constituency. There is a real danger of risking further social and economic alienation for much of this area if they are tagged on to constituencies with which they have no bond, and this will lead to further losses in political participation, at a time when we all must be encouraging people to vote and exercise their democratic rights.

The North-south connection of this area is far stronger than the east-west connection, a fact not only supported by the socio-economic links, but also by the RPA proposals, and we strongly feel that in terms of parliamentary constituencies Magherafelt and Cookstown should remain linked.

The existing strong ties between Omagh and Strabane within West Tyrone enjoys strong community support and attachment which should not be disturbed by the new boundaries.

We strongly recommend that West Tyrone boundaries should remain untouched.

APPENDIX 5:

SDLP Fermanagh and South Tyrone

Response to Boundary Commission Proposals for Sixth Periodical Review of Parliamentary Constituencies NI 2011

The review of parliamentary constituencies is occurring at an appropriate time when the Review of Public Administration is also being undertaken.

This opportunity should then allow for the establishment, where possible, of co-terminus borders which naturally build on historical and geographical aspects of life in constituencies.

That arrangement would enhance existing relationships which are important in rural areas and would facilitate more effective delivery of services.

Impact on Fermanagh/South Tyrone

The proposals for Fermanagh/South Tyrone would make it the largest constituency in Northern Ireland, both geographically and in terms of electorate size at 78,664.

Yet it is also the constituency most under-developed in terms of services and economic factors.

While it seems unlikely to retain the same area in terms of electorate numbers if we accept the new required standards – at 68,979, it would fall below the minimum required under the new terms - the changes proposed would bring an increase in the electorate without any other perceived advantages.

Relationships

The electorate in the area of the six Omagh wards – Dromore, Fintona, Sixmilecross, Drumquin, Newtownsaville and Trillick – which are proposed for inclusion in this constituency historically look to Omagh as their natural urban centre and have no emotional, economic or social ties with Fermanagh/South Tyrone.

They are currently ideally placed in West Tyrone. The inhabitants of Fermanagh/South Tyrone look eastwards for their connections, not northwards, in terms of social and business relationships, transport and educational links.

The Tyrone wards of Altmore, Donaghmore, Coalisland West and Newmills, Coalisland South and Washing Bay were part of the Fermanagh/South Tyrone Constituency since it was first created in 1950 and continue to form part of the Dungannon/South Tyrone District Council as Torrent.

These wards border the Dungannon town, one of the two nuclei with Enniskillen in the constituency. They are the natural hinterland of Dungannon and therefore their retention would create a more coherent area within Fermanagh/South Tyrone.

Appendix 5 continued:

Socio-Economic Considerations

The road system in the constituency emphasises east-west connections within Fermanagh/South Tyrone , linking Enniskillen and Dungannon and onwards to Belfast. The same also applies to bus connections. Links to the north are much less developed and are of an inferior standard.

Education links run across the Clogher Valley with schools at Fivemiletown and Ballygawley drawing pupils from both directions. Proposed changes in the make-up of schools will further develop the educational connections across this area.

The farming communities in Fermanagh and Tyrone buy and sell animals in both Enniskillen and Clogher markets.

Tourism in the area concentrates on the more profitable attraction of people from Belfast down the Clogher Valley Corridor.

The churches have also developed strong ecumenical relationships within a diocesan structure which aligns to the present geographical and administrative boundaries.

Conclusions

The emphasis for the people of Fermanagh/South Tyrone lies in east-west connections, not northwards.

Development of economic progress requires those connections as we seek to improve our economic situation, with further improvement of existing services.

But the maintenance of the shape of this constituency would also ensure that we can build on existing relationships, particularly cross-community connections and the important sense of belonging within an ethos which is unique to this largely rural area.

Appendix 6:

SDLP Foyle – November 2011

Response to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's proposals for the Sixth Periodical Review of Parliamentary Constituencies.

The major concern in the Foyle Constituency in relation to the proposals centres on the criteria relating to sense of belonging.

In the current proposals the Claudy and Banagher wards of Derry City Council have not been included in the new Foyle Constituency.

The Boundary Commission should have included Claudy and Banagher back into Foyle first before looking at adding 3 new wards from Strabane to Foyle.

Claudy and Banagher are Derry City Council wards and the voters in this area see themselves as part of the Derry City area and therefore have a greater affinity with the Foyle Constituency.

The new Glenshane Constituency is geographically quite large and runs over 5 district councils.

Returning Claudy and Banagher into Foyle would mean that all of Derry City Council would be in Foyle which would make more sense for people in those areas as they already look towards Derry as their place of political representation.

This would help reduce the representation overlap in Glenshane.

Along with the addition of Claudy and Banagher into Foyle, the addition of one more ward is required from the Limavady Council or Strabane Council area to ensure that Foyle meets the minimum numeric voter threshold requirements.

This would result in a much more compact and representative constituency for Foyle.

Appendix 7:

SDLP Upper Bann – November 2011

Response to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's proposals for the Sixth Periodical Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

The SDLP in Upper Bann believes strongly that the Aghagallon ward should be retained within the Upper Bann Constituency.

Aghagallon covers a substantial area and in particular takes in a significant part of North Lurgan.

Lurgan is the closest urban area to Aghagallon so when people talk about 'going to town' they mean Lurgan. The people of Aghagallon have no affinity with Lisburn which is ten miles from the centre of the village while Lurgan is three. People do their shopping locally either in Lurgan Town or Craigavon Centre.

The primary schools in the area are part of the Dickson Plan and as such the children of the area attend the Junior and Senior High Schools in the Lurgan/Craigavon area. The primary schools in the area come under the Southern Education & Library Board and they are covered on the healthcare front by the Southern Health & Social Services Trust.

Almost all social activity takes place in the town of Lurgan, young people from the area would not venture to Lisburn for weekend entertainment.

As part of a recent review of wards in preparation for the upcoming Review of Public Administration there was a proposal to move the Aghagallon ward to Lisburn Borough but this was successfully argued and the ward is to remain in Craigavon Borough. There is therefore precedent for presenting the same argument in relation to the Boundary Commission's deliberations on the Westminster constituencies.

Aghagallon should therefore remain in the Upper Bann Constituency on the basis of these strong 'sense of place' arguments.