

**REPORT OF A LOCAL INQUIRY HELD IN RESPECT  
OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES OF  
BELFAST EAST, BELFAST NORTH, BELFAST SOUTH  
AND BELFAST WEST ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2005 AT  
CITY HALL, BELFAST**

**TO THE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**REPORT OF A LOCAL INQUIRY HELD IN RESPECT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY  
CONSTITUENCIES OF BELFAST EAST, BELFAST NORTH, BELFAST SOUTH  
AND BELFAST WEST ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2005 AT CITY HALL, BELFAST**

I have the honour to report to you as follows:

**1: INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 By Public Notice dated 16 May 2003 The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland announced their intention to conduct a Review of all the United Kingdom Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 as amended. The Notice advised that members of the public, and bodies and organisations, with an interest in the Commission's recommendations would be invited to express their views on publication of the Commission's Provisional Recommendations. By way of providing additional information the Commission exhibited to their associated press notice a tabulation of constituency electorates specifying 16 May 2003, being date of Notice, as enumeration date for purposes of the Review and for purposes of stated calculation of the Electoral Quota (hereinafter EQ) at 60,969. Details of Parliamentary electorates and percentage deviations so advised touching on the constituencies of Belfast East, Belfast North, Belfast South and Belfast West were given as: -

<b>Parliamentary Constituency</b>	<b>Parliamentary Electorate</b>	<b>Percentage Deviation from EQ[60969]</b>
Belfast East	51,899	-14.9
Belfast North	51,422	-15.7
Belfast South	50,599	-17.0
Belfast West	50,870	-16.6

- 1.2 On 6 May 2004 the Boundary Commission, in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 1992, gave notice that the Commission had provisionally determined to make recommendations to the Secretary of State with respect to said constituencies under section 3 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986.
- 1.3 The Provisional Recommendations annexed to the Notice proposed that Northern Ireland be divided into 18 constituencies and that in relation to the four Parliamentary constituencies of Belfast East Borough Constituency, Belfast North Borough Constituency, Belfast South Borough Constituency and Belfast West Borough Constituency that they be comprised of the following wards, [giving their electorates in brackets as of 16 May 2003 being the stated enumeration date]: -

**Belfast East Borough Constituency (59,214)** The Belfast local government district (hereinafter LGD) wards of Ballyhackamore, Ballymacarrett, Belmont, Bloomfield, Cherryvalley, Island, Knock, Orangefield, Stormont, Sydenham and The Mount; and the Castlereagh LGD wards of Ballyhanwood, Carrowreagh, Downshire, Dundonald, Enler, Gilnahirk, Graham's Bridge, Hillfoot, Lisnasharragh, Lower Braniel, Tullycarnet and Upper Braniel.

**Belfast North Borough Constituency (59,337)** The Belfast LGD wards of Ardoyne, Ballysillan, Bellevue, Castlevue, Cavehill, Chichester Park, Cliftonville, Crumlin, Duncairn, Fortwilliam, Legoniel, New Lodge, Water Works and Woodvale; and the Newtownabbey LGDwards of Abbey, Cloughfern, Collinbridge, Coole, Dunaney, Glebe, Glengormley, Valley and Whitehouse.

**Belfast South Borough Constituency (57,767)** The Belfast LGD wards of Ballynafeigh, Blackstaff, Botanic, Finaghy, Malone, Musgrave, Ravenhill, Rosetta, Stranmillis, Upper Malone, Shaftesbury, Windsor and Woodstock; and the Castlereagh LGD wards of Beechill, Cairnshill, Carryduff East, Carryduff West, Cregagh, Galwally, Knockbracken, Minnowburn, Newtownbreda and Wynchurch.

**Belfast West Borough Constituency (58,722)** The Belfast LGD wards of Andersonstown, Beechmount, Clonard, Falls, Falls Park,

Glencairn, Glencolin, Glen Road, Highfield, Ladybrook, Shankill, Upper Springfield and Whiterock; and the Lisburn LGD wards of Collin Glen, Derryaghy, Dunmurry, Kilwee, Poleglass, Seymour Hill and Twinbrook.

- 1.4 The essence of effect of the Provisional Recommendations insofar as concerned the above Parliamentary constituencies was conveniently stated in earlier Announcement of the Provisional Recommendations on 29 April 2004 in the following terms: -

“**Belfast East** constituency to include the Castlereagh LGD wards of Ballyhanwood, Carrowreagh, Dundonald, Enler and Graham's Bridge. These wards are at present in the Strangford constituency;

**Belfast North** constituency to include the Newtownabbey LGD wards of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley, at present in the South Antrim constituency, and Cloughfern, at present in the East Antrim constituency;

**Belfast South** constituency to include the Castlereagh LGD wards of Carryduff East and Carryduff West at present in the Strangford constituency, and Cregagh and Wynchurch, at present in the Belfast East constituency; and

**Belfast West** constituency to include the Lisburn LGD wards of Derryaghy, Dunmurry and Seymour Hill, at present in the Lagan Valley constituency.”

- 1.5 The Announcement further tabulated, by way of annex, in relation to each of the said Parliamentary constituencies its recommended name, Parliamentary electorate value and percentage deviation from the stated EQ of 60,969 based on calculation of a total registered parliamentary electorate [1,097,450] within the 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland on 16 May 2003, being date when pending Review was initially announced.

Parliamentary Constituency Recommended name	Parliamentary Electorate	Percentage Deviation from EQ[60,969]
Belfast East	59,214	-2.9
Belfast North	59,337	-2.7
Belfast South	57,767	-5.3
Belfast West	58,722	-3.7

1.6 On 30 March 2005 I was appointed an assistant Commissioner by the then Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Paul Murphy under section 2 of, and Schedule 1 to, the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 and was subsequently invited by the Commission to conduct a public Local Inquiry into the Commission's proposals affecting the borough constituencies of Belfast East, Belfast North, Belfast South, and Belfast West.

1.7 Notice of Local Inquiry in relation to the said Parliamentary constituencies was published on 14 June 2005, on which date the Commission also published their Statement of Reasons for the Provisional Recommendations which laid down the principles which had guided their Provisional Recommendations and which, in relation to the said constituencies and number thereof stated:-

“12. The electorates of the existing Belfast borough constituencies have diminished in size considerably since the last review, leaving the Commission with a choice, either to extend the boundaries of existing constituencies into adjacent urban areas to bring the Belfast constituency electorates closer to the EQ or to reduce the number of constituencies in Belfast to three. After careful consideration the Commission have chosen to retain four borough constituencies.

13. The assistant Commissioner who conducted the public Local Inquiry in Belfast into the Commission's Provisional Recommendations in 1994 recommended that the four then existing constituencies should be retained and extended outwards in a radial fashion.<sup>1</sup> The Commission accepted that

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<sup>1</sup> *Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland Fourth Periodical Report on Parliamentary Constituencies and Second Supplementary Report on the number of members to be returned to the Northern Ireland Assembly by each of those constituencies* (Cmnd 2949, October 1995), Appendix E: Report of a Local Inquiry held in Belfast on 4 and 5 May 1994, Annex I, pp. 72-73.

recommendation and their present Provisional Recommendations continue to give effect to that fundamental framework, with one exception. It is proposed that the Castlereagh LGD wards of Cregagh and Wynchurch should be transferred from the Belfast East to Belfast South constituency. The Commission considered various permutations involving these two wards and the wards of Downshire and Hillfoot before deciding provisionally to recommend the transfer of the two wards which would serve to help equalise the electorates of the constituencies of Belfast East and Belfast South in accordance with rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats.

14. The proposed transfer of other Castlereagh LGD wards<sup>1</sup>, Newtownabbey LGD wards<sup>2</sup> and Lisburn LGD wards<sup>3</sup> to the Belfast constituencies reflect the urban development of Belfast<sup>4</sup> and enable the retention of four Belfast borough constituencies with similar sized “electorates, and respect the integrity of the Castlereagh East, Dunmurry Cross and Macedon district electoral areas (hereinafter DEAs).<sup>5</sup> “

The proposed four Belfast borough constituencies are:

**Belfast East** with an electorate of 59,214 (2.9% below the EQ);  
**Belfast North** with an electorate of 59,337 (2.7% below the EQ);  
**Belfast South** with an electorate of 57,767 (5.3% below the EQ);  
**Belfast West** with an electorate of 58,722 (3.7% below the EQ).”

- 1.8 In Statement of Reasons for their Provisional Recommendations issued by the Commission on 14 June 2004 they set out the principles which had guided their Provisional Recommendations: -

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<sup>1</sup> Ballyhanwood, Carrowreagh, Carryduff East, Carryduff West, Dundonald, Enler and Graham's Bridge.

<sup>2</sup> Cloughfern, Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley.

<sup>3</sup> Derryaghy, Dunmurry and Seymour Hill.

<sup>4</sup> *Inter alia* the Commission had regard to issues raised in presentations made by officers of the Department of Regional Development in relation to the *Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 – Shaping our Future*, the *Regional Transport Strategy 2002-2012* and the *Belfast Metropolitan Area Draft Plan 2015*.

<sup>5</sup> “Representations received in response to the Provisional Recommendations suggest that the boundaries of these DEAs and the wards they comprise may not reflect local ties and the residential development there has been since these boundaries were last reviewed.”

“1. The Rules to which Boundary Commissions must give effect when reviewing representation in the House of Commons are set out in Schedule 2 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. A copy of the Rules is attached to this statement. In formulating their Provisional Recommendations the Commission have been guided by the following principles which are intended to reflect the provisions of the Rules:

- a. to examine 17 constituency schemes in the first instance and schemes for 16 and 18 constituencies only to reduce or alleviate difficulties experienced in applying the Rules on the basis of 17 constituencies;
- b. to ensure so far as it is practicable that no local government wards are split between constituencies;
- c. to promote electoral equality by aiming, in the first instance, to restrict constituency electorates to within a tolerance of 10% above or below the average sized constituency electorate; and
- d. to take account as far as reasonable of:
  - i. inconveniences attendant on alterations of constituencies, and
  - ii. any local ties which would be broken by such alterations.”

1.9 At paragraph 8 of their Statement of Reasons the Commission identified as a factor in reaching their conclusions the intention to limit the number and scale of boundary changes proposed and to preserve the integrity of LGDs and DEA groups of wards wherever practicable.

1.10 The Rules for Redistribution of Seats which accompanied the Statement, insofar as they apply to Northern Ireland may be summarised, and are replicated for ease of reference, as follows:-

Rule 1(4) The number of constituencies in Northern Ireland shall not be greater than 18 or less than 16 and shall be 17 unless it appears to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland that Northern Ireland should for the time being be divided into 16 or (as the case may be) into 18 constituencies.

Rule 4(1)[c] So far as is practicable having regard to rules 1 to 3A — in Northern Ireland, no ward shall be included partly in one constituency and partly in another.

Rule 5 The electorate of any constituency shall be as near the EQ as is practicable having regard to rules 1 to 4; and a Boundary Commission may depart from the strict application of rule 4 if it appears to them that a departure is desirable to avoid an excessive disparity between the electorate of any constituency and the EQ, or between the electorate of any constituency and that of neighbouring constituencies in the part of the United Kingdom with which they are concerned.

Rule 6 A Boundary Commission may depart from the strict application of rules 4 and 5 if special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, appear to them to render a departure desirable.

Rule 7 It shall not be the duty of a Boundary Commission to aim at giving full effect in all circumstances to the above rules (except rule 3A) but they shall take account as far as they reasonably can —

(a) of the inconveniences attendant on alternations of constituencies other than alterations made for the purpose of rule 4, and

(b) any local ties which would be broken by such alterations.

### **Written Representations**

1.11 In relation to all four Belfast constituencies written representations were received by the Commission following Notice of their Provisional Recommendations of 6 May 2004 from the under named contributors, political representatives or political organisations. The representations have been considered by me in anticipation of, and for purposes of, Inquiry and preparation of this Report and their authors are ranked according to chronological order of submissions received: -

Mr John Auld

Councillor Thomas Burns MLA South Antrim

Mr David McCarthy, Lodge Secretary, Dunmurry True Blues LOL 1046, Derryaghy District No 11

Mr Gerry McBride, Policy & Co-ordination Officer, Down District Council;

Rev Dr Ian Paisley MP MLA, Leader Ulster Democratic Unionist Party

Mr Robert Foy, Constituency Chairman, South Belfast Ulster Unionist Association

Councillor John Norris, Castlereagh Borough Council

Councillor Wallace Browne, Chairman DUP East Belfast Association

Ms Mary Wylie

Mr William Leathem, Chairman DUP Lagan Valley Association

Mr Jeffrey Donaldson MP MLA

Mr Peter Robinson MP MLA

Mrs Angela Smith, Chairperson, Seymour Hill and Conway Residents' Association and Mr Jackie Stewart, Chairperson, Dunmurry Community Association

Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA<sup>1</sup>

Mr Pat Doherty MP MLA, Vice President Sinn Féin

Ulster Unionist Party

Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

Mr Malachy McAnespie

Mr Nigel Dodds OBE MP MLA

### **Designation and Names of Constituencies**

- 1.12 None of the representations received by the Commission or subsequently made to me raised the proposed designation or names of constituencies, save indirectly in relation to the counter proposal that the number of constituencies for Belfast be reduced to three.

### **Local Inquiries**

- 1.13 Section 6[2] of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 provides: "where, on the publication of the notice under section 5[2]... the Commission receive any representation objecting to the proposed recommendation from a body of electors numbering one hundred or more, the Commission shall not make the recommendation unless, since the publication of the notice, a local public inquiry has been held in respect of the constituencies."
- 1.14 The Boundary Commission in causing Local Inquiries to be held, in terms of adherence to a broad policy aimed at seeking views and representations in relation to their proposed recommendations, appears to have been strongly guided in any event by section 6[1] of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 which permits the establishment of a Local Inquiry where the Commission deem it fit. That would appear to be particularly so given that Inquiries have been established where no statutory requirement for such course has arisen.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr McDonnell was elected Member of Parliament for the Belfast South constituency at the General Election held on 5 May 2005

## **Conduct of Inquiry**

1.15 The Inquiry in relation to the four borough constituencies of Belfast commenced on Monday 5 September 2005 at City Hall, Belfast and concluded in late afternoon of said date. With the agreement of those present, and making time-tabling adjustments and allowances for those who wished to be heard but required to be inconvenienced due to prior commitments, the Inquiry was conducted so far as was reasonably practicable touching on the issues and constituencies in the following sequence: -

- (a) number of Belfast constituencies;
- (b) Belfast East;
- (c) Belfast South;
- (d) Belfast West;
- (e) Belfast North.

1.16 All speakers agreed to be directly cross-examined from the floor at conclusion of their submissions and responded to cross-examination, where it arose, in a positive and meaningful manner. Questions were, furthermore, posed by the Chair. I was, and remain, satisfied that all persons attending the Inquiry had opportunity to make representation on the Provisional Recommendations, to express their views thereon and to raise questions or comment on the Commission's proposals or, if so desired, on counterproposals fielded.

## **Oral Representations at Inquiry**

1.17 At the Inquiry oral submissions, comment or observations were made by the following persons declared members of political parties or otherwise on their own behalf: -

Mr Nigel Dodds MP [Belfast North] Democratic Unionist Party  
Dr Alistair McDonnell MP [Belfast South] SDLP  
Dr Esmond Birnie MLA [South Belfast] Ulster Unionist Party  
Mr Alban Maginness MLA [North Belfast] SDLP  
Mr Robin Newton MLA [East Belfast] Democratic Unionist Party  
Cllr Wallace Browne, Chairman East Belfast DUP Association  
Cllr John Norris, Democratic Unionist Party  
Mr Richard Bullick, spokesman for Democratic Unionist Party Belfast  
MPs and MLAs  
Dr Stephen Farry, Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

Mr Sean Begley, Sinn Féin  
Mr Stephen Barr, Ulster Unionist Party  
Mr Isaac Clark, Chairman East Belfast Ulster Unionist Association  
Mr John Auld.

### **Document submitted to Local Inquiry**

1.18 Prior to hearing of his evidence Mr Richard Bullick tendered for consideration 'Submission to the Boundary Commission Inquiry for the Belfast constituencies on behalf of Belfast DUP MPs and MLAs' and spoke to that in course of his submissions.

### **Content of Report**

1.19 For purposes of presentation and with a view to clarity and focus, this Report addresses separately the issues before, and outcome of, the Inquiry and support of, objections to or counterproposals sequentially in relation to the Provisional Recommendations for or in relation to the :-

- [i] number of Belfast constituencies;
- [ii] Belfast East constituency;
- [iii] Belfast South constituency;
- [iv] Belfast North constituency;
- [v] Belfast West constituency;

Clearly issues common to constituencies exist. At the Inquiry it was recognised by all concerned, for example, that there was a common issue of interest as between the Belfast East and Belfast South constituencies given proposals for the transfer of the Cregagh and Wynchurch wards from Belfast East to Belfast South and counterproposals for the transfer of the Hillfoot ward alone as between the constituencies. In similar terms a common issue affecting the relevant constituencies was clearly identifiable in relation to counterproposals to transfer the Crumlin and Woodvale wards from the Belfast North to the Belfast West constituency. In preparing this report I have sought to avoid undue repetition of the representations, evidence given, observations and recommendations. Accordingly, the wards of Cregagh and Wynchurch and of Hillfoot are dealt with in Part 3 of this Report and the Crumlin and Woodvale wards in Part 5 of this Report.

## **2: NUMBER OF BELFAST CONSTITUENCIES**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1 The Commission in their formal Public Notice of Provisional Recommendations on 6 May 2004 gave notice that the effect of their recommendations was that Northern Ireland should be divided into 18 constituencies and defined and named as set out in the recommendations.
- 2.2 In the initial announcement of Provisional Recommendations some short time earlier on 29 April 2004 the Commission had given notice of their proposal that the number of constituencies in Northern Ireland should remain at 18 and of their conclusion that there should be four constituencies in Belfast, in the following terms: -

### **Number of Constituencies**

“9. Rule 1(4) of the Rules of Redistribution of Seats states:

“The number of constituencies in Northern Ireland shall not be greater than 18 or less than 16 and shall be 17 unless it appears to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland that Northern Ireland should for the time being be divided into 16 or (as the case may be) into 18 constituencies”.

10. The Commission are of the opinion that they would be justified in recommending a number of constituencies other than 17 only to reduce or alleviate difficulties experienced in applying the Rules for Redistribution of Seats on the basis of 17 constituencies. In the course of their deliberations the Commission gave careful consideration to a number of schemes according to which the electorate might be organised into 17 constituencies. However, in their view each such scheme posed substantial difficulties in relation to the application of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats, in particular with regard to inconvenience to electors and the significant disruption of local ties. The Commission’s Provisional Recommendations are that there should continue to be 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland.

## Recommendations

11. The Commission looked very carefully at the number of constituencies in Belfast, and having done so, concluded that there should be four constituencies in Belfast, the boundaries of which should be extended in a radial fashion.”

## Written Representations

- 2.3 Following publication of their Public Notice of the Provisional Recommendations on 6 May 2004 pursuant to section 5[2](a) of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 and invitation for submissions of response or representations under section 5[2](b) of the Act, the Commission received, in relation to their proposal for the retention of 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland and of four Belfast borough constituencies, written representations which shall be the subject of more detailed comment below. The Commission also received a number of representations from ‘bodies of electors’ but these are solely in relation to proposed ward configurations for the four borough constituencies and to the neighbouring constituencies of Lagan Valley and South Antrim, both of which are directly affected by proposed revisions to their neighbouring borough constituency boundaries.
- 2.4 In relation to proposals for retention of the current constituency numerical framework the representations, save for one counterproposal submitted by the Alliance Party, are supportive of the Provisional Recommendations.
- 2.5 The **Alliance Party** submission [Representation No 24] urges that the Commission reconsider a three-seat constituency model for Belfast and in support of its counterproposal, while acknowledging account taken of requirement for balancing electorates, the necessity to observe respect for natural communities and the ambition of maintaining existing DEAs, argues that: -
  - (a) there is currently a much stronger case than that existing at the time of Fourth Review for the reduction in number of Belfast seats to three. It further suggests that the current borough constituencies, although presently accommodating significant elements of population outside the City boundary, only contain a composite of 3.36 EQs by reason of having experienced significant depletion of population over the past decade;

- (b) fixation with preservation of three Belfast seats may result in minor changes within the Greater Belfast Area but inflicts a knock-on effect on the rest of the eastern constituencies and that, by way of contrast in approach, examples are to be found of other cities in the United Kingdom having lost seats in light of population migration to suburban areas;
- (c) under the Provisional Recommendations the revised Belfast seats still remain below EQ while, with minor exception, seats in Counties Armagh and Down remain significantly above quota. It is projected that trends shall only aggravate this imbalance.

2.6 A further submission [Representation No. 9] received from **Mr G McBride, Policy and Co-ordination Officer on behalf of Down District Council** advises that Council members, in considering the Provisional Recommendations, wished it to be observed that the realignment of boundaries in Belfast was having a negative impact on neighbouring constituencies and that further consideration should be given to the number of Belfast constituencies.

2.7 The question of number of borough constituencies was likewise addressed by submission [Representation No.25] received from **Ms Gerry Cosgrove, General Secretary, Social Democratic and Labour Party** observing that the SDLP would not be adverse to a reduction in the number of constituencies in the hope or desire to see more powers being transferred to a working Assembly. In the submission Ms Cosgrove further suggests that an approach might be to consider whether a move to three main Belfast constituencies rather than extending the existing four might contain the consequential displacement in other areas but with recognition expressed that “there could equally be difficulties with [such] approach” which “might be better explored rather than favoured.”

2.8 As indicated there appears on face of the representations received, nonetheless, broad support for the provisional recommendation proposing retention of four borough constituencies. Those Representations explicitly, tentatively or by implication registering support for the proposal are identified and summarised below for ease of reference: -

Representation No. 5, Mr John Auld: scheme submitted provides for the retention of four borough constituencies and their expansion;

Representation No.11, **Rev Dr Ian Paisley MP MLA, Leader Ulster Democratic Unionist Party** recording support for the provisional recommendation that there should be eighteen Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland, including four in Belfast.

Representation No.12, **South Belfast Ulster Unionist Association** expressing welcome for the decision to retain 18 seats for the Province on basis that the Association regards it as “important to maximise Northern Ireland’s representation at Westminster”.

Representation No.19, **Mr Peter Robinson MP MLA, Democratic Unionist Party**, expressing agreement that Northern Ireland should retain 18 seats and that there should be retention of four seats for Belfast.

Representation No.21, **Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA South Belfast, Social Democratic and Labour Party**, giving broad welcome to the decision to retain four Belfast constituencies, the retention of constituencies for the four existing “distinct areas” of North, South, East and West Belfast and advising that he would wish to protest strongly should any attempt arise later to reduce the Belfast city area to three seats.

Representation No.22, **Sinn Féin**, submission of counterproposals to the redrawing of the Parliamentary boundaries based on a four-borough constituency framework;

Representation No.23, submission of Official Response by **Ulster Unionist Party** indicating that the party “strongly supports” the Commission’s proposal to retain the four Belfast constituencies, “and that Northern Ireland should continue to be represented at Westminster by a total of 18 seats.”

Representation No.27, **Mr Nigel Dodds, MP MLA, Party Secretary, Democratic Unionist Party** confirming party stated views on the desirability of 18 seats for Northern Ireland.”

2.9 At this point I think it important to record as a matter of caution that preservation of strength of political representation for the Province raised as a consideration ostensibly underpinning some of the representations is not a factor of which due account can be taken within the discipline of the statutory framework nor can it be presumed as a certainty that reduction in number of

Belfast borough seats would automatically reflect a like reduction in number of Parliamentary constituencies for Northern Ireland. Such issues, although clearly politically relevant, fall outside the remit of the Inquiry.

### **Representations at Inquiry**

2.10 In moving a counterproposal for a three seat constituency Dr Stephen Farry, General Secretary of the Alliance Party, spoke of the proposition as being one which had been well analysed by the Boundary Commission prior to publication of their Provisional Recommendations under the Fourth Review and as part of their proposals as tabled in 1995 but which were subsequently overturned following Local Inquiry. He considered that the three-seat model was still worthy of consideration given that assumptions of 1995 might not necessarily still apply. He suggested that under proposals for Review of Public Administration it had come to be recognised, in his view, that the present Belfast City Council shall be preserved intact with no major plans to change its boundaries irrespective of the overall outcome of the Review. He considered that a Local Government Boundary Commission thereafter might effect some change to boundaries but that such change would be minor in character. Dr Farry observed that the four borough constituencies collectively accommodated “much less” than four EQs and that the borough constituencies would still remain below quota even under the arrangements proposed by the Provisional Recommendations. He contrasted this with the constituencies of Counties Down and Armagh [save North Down] where under the Provisional Recommendations quota surpluses prevail. He considered that the traditional view of four constituencies for Belfast was no longer an imperative alluding to examples in Great Britain where cities have lost Parliamentary seats in response to population shift into suburban areas. He spoke of a conservative approach to seat distribution having adverse ripple effect with illogical boundaries occasionally being the outcome, citing Glengormley as a particular example under the Provisional Recommendations arrangement. Dr Farry believed that diminishing population trends for the City would persist, with requirement to stretch Parliamentary boundaries for the City being detrimental in causing disruption to coherent seats elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

The argument that the reduction in number of seats for Belfast might lead to a default position of 17 seats for Northern Ireland was rejected by Dr Farry as he envisaged the creation of a new seat. He spoke of the effects of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 with its provision for 108 members in the Assembly based on an 18 constituency formula. While support for retention of four

seats within Belfast was recognised by Dr Farry, he indicated that there existed evidence elsewhere pointing to a desire that the number of seats for Belfast should be reconsidered. Dr Farry indicated that a three-seat model had been prepared for purposes of the Alliance Party submission to the Boundary Commission following their Provisional Recommendations which was primarily illustrative. He suggested that the scheme was not as radical as some might have expected insofar as it envisaged no alteration of the western constituencies, limited change within the three County Antrim constituencies, an extension of Belfast North to include all Court DEA wards, an expansion of Belfast East to the River Lagan with the creation of a new South East borough constituency and annexation of remaining Belfast South with existing Belfast West wards to form a new Belfast South-West constituency. He considered that this arrangement would then facilitate designation of seven constituencies to the south-east including the creation of a new seat, thereby alleviating the prevailing problem of high quotas.

In response to questions Dr Farry did accept that the Provisional Recommendations placed the existing constituencies within an acceptable EQ range. In relation to alignment of South and West Belfast he emphasised that while there were settled communities “particularly in South Belfast” that the area had changed demographically quite substantially over the past 30 years. He urged that the imbalance in EQ in the distribution of seats within Northern Ireland was an issue to be cured now rather than in the future, when it would be all the more acute. In relation to the observation that Forestside would fall outside a Belfast constituency within terms of his counterproposal, he considered that all formulae would lead to some anomalies. Asked if he had considered various strategic planning documents [Regional Development Strategy, Regional Transport Strategy and the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan], which it was suggested emphasised the reality of the suburbanisation of Belfast, he confirmed that, while he recognised the existence of proposals to increase the number of people who live within the City, he questioned as to how far one could credibly stretch out the Belfast seats without breaking up natural seats that are still sustainable. In relation to the alleged potential effects of the Electoral Fraud [Northern Ireland] Act 2002, and whether he had factored such effects into his proposals, he believed that any argument arising in terms of Electoral Register under-representation could be made in relation to Northern Ireland at large and would not make a significant difference to the overall pattern of EQ deficiency in respect of the Belfast constituencies.

Mr Alban Maginness MLA for Belfast North, speaking on behalf of the Belfast District Executive of the SDLP, was the first contributor to speak against the counterproposal of the Alliance Party and, *de facto*, in support of the Provisional Recommendations case for retention of four borough constituencies. He emphasised that it was his view that although the population of the City had declined over the previous two decades or so there was now greater demographic stability with potential for population growth as a reasonable possibility in the near future. He spoke of those who had left the Belfast LGD and moved in significant numbers into surrounding suburbs where they had maintained very close ties and links to the City through work, family social ties and other relationships. He suggested that Belfast, as a political reality and political entity, was not simply confined to the formal local government boundary and he believed that the continuance of the distinctive entities of four constituencies following the 1995 Boundary Commission Report had further consolidated the four-seat structure within Belfast itself, serving to reinforce the historic character and identity of the seats individually and their collective impact on the politics of Belfast. He forecast that a reduction in number of borough seats would lead to reduction in the overall number of constituencies in Northern Ireland, and level of Parliamentary and Assembly representation. Looking to the past he observed that the notion of confining Belfast to its LGD was substantially breached, and rendered redundant, by the inclusion of Castlereagh, Lisburn City and Newtownabbey wards into Belfast constituencies since the 1995 Boundary Commission Report and, prior to such time, by the absorption of wards from Castlereagh into Belfast East. As to the foreseeable future he forecast that Belfast seats would contain a significant number of wards from outside the Belfast City Council boundaries. He suggested that one could not be oblivious to the probable radical reordering of LGD boundaries as an outcome of the Review of Public Administration and he considered it ill-advised to rely upon the present configuration of LGD boundaries at this time. Mr Maginness suggested that the existence of four seats would provide flexibility in terms of reshaping constituencies within the parameters of the EQ. By way of conclusion, Mr Maginness observed that for decades there had been an established historic, political character and identity to the four seats and that experience of extending boundaries into the suburban wards of the surrounding local government districts had been met with no serious opposition, if not widespread political approval, to date.

- 2.11 Mr Richard Bullick, spokesman for Belfast Democratic Unionist Party MPs and MLAs, presented a written submission and spoke in favour of the

provisional recommendation. Firstly he considered the recommendation to be correct in light of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats which provide, at first instance, for 17 constituencies, but also for the possibility of 18 constituencies. He considered that having regard to rule 1[4] as an enabling provision and the other rules at large, in his submission, leaned towards the *status quo* that 18 seats should be retained. He believed that any permutation of 17 seats would ultimately significantly offend against the other Rules for Redistribution of Seats. He argued that any options that might come close to being acceptably near the EQ for each of 17 constituencies would result in considerable changes of boundaries, material disruption, significant inconvenience and breaches of numerous local ties.

Secondly, in relation, more specifically, to retention of four Belfast borough constituencies he believed that in an 18-seat framework for the Province there is a natural fit for four seats within Belfast insofar as three Belfast seats would not only breach significant local ties but would result in a “wholly unnatural merger” of South and West Belfast.

Thirdly, he projected that with brownfield development the City is set for population increase which, with any concurrent migration of population to City suburbs, pointed in his view to a population trend favouring a four seat arrangement. He believed that such an arrangement better reflected the true nature of the City.

Fourthly, he considered that the LGD boundaries for Belfast, as reflected by current arrangements, do not represent the actual limits of the City.

Finally, Mr Bullick observed that the City of Belfast was currently very different in nature and make-up than it was 30 or 40 years ago and that it was evident from long term strategy documents such as Regional Development Strategy, Regional Transportation Strategy, Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan and Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan that the boundaries of the City today are far in excess of what they were a generation ago. He believed that such a reality could only be reflected by the preservation of four borough constituencies, as was recognised by expansion of boundary lines in preservation of four constituencies following the Boundary Commission's Fourth Review.

- 2.12 Mr Begley, speaking on behalf of Sinn Féin wished for the party position in support of preservation of four borough seats to be registered believing there

to be “very good reasons” for the recommendation. In course of raising questions he emphasised that the effects of the Electoral Fraud [Northern Ireland] Act 2002 had to be recognised with contemporary registration yielding electoral numbers much greater than at the time of the Commission’s initial recommendations. He suggested that any problems identified as to deficit in EQs for borough constituencies might not be as acute as otherwise perceived.

- 2.13 Mr Stephen Barr, spokesman for the Ulster Unionist Party, consistent with the party position paper in response to Provisional Recommendations, confirmed support for them at large. His party colleague Dr Esmond Birnie MLA for Belfast South in raising questions following presentation of the counterproposal indicated that in his view any scheme based on three borough seats constrained by adherence to Belfast City Council boundaries was taking a conservative line. He further urged that consideration had to be taken of current existence and effect of strategic Development and Transport Plans all of which emphasised, in his view, the “suburbanisation of Belfast” with people moving out of the City centre but remaining tied to the same working, social and economic system. He considered the expansion of the four borough constituencies to be recognition of that reality.

## Recommendations

### 2.14 It is recommended that four Belfast borough constituencies be retained.

- (a) The consensus evidence, written and oral, before the Inquiry pointed to a sub-urbanisation of the City of Belfast over the past two to three decades with growth of areas to North, South, East and West of the City. The Inquiry heard of the development of Glengormley and its environs to the North, Carryduff to the South, Dundonald and its sister wards to the East and rapid expansion of infrastructure development and increase in population of wards such as Derryagh to the South West of the City. I would consider on the face of the evidence that migration of population, nonetheless, has not loosened ties of many persons so relocated with the City as an entity. It is my view that the City boundary has clearly expanded by radial redistribution of its inhabitants who continue to hold a perception that they are, and remain, "Belfast people".
- (b) I would consider it an unnecessary constraint to regard Belfast as being bound by historic designation of its local government boundary. Clearly the present LGD boundary is not recognised in terms of definition of the City nor its existing constituency boundaries and as to the current landscape I refer, in particular, to Castlereagh District Council wards such as Tullycarnet, Gilnahirk, Upper Braniel, Lower Braniel, Hillfoot, Lisnasharragh, Downshire, Cregagh and Wynchurch falling within Belfast East; the Castlereagh District Council wards Galwally, Newtownbreda, Cairnshill, Knockbracken, Beechill, and Minnowburn to be found in Belfast South; the Newtownabbey District Council wards of Coole, Dunaney, Abbey, Whitehouse and Valley in Belfast North and the Lisburn District Council wards of Twinbrook, Poleglass, Kilwee, and Collin Glen located within Belfast West. In summary, 24 of the 75 wards currently comprising the four borough constituencies fall outside the existing boundaries of Belfast City Council.
- (c) On the premise, advanced in support of the counterproposed reduction and remodelling of the borough constituencies, that they compositely only accommodate 3.36 EQs [which might suggest a mean average deficit of 0.16 for each of the four constituencies], and while bound at first instance by the statutory regime under the Rules for Redistribution of Seats and requirement to have regard to EQs as existing on the designated enumeration date, in addressing arguments advanced in support of the

counterproposal as to possible *future* depletion trends of EQs within the borough constituencies, I have to express some awareness of the arguments or observations in relation to:-

- [i] the possible counter-effect of the Electoral Fraud [Northern Ireland] Act 2002 and the possible deficiency in the figures grounding arguments as to critical depletion in EQs;
  - [ii] the possible inflating effect in electoral terms of existing schemes to regenerate the City such as under the auspices of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and associated Regional Development Plans which point to a recent more favourable climate for economic optimism and development, to more recent arrest of population decline and migration, urban renewal, and improved urban infrastructure and renewal of housing stock within the inner city which has also been contributed to in part by the Belfast Area Urban Plan 2001. While necessity for a rejuvenated transport strategy has been partly founded by increased car ownership such necessity may also reflect the maintenance of employment, family and social ties linking residents of suburbs with the City with their influence on travel patterns;
  - [iii] the outcome arising from the current Review of Public Administration in terms of designation or definition of local government boundaries and, in particular, any such outcome in relation to the City of Belfast.
- (d) Even if one were to displace the above, possibly speculative, factors from consideration, I do not consider that on application of a rigid or conservative interpretation of the discipline of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats that I could commend to the Boundary Commission a reduction in the number of Belfast borough seats below four, as I would consider this to result in a dramatic and unacceptable breach of local ties of significant and widespread effect having regard to rule 7[b] of the Rules.

- (e) I bear in mind, for example, that on any redrawing of the reconstituted constituency boundaries under the counterproposal, taking the existing Belfast South constituency as a more obvious example, that: -
- [i] many of the community of wards currently within Belfast South, would be severed *inter se* resulting in material and significant detriment to local ties;
  - [ii] the displaced wards would be transferred into reconstituted constituencies where the measure of loss of ties so suffered would not be ameliorated to any appreciable degree by existence of ties with new partner wards within the reconstituted constituency or by any apparent short term or medium term reorientation of local ties;
  - [iii] wards with long established links to the City, and effectively within any geographic definition of the City, are likely to become displaced and transferred into neighbouring county constituencies in an effort to achieve acceptable compatibility with the EQ. I note, in particular, that under the counterproposal ward distribution scheme [which I acknowledge as being carefully considered and as the most likely proximate model to emerge if the counterproposal was to be given effect] that wards such as Galwally and Newtownbreda would lose borough constituency status. Likewise all the wards which are envisaged under the Provisional Recommendations as becoming incorporated into a borough constituency would not find themselves being so relocated notwithstanding that the weight of representation and evidence which exists, and noted during the course of Inquiry, appears to lean to a conclusion that, increasingly, they form part of the City.
- (f) In summary I would consider that prevalence of very close ties and links to the City through work, family, social ties and other relationships, and the detriment caused to them by the remodelling of the City borough constituency framework as counter proposed leads me to the view that the provisional recommendation for retention of four borough seats is to be commended.

- (g) In recommending that the provisional recommendation for retention of four borough constituencies be given effect I also have regard to the inconvenience, such as to public administration, to political party organisation and administration and, in particular, that occasioned to the electorates of the respective constituencies attendant on the alteration of each of the existing constituencies concerned. I would consider it likely that such inconvenience would not be insignificant or immaterial and that it would be of such nature and degree as to warrant it to be of influential account when addressing the reshaping of the constituencies having regard to rule 7[a] of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats.

### 3: BELFAST EAST

#### Introduction

- 3.1 In their Provisional Recommendations announced on 29 April 2004 the Boundary Commission recommended the following revision: -

“**Belfast East** constituency to include the Castlereagh LGD wards of Ballyhanwood, Carrowreagh, Dundonald, Emler and Graham’s Bridge. These wards are at present in the Strangford constituency”

- 3.2 The Statement of Reasons published by the Commission on 14 June 2005 identified the transfer of Cregagh and Wynchurch as being an exception to the fundamental framework of extending borough constituencies outwards in a radial fashion, and explained the rationale underlying the Provisional Recommendations in the following terms: -

“It is proposed that the Castlereagh LGD wards of Cregagh and Wynchurch should be transferred from the Belfast East to Belfast South constituency. The Commission considered various permutations involving these two wards and the wards of Downshire and Hillfoot before deciding provisionally to recommend the transfer of the two wards which would serve to help equalise the electorates of the constituencies of Belfast East and Belfast South in accordance with Rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats.”

#### Written Representations

- 3.3 The Commission received a number of representations pertaining to the Belfast East constituency including representations from ‘bodies of electors’, namely under cover of Representation No 14 from Councillor John Norris of Castlereagh Borough Council of 395 names [and thereafter a supplemental petition bearing an additional 240 names technically out of time but the existence of which, no doubt, is to be noted as a representation *per se*] and Representation No 22 received from Sinn Féin covering submission of a petition bearing 114 names [Belfast East].
- 3.4 The representations received by the Boundary Commission in relation to their proposals for the revision of constituency boundaries of Belfast East were all essentially supportive of the proposal to extend the boundaries of the

constituency to include the Castlereagh LGD wards of Ballyhanwood, Carrowreagh, Dundonald, Enler and Graham's Bridge.

- 3.5 In relation to the proposal to transfer the Cregagh and Wynchurch wards from the Belfast East to Belfast South constituency, the written representations reflected little such unanimity with the emergence of opposition expressed in relation to the proposed transfer of Cregagh ward from Belfast East to Belfast South and lesser so in relation to like transfer of the Wynchurch ward.
- 3.6 For ease of reference it may be convenient to summarise representations in relation to the proposed reconstitution of the Belfast East constituency. These show clear disparity: -

Representation No. 5, **Mr John Auld**: supportive of proposals which would result in all Castlereagh East DEA wards being accommodated in Belfast East and to the transfer of Cregagh and Wynchurch wards from Belfast East into Belfast South;

Representation No. 12, **Mr Robert Foy, Chairman of the South Belfast Ulster Unionist Association**, supportive of transfer of Cregagh and Wynchurch wards from Belfast East to Belfast South. The wards of Cregagh and Wynchurch are identified as comprising a comparatively small area adjoining the south east corner of Belfast South with their inclusion resulting in a "tidier" boundary as almost all of the Cregagh Road would represent part of the dividing line between Belfast East and South. The submission indicates that proposal to transfer Cregagh and Wynchurch would not be inconsistent with rule 7 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats regarding importance of 'local ties' ;

Representation No 14, **Councillor John Norris, Castlereagh Borough Council**, raising objection to transfer of Cregagh ward to Belfast South, asserting ties between Cregagh and Belfast East and absence of affinity with Belfast South. The representation is supported by submission of petition and a supplemental petition ostensibly representing, it is said, 54% of electors in [Cregagh] ward with indication that of all electors canvassed only one refused to sign;

Representation No 15, **Councillor Wallace Browne, Chairman of Democratic Unionist Party East Belfast Association** supporting Commission's recommendation for Belfast East but objecting to the transfer of Cregagh and Wynchurch wards to Belfast South and

suggesting that Cregagh, in particular, is inextricably linked to Belfast East;

Representation No 16, **Ms Mary Wylie, resident** for most of her life in Cregagh, objecting to transfer of Cregagh from its “natural home” to Belfast South and describes transfer of Cregagh from, but retention of Hillfoot within, Belfast East as illogical and a disregard for the compass;

Representation No 19, **Mr Peter Robinson MP MLA, Democratic Unionist Party**, supportive of transfer of Dundonald wards largely peopled by former Inner East Belfast residents who moved to the suburbs and observes the Provisional Recommendations return an area to East Belfast which was part of the constituency when he became its Member of Parliament in 1979. In relation to Hillfoot, Wynchurch and Cregagh wards, he suggests that the latter holds the strongest links to East Belfast and reports that the proposals have caused considerable concern among its residents. In asserting that Cregagh ward is part of East Belfast he highlights issues of family connections, culture, sport, church life, transport, work and return patterns. In his submission Mr Robinson accepts that geographically Wynchurch “leans slightly” into South Belfast but identifies its long association with the Belfast East constituency. The Hillfoot ward is accepted by him as being neither natural nor cohesive with an element penetrating into South Belfast but he emphasises a long established identification of the ward as part of the Belfast East constituency;

Representation No 21, **Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA, Social Democratic and Labour Party**, supportive of proposals in relation to Belfast South and, by implication the transfer of the Cregagh and Wynchurch wards from Belfast East. By way of improvement raises possibility of division of Hillfoot ward with a view to partial transfer of the southern sector [Beechgrove and environs] from Belfast East into Belfast South identifying Cregagh Glen watercourse as an appropriate partition line. On basis of geographical complexion he considers division of the ward to be “fully justified”;

Representation No 23, **Ulster Unionist Party**, supportive of proposals to realign boundary of Belfast East with transfer of Cregagh and Wynchurch wards from the constituency. Support for the Provisional Recommendations in relation to the constituency is voiced on the basis that they are necessary in order “to provide South Belfast with the number of electors necessary to reflect local social geography” and to ensure the continued existence of the seat;

Representation No 25, Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, raises objection to transfer of Cregagh and Wynchurch wards from Belfast East, it being desirable to retain all of Castlereagh Central DEA within same constituency. The representation further suggests that exclusion of Cregagh and Wynchurch from Belfast South would maintain a “neater boundary”. By way of counterproposal it is further submitted that Hillfoot ward should be transferred from Belfast East to Belfast South.

- 3.7 The provisional recommendation relating to the transfer of the Ballyhanwood, Carrowreagh, Dundonald, Enler and Graham’s Bridge wards from the Strangford to the Belfast East constituency appears to be broadly welcomed by political parties and other interested commentators, a view reinforced during course of the Inquiry. The wards appear to represent city conurbation by way of extension of the City boundary eastwards with little, if any, viable City boundary demarcation. While the wards of Enler and Graham’s Bridge appear to be densely populated with proliferation primarily of residential dwelling and some commercial property the remaining wards of Ballyhanwood, Carrowreagh and Dundonald, while containing large rural elements, likewise accommodate significant sectors of habitation. Transfer of the wards, in coalition, provide for the preservation of Dundonald and its immediate environs as a cohesive social and community unit within the constituency of Belfast East of which it now appears to be an integral part.
- 3.8 The Alliance Party finding itself in favour of the proposed recommendations for Belfast East differed in one material respect insofar as it advocated, consistent with its written submission, that Hillfoot ward should be transferred from Belfast East into Belfast South and that the Cregagh and Wynchurch wards should remain in Belfast East. In presenting the argument it emphasised that Cregagh in particular is an integral part of East Belfast and “part of that greater East Belfast identity”. Objection to proposals was partly founded by concern that part of the Cregagh estate lay within the Downshire ward and that the Boundary Commission proposals would effectively cause some degree of severance of the Estate as between Belfast East and Belfast South. It was further submitted by Dr Farry, party spokesman, that the neighbouring Wynchurch ward was effectively tied to Cregagh and that it should likewise remain part of Belfast East. Dr Farry argued that the transfer of Hillfoot ward from Belfast East into Belfast South would yield a more natural alignment of the constituencies and also accomplish greater DEA alignment. Dr Farry considered that the Hillfoot ward had no particular affinity with Belfast East akin to that of Cregagh or Wynchurch and thus its transfer would not offend preservation of local ties or maintenance of convenience.

3.9 The thrust of submission offered on behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party by its spokesman Mr Richard Bullick, aided by evidence called by him and presented by Councillor Wallace Browne, Councillor John Norris, and Mr Robin Newton MLA, was to the effect that there was significant opposition among the electorate of Cregagh ward to the recommended proposal that the ward should be excluded from Belfast East with which it had inextricable linkage. The evidence presented sought to focus on ties and links with Belfast East in terms of origin of ward residents, housing, culture, sport, church life, transport, employment, retail and shopping patterns. Councillor Browne spoke of his role as Chairman of his party's East Belfast Association since 1990 and of his opportunity in such capacity to have frequent contact with constituents and residents of Cregagh ward. He spoke of his perception of real opposition to the Boundary Commission proposals within the Cregagh ward. He regarded the people of Cregagh as belonging within East Belfast, to be part of its social fabric and to be socially embedded within the constituency both culturally and economically. Councillor Norris spoke of the strength of feeling within Cregagh estate apparent to him, and unanimous cooperation secured as he and party associates sought signatories in relation to petition for submission following Public Notice of the Commission's Provisional Recommendations. Mr Newton MLA for East Belfast, in support of the submission, asserted the existence of enduring affinities between Cregagh and Belfast East in terms of shopping, socialising, employment and housing migration as between the ward and its associated Belfast East constituency wards.

While it was accepted that the Wynchurch ward also included part of the Cregagh estate, it was acknowledged that the ward was not homogenous in terms of ties and linkage with the constituency. Councillor Browne considered that 10% of the Cregagh estate fell within the Wynchurch ward. He considered that Wynchurch ward formed a natural link with East Belfast in any event.

In the course of his submission Mr Bullick accepted that the Hillfoot ward was not a 'natural electoral unit' in character, that it was somewhat geographically separated from Belfast East by Upper Knockbreda Dual Carriageway and it had no long association or strong affinity with the constituency of Belfast East, having formerly been part of the Strangford constituency. Mr Bullick was unable to identify a strong or "overwhelming" case for justifying partition of the ward as between constituencies.

- 3.10 In essence the Democratic Unionist Party submission, in broad agreement with counterproposal of the Alliance Party, was to the effect that Cregagh and Wynchurch wards should remain in Belfast East and that Hillfoot ward in tandem with the Strangford ward of Moneyreagh should be transferred from Belfast East to Belfast South. I return to the Moneyreagh ward later.
- 3.11 Representations on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party were made by Dr Esmond Birnie MLA as representative of the South Belfast Unionist Association, Mr Isaac Clarke as Chairman of the East Belfast Ulster Unionist Association and Mr Stephen Barr, spokesman for the party. The speakers confirmed continued support by the party for the Provisional Recommendations. The position taken by the representatives at the Local Inquiry reflected that of its written submission. In support of transfer of Cregagh ward Dr Birnie called for a tempered view as to the true strength of ties claimed to exist as between the ward and Belfast East. In that regard he pointed to the engagement of ward residents in their use of shopping facilities, enjoyment of sporting links and attendances at educational establishments within Belfast South. He also spoke of use by Cregagh residents of public transport on routes threading through both neighbouring constituencies of Belfast East and Belfast South. Mr Clarke, while emphasising his recognition of “very strong feelings and the strong affinity within the Cregagh estate to remain part of Belfast East” considered that there was a requirement to tidy up the boundaries.

In relation to Hillfoot, Dr Birnie expressed an open mind as to possible partition of the ward but disquiet at the possible prospect that the Hillfoot ward, but not Cregagh and Wynchurch wards, might be transferred to Belfast South on the basis of resultant irregularity in shape of the constituency.

- 3.12 Dr McDonnell speaking in his capacity as sitting Member of Parliament for the Belfast South constituency reiterated his support for the Provisional Recommendations save to invite serious consideration to partition of the Hillfoot ward as between Belfast East and Belfast South given, in relation to the ward, its diverse character, the disparate nature of any local ties or affinities and for reasons and in a manner outlined in his written representation.

## Recommendations

3.13 With the benefit of written representations and what I would consider to have been very well crafted, extremely helpful and analytical submissions and comment, augmented by personal inspection of each of the wards subject to determination, I recommend to the Commission in respect of Belfast East that:-

- (a) **the Provisional Recommendations in respect of incorporation within Belfast East of the wards of Ballyhanwood, Carrowreagh, Dundonald, Enler and Graham's Bridge be given effect.** The approval for the Commission's proposals would appear to be unequivocal and I accept the evidence given in that regard before the Inquiry hearing as being compelling. I would consider that the transfer of these wards is desirable for purposes of achieving parity with the EQ within the spirit of rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats. The evidence before me, and opportunity taken to visit the wards, has not, having regard to rules 6 and 7 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats raised concerns in relation to resultant size, shape and accessibility of the proposed constituency, definition of its boundaries, inconveniences or breach of local ties should the Provisional Recommendations be given effect;
  
- (b) **the Provisional Recommendations in respect of the transfer of the Cregagh ward from Belfast East to Belfast South constituency is not given effect and that the counterproposal in respect of retention of said ward in Belfast East be adopted.** Representations in support of the Provisional Recommendations in relation to transfer of Cregagh ward from Belfast East to Belfast South point to a necessity to achieve compatibility of the proposed constituency quota with the EQ and of the desirability to effect change which would tidy the boundaries of the constituencies. The evidence before the Inquiry nonetheless pointed convincingly, in my assessment, to strong feeling within the ward against its exclusion from Belfast East as envisaged under the Provisional Recommendations. The proposals affecting Cregagh ward have engendered a volume of opposition, evidenced

in part by petitions presented, being representations to which I have to have regard. I have not come to recognise the opposition voiced to the relevant provisional recommendation, from its inception in June 2004, as being motivated by a perception that the proposed changes would alter the nature of political representation for Cregagh as an affected area, which would clearly not be a legitimate concern for the Boundary Commission or an Inquiry. I further observe that the Cregagh estate as such lies partly in the Downshire ward which spans westward across the Cregagh Road on the cityward approach to Bell's Hill Roundabout. The encroachment is relatively minor in area save that it has the unfortunate consequence of absorbing the 'iconic' tower blocks known colloquially as 'Cregagh Flats' [Woodstock House and Willowbank House]. Transfer of Cregagh ward into Belfast South would thus have the more startling effect of mutually splitting the tower blocks from the core of the estate with their relocation within Belfast East and Belfast South respectively. In that regard the case for transfer of the ward on the basis of a housekeeping or boundary tidying exercise, while attractive at first given the Belfast South designation of neighbouring wards of Ravenhill and Woodstock, may not ultimately withstand careful scrutiny. I accept that the provisional recommendation, if given effect in relation to Cregagh would breach local ties with adverse consequence. Taking all of the foregoing factors into account, including observations in relation to shape and boundary definition set out at sub-paragraph (c) below and assessing any breach of ties to be materially significant and detrimental, I would consider that giving effect to account taken of such 'local ties' under rule 7 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats does not offend against the primacy of rule 5 of the Rules. So I conclude having regard to the potential quota equilibrium effect of the proposal to transfer Hillfoot ward from Belfast East in terms detailed at sub-paragraph [d] below.

- (c) **the Provisional Recommendation in respect of the transfer of the Wynchurch ward from Belfast East into the**

**reconstituted Belfast South constituency be given effect.**

While it is recognised that ties may well exist between the ward and other constituent wards forming the Belfast East constituency, I would consider that the Wynchurch ward is not homogenous in nature or character and that any inconveniences or breach of local ties, of which account has to be taken under rule 7, are not, or likely to be, of sufficient weight or degree as to justify departure from the Provisional Recommendations or intent of rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats as to establishment of an appropriate EQ for Belfast East and its neighbouring borough constituencies. The presence of part of the Cregagh estate within Wynchurch ward is noted but the evidence, study of mapping and visits to the ward suggest such incursion of the estate to be relatively small in terms of both size of the sector of the estate concerned and area of the ward affected. It is also to be observed that a substantial part of the ward falls to the south of the Rosetta Road. This part of the ward is served by a network of streets which, with Rosetta Road, appear to gravitate it towards the Rosetta and upper Ormeau Road areas. Finally while in geographic terms the Cregagh and Wynchurch wards may form a couplet, I would not consider this to be a matter of primacy. The inclusion of Wynchurch ward in the South Belfast constituency may represent an improvement in the definition of the existing constituency boundary, particularly in contrast to that sector of the constituency line which currently exists between Wynchurch and Galwally wards. The inclusion of Wynchurch ward in the constituency shall result in the extension of the constituency line in part out to the ward boundaries of the Cregagh Road and the more transparent lines of The Straight and Mount Merrion Drive.

- (d) **the counterproposal in respect of the transfer of Hillfoot ward from Belfast East into reconstituted constituency of Belfast South be adopted and given effect.** In short, its transfer is desirable with the ambition of achieving an equilibrium in the deviations from the EQ of both Belfast East and Belfast South, given that it is proposed that the

Cregagh ward should remain in Belfast East. The evidence at large does not point to any particular or strength of affinity between Hillfoot ward and Belfast East. Indeed any such affinity may be balanced by ties which are likely to exist between the southerly sector of the ward [beyond the geographic feature of Cregagh Glen] and Belfast South which falls within panorama of the sector concerned. The evidence points to diversity in character of the ward and to potential for division of the ward as between two constituencies. However this course is not recommended having regard to the terms of rule 4(1)(c) of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats and the absence of compelling evidence laid before the Inquiry justifying such course on basis of necessity to establish compatibility with the EQ under rule 5, or for “special” geographic considerations under rule 6 or, if permissible, the preservation of ties under rule 7 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats. The recommendation is made, nonetheless, with the acknowledgement that the resultant shape of Belfast South constituency may not be ideal but it is by no means totally uncharacteristic for the borough constituencies as they stand. In essence considerations for achieving an acceptable degree of compatibility with the EQ for the constituency of Belfast South appear to attain prominence in the absence of rebuttal evidence of sufficient weight to the contrary.

I also bear in mind, but very much as a secondary consideration, that the Commission may be a little more hesitant to contemplate division of a ward as between constituencies in circumstances where the outcome of the Review of Public Administration is pending. The observation is made mindful, nonetheless, that the Commission, in seeking to complete their Review, have been, and shall be, constrained by a statutory time-frame in compliance with the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 1992 and that the Rules for Redistribution of Seats *per se* do not provide, in terms of determinant factors, for such contingency as an anticipated boundary review.

- (e) I recommend that the constituency be designated a borough constituency and that the name of the constituency should remain 'Belfast East'.

3.14 The deviation from the EQ, under the recommended proposals for Belfast East, calculates at -2.9% based on an electorate of 59,214. While it is recognised that in relation to Belfast East this Report recommends an electorate figure of 58,756 and deviation from the EQ of -3.6%, slippage from the values yielded by the Provisional Recommendations is commended as being an acceptable proposition in giving effect to account taken of 'local ties' under rule 7[b] of the Rules and the resultant suppressing effect on the figures by the transfer, as proposed, from the constituency of the larger Hillfoot ward into Belfast South.

3.15 I am mindful that the Commission do not base their recommendations on long term or speculative projected electorates or on actual or projected populations and that the Commission are required, in compliance with rules 5 and 8 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats, to base recommendations on the Parliamentary Electoral Register as it stands at the start of a Review on the enumeration date, rather than on any subsequent register, or any local government Electoral Register. I am also aware that in choosing between schemes which are otherwise permissible under the Rules the Commission may, nonetheless take into account changes in the electorate which have either occurred since the enumeration date or which they are satisfied will occur in the near future whether they be due to passage of time since the enumeration date or the alleged evolving effects of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 and the Electoral Registration (Northern Ireland) Act 2005 or otherwise.

3.16 To that end I would advise that the effect of proposals herein, by reference to ward parliamentary electorates according to the Electoral Register published on 1 April 2005, would yield a total Parliamentary constituency electorate figure of 60,279 and a percentage deviation from the average constituency electorate

[63,665] of -5.3%. The deviation figure arising under the Provisional Recommendations using comparable 2005 figures stands at - 4.5% based on an electorate total of 60,771. While the outcome of proposals under the Provisional Recommendations represents a greater achievement of compatibility with the EQ within terms of rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats, departure from strict application of rule 5 has been recommended on the basis of taking into account, within the spirit of rule 7[a] and [b], inconveniences and, to much greater extent, breach of local ties, which I believe may be otherwise caused under the relevant provisional recommendation.

## 4: BELFAST SOUTH

### Introduction

- 4.1 In their Provisional Recommendations announced on 29 April 2004 the Boundary Commission recommended the following revision:

“**Belfast South** constituency to include the Castlereagh LGD wards of Carryduff East and Carryduff West at present in the Strangford constituency, and Cregagh and Wynchurch, at present in the Belfast East constituency”

- 4.2 The Statement of Reasons published by the Commission on 14 June 2005 observed that the Provisional Recommendations at large continued to give effect to the fundamental framework of extending borough constituencies outwards in a radial fashion as had been recommended by the assistant Commissioner who conducted the Local Inquiry in Belfast into the Commission’s Provisional Recommendations in 1994.

### Written Representations

- 4.3 In addition to the representations pertaining to the Belfast South constituency already referred to and discussed in Part 3 of this Report, other written representations were received by the Commission broadly in support, if not expressing strong consensus support, for the transfer of the Castlereagh LGD wards of Carryduff East and Carryduff West to Belfast South from the Strangford constituency.
- 4.4 The essential elements of written representations received by the Commission were as follows:

Representation No. 5, **Mr John Auld**: supportive of proposals to transfer Carryduff wards into South Belfast;

Representation No. 12, Mr Robert Foy, Chairman of the **South Belfast Ulster Unionist Association**, supportive of transfer of Carryduff East and Carryduff West. The representation identifies Carryduff and South Belfast

as a single unit in social and economic terms joined by “southern approaches” travel route into the city, shopping trends, South Belfast origins of Carryduff residents and importance of ties and convenience;

Representation No 23, Ulster Unionist Party, supportive of proposals to transfer of Carryduff East and Carryduff West to Belfast South. In relation to Carryduff wards, the submission emphasises expansion into the City hinterland as reflecting the daily reality of the modern city, the origin of most of the residents of Carryduff from within the City, existing family ties, the character of the wards as part of the southern approach into the City and the proposed marriage of wards to Belfast South as recognition of existence of a single unit in social and economic terms;

Representation No 25, Alliance Party of Northern Ireland counterproposes that the Moneyreagh ward should be transferred to Belfast South being a natural route for population expansion and given that elements of the ward already lie within the environs of Carryduff. The submission recommends further counterproposals on basis that they would have the effect of uniting all of Castlereagh South and Castlereagh West within the same constituency.

### **Oral Representations at Inquiry**

- 4.5 In relation to the transfer of the Castlereagh LGD wards of Carryduff East and Carryduff West at present in the Strangford constituency to Belfast South, written representations submitted to the Commission clearly reflect broad support for the provisional recommendation. At the Inquiry it was apparent that such support continued to prevail and has consolidated over time as minds have been further applied to the Provisional Recommendations and any alternative formula for landscaping of the constituency boundary. The evidence presented before the Inquiry at large in relation to Belfast South and the issue of number of borough constituencies for Belfast pointed to migration over time of inhabitants out from the City constituencies to the Carryduff wards but also the maintenance of strong and focussed ties with Carryduff residents continuing to look to Belfast in terms of their origins, family ties, work, social encounter and where they identify with. The evidence identified the steady development and encroachment of the City in a southward direction along the south-east corridor, the increasing obscurity of the City boundary line and harmony of the Boundary Commission proposals with transport and strategic planning realities and advent of regional strategy insofar as the Carryduff wards are now regarded as being part of the City.

- 4.6 In moving the counterproposal for the transfer of the Moneyreagh ward to Belfast South from the Strangford constituency, Dr Farry, speaking on behalf of the Alliance Party, considered that the import of Moneyreagh into Belfast South was justified on the basis that areas of housing on the fringes of the Carryduff East ward were currently encroaching over the ward boundary into Moneyreagh. He considered that failure to effect a transfer of the ward would produce an anomaly of Moneyreagh being the only ward within the Castlereagh LGD not to fall within either Belfast East or Belfast South constituencies. He further considered that with the anticipation of future development to the south east of the City incorporation of Moneyreagh ward into Belfast South at this point would go some distance to stabilize the constituency.
- 4.7 As mentioned earlier, the Democratic Unionist Party submission and counterproposal, was in broad agreement with that of the Alliance Party, to the effect that, whereas Cregagh and Wynchurch wards should remain in Belfast East, Hillfoot and Moneyreagh wards should be transferred to Belfast South from the Belfast East and Strangford constituencies respectively. The submission also sought to point to the value of designation of the entire Castlereagh South DEA into the single constituency of Belfast South, of accomplishment of an acceptable deviation from the EQ for the constituency, and of accommodating into the constituency fringe areas of Carryduff presently falling within the Moneyreagh ward.
- 4.8 Representations on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party were made by Dr Esmond Birnie MLA as representative of the South Belfast Ulster Unionist Association, Mr Isaac Clarke as Chairman of the East Belfast Ulster Unionist Association and Mr Stephen Barr, spokesman for the party. In essence the Ulster Unionist Party position at the Local Inquiry reflected that of its written submission in support of the Provisional Recommendations. Dr Birnie spoke of compelling factors supporting inclusion of Carryduff East and Carryduff West into Belfast South as envisaged under the Provisional Recommendations. Dr Birnie also expressed concern at possible inclusion of Moneyreagh in the constituency. He considered Moneyreagh to be very extensive geographically and predominantly rural in character, without close local ties to Belfast South. He felt it to be ill-advised that an essentially urban constituency should take on what he considered to be a “quite different representation sectional interest group” and that its inclusion would create, in

terms of size and shape, a constituency of rather peculiar characterisation for the Belfast South seat.

- 4.9 Dr McDonnell speaking in his capacity as Member of Parliament for the Belfast South constituency reiterated his support for the Provisional Recommendations. He expressed disquiet at any counterproposal incorporating the transfer of Moneyreagh ward into Belfast South as he considered the ward in essence to be a large rural and agricultural unit in close proximity to locations such as Comber or Ballygowan. He believed that the ward belonged more properly to an agricultural district than with the City of Belfast. He also urged that serious consideration should be given to the partition of Hillfoot ward as between Belfast East and Belfast South given its diverse character, the disparate nature of any local ties or affinities and for reasons and in a manner outlined in his written representation.

### **Recommendations**

- 4.10 Assisted by written representations submitted in response to Provisional Recommendations, together with the benefit of oral representations, arguments and comments fielded in course of the Inquiry hearing, and subsequent inspection of localities affected, I further recommend to the Commission in respect of Belfast South that:-

- (a) **the Provisional Recommendations in respect of incorporation of the wards of Carryduff East and Carryduff West into Belfast South be given effect.** The evidence points to a radial extension of the notional city boundary along a south-easterly corridor served by a major arterial traffic route, a pattern of city/suburban migration with maintenance of established ties, affinities and city orientation together with increasing obscurity of the City boundary compounded by suburban development and the growing effects of planning and development strategies. The proposal for the transfer of Carryduff East and Carryduff West to Belfast South has been met with widespread acceptance by representatives and contributors to the Review. The evidence received reflects recognition by some contributors of the integration of Carryduff with a revised

constituency arrangement for Belfast South as being a logical necessity if not inevitability.

- (b) **the counterproposal for transfer of the Moneyreagh ward, at present in the Strangford constituency, to Belfast South is not adopted.** In relation to this counterproposal the evidence points, with little disagreement at first instance, to the ward being very large and intrinsically rural, and significantly different in character with the other actual and prospective constituent wards. More importantly while the guiding factor for inclusion of Moneyreagh ward in the Belfast South constituency relates to the severance of fringe habitation from Carryduff East, any residential concentrations involved would appear to be extremely small and isolated set against a predominantly agricultural district. In terms of integration of wards of a rural character into City borough constituencies I would consider the character of Moneyreagh to be distinctly more rural than, for example, the neighbouring smaller ward of Ballyhanwood, mentioned in course of Inquiry as a comparator. Ballyhanwood appears to accommodate significant areas of dense housing to its northern sector as part of the Dundonald complex of wards and the comparative electorate/hectare quotas for the Ballyhanwood and Moneyreagh wards being 2.14 and respectively 0.73 appear to emphasise the distinction. For reasons expressed above I therefore do not recommend transfer of the Moneyreagh ward into the Belfast South constituency as so counter proposed.
- (c) I recommend that the constituency be designated a borough constituency and that the name should remain 'Belfast South'.

4.11 Deviation from the EQ under the recommended proposals for Belfast South calculates at -5.3% based on a projected electorate of 57,767. The recommendations herein provide for an EQ deviation of -4.5% based on a constituency electorate figure of 58,225.

4.12 I am mindful of the considerations already mentioned in paragraph 3.15 above. To that end I would advise that the effect of proposals herein, by reference to ward Parliamentary electorates according to the Electoral Register published on 1 April 2005, would yield a total Parliamentary Electorate figure of 60,186 and a percentage deviation from average electorate [63,665] of -5.5%, the comparable values under the Provisional Recommendations being a total electorate of 59,694 and EQ deviation of -6.2%.

## 5: BELFAST NORTH

### Introduction

- 5.1 In their Provisional Recommendations announced on 29 April 2004 the Boundary Commission recommended the following revision:

“**Belfast North** constituency to include the Newtownabbey LGD wards of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley, at present in the South Antrim constituency, and Cloughfern, at present in the East Antrim constituency”

- 5.2 In their Statement of Reasons published 14 June 2005 the Commission sought to address and amplify guiding principles behind the proposed revision in the following terms: -

“The proposed transfer of ..... [and] Newtownabbey LGD wards .....reflect[s] the urban development of Belfast and enable[s] the retention of four Belfast borough constituencies with similar sized electorates, and respect the integrity of the .....and Macedon DEA(s). The proposed [constituency is] **Belfast North** with an electorate of 59,337 (2.7% below the EQ).”

### Written Representations

- 5.3 The Commission received a number of written representations pertaining to the Belfast North constituency which are discussed below. The Commission also received representation from ‘bodies of electors’ being parliamentary electors for constituencies affected by the proposed recommendations. Petitions bearing 159 names in respect of Belfast North and 122 names in respect of South Antrim were received under cover of Representation No 22 submitted by Sinn Féin.

Most of the written representations received by the Commission were broadly supportive of the inclusion of Collinbridge, Glebe, Glengormley and Cloughfern wards into the reconstituted constituency. However general schemes submitted by the Alliance Party and Mr John Auld provided for the transfer of additional Newtownabbey LGD wards from South Antrim on basis of requirement to maintain the cohesion of Glengormley Village and to preserve ties. The importation of these additional wards into the constituency

was to be facilitated by the redrawing of the existing boundary with the resultant transfer of Crumlin and Woodvale wards from the Belfast North to the Belfast West constituency. The counterproposal was also identified as being advantageous on the basis this would unite all Court DEA wards, recognise local ties and tidy up an illogical boundary between the Belfast North and Belfast West constituencies in any event. The Alliance Party's written submission provided further for the retention of Cloughfern within East Antrim and the transfer to the constituency of Abbey ward from Belfast North. The scheme submitted by Sinn Féin did not provide for the inclusion of additional wards into Belfast North beyond that provisionally recommended by the Commission but for the retention of Cloughfern within East Antrim.

- 5.4 For ease of reference the essential elements of written representations received by the Commission touching on Belfast North are summarised as follows: -

Representation No. 5, Mr John Auld: supportive of proposals to transfer Newtownabbey LGD wards of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley into Belfast North; urges the further transfer of DEA sister wards of Hightown, Ballyhenry and Burnthill on basis of social and economic ties; counterproposes the transfer of Crumlin and Woodvale wards from Belfast North to Belfast West to facilitate the foregoing; points further, to the illogical division of Greater Shankill [Court DEA] wards between Belfast North and Belfast West and to the existence of very close social and residential ties linking Crumlin and Woodvale with their neighbouring Shankill wards which are ignored under current constituency configurations. By way of illustration as to the present unsatisfactory boundary lines, he points to the constituencies of Belfast West and Belfast North intermittently intersecting the main arterial route of the Shankill Road;

Representation No. 6, Councillor Thomas Burns MLA South Antrim, SDLP criticises the absence of a clear boundary line between Belfast North and South Antrim under proposed arrangements;

Representation No 22 Sinn Féin, supportive of recommendations in relation to Belfast North insofar as they relate to the transfer of the wards of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley but objects to the transfer of Cloughfern from East Antrim.

Representation No 23 Ulster Unionist Party, provides tentative support for the proposals on the basis that it agrees that there should be no

transfer of wards between Belfast North and Belfast West and accepts that County Antrim is the only place from which additional electors can be transferred into Belfast North.

Representation No 24 Alliance Party, scheme for four borough constituencies supports the transfer of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley wards into Belfast North. However, expresses concerns that the proposals “create a boundary that meanders through suburban streets and divides a clear and obvious community”, and urges the transfer of Hightown, Ballyhenry, Burnthill wards to unite Glengormley Village. The scheme provides for retention of Cloughfern within and transfer of Abbey ward [currently Belfast North] to East Antrim and further urges the transfer of Crumlin and Woodvale wards from Belfast North to Belfast West thereby uniting all Court DEA wards within one constituency.

### **Representations at Inquiry**

- 5.5 At hearing of the Inquiry oral representations in relation to the transfer of Newtownabbey LGD wards of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley from South Antrim into the reconstituted constituency of Belfast North, none of the representatives or contributors speaking at the Inquiry, save for Mr Maginness speaking on behalf of North Belfast SDLP Constituency Association, aired disagreement with the provisional recommendation. However, counterproposals submitted by the Alliance Party and Mr Auld were more ambitious in their stated quest of aiming to protect the integrity of Glengormley, local ties and existing DEA arrangements. Likewise the Alliance Party and Sinn Féin objected to the transfer of Cloughfern ward from the East Antrim constituency.
- 5.6 In his submission, Mr Maginness accepted that the current constituency boundaries of Belfast North should be extended solely to include additional wards from the Newtownabbey LGD. He further observed that the Provisional Recommendations involved the inclusion to the constituency, detrimentally, of three of the seven Antrim Line DEA wards. In relation to DEA arrangements he acknowledged that the proposal under the Provisional Recommendations to transfer Cloughfern ward into Belfast North would complete the importation of all the Macedon DEA wards into the Belfast North constituency which he considered had a logical basis. He did object however to the severance of the Antrim Line DEA as being a “serious fracturing” effect of the Provisional Recommendations and spoke of the disintegration of

Antrim Line DEA integrity in terms of close social, economic and physical association.

- 5.7 By way of counterproposal, Mr Maginness suggested that the redrawing of the constituency boundary line to include Jordanstown, Monkstown and Rostulla wards into Belfast North would be a more sensible alternative and he pointed to their inter-connection, the “geographic sweep” of the city borough along the Belfast Lough shoreline, the Belfast origins of many inhabitants within those wards, and their family, social and employment ties with Belfast North or the City at large. Such ties, he suggested by implication, were stronger than existing bonds with East Antrim. He considered it also to be relevant that the wards had a close proximity to Cloughfern which, he observed, was actually being transferred to Belfast North under the Provisional Recommendations. Mr Maginness acknowledged that the departure of Monkstown, Jordanstown and Rostulla wards from their host University DEA would cause fracturing of that entity but he considered that such impact would not be as significant as that otherwise experienced under the Commission’s proposals with the displacement of Collinbridge, Glengormley and Glebe wards from Antrim Line DEA. In terms of EQ he considered that as both the recommended proposals and his counterproposals yielded similar outcomes his arrangement could not be criticised as being disadvantageous on that basis.

Mr Maginness accepted that a notional alternative might be to import all the Antrim Line DEA wards into Belfast North but he considered this impractical having regard to a requirement to establish an acceptable deviation from the EQ for the constituencies affected.

In response to questioning, Mr Maginness suggested that it was unarguable that there was a natural affinity between the Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley wards and North Belfast but argued that the remaining undisplaced Antrim Line DEA wards had a similar affinity with the constituency. He considered the effect of the Provisional Recommendations to be arbitrary and he also expressed the need to have some cognisance of “radical reordering” of local government boundaries which may follow the Review of Public Administration.

- 5.8 Dr Farry spoke to the Alliance Party proposals confirming a belief that Belfast North should be extended outwards to include, along with the three proposed wards, the additional wards of Hightown, Ballyhenry and Burnthill. He

suggested that Cloughfern should remain in East Antrim to which, he urged, Abbey ward should be transferred from Belfast North. He considered this necessary in order to facilitate EQ requirements for remodelling of the current East Antrim constituency.

Dr Farry concluded his submission with an expression of caution and “particular concern” as to the proposed boundary for Glengormley under the Provisional Recommendations suggesting that it was *“not... logical, ... it goes up and down streets and makes no local sense.”*

In response to questioning, Dr Farry agreed that there would be a certain logic to the import of Mallusk ward, and thus the inclusion of all Antrim Line wards, into Belfast North, leaving the constituency, he suggested, well within reasonable EQ parameters. He further considered that the inclusion of all of the Antrim Line wards would create a much more coherent constituency. He also accepted the proposition that the exclusion of Cloughfern and Abbey wards from Belfast North would dislocate Macedon as a DEA.

Dr Farry further reiterated the view that the boundaries proposed under the Provisional Recommendations were haphazard, that they split off natural areas from one another and had the effect of arbitrarily splitting Glengormley Village between South Antrim and Belfast North constituencies. He invited the Commission to reconsider the effect of the Provisional Recommendations on Glengormley in greater detail.

- 5.9 Mr Bullick, spokesman for the Belfast Democratic Unionist Party MP's and MLA's submitted that it was something of an inevitability that Belfast North would have to expand northwards particularly, in his view, as the boundary between Belfast North and Belfast West was now well settled and any inconvenience caused by change should be minimised within the spirit of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats. He considered that expansion of Belfast North would have to be accomplished in the direction of East Antrim and South Antrim. In support of the Commission's Provisional Recommendations, he argued that they were as defensible as any other possible arrangements. He believed that it made sense to unite Cloughfern with all associated wards in the Macedon DEA having regard to social and geographic ties in any event. He suggested that a study of the map would lend itself to an inescapable conclusion that the addition of Cloughfern as part of Belfast North made perfect sense. He also spoke of most of the people living in Cloughfern having originated from inner North Belfast and of their sense of

identity with the north of the City. In support of his argument he further pointed to the value of uniting the whole of a spanning housing area which currently stands divided significantly between the two constituencies of East Antrim and Belfast North. He also highlighted the existence of governmental agency arrangements which treat Cloughfern and Rathcoole as a single administrative unit.

On being questioned, Mr Bullick agreed that the current proposed boundary for Glengormley gave rise to difficulties but argued that creation of Glengormley as an area has almost inevitably led to difficulties over time. He expressed doubt as to whether it was likely that an ideal solution could emerge with more clearly acceptable alternatives to that proposed.

- 5.10 Mr Begley, speaking on behalf of Sinn Féin, in the course of his submission and questions or comment invited at conclusion of contributions from associate speakers, confirmed support for the expansion of Belfast North to include the Newtownabbey LGD wards of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley recognising that the City was being pushed outwards. He emphasised that the wards in his assessment were the “natural area for expansion” with obvious work and travel patterns consequent to outward city migration. He suggested that rule 5 had to be observed as a matter of necessity although he observed that the effects of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 had to be factored into any considerations. He further advocated that Cloughfern should remain in East Antrim primarily on the basis of issues affecting, or arising from, the reconstruction of neighbouring constituencies including East Antrim.

In relation to the effects of any reconfiguration of wards on DEAs, Mr Begley believed that the argument in terms of council boundaries was not significant at this point as he anticipated that local government boundary lines would be redrawn following the Review of Public Administration.

Mr Begley said he was aware of problems with definition of the boundaries in Glengormley but believed that this would remain an issue irrespective of reconfiguration of the wards. He was aware that the proposals might create a split within Glengormley but did not regard this as a paramount problem for the present. He considered that any proposition to introduce the additional South Antrim wards of Hightown, Ballyhenry and Burnthill to the Belfast North constituency would have to be considered cautiously in terms of knock-on or ripple effect.

5.11 Mr Auld in his submission confirmed that he resided in the Collinbridge ward and voiced his support for the Provisional Recommendations to add Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley wards to Belfast North. He also expressed grave concern however at the prospect that the effect of the proposals would be to split Glengormley Village. He observed that many people residing in the Glengormley and Glebe wards shopped in the other three wards of Hightown, Ballyhenry and Burnthill while, conversely, many residents within the latter wards would shop and work in North Belfast. In relation to educational links he spoke of Hightown School serving pupils from North Belfast.

In relation to Mallusk ward, Mr Auld considered that there was a case for adding it to Belfast North as concentrations of population within the ward were to be found to the east of Mallusk ward in proximity to the Hightown and Ballyhenry wards. He also spoke of industrial estates within the ward that provided employment predominantly for people from North Belfast. As to the proposition put to him that the boundary between the Burnthill and Carnmoney wards might be very irregular and that it might be better to include Carnmoney in Belfast North rather than Mallusk, Mr Auld indicated that while that was a possibility if permitted by the EQ considerations, the people of the ward of Burnthill would generally look more southward given that the main shopping area for the ward was, in his view, Glengormley.

5.12 Mr Nigel Dodds, Member of Parliament for the Belfast North constituency addressed the Inquiry. He emphasised the value of having Cloughfern join associate Macedon DEA wards within the North Belfast constituency. He described its current exclusion as an anomaly. He spoke of the people within the ward regarding themselves as being part of Belfast North by orientation and of close links between, for example, residents of Rathfern and King's Park and the Rathcoole, Rush Park and the Abbots Cross areas. He advised that one of his constituency offices is actually located technically over the constituency line in East Antrim opposite the entrance to Rathfern. Referring in particular to the Housing Executive he highlighted that statutory agency administrative arrangements ostensibly covering areas within his constituency of Belfast North could be found to extend over the boundary into areas such as Rathfern and King's Cross. He further observed that in terms of attempting to establish the existence of an affinity with North Belfast there is an argument that greater affinity is to be found beyond Cloughfern, for example in Monkstown, than in some of the Antrim Line DEA wards. He

considered there to be strong linkages between Monkstown and the rest of Macedon DEA wards. He accepted in response to questioning that loss of Monkstown would, nonetheless, have an impact on the integrity of the University DEA.

5.13 Mr Stephen Barr, speaking on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, confirmed party support for the Provisional Recommendations for Belfast North. He recognised that the proposed boundary for Glengormley was “uncomfortable” and that it gave rise to a split but he considered the recommendations to be the best option in the interests of electoral equality. He also indicated endorsement on behalf of the party for the proposal to transfer Cloughfern into Belfast North.

5.14 Although in relation to Belfast North, Dr McDonnell MP did not seek to make a formal submission given earlier presentation by his party colleague, Mr Maginness MLA on behalf of the North Belfast SDLP Constituency Association, he made a number of observations in the course of questions raised by him from the floor. He spoke of the boundary proposed under the Provisional Recommendations, as between Burnthill and Carnmoney wards, being very irregular and ragged and he suggested the possibility that it might make more geographic sense to add Carnmoney instead of Mallusk should transfer of the latter to Belfast North be considered. He further suggested that the observations of Mr Dodds MP in relation to Monkstown reinforced to some extent points advanced by Mr Maginness in course of his submission.

#### **Crumlin and Woodvale Wards**

5.15 The Alliance Party submission by Dr Farry reiterated the view taken in the party’s response to the Provisional Recommendations and urged that Crumlin and Woodvale wards be transferred to Belfast West. In advancing such a view, and in response to questions raised, he suggested that the transfer would unite all of the Court DEA wards within one constituency, would make ‘geographic sense’ to tidy up the anomaly which in his view existed along the Shankill Road, would serve to balance out the population of the City in terms of striving to achieve appropriate electorates and that, by way of ties or connections, the wards would become united with neighbouring Shankill, Highfield and Glencairn wards currently located within the Belfast West constituency.

5.16 Mr Alban Maginness MLA, speaking on behalf of the North Belfast SDLP Constituency Association, confirmed that the transfer of Crumlin and

Woodvale wards to Belfast West from Belfast North was not part of the SDLP proposal but was an approach that the party might be interested in and look at sympathetically.

5.17 Mr Bullick, on behalf of the Belfast Democratic Unionist Party MPs and MLAs, spoke of the boundary between the constituencies of Belfast West and Belfast North being well established since creation of the latter constituency in the early 1980s, and of the need to minimize inconvenience within terms of the statutory rules arguing that a credible case for uniting the Court wards could only be made within a Belfast North framework. In relation to both wards he sought to emphasise the affinity of their electorates with Belfast North and lack of any ties with Belfast West in terms of shopping patterns, organisation of non-governmental agencies of any significance, social links or geographical features. In opposing the counterproposal he spoke of Crumlin ward being part of established development arrangements for North Belfast and of resultant damage to relationships and disruption of arrangements should the ward be transferred from Belfast North. In terms of determining links and ties he observed that Crumlin looked northward to Ballysillan and not to West Belfast with which it had no connecting arterial route. As to Woodvale, he spoke of enduring historic links with Belfast North, and while conceding the influence of peace lines on the drawing of boundaries, emphasised that the presence of industrial buffer zones in the area would lead to the belief that these ward communities faced northwards rather than southwards into West Belfast.

5.18 Mr Auld, in making his presentation expressed doubt, firstly, as to whether the boundaries for Crumlin and Woodvale wards have been in existence for any considerable period as, in his view, they had been in state of flux over time depending on the way that local government boundaries had been drawn. He further questioned whether people in the affected wards would regard themselves as being part of North Belfast rather than West Belfast and spoke of a personal perception of a lack of a clear sense within the area *vis-à-vis* a North or West Belfast identity. In seeking to illustrate problems of accessibility within the constituency of Belfast North as presently constituted, he pointed to the presence of peace lines divorcing otherwise neighbouring wards. The present constituency landscape was criticised by him as being illogical on the basis of the Shankill Road, the main arterial route, being alternatively intersected by both constituencies in the course of a journey taken along it. Mr Auld expressed the view that unity of the Court DEA wards within either Belfast West or Belfast North should be viewed as an overriding

consideration or ambition and in that regard he declared a preference for the placement of such DEA grouping within Belfast North, should electorate considerations permit such course by way, for example, of reduction in the number of Belfast seats. As matters currently stand however he conceded that any such placement would have to be within Belfast West.

5.19 Mr Nigel Dodds, Member of Parliament for Belfast North, in support of the Provisional Recommendations, spoke of no doubt in his mind that people in the Crumlin and Woodvale wards would regard themselves as being in North Belfast, as would others currently in Court DEA wards within Belfast West, in terms of community, social, family and shopping linkages. He pointed to statutory agency and community organisation arrangements for Crumlin and Woodvale being of North Belfast orientation and connection, the historic connection of Crumlin with Belfast North, and the composition of the Greater Belfast Partnership embracing all Court wards and Ballysillan as a recognition of their association with North Belfast. In the course of his submission or in response to questioning, he further emphasised the prevalence of family, church, social, community, statutory and organisational ties, all based on linkages with Ballysillan and the rest of Belfast North. While calling for unity of DEA wards he considered that this could only be accomplished within a Belfast North framework.

5.20 Mr Stephen Barr, speaking on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, expressed opposition to any change of the boundary between Belfast West and Belfast North, believing that Crumlin and Woodvale should remain in Belfast North. He recognised that with regard to Belfast West the constituency electorate was small but he suggested that with the existence of an established and settled constituency boundary between Belfast North and Belfast West the only remedial approach available in relation to the Belfast West electorate was to look to Lagan Valley or Belfast South as donor constituencies.

### **Recommendations**

5.21 Having regard to the written representations submitted to the Commission and the submissions, evidence and observations laid before the Inquiry, and assisted by inspections of the relevant localities, I recommend to the Commission in respect of the Belfast North constituency that:-

- (a) **the Provisional Recommendations in respect of the transfer of the wards of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley, at present in**

**the South Antrim constituency, to Belfast North be given effect.**

The recommendation to transfer each of these wards from South Antrim to Belfast North was supported by all representatives who contributed to the Inquiry save for Mr Maginness MLA who tabled a counterproposal that the wards of Monkstown, Jordanstown and Rostulla, currently in East Antrim be transferred to the reconstituted Belfast North constituency, a counterproposal to which I shall refer further at paragraph [f] below. In relation to the substantive recommendation this was broadly accepted by those supporting the proposal on the basis that, firstly, any quest to secure an acceptably-sized electorate for Belfast North would require expansion of the constituency and, secondly, that any such expansion would have to radiate northwards. Thirdly it was suggested that, as the City was being expanded with migration northwards into these wards, obvious work and travel patterns could be identified by way of ties. Having considered the evidence in support of the provisional recommendation and that advanced by way of counterproposal I would accept the validity and strength of points made in support of the proposal and recommend, accordingly, that the Provisional Recommendations in relation to the transfer of the Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley wards from the South Antrim to the Belfast North constituency be given effect.

- (b) **the Provisional Recommendations in respect of the transfer of Cloughfern ward, at present in the East Antrim constituency, to Belfast North be given effect.** It is clear that in relation to Cloughfern ward differences of opinion have emerged between the parties. While the Democratic Unionist Party and Ulster Unionist Party representatives supported the Provisional Recommendations to the effect that the ward be transferred to Belfast North, their counterparts speaking on behalf of the Alliance Party, Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labour Party, and Mr John Auld, all spoke against the proposal urging that the ward be retained in East Antrim. In essence the submissions opposing the transfer of the ward related in large measure to facilitation of EQ

requirements in anticipation of the reconfiguration of the East Antrim constituency.

Arguments presented in favour of the Commission's proposal sought to identify Belfast North as being the natural home for the ward of Cloughfern. The evidence given was material insofar as it has discounted from my mind the possibility that, within the terms of rule 7[a] and [b] of the Rules, account should be taken of evidence, the weight of which points to significant and material inconvenience or detriment to local ties resulting from the exclusion of Cloughfern ward from East Antrim. I consider that the proposed transfer is in keeping with the ambitions of rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats in seeking to establish an acceptably sized electorate for Belfast North. Accordingly, I commend the proposal under the Provisional Recommendations that the ward of Cloughfern be transferred to the Belfast North constituency.

- (c) **the counterproposal in respect of the transfer of the wards of Hightown and Ballyhenry, at present in the South Antrim constituency, to Belfast North be adopted and given effect.** Observations and recommendations expressed are to be read in conjunction with paragraph [d] below. This counterproposal has been submitted by Mr John Auld and the Alliance Party. In his written submission Mr Auld highlighted that the Newtownabbey LGD wards of Glengormley, Glebe and Collinbridge are tied socially and economically to the other three Antrim Line DEA wards of Hightown, Ballyhenry and Burnthill and subscribed to criticism of the alleged severance effect of the proposals on Glengormley.. The Alliance Party submission spoke of detriment caused by the divide of a "clear and obvious community" arising from the Provisional Recommendations which, it was suggested, had the detrimental effect of splitting Glengormley Village. Criticism was also raised as to the meandering nature of the proposed constituency boundary *per se*. Written representation received by the Commission from Councillor Thomas Burns MLA, South Antrim, also touched on the absence of a clear boundary line as between the proposed constituencies of Belfast North and South Antrim.

The Democratic Unionist Party, Sinn Féin and Ulster Unionist Party representatives all recognised that the boundaries were 'uncomfortable' but had concerns, firstly, as to whether such concerns could be readily curable by a reconfiguration of the wards and, secondly, as to a possible ripple effect on the South Antrim constituency created by loss of wards arising from any remedial exercise.

With the benefit of a number of inspections to the locality I have little doubt but that the Provisional Recommendations, if effected, would have the outcome of intersecting Glengormley with the imposition of the constituency boundary line across the main Antrim Road thoroughfare at its intersection with Carnmoney Road and Farmley Road. I would regard this outcome as being unfortunate and having a clear adverse implication in terms of local ties.

I am likewise of the view that the boundary lines created under the proposals are unwieldy and at certain locations virtually obscure. I refer in particular to the intended constituency boundary line at the north east extremity of the Glengormley ward in the area of Pembroke south of Ferndale Road. It is to be noted at this point however that this boundary borders onto Burnthill ward. There further exist areas of new-build along the northern boundary of Glengormley ward that compound the difficulty in securing a defined constituency line.

On a broader issue, I also have regard to probable detriment arising from breach of ties that would result from severance of the Collinbridge, Glengormley and Glebe wards from the neighbouring wards of Hightown, Ballyhenry and Burnthill.

I consider misgivings expressed in relation to the Provisional Recommendations to have force and in that regard would recommend to the Commission the counterproposal for the transfer of Hightown and Ballyhenry wards from South Antrim into the reconstituted constituency of Belfast North, but not Burnthill for reasons explained below. I would regard the transfer to Belfast North of Hightown and Ballyhenry taken in

isolation with the three wards of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley as envisaged under the Provisional Recommendations to be the best available of a number of difficult options. I believe this to be the most effective approach aimed at maintaining cohesion of Glengormley Village as an entity and as a community unit taking account of local ties which would otherwise suffer prejudice, in my assessment, to an unacceptable degree. The transfer of said wards of Hightown and Ballyhenry should likewise serve to improve the geography of the constituency in terms of preferable boundary lines in terms of their definition. In that regard I bear in mind the advantage of increased coalition of boundary lines with arterial routes and the spanning of the constituency north eastwards through Glengormley to a clear pivotal point at Sandyknowes Roundabout.

I would further consider that the transfer of the wards of Hightown and Ballyhenry would, on one interpretation, provide some semblance of better cohesion of the net Antrim Line DEA arrangement with unity of five of the seven constituent wards, although I acknowledge misgivings expressed in course of Inquiry as to the sanctity of current DEA arrangements in the shadow of the Review of Public Administration.

- (d) **the counterproposal in respect of the transfer of the Burnthill ward, at present in the South Antrim constituency, to Belfast North is not adopted.** The counterproposal in respect of Burnthill would appear to raise a number of concerns although theoretically the option for its transfer appears to be distinctly attractive on initial analysis on grounds of establishing an acceptably sized electorate for the constituency and desire to preserve, so far as is possible, the integrity of the Antrim Line DEA. Objections to the counterproposal for the transfer of Burnthill and associate wards of Hightown and Ballyhenry were, in the main, based on doubt as to whether any reconfiguration of Newtownabbey LGD wards within a Belfast North constituency framework could, and would, alleviate difficulties in relation to unsatisfactory boundary lines. Dr McDonnell more specifically raised doubts as to the character

of the constituency boundary line running its course between Burnthill and the neighbouring ward of Carnmoney. Secondly, uncertainty was expressed as to the adverse ripple effect caused by depletion of the number of South Antrim wards should the counterproposal be given effect.

Concerns as to the efficacy of any boundary line between Burnthill and Carnmoney would in my assessment appear to be well founded as the proposed boundary line appears to weave relentlessly in zig-zag fashion through the narrow residential avenues within the Wynnland area to the north of the ward. While there remain undoubted concerns as to the character and definition of the ward boundary line between the Glengormley and Burnthill wards and to, *de facto*, what may materialise as the constituency boundary line, I am far from confident that these shall necessarily be cured or alleviated by the annexation of Burnthill into the Belfast North constituency. In some respects I would consider deficiencies arising under the proposed recommendations to be compounded by inclusion of the Burnthill ward.

Moreover unlike Hightown and Ballyhenry, I do not regard the transfer of Burnthill ward as being crucial to uniting the core of Glengormley. I have immediately to recognise and acknowledge that, all other considerations aside, the joinder of Burnthill within Belfast North would be the preferable course given that some measure of loss of ties is likely to arise.

The transfer of wards as between constituencies has, obviously, a ripple effect, of influence to the Boundary Commission's formulation of their Final Recommendations. The counterproposal to transfer from South Antrim the wards of Hightown, Ballyhenry and Burnthill in addition to Collinbridge, Glengormley and Glebe yields for Belfast North a total electorate figure of 65,121 based on 2003 enumeration date figures and a healthy deviation from the EQ of +6.8%. However in terms of ripple effect on South Antrim flowing from the counterproposal, the assessed Provisional Recommendations electorate figure for that constituency of 57,615 is decreased to 51,831 and this is mirrored by an

increase in the deviation EQ for the constituency from –5.5 to –14.99 percentage points. With rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats in mind one suspects that a deviation from the EQ of that significance parts from the realms of acceptability.

In terms of reappraising the counterproposal with rule 5 to the fore, it is apparent that the substance of the mischief sought to be cured by the spirit of the counterproposal can still be accommodated in large measure by the retention of Burnthill within South Antrim. This approach would yield for South Antrim reduced deviation from the EQ of -11.8% based on enumeration date electoral figures [or –10.6% on 2005 electoral figures]. This deviation might be considered as uncomfortable but it holds Belfast North's deviation from the EQ at +3.0% and, in relation to both constituencies allows for future trend adjustments. On the basis of the foregoing and having regard to rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats, I do not recommend adoption of the counterproposal in relation to the transfer of Burnthill accordingly.

- (e) **the counterproposal for the transfer of the Mallusk ward at present in the South Antrim constituency to Belfast North is not recommended.** This counterproposal was not formally fielded in written representations or alternative schemes submitted in response to Provisional Recommendations. It emerged initially at hearing only as an observation in relation to the effect of the Alliance Party scheme, and that of Mr Auld, to transfer six of the seven Antrim Line DEA wards to Belfast North thus isolating Mallusk. Both Dr Farry and Mr Auld recognised the potential value in moving all of the Antrim DEA wards on block into Belfast North. Although an attractive proposal I would not consider it to be viable at this time. I bear in mind, having regard to both enumeration date and April 2005 figures [3,568 and 4,130 respectively] that Mallusk by a substantial margin holds the largest electorate figure of the 35 wards comprising the South Antrim constituency. Its transfer would thus hold EQ disparity implications well in excess, for example, of those discussed above in relation to possible redesignation of Burnthill. On the

basis of evidence before the Inquiry I am unable to commend transfer of Mallusk as being an imperative within terms of the Rules or as desirable in attempting to achieve EQ compliance. Despite its high electorate values Mallusk in parts remains distinctly rural unlike its sister DEA wards and it does not appear to span into the 'community entity' core of Glengormley. Accordingly I do not believe that the reasons given for the recommended transfer of Hightown and Ballyhenry hold true for Mallusk.

- (f) **the counterproposal for the transfer of Jordanstown, Monkstown, and Rostulla wards, at present in the East Antrim constituency, to Belfast North is not adopted.** This counterproposal tabled by Mr Maginness MLA had at its core the protection of the integrity of the Antrim Line DEA. Mr Maginness readily acknowledged that there existed a natural affinity between the Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley wards and North Belfast and that the counterproposal to transfer the wards of Jordanstown, Monkstown and Rostulla from East Antrim to Belfast North would result in a degree of disintegration of their host University DEA although he considered the impact to be less significant than that resulting from the Provisional Recommendations. From the perspective of achieving compatibility with an acceptably-sized electorate under rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats, he considered that the counterproposal was no less disadvantageous than, if not on par with, the option proposed under the Provisional Recommendations. He further submitted that geographical considerations favoured his counterproposal.

While considering the counterproposal to be worthy of careful consideration I hold a number of reservations which ultimately lean me to a view that transfer of Antrim Line DEA wards may be a more sustainable option in the final analysis.

The scheme for transfer of three Newtownabbey LGD wards of Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley from South Antrim as proposed under the Provisional Recommendations yields a deviation from the EQ of -2.7% for Belfast North with a

resultant deviation value of -5.5% for the donor constituency of South Antrim. The calculations are based on transfer of Cloughfern from East Antrim into Belfast North as envisaged under the Provisional Recommendations. The counterproposal yields a deviation from the EQ of +0.54% for Belfast North with like inclusion of Cloughfern but the deviation from the EQ for East Antrim on the basis of that configuration stands at -14.56%. This places the Provisional Recommendations at a distinct advantage in terms of achievement of an acceptably sized electorate within rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats.

Setting the counterproposal against a scheme involving the transfer of Collinbridge, Glebe, Glengormley and Cloughfern wards as envisaged under the Provisional Recommendations in tandem with transfer of additional South Antrim wards of Hightown and Ballyhenry provides for a much more finely tuned balance from an EQ standpoint. The deviations from the EQ under such scheme compute at +3.7% for Belfast North and -11.8% for South Antrim compared to the stated counterproposal values of -0.54% for Belfast North and -14.6% for East Antrim. The counterproposal provides for the retention of Cloughfern within East Antrim which would reduce the deviation for that constituency to -11.4% but likewise have the effect of increasing the margin for Belfast North to -2.6%. The Antrim Line scheme would thus be a preferable outcome with a figure of 3.7 percentage points above the EQ. Calculations on basis of the 2005 electoral figures indicate a sustained advantage to the Antrim Line scheme with a reduced deviation from the EQ for Belfast North at +1.7% but like reduction in the deviation value for South Antrim to -10.6% compared to counterproposal values of -0.7% and -13.95% for Belfast North [Cloughfern included] and East Antrim respectively.

In short, from the perspective of deviations from the EQ, I would be cautious in commending the counterproposal as a preferred option.

Placing mathematical considerations aside, I also believe that the Provisional Recommendations, if revised to include the transfer of Hightown and Ballyhenry, may go some distance to ameliorating the more obvious fracturing of the Antrim Line DEA which has been raised as a concern.

However in coming to a final determination on the issue the answer, in part at least, also clearly lies in the identification of that coalition of wards which lies more naturally within the bounds of North Belfast. I believe that the balance favours the Antrim Line wards in terms of geographic association and social affinity and ties. In that regard I bear in mind the general favourable response to the proposals for the transfer of Antrim Line wards at first instance, the acknowledgment by Mr Maginness of affinity between the Antrim Line wards and Belfast North or the City, the evidence given of affinity as between the wards within the Antrim Line grouping and the general proximity and orientation of the wards concerned to the constituency of Belfast North compared, perhaps, to the more remote northern reaches of Jordanstown ward.

- (g) the counterproposal for the transfer of the Abbey ward, at present in the Belfast North constituency, into East Antrim [Antrim Coast & Glens], is not adopted.** This counterproposal was tabled by the Alliance Party as part of their proposals in respect of the reconstituted East Antrim constituency ostensibly to establish an acceptably-sized electorate for the constituency. The schemes submitted by way of written representations and the evidence adduced or submissions made before the Inquiry have not pointed to any real support for this counterproposal. With ambition to establish a reasonably-sized electorate for Belfast North, and having some regard to the possibility of an element of detriment to local ties given exclusion of Abbey from its family of wards within the Macedon DEA, I am not of a view that it would be appropriate to transfer the ward of Abbey from Belfast North. I also have regard to the contingency nature of the counterproposal and the absence of evidence upon which a decision could be appropriately made. I do not recommend adoption of the counterproposal accordingly.





































