

**Boundary Commission  
for Northern Ireland**



# **Fifth Review of Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries**

**Report  
2006-2007**

**July 2007**



Forestview, Purdy's Lane, Newtownbreda,  
BELFAST BT8 7AR

16 May 2007

The Rt Hon Peter Hain MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland  
11 Millbank  
LONDON  
SW1P 4PN

*Dear Secretary of State,*

I present to you a report of the activities of the Boundary Commission. The report covers the twelve month period to 16 May 2007.

The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner recently published recommendations for restructuring local government districts in Northern Ireland and their constituent wards. It is important for the organisation and conduct of elections and to avoid confusion amongst voters that elections in Northern Ireland are conducted on common ward boundaries. Accordingly, the Commission placed under review their published Revised Recommendations and will shortly decide how best to bring a speedy conclusion to their present Review.

I am copying this letter to the Speaker.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'The Hon Mr Justice Coghlin', is written over a white background.

**The Hon Mr Justice Coghlin  
Deputy Chairman**

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# CONSTITUTION

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland are constituted in accordance with section 2 of and Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986:

Chairman: The Speaker of the House of Commons\*  
The Rt Hon Michael Martin MP

Deputy Chairman: The Hon Mr Justice Coghlin

Members: Mr R Mackenzie CB  
Mrs J Ruddock CBE

Assessors: The Registrar General in  
Northern Ireland  
Dr T N Caven

The Commissioner of Valuation for  
Northern Ireland  
Mr D Rainey\*\*

The Chief Electoral Officer for  
Northern Ireland  
Mr D Bain CBE, TD

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The Chief Executive, Ordnance  
Survey of Northern Ireland\*\*\* provides  
professional advice on matters affecting  
Ordnance Survey responsibilities

Secretary: Mr J R Fisher

\* The Deputy Chairman, by custom, presided at all meetings of the Commission but the Speaker was kept fully informed of the progress of the work of the Commission.

\*\* Mr David Rainey was appointed Commissioner of Valuation in succession to Mr Nigel Woods in September 2006.

\*\*\* Mr Iain Greenway was appointed Chief Executive of Ordnance Survey in July 2006.



# **REPORT 2006-2007**

1. In common with the three other Boundary Commissions for the United Kingdom, the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland are a permanent body constituted under the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 1992 and are an independent advisory non-departmental public body. The role of the Commission is to keep under continuous review the number, names and boundaries of the parliamentary constituencies into which Northern Ireland is divided and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. The Commission are also required to undertake general periodical reviews and to report with recommendations every 8 to 12 years.
2. The Report covers the twelve month period from 16 May 2006.

## **Meetings and Consultation**

3. In the twelve month period the Commission met on four occasions. In addition, the Commission were represented by one of their members at a meeting of all four United Kingdom Parliamentary Boundary Commissions to discuss matters of common concern, as provided for by Schedule 1 to the 1986 Act.
4. The joint meeting of Boundary Commissions was held in Edinburgh in March 2007. The Commissions discussed the Eleventh Report of the Committee on Standards in Public

Life and its recommendations affecting the restructuring and work of the Boundary Commissions; digital boundary setting; systems of proportional representation voting; the review and restructuring of local government; and a common approach to future funding of the Boundary Commissions.

5. The Commission continue to work closely with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, the Land and Property Services Agency and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The Commission's Secretariat also maintain contact with relevant Government departments and public bodies.
  
6. Mr Nigel Woods was succeeded by Mr David Rainey as Commissioner of Valuation for Northern Ireland in September 2006 and the Commission place on record their appreciation for the able contribution made to the present review by Mr Woods. The Commission also rely upon the professional advice of the Chief Executive of Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland. Mr Iain Greenway was appointed Chief Executive last July to replace Mr Trevor Steenson, the acting Chief Executive. The Commission are grateful to Mr Steenson for his contribution and advice. The Commission also gratefully acknowledge the contributions made by Mr Douglas Bain, Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, and Dr Norman Caven, Registrar General in Northern Ireland.

## **Progress of Review**

7. The Commission published Provisional Recommendations for new parliamentary constituencies in 2004 and, in response to representations and submissions they received on those proposals, held three public Local Inquiries in 2005. The inquiries were conducted by assistant Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State for this purpose.
8. The Commission place importance on the reports of assistant Commissioners and accepted their recommendations wherever practicable to do so. In reaching decisions, the Commission considered the representations they had received, matters discussed at Local Inquiries, and other relevant information including changes which had occurred in the electoral register. Accordingly, the Commission published Revised Recommendations in May 2006 affecting 12 constituencies and gave notice of this in accordance with the requirements of section 5 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986.
9. The Revised Recommendations reflected the recommendations of the assistant Commissioner who had held a Local Inquiry in Belfast and which supported the Commission's Provisional Recommendations to extend the existing four Belfast borough constituencies in a radial fashion. The assistant Commissioner considered it an unnecessary constraint to regard Belfast as being bound by the historic designation of the local government boundary, which no longer recognised the suburbanisation of Belfast

and ties and links with and within the city. The Revised Recommendations therefore provided for Castlereagh Local Government District (LGD) wards in the Strangford constituency to be incorporated into the Belfast East and Belfast South constituencies and wards in the Belfast East constituency to transfer to the Belfast South constituency; Newtownabbey LGD wards to transfer from the East Antrim and South Antrim constituencies to the Belfast North constituency; and, subject to modifications proposed by the assistant Commissioner who conducted a Local Inquiry in Newcastle, one ward and one part Lisburn City LGD ward to transfer from the Lagan Valley to the Belfast West constituency.

10. Elsewhere, the recommendations of the assistant Commissioner who conducted the Local Inquiry in Newcastle were accepted. As mentioned, it was proposed that the boundaries of the Lagan Valley and Belfast West constituencies should be adjusted; no changes should be made to the constituency boundaries of Newry and Armagh or those of Upper Bann; and more limited changes to those provisionally proposed by the Commission should be made to the boundaries of the South Down and Strangford constituencies.
11. The Commission also gave effect to the recommendations of the assistant Commissioner who conducted a Local Inquiry in Ballymena in regard to boundaries between the East Antrim and North Antrim constituencies and the East Londonderry and Foyle constituencies. The Commission, however, reached a different conclusion to that

recommended by the assistant Commissioner in regard to five wards affecting the South Antrim constituency. The Commission's decision had particular regard to the need to achieve constituency electorates of an acceptable size and minimise inconveniences attendant on change. The decision also took into account considerations already identified in relation to the Newry and Armagh and Upper Bann constituencies.

12. The Revised Recommendations, illustrated by maps, together with copies of the reports of the Local Inquiries and an explanatory note were made available for public inspection at all district council headquarters offices, the Electoral Office and Area Electoral Offices, public libraries, the offices of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland and at this Commission. The revised proposals were sent to all Northern Ireland Members of Parliament, the main political parties, all district councils and a range of interested bodies as well as being made available for inspection in the Library of the House of Commons. Notice was also sent to those who had attended the Local Inquiries and had asked to be informed of the Commission's decisions.
13. Seventeen representations were received on the Revised Recommendations including several from political parties and elected representatives in Northern Ireland, interested groups and members of the public. Petitions were received from two community groups. Of the representations received, four expressed support for the Revised Recommendations and others favoured aspects of them.

14. In effect, some representations questioned the weight which had been given to the written evidence and oral submissions made at the inquiries, and hence to the conclusions and recommendations of assistant Commissioners. The Commission were criticised for having proposed boundary arrangements alternative to those recommended by assistant Commissioners, and for favouring the recommendations of one assistant Commissioner above another where their recommendations conflicted.
15. Some representations criticised the Commission's Revised Recommendations for compromising district council and district electoral area boundaries, as well as for making proposals which were seen as anticipating the outcome of the review by the then recently appointed Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. The proposals were also criticised for three proposed constituencies being substantially above the electoral average with a number of others below it.
16. Some representations considered improvements to the Revised Recommendations but others raised matters of a political nature and bias or issues which lay outside the terms of reference of the Commission.

## **Local Government Boundaries**

17. The Commission have on several occasions drawn attention to the difficulties arising from the postponement of the appointment of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and the uncertainties brought about by the

proposed restructuring of local government in Northern Ireland. A review of local government boundaries normally precedes that of Parliamentary constituencies. Local government district wards provide the building blocks with which the Commission construct constituencies. The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 obliges the Commission, so far as is practicable, not to include wards partly in one constituency and partly in another. At the outset of the Review, the Commission expressed their concern that ward boundaries had not been reviewed since the last Local Government Boundaries Commissioner reported in 1992 and that present ward boundaries no longer accurately reflected changes which had occurred in the distribution of the electorate.

18. The decision by the Secretary of State to restructure local government in Northern Ireland to reduce the number of district councils from 26 to seven, and to reduce their constituent wards from 582 to 420 therefore had a profound impact on the Commission's Review. The Review had been conducted throughout on the basis of the existing ward structure. The appointment of one of the Members of the Commission, Mr R H Mackenzie<sup>1</sup>, as Local Government Boundaries Commissioner in June 2006 and his publication of proposals in November 2006 led the Commission to decide that it would not be in the public interest for them to proceed to their Final Recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Mackenzie was subsequently designated District Electoral Areas Commissioner with effect from 1 June 2007, with responsibility for recommending the grouping of wards into district electoral areas for local government elections.

19. The Commission consider it important for the organisation and conduct of elections and to avoid confusion amongst voters that elections in Northern Ireland are conducted on common ward boundaries. The Commission therefore decided to review their recommendations in the light of progress by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and the effect of his proposals on the ward structure.
20. The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner caused seven independent public hearings to be held during January and February 2007 and the Commissioner published revised recommendations in March this year. The Commissioner is to submit his final recommendations by 31 May this year.
21. The Commission will shortly decide in the light of those recommendations whether to publish Modified Recommendations for parliamentary constituencies. In reaching their decision they will have regard to all relevant representations and submissions made to the Commission throughout the Review, the reports and recommendations of the assistant Commissioners, changes which have occurred in the distribution of the electorate since the inception of the Review and any other relevant matters.

## **Transfer of Functions and Review of Procedure**

22. The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 provides that the functions of the Commission will transfer to

a Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission at a time to be determined by Order. The proposed transfer of functions has, however, formed a part of a review of the mandate, governance arrangements and accountability framework of the Electoral Commission. The Review, undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, began in February 2006.

23. In written evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the Commission drew attention to a number of concerns affecting the proposed transfer of functions, notably:
- the working relationship between the Electoral Commission and the intended Boundary Committee for Northern Ireland would benefit from a less prescriptive and more flexible approach to that which already governs the relationship between the Electoral Commission and the Boundary Committee for England;
  - Northern Ireland would be treated differently to the rest of the United Kingdom in the matter of responsibility for the review of local government boundaries. The degree of co-ordination of reviews of Parliamentary, regional and local government boundaries which is to be possible under the proposed arrangements in Great Britain might as a consequence not be achieved in Northern Ireland; and
  - the future chairperson of the proposed Boundary Committee for Northern Ireland would be drawn from a membership of the Electoral Commission which at

present does not adequately reflect the interests of Northern Ireland, a situation in need of urgent remedy. The particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and the considerations they give rise to need equally to be fully taken into account by the Electoral Commission, and be seen to be so in its wider United Kingdom composition.

24. The Committee reported<sup>2</sup> to the Prime Minister in January recommending that:
- the Electoral Commission should no longer have any involvement in electoral boundaries matters. Provision in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 to allow the transfer of boundary setting functions to the Commission should be repealed;
  - the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions and local boundary commissions (or Commissioners in Northern Ireland) in each of the four home countries should share joint secretariats;
  - there existed a strong case for the current legislation in relation to the conduct of parliamentary boundary work to be reviewed and, where necessary, amended before the commencement of the sixth general review of parliamentary constituencies due around 2012. This review should not be undertaken by the Electoral Commission. Instead, an independent review commission for this purpose could be established, overseen by the Speaker's Committee with the

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<sup>2</sup> *Committee on Standards in Public Life. Review of The Electoral Commission. Eleventh Report (Cm.7006, January 2007)*

outcome presented to Parliament through the Speaker; and

- the practice of appointing an Electoral Commissioner from Scotland and another from Wales with a lead interest in Scottish and Welsh matters should continue, and the Speaker's Committee should proceed with appointing a commissioner from Northern Ireland who would play a similar role.

25. The Commission await the Government's views on these recommendations, and consultation.

## **Other Matters**

26. During the period of this Report, the Commission have been kept informed of a number of developments affecting electoral reform and, in particular, the electoral registration process in Northern Ireland. The detail of these and other matters affecting the work of the Commission have been helpfully explained by and discussed with the Chief Electoral Officer and officials of the Northern Ireland Office.

27. The Commission's geographic information system which combines digitised boundaries with electorate figures and Ordnance Survey mapping was made available to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to facilitate his review.

## **Staff and Expenditure**

28. The Commission are supported by a small Secretariat led by the Secretary to the Commission, Mr John Fisher. In the course of the year two members of staff left the Secretariat. The Commission pay tribute to Mrs Carolyn Fullerton who, as a part-time member of staff, retired from public service, having been a member of the Secretariat for the past three years. Other members of staff, Dr Colm McNamee and Mr Crawford McIlveen, returned to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland respectively, but subsequently rejoined the Secretariat to assist the Commission in the completion of their Review. The Commission welcomed Mrs Jennifer Hamilton to the Secretariat. Mrs Hamilton has provided valuable continuity needed for the Review this year.

29. The Commission incurred the following provisionally calculated expenditure in the financial year 2006-2007.

	<b>Expenditure (£k)</b>
Salaries and related costs <sup>a</sup>	85.0
Members' attendance allowances and travelling and other expenses	10.9
IT and equipment <sup>b</sup>	10.5
Running costs <sup>c</sup>	25.6
Advertising and publishing	14.9
Stationery, postage, printing and reprographics	13.1
Other <sup>d</sup>	11.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>171.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> includes payments of £17.6k made to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland in respect of salaries and allowances of members of staff on loan from these bodies.

<sup>b</sup> includes licence and maintenance charges.

<sup>c</sup> includes maintenance and minor works, cost of cleaning, electricity charges, telephone rental and usage charges and accommodation rental, rates, and service charges.

<sup>d</sup> includes catering and hospitality, publications and newspapers, travel and subsistence and incidental expenditure

## **Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland May 2007**





