

STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR PROVISIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Principles

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.

Number of Constituencies

2. The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, Schedule 2, Rule 1(4) states that:

“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.”

During the last review, the Commission published Provisional Recommendations proposing that Northern Ireland be divided into 17 constituencies and that boundaries be altered significantly. Representations received by the Commission after the publication of those Provisional Recommendations and the reports of assistant Commissioners appointed to conduct public local inquiries in regard to these made clear that the Commission’s recommendations were more radical than was acceptable to the electorate. In examining options for revised recommendations, the Commission sought to draw up proposals for 17 constituencies which would give effect to the substance of the reports and recommendations of the assistant Commissioners but found it impossible to do so. The Commission therefore considered that they were entitled, in accordance with the opinion of Senior Crown Counsel, to put forward Revised Recommendations on the basis of 18 constituencies. The opinion of Senior Crown Counsel was that the Commission would be justified in recommending a number of constituencies other than 17 only to reduce or alleviate difficulties in applying the Rules for Redistribution of Seats on the basis of 17 constituencies. The present 18 constituencies are those which were recommended by the Commission to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1995.

3. The Commission, having considered schemes for 17 constituencies and alternative schemes for 16 and 18 constituencies, are satisfied by reference to the Rules and the opinion of Senior Crown Counsel, that there should continue to be 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4. The Commission are no longer required to make periodical recommendations as to the number of members which should be returned to the Northern Ireland Assembly by each constituency. The Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides that each constituency shall return six members to the Assembly.

5. The Commission's Provisional Recommendations do not affect the structure or arrangements for local government, area boards or other public authorities and the services they provide.

Ward and other Boundaries

6. There are 582 local government wards in Northern Ireland. None are divided between constituencies. While the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, Schedule 2, Rule 4(1)(c) states that, so far as is practicable, "no ward shall be included partly in one constituency and partly in another", Rules 5 and 6 provide for the division of wards either to avoid "an excessive disparity between the electorate of any constituency and the electoral quota, or between the electorate of any constituency and that of neighbouring constituencies"; or "if special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, appear to them to render a departure desirable".

7. When the present local government wards were determined they were intended to be indicative of areas with a community of interest. Local political party organisations may be based on wards or groups of wards. Any division of wards between constituencies may therefore break local ties, disrupt political party organisation and confuse the electorate. At the outset of the Review, the Commission expressed their concern to the Secretary of State that there had

been no review of local government boundaries since they last reported and that the present boundaries might not accommodate the changes there have been in the distribution of the electorate. The Provisional Recommendations nevertheless avoid dividing wards.

8. The Commission have sought to limit the number and scale of boundary changes proposed and to preserve the integrity of local government districts (LDGs) and district electoral area groups of wards for which councillors are elected to district councils (DEAs) wherever practicable. There are 26 LGDs and 101 DEAs. The Commission's proposals divide 11 LGDs and 16 DEAs between constituencies.

Electoral Quota

9. Rule 5 of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats provides that the electorate of any constituency shall be as near the electoral quota as practicable. Notice announcing the commencement of the Review was published on 16 May 2003. This date became the enumeration date for the purpose of the Review. The electoral quota (EQ) is the number obtained by dividing the total parliamentary electorate of Northern Ireland on the enumeration date by the number of constituencies then existing. On 16 May 2003 the electorate of Northern Ireland was 1,097,450 and the number of constituencies in Northern Ireland was 18. Therefore, the EQ is 60,969.

General Considerations

10. At the outset of the Review, the Commission were faced not only with the electorates of the four borough constituencies in Belfast substantially below the EQ (Belfast East, -14.9%; Belfast North, -15.7%; Belfast South, -17%; and Belfast West, -16.6%) but with the electorates of other constituencies having become significantly above the EQ (Newry and Armagh, +12.7%; North Antrim, +15.8%, South Down, +15.1%; and Upper Bann, +12.9%). The difficulty facing the Commission has been to reduce these imbalances whilst having regard to the framework of local government, local ties and geographical constraints.

11. The Commission have sought to minimise inconvenience to the electorate and those who participate in and organise election campaigns. Accordingly, the Commission's recommendations confine the number of electors transferring to a different constituency to less than 6% of the total Northern Ireland electorate. They would bring all constituency electorates to within 7.5% of the EQ. The Commission recognise however that a number of representations received reflect a concern about the need to maintain a fair balance between the aim of reducing disparity between the number of electors in each constituency and the requirement, where possible, to preserve long established ties.

PROPOSED CONSTITUENCIES

Belfast East, Belfast North, Belfast South and Belfast West Borough Constituencies

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.¹ The Commission accepted that 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

¹ *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.

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 wards², Newtownabbey LGD wards³ and Lisburn LGD wards⁴ to the Belfast constituencies reflect the urban development of Belfast⁵ 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 DEAs.⁶ 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); and **Belfast West** with an electorate of 58,722 (3.7% below the EQ).

Lagan Valley, Newry and Armagh, South Down, Strangford and Upper Bann County Constituencies

15. As a consequence of proposed changes affecting Belfast, the Commission have had to consider how to accommodate the ripple effect on adjacent constituencies, and have sought to do so having regard to the two largest constituencies in Northern Ireland, namely North Antrim with an electorate of 70,582 (15.8% above the EQ) and South Down with an electorate of 70,173 (15.1% above the EQ).

16. The transfer of Castlereagh LGD wards to the Belfast East and Belfast South constituencies would have a particularly pronounced effect on the

² Ballyhanwood, Carrowreagh, Carryduff East, Carryduff West, Dundonald, Enler and Graham's Bridge.

³ Cloughfern, Collinbridge, Glebe and Glengormley.

⁴ Derryaghy, Dunmurry and Seymour Hill.

⁵ *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 proposed Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015.

⁶ Representations received in response to the Provisional Recommendations suggest that the boundaries of these district electoral areas and the wards they comprise may not reflect local ties and the residential development there has been since these boundaries were last reviewed.

Strangford constituency reducing it to an electorate of 51,820 (15% below the EQ). At the last Periodical Review, the Down LGD wards of Derryboy, Killyleagh and Saintfield were transferred from the South Down to the Strangford constituency. The Commission now propose that the remaining Rowallane DEA wards of Crossgar and Kilmore should be similarly transferred, together with the whole of the Ballynahinch DEA but not the ward of Seaforde. To transfer the Seaforde ward would effectively detach the Downpatrick DEA from the remaining part of the South Down constituency.

17. To equalise the electorates of the remaining parts of the South Down and the electorates of the adjacent Newry and Armagh and Upper Bann constituencies, the Commission propose that in the Newry and Mourne LGD, Newry Town DEA wards of St Mary's, St Patrick's and Windsor Hill currently within the Newry and Armagh constituency should transfer to the South Down constituency. The areas contained in these County Down wards formed part of the South Down constituency until 1983. The Commission also propose that the Banbridge LGD ward of Loughbrickland be transferred from the Upper Bann to the South Down constituency and the Craigavon LGD ward of Aghagallan be transferred from the Upper Bann to the Lagan Valley constituency with the cumulative effect of creating five constituencies of broadly equivalent sized electorates; Lagan Valley with an electorate of 62,707 (2.9% above the EQ); Newry and Armagh with an electorate of 63,380 (4.0% above the EQ); South Down with an electorate of 65,496 (7.4% above the EQ); Strangford with an electorate of 63,564 (4.3% above the EQ); and Upper Bann with an electorate of 64,493 (5.8% above the EQ).

East Antrim, North Antrim and South Antrim County Constituencies

18. To accommodate the transfer of electorate in the Newtownabbey LGD wards of Collinbridge, Cloughfern, Glebe and Glengormley from the East Antrim and South Antrim constituencies to the Belfast North constituency, the Commission concluded that, as an alternative to disturbing local ties within the Ballymena LGD by transferring wards from that LGD to the South Antrim constituency, the size of the electorate of the North Antrim constituency might

instead be reduced to within an acceptable margin of the EQ by transferring Moyle LGD wards⁷ presently in the North Antrim constituency to the East Antrim constituency. This proposal reflects in part views put to the Commission during their last Review with respect to the coastal road linking certain of these wards with Larne LGD. The combined effect of these proposals would be to create constituencies with reasonably sized electorates; namely East Antrim, which the Commission propose might be renamed Antrim Coast and Glens to reflect its different character, with an electorate of 60,061 (1.5% below the EQ), North Antrim with an electorate of 64,031 (5.0% above the EQ) and South Antrim with an electorate of 57,615 (5.5% below the EQ).

East Londonderry and Foyle County Constituencies

19. Finally, to equalise the electorates of the East Londonderry and Foyle constituencies, the Commission propose that the Derry LGD wards of Banagher and Claudy, which are predominantly rural in character, should be transferred from the Foyle to the East Londonderry constituency with the effect of creating two constituencies of similarly sized electorates both close to the EQ, namely East Londonderry with an electorate of 60,494 (0.8% below the EQ) and Foyle with an electorate of 60,823 (0.2% below the EQ).

Other constituencies

20. The Provisional Recommendations do not affect the present county constituencies of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mid Ulster, North Down and West Tyrone, the existing electorates of which all lie within a range of the EQ which the Commission regard as acceptable (64,345 and 5.5% above the EQ; 60,119 and 1.4% below the EQ; 57,435 and 5.8% below the EQ; and 57,847 and 5.1% below the EQ respectively).

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland June 2005

⁷ Bonamargy and Rathlin, Dalriada, Glanaan, Glenariff, Glendun, Glenshesk, Glentaisie and Knocklayd.

**APPENDIX: EXTRACT FROM THE
PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES ACT 1986
(AS AMENDED)**

SCHEDULE 2

RULES FOR REDISTRIBUTION OF SEATS

The Rules

1. (1) The number of constituencies in Great Britain shall not be substantially greater or less than 613.

(2) [The number of constituencies in Scotland shall not be less than 71.] omitted.⁸

(3) The number of constituencies in Wales shall not be less than 35.

(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.
2. Every constituency will return a single member.
3. There shall be a constituency which shall include the whole of the City of London and the name of which shall refer to the City of London.

⁸ Omitted Scotland Act 1998, s.86(2).

3A. A constituency which includes the Orkney Islands or the Shetland Islands shall not include the whole or any part of a local government area other than the Orkney Islands and the Shetland Islands.⁹

4. (1) So far as is practicable having regard to rules 1 to 3A —

(a) in England and Wales —

(i) no county or part of any county shall be included in a constituency which includes the whole or part of any other county or the whole or part of any other London borough,

(ii) no London borough or any part of a London borough shall be included in a constituency which includes the whole or part of any other London borough,

(b) in Scotland, regard shall be had to the boundaries of local authority areas,

(c) in Northern Ireland, no ward shall be included partly in one constituency and partly in another.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1)(b) above “area” and “local authority” have the same meanings as in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.¹⁰

5. The electorate of any constituency shall be as near the electoral quota 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 electoral quota, or between the electorate of any

⁹ Scotland Act 1998, s.86(2).

¹⁰ As amended by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994.

constituency and that of neighbouring constituencies in the part of the United Kingdom with which they are concerned. For the purposes of the first report of the Boundary Commission for Scotland¹¹, “electoral quota” means the number which, on the enumeration date in relation to that report, is the electoral quota for England.

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.

General and Supplementary

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.

8. In the application of rule 5 to each part of the United Kingdom for which there is a Boundary Commission —

(a) the expression “electoral quota” means a number obtained by dividing the electorate of that part of the United Kingdom by the number of constituencies in it existing on the enumeration date,

(b) the expression “electorate” means —

¹¹ To be submitted under section 3(1) of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 after the commencement of section 86(4) of the Scotland Act 1998.

(i) in relation to a constituency the number of persons whose names appear on the register of parliamentary electors in force on the enumeration date under the Representation of the People Acts for the constituency,

(ii) in relation to the part of the United Kingdom, the aggregate electorate as defined in sub-paragraph (i) above of all the constituencies in that part,

(c) the expression “enumeration date” means, in relation to any report of a Boundary Commission under this Act, the date on which the notice with respect of that report is published in accordance with section 5(1) of this Act.

9. In this Schedule a reference to a rule followed by a number is a reference to the rule set out in the correspondingly numbered paragraph of this Schedule.