**Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland**

**2023 Parliamentary Boundary Review, Secondary Consultation**

**Public Hearing, Glenavon Hotel, Cookstown**

**11th March 2022**

**District Judge Michael Ranaghan (Chair of the Public Hearing):**

Good morning everyone. I’m still going to say everyone, albeit we are somewhat thin on the ground. You are welcome. I’m just going to take this opportunity to confirm the technology is working okay, yes? Thank you.

It is now just after 11amand I formally declare this public hearing open.

As it says at the front here, my name is Michael Ranaghan and I have been appointed by the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland to chair this hearing about its Initial Proposals for Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland. I currently sit as a District Judge in Dungannon and Craigavon. Prior to that I worked mostly in the public sector. I am independent of the Commission, and my role is to chair this hearing, in line with the legislation. I am not required to subsequently make any recommendations to the Commission relating to the proposals.

I am assisted here today by members of the Commission Secretariat. We have Andrea, Lisa and Lyn in the room and also the Secretary to the Commission, Ms Heather McKinley, who is sitting beside me to my right. We also have our AV team who are managing the technical side of the hearing and they are situated to my right as well.

The Parliamentary Constituencies Act (as amended) sets out a number of duties relating to my role – but in particular, it notes that it is for the Chair to determine the procedure that is to govern the hearing and ensure its effective operation, in line with the legislation.

The Act requires the Commission to hold a number of public hearings during the secondary consultation period. The relevant legislation states that that ‘the public hearings in Northern Ireland shall be concerned with proposals for Northern Ireland, and shall between them cover the whole of Northern Ireland.’ Public hearings are therefore intended to provide an opportunity to make representations about any of the Commission’s initial proposals, and to present or comment on any alternative proposals.

If you have a view on the Commission’s proposals, this is your opportunity to be heard. I would however highlight that in making their initial proposals, the Commission was constrained by the rules set out in the legislation and so any alternative proposals put forward should also comply with those rules.

It is important to note that representations about any or all proposed constituencies can be made at any of the three public hearings in Northern Ireland that have been scheduled as part of the 2023 Boundary Review. You may therefore attend any of the public hearings and make a representation about any constituency in Northern Ireland.

The legislation requires me to make you aware of how written representations may also be made during the secondary consultation period. In addition to the public hearings, the secondary consultation period provides an opportunity to submit further written representations with respect to the representations from the initial consultation period. These are available on the Commission’s website. Written representations made during the secondary consultation can therefore support or challenge the representations made by others during the initial consultation.

Written representations must be received by the Commission by the close of the secondary consultation period on 23rd March – details about how to submit your representation are available on the Commission’s website, or please do speak to any of the Secretariat staff here today. The Commission will take both written representations, and those made at the public hearings, into account as it moves through the Review process.

The legislation also requires that the hearing should begin with an explanation of the proposals about the hearing is concerned. I would now ask the Secretary to the Boundary Commission, Heather McKinley, to make a brief presentation of the Boundary Commission’s Initial Proposals.

**Heather McKinley (Secretary to the Boundary Commission):**

Thank you very much and good morning. My team and I are here today supporting Judge Ranaghan in carrying out his role as the Chair of this public hearing. As we have heard then, the Parliamentary Constituencies Act (as amended) requires that each public hearing should begin with an explanation of the proposals about which the hearing is concerned, so I’ll briefly run through those now.

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland is an independent and impartial public body responsible for reviewing Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries in Northern Ireland on the basis of rules established by Parliament. These rules are set out in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, amended most recently by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020.

As set out in the 2020 Act, all four UK Commissions are required to submit a final report with recommendations to the Speaker of the House of Commons by the 1st July 2023. The 2020 Act also stipulates 650 seats across the UK with Northern Ireland retaining its 18 seats for the 2023 Review.

This review commenced in January 2021 with the publication of the electoral data as at March 2020, which is the base data which must be used. The Commission published its initial proposals on 20th October 2021 and the eight week initial consultation period ended on the 15th December.

The representations received during the initial consultation period were then published on the Commission’s website in line with its statutory duties. The secondary consultation period then commenced on the 9th February, it will last for six weeks and close on the 23rd March.

There are a number of statutory rules which the Commission must follow in making its recommendations. Rule 2 specifies that each constituency must be within 5% of the electoral quota - that is between 69,724 electors, and 77,062 electors.

Rule 5 specifies other factors which the Commission may take into account if, and to such extent as they think fit. These factors are: special geographical considerations including, in particular, the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency; local government boundaries i.e. ward boundaries, which exist or are prospective on the review date; the boundaries of existing constituencies; any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies; and the inconveniences attendant on such changes.

Rule 7 only applies to Northern Ireland, and where the Commission feels that having to apply Rule 2 would unreasonably impair its ability to take into account the factors set out in Rule 5 or to submit a report on time, Rule 7 can be applied, and one or more constituencies can be recommended which fall slightly outside the Rule 2 range, in accordance with a prescribed formula. For the 2023 Review, this means that the Commission could propose one or more constituencies of between 68,314 electors and 77,062 electors.

The last enacted Parliamentary Boundary Review was in 2008. In formulating its initial proposals, the Commission noted that eleven of the eighteen extant constituencies’ electorates fall outside that Rule 2 statutory range. For example, East Antrim has the smallest electorate at 64,907 electors, and Upper Bann has the largest electorate at 83,028 electors. Changes to the existing constituencies are therefore required.

It was also noted that the existing Parliamentary constituencies are those established in 2008, but that the existing local government boundaries (or wards) date from 2012. It is therefore the case that the boundaries of the current wards do not completely align with the boundaries of the existing constituencies. There are 56 wards which currently straddle two or more existing constituencies.

The Commission’s initial proposals are displayed on screen here, on an interactive map which you may have seen, and which the Commission published as part of its initial consultation resources. All eighteen of the Commission’s proposed constituencies fall within the Rule 2 range. In making their initial proposals the Commission did not consider itself to be unreasonably impaired and therefore, has not relied on Rule 7 in any of these proposed constituencies.

In considering the Rule 5 factors, the Commission considered that the boundaries of existing constituencies and wards, being clear and certain, provided an appropriate starting point for its work. Wards are well-defined and well-understood units and the Commission therefore considered them to be the default building block for constituencies. In developing its initial proposals the Commission was also mindful of undue disruption to existing constituency boundaries. In considering those existing ward boundaries to be the default building block for constituencies, the Commission sought to address the misalignment of the 56 wards that are currently split, by moving each of them wholly into a single constituency where the Commission was satisfied that it was appropriate to do so. Being mindful of undue disruption to existing constituency boundaries, the Commission was satisfied that it was appropriate for 54 of these split wards to be aligned wholly into one of the constituencies in which it was already partially located.

In addition, the Commission also took into consideration special geographic considerations and understands that the factors of local ties and inconvenience will be informed by the consultation process.

Finally, the Commission is also required to recommend a name and designation, either county or borough, for each of the proposed constituencies. The Commission considered that in two of the 18 constituencies, the proposed changes mean that the existing name is no longer appropriate. The other 16 constituencies retain their current names. Four constituencies have been designated as borough constituencies, with the remaining 14 designated as county constituencies.

So this is an explanation of the proposals published by the Commission at the initial consultation stage. The Commission welcomed the representations it received relating to those proposals, and as we’ve heard, is now partway through the secondary consultation period during which, of course, further reps can be submitted both via these public hearings and also in writing. Thank you.

**District Judge Michael Ranaghan (Chair of the Public Hearing):**

Thank you, Heather, that’s very helpful and very clear. I will now continue with the Chair’s portion of this presentation. As we have already indicated, the public hearings for the 2023 Boundary Review are being held in a hybrid format, allowing for representations to be made both in-person, and via video link. This hearing today is planned to take place across three sessions and they are:

* 11am to 1pm;
* 2pm to 4pm; and
* 5pm to 7pm.

I can vary that timetable and I will take into account the attendance today and the demand for opportunities to speak. I may adjourn any of those sessions early, if appropriate, or consider allowing them to run on to ensure all those who wish to speak have an opportunity to do so.

After the end of the secondary consultation period, the Act requires the Commission to publish the record of each public hearing. Therefore, all contributions to the hearing (both in-person and virtual) will be recorded, and to ensure accuracy, participants may be asked to repeat what they have said. The transcript will include the name of the speaker and organisation represented (if any).

I will not be able to hear representations about issues outside the scope of this hearing, such as the possible impact of the Commission’s proposals on future election results or the Rules contained within the legislation.

I wills shortly adjourn the hearing briefly to finalise, if any, those who have indicated they wish to make representations. If you have not registered to speak in advance, but wish to make a representation, you should indicate this to the Commission staff during the adjournment, who will seek to offer you a suitable speaking slot.

Those making a representation in-person will be called up to the table at the front in turn. Please begin by:

* speaking into the microphone;
* stating your name; and
* whether you are speaking as an individual or on behalf of an organisation, and if so, the name of the organisation.

There is provision for those joining virtually, although I understand today that no one has registered with the virtual system. If anyone has requested that the Commission team display any supporting materials on our screens relating to your presentation, which appear behind us, we will cue those up for you at the appropriate time with the assistance of the AV staff, otherwise the Commission’s proposals map will be put back up on the screen as you speak.

At the end of each representation, there will be an opportunity for questions from other attendees to be put to speakers through myself. I would ask anyone wishing to pose a question to raise their hand (either in-person in the room, visibly on camera or using the electronic feature on Zoom) and wait until they have been called upon, before speaking. I would ask everyone to be courteous in their questions, bearing in mind that this is not intended to be a cross-examination. I may also put questions or points for clarification to speakers myself.

During the course of the hearing, please feel free to approach any of the Secretariat staff with any queries that you may have and they will be pleased to help you or to draw the matter to my attention. I now propose to adjourn for a short period to finalise the order, if any, of speakers. I would also note we request that any representations will be of a duration no longer than fifteen minutes. I will now adjourn the hearing.

[Hearing adjourned]

**District Judge Michael Ranaghan (Chair of the Public Hearing):**

Now, this hearing has reconvened. I understand that nobody has registered to speak. As a result of that, I’ll adjourn this portion of today’s hearing until others attend either virtually or in person. If no-one further attends this session, this session of the hearing will then formally adjourn at 1pm. Thank you.

[Hearing adjourned]

**District Judge Michael Ranaghan (Chair of the Public Hearing):**

This is a continuation of a public hearing which adjourned informally at 11.30am. Since that time, nobody has attended virtually to the hearing and nobody has attended in-person to the hearing. The time is slightly after 1pm. This portion of today’s public hearing will adjourn now. It will reconvene at 2pm.

[Hearing adjourned]

**District Judge Michael Ranaghan (Chair of the Public Hearing):**

Good afternoon, everyone. You are all very welcome today. This is a reconvened session of this public hearing. It is shortly after 2pm and I declare this hearing open again.

My name, as you can see there folks, is Michael Ranaghan, I am currently a District Judge, sitting in Dungannon and Craigavon. Prior to that I was primarily in the public service. I am independent of the Commission, and my role is to chair this meeting in line with the legislation, and I am not required to subsequently make any recommendations to the Commission relating to the proposals.

You’ll see that today we have members of the Secretariat at the rear. Also beside me is the Secretary to the Commission, Ms Heather McKinley. We have our AV team who are managing the technical side of the hearing and they are situated to my right as well.

The Parliamentary Constituencies Act (as amended) sets out a number of duties relating to my role – but in particular, it notes that it is for the Chair to determine the procedure that is to govern the hearing and ensure its effective operation, in line with the legislation.

The Act requires the Commission to hold a number of public hearings - this is the third and final during the secondary consultation period. The relevant legislation states that that ‘the public hearings in Northern Ireland shall be concerned with proposals for Northern Ireland, and shall between them cover the whole of Northern Ireland.’ Public hearings are therefore intended to provide an opportunity to make representations about any of the Commission’s initial proposals, and to present or comment on any alternative proposals.

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It is important to note that representations about any or all proposed constituencies can be made at any of the three public hearings in Northern Ireland that have been scheduled as part of the 2023 Boundary Review. You may therefore attend any of the public hearings and make a representation about any constituency in Northern Ireland.

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Written representations must be received by the Commission by the close of the secondary consultation period on 23rd March – details about how to submit your representation are available on the Commission’s website, or please do speak to any of the Secretariat staff here today. The Commission will take both written representations, and those made at the public hearings, into account as it moves through the Review process.

The legislation also requires that the hearing should begin with an explanation of the proposals about the hearing is concerned. I would now ask the Secretary to the Boundary Commission, Ms Heather McKinley, to make a brief presentation of the Boundary Commission’s Initial Proposals.

**Heather McKinley (Secretary to the Boundary Commission):**

Thank you, Chair. As we have heard, the Parliamentary Constituencies Act (as amended) requires that each public hearing should begin with an explanation of the proposals about which the hearing is concerned. So I’ll briefly run through those now.

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So this is an explanation of the proposals published by the Commission at the initial consultation stage. The Commission welcomed the representations it received relating to those proposals, and as we’ve heard, is now partway through the secondary consultation period during which, of course, further reps can be submitted, both via these public hearings and also in writing. Thank you, Chair.

**District Judge Michael Ranaghan (Chair of the Public Hearing):**

Thank you, Heather. As you are aware, these hearings can be conducted both in an in-person representation or indeed, by video link. I just want to check at this stage, has anyone joined by video link today? Thank you.

You’ll be aware that the hearing today is across three sessions. We’ve had the initial session from 11am to 1pm, and this session runs from 2pm to 4pm, depending on the number of representations made. And we then have a final session which will commence at 5pm and then end at 7pm. I can, if necessary, vary that timetable and I will take into account the attendance today and indeed, any demand for opportunities to speak. I may adjourn any of those sessions early if appropriate, or consider allowing it to run on to ensure all those who wish to speak have an opportunity to do so.

After the end of the secondary consultation period, the Act requires the Commission to publish the record of each public hearing, obviously to include this one. Therefore, all contributions to the hearing (both in-person and virtual) will be recorded, and to ensure accuracy, participants may be asked to repeat what they have said. The transcript will include the name of the speaker and organisation represented (if any).

I will not be able to hear representations about issues outside the scope of this hearing, such as the possible impact of the Commission’s proposals on future election results or the Rules contained within the legislation.

If you have not registered to speak in advance, but wish to make a representation, you should indicate this to the Commission staff during the adjournment, who will seek to offer you a suitable speaking slot, and it doesn’t appear that there will be any difficulty in accommodating anybody.

Those making a representation in-person will be called up to the table at the front in turn. Please begin by:

* speaking into the microphone;
* stating your name; and
* whether you are speaking as an individual or on behalf of an organisation, and if so, the name of the organisation.

For people who are attending virtually, there are requirements, but that doesn’t apply to this session because there is nobody coming in virtually for the final session.

If you have requested that the Commission team display any supporting materials on our screens relating to your representation, whether delivered in the room or online, we will cue those up for you at the appropriate time with the assistance of the AV staff, otherwise the Commission’s proposals map will be put back up on the screen as you speak.

At the end of each representation, there will be an opportunity for questions from other attendees to be put to speakers through myself. I would ask anyone wishing to pose a question to raise their hand (either in-person in the room, visibly on camera or using the electronic feature on Zoom) and wait until they have been called upon, before speaking. I would ask everyone to be courteous in their questions, bearing in mind that this is not intended to be a cross-examination. I may also put questions or points for clarification to speakers myself.

During the course of the hearing, please feel free to approach any of the Secretariat staff with any queries that you may have and they’ll be pleased to help you or draw the matter to my attention.

I may adjourn for a short period to finalise the order of speakers. I’ll take into account the number of people we have present today, folks, when I decide whether to do that or not. Any representation should be a duration of no longer than 15 minutes.

Now, Heather, I’ve got to decide whether to adjourn or not - now, there’s only two gentlemen present, I’m not sure if either wish to speak? Gentlemen, any questions about the process to date? You don’t. Nobody else planned as far as we know, Heather? No, okay. There’s nobody else here, there is nobody on the link to join us today. At this stage, I will informally adjourn the hearing, I’ll wait for anybody else to join either in-person or indeed, on the link. If anybody else does, I’ll reconvene the hearing but the hearing will formally adjourn then at 4pm. Thank you.

[Hearing adjourned]

**District Judge Michael Ranaghan (Chair of the Public Hearing):**

This is a reconvened session of the afternoon’s session of today’s public hearing. It adjourned at approximately 2.30pm as no one present wished to make any representations, and no one was on the link, or indicated that they would be. In the intervening period, no one has joined the meeting in person or virtually. It is now just after four o’clock and this afternoon session will adjourn.

[Hearing adjourned]

**District Judge Michael Ranaghan (Chair of the Public Hearing):**

It is now just after 5pm. During the first two sessions of this public hearing, I outlined the nature of this hearing today, my role in that hearing, and how written representations can be made at the secondary consultation period. Ms Heather McKinley, Secretary to the Boundary Commission, also gave a presentation on the initial proposals to include an outline of the statutory framework. As I understand it, no further speakers have joined us for this session either in-person - there’s nobody in the room - and nobody online?

On that basis, as with earlier hearings, I’ll adjourn it now. The hearing will be informally adjourned, and will be formally adjourned at 7pm. Should anyone arrive in the meantime, the hearing can recommence.

[Hearing adjourned]

**District Judge Michael Ranaghan (Chair of the Public Hearing):**

It is now just after 7pm, this is a reconvened session - the hearing adjourned at approximately 5.30pm. Since that time, nobody else has attended at the hearing and nobody has attended virtually. There is nobody in the room to ask any questions or make representations, so I now propose to close the hearing. For the record, once the hearing is closed, there is still an opportunity to make written representations to the Boundary Commission and that is until the close of the secondary consultation period on 23rd March. After the end of that period, the Commission will publish the records of the public hearings on its website. The Commission will also publish the written representations received during the secondary consultation period. Detailed information about the third consultation period will be announced at the appropriate time.

Before we formally close the proceedings, I’d like to thank those who have attended today, all the staff from the Boundary Commission, our AV team and finally the staff in the Glenavon Hotel. And this is the hearing formally closed.

***HEARING CLOSED***