[SC – DUP]

Further to the oral representations given by the Democratic Unionist Party during the public hearing of the Secondary Consultation Stage, we wish to submit our written response to publication of submissions to the Provisional Recommendations.

It is clear from the submissions made by others, that they have identified the same core flaw with the Provisional Recommendations that we have, which have resulted in unacceptable changes proposed by the Commission.

That of the proposals for the Strangford and Quoile Constituency and the consequential changes unnecessarily caused to neighbouring constituencies.

It comes as no surprise to the DUP, that the proposals for the Strangford and Quoile Constituency and the South Down Constituency, have generated by far, the most objections during the Provisional Recommendation stage.

As the Commission will be aware, the DUP’s response centred on the unacceptable nature of the proposal for these constituencies and the disruption that these proposals cause.

We warmly welcome the strong endorsement for our proposed changes to the Provisional Recommendations, from across the political and community spectrum, which we believe are much more compliant with Rule 5, retain local resonance and provide a more purposeful geographical fit.

As the core of the DUP’s proposals centred on the Strangford and Quoile Constituency and this has generated the most objections, I wish to begin with this constituency.

No political party has endorsed the proposals by the Boundary Commission for this constituency and the responses from those living in the constituency are overwhelmingly negative.

The commonality in all these responses is the unwarranted and unnecessary decision to attempt to move the Downpatrick area into this constituency, when Saintfield, Kilmore, Ballynahinch and Drumaness have far greater local connections. Their inclusion would be in far greater compliance with Rule 5 and would minimise the movement of electors from their existing constituencies.

IC 007 endorses the DUP proposal to keep Lecale in South Down.

IC 008 shares our deep concerns regarding the proposed changes, highlighting Ballynahinch and Saintfield having strong links to Saintfield and Newtownards.

IC 011 as a resident of Downpatrick totally opposes the inclusion of Downpatrick in Strangford and Quoile.

Councillor Patrick Browne of the Alliance Party, endorses our proposal to include Kilmore and Ballynahinch with Newtownards.

The SDLP has very serious concerns with the proposed inclusion of Downpatrick and the Lecale area in the Strangford and Quoile Constituency.

The UUP highlights that Downpatrick’s identity is more to South Down than north towards Newtownards.

This overwhelming and frank rejection of the proposals for Strangford and Quoile from such a large section of the community and the consequential changes they have caused to South Down and neighbouring constituencies, must be a matter that is addressed in the Revised Recommendations issued by the Commission.

No other constituency in Northern Ireland has received such objections, from such a broad range of responses. This must lead the Commission to the inevitable outcome, that changes at the next stage of the process must begin with Strangford and Quoile.

As highlighted in the DUP response and endorsed by the responses of others, there is a solution that we believe is much more compliant with Rule 5, retains local resonance and provides a more purposeful geographical fit.

As the Commission will be aware from previous exercises, the DUP has always encouraged the full use of the legislative flexibilities afforded to Northern Ireland under the Act to create the most compliant constituencies.

We believe this move by the Commission in other constituencies sets an important precedent which we believe should be built upon in the cases of Strangford and Quoile and South Down constituencies, to ensure special geographical considerations are maximised and disruption to local ties through changes to existing constituencies are minimised.

Outside of the problems cause by the proposals for Strangford and Quoile and South Down and the consequential impact for these proposals upon neighbouring constituencies, just like the DUP, the majority of responses are on the whole, content with the Provisional Recommendations, with a number of localised exceptions.

In the City of Belfast, the UUP, IC-002, Dr Nicholas Whyte, the SDLP and the Alliance Party all generally concur with the DUP and the Commission of the Provisional Recommendation for East Belfast.

In North Belfast, while our concerns remain over the removal of the Shankill Wards and the loss of Newtownabbey Wards to neighbouring constituencies, no response put forward by others at this stage, would overcome the legislative requirements, or improve the proposals made in the Provisional Recommendations of the Commission.

Only the Alliance Party have endorsed the Provisional Recommendations for South Belfast and Mid Down, although their proposals to change South Down and Strangford conflict with the stance they have adopted in relation to this constituency. They approached these constituencies in isolation rather than presenting a complete solution to the Commission.

The common solution to Belfast South as proposed by the DUP is based on moving Saintfield back into its natural home of Strangford.

This view is endorsed by IC015, Councillor Patrick Brown, the SDLP, the UUP and Sinn Fein.

Rather than the Commission engaging in a fundamental rewrite of the proposals for the Belfast seats, which would lead to major disruptions, the solution put forward by the DUP has strong support and minimises disruption.

This proposal would encompass Strangford retaining Saintfield, with Ballymacbrennan moving into South Belfast and Mid Down in its place.

The proposals of West Belfast attract very limited commentary, which we believe is indicative of the sound proposals put forward by the Commission. Our view is endorsed by IC002, the UUP and the SDLP on the whole.

Moving to East Antrim, we welcome the views expressed by IC002 and the Alliance Party’s support, who strongly endorse the proposals for East Antrim.

The counterproposals by the UUP to stretch East Antrim from the edge of Belfast, to Ballycastle are completely unacceptable and would destroy local ties in both East Antrim and North Antrim.

The DUP welcomes the endorsement of IC001 and IC002 for the East Londonderry constituency, as highlighted the inclusion of Eglinton within East Londonderry is entirely reasonable.

None of the counterproposals suggested would be compliant with Rule 5 of the Act, whilst at the same time minimising disruption to existing communities and constituencies.

The responses of IC001, IC014, IC016, and the UUP all share the DUP’s concerns regarding the inclusion of Loughgall in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Though like the DUP, all recognise the Commission is constrained by the available electors in the surrounding constituencies.

AS IC001 highlights, the Foyle constituency is also a fairly sound unit as proposed. As with the counterproposal produced for East Londonderry, those put forward for Foyle, all suffer from the fatal flaw of not being compliant with Rule 5 of the Act, whilst at the same time minimising disruption to existing communities and constituencies.

The SDLP and IC006 shares the DUP’s concern at the inclusion of Aghagallon in the Lagan Valley constituency, as the area has no affiliation with Lisburn, but rather looks towards Lurgan.

We welcome the UUP’s endorsement of our proposal to move Ballymacbrennan into Belfast South.

The limited commentary in opposition to the proposals by the Commission for Mid Ulster, which have been positively endorsed by the DUP and UUP, show the Commission made sound proposals for this constituency.

Notwithstanding our previous remarks regarding Loughgall, we welcome IC-001, IC,002, the SDLP’s and the UUP’s overall endorsement for the proposals for Newry and Armagh.

As IC001 rightly says, changes to North Antrim are somewhat inevitable. Our concerns over the removal of Slemish and the Glenwhirry wards are shared by the SDLP, the UUP and IC001.

The DUP shares the position of IC001, IC002, the UUP and the Alliance Party to support the Provisional Recommendations for the North Down constituency.

The DUP, SDLP UUP, IC002, and IC001 all support the overall proposals for South Antrim proposed by the Commission.

As highlighted above, there is a lack of support for the Provisional Recommendations for South Down, this is as a result of the proposals for Strangford. As endorsed by others, the Gransha Ward should move to Lagan Valley, Kilmore, Drumaness and Ballynahinch should move to Strangford and the Quoile ward should be split at the river to deliver a solution that has overwhelming support.

The DUP and SDLP share the view that the loss of Aghagallon and Magheralin from Upper Bann are not strong proposals and lack local support. As IC006 who is from the area says, there is no sense of affiliation or sense of belonging to Lagan Valley.

The DUP welcomes the endorsement of IC002 for the Provisional Recommendations for West Tyrone. the counterproposals put forward by others, cause a huge amount of unnecessary and avoidable disruption which would be in breach of Rule 5 of the Act.

Before I conclude Mr Chairman, I believe it is important that I highlighted the completely unacceptable nature of the proposals put forward by Sinn Fein, which stand alone, as the only proposals to be advancing a three seat model for Belfast.

This complete redraw of the Provisional Recommendations would cause an untold amount of change, disruption and movement of electors to entirely new constituencies.

Rule 5 is enshrined in law for a very clear reason and these proposals, which have no support amongst any of the responses, would be in clear breach of that Rule.

The work of previous Commissions, rejected the idea of a three seat Belfast model, even in circumstances where 17 seats would be in place.

Any attempt to reverse that precedent, would be opposed strongly.

To conclude, it is clear from the submissions that they have identified the same core flaw with the Provisional Recommendations as we have, that of the proposals for the Strangford and Quoile and South Down constituencies and the consequential changes unnecessarily caused to neighbouring constituencies.

The DUP believes if the major changes are focused in this area, the Commission will be able to produce Revised Recommendations that will meet with the approval of the overwhelming majority of the parties and the people of Northern Ireland.

The DUP wishes to thank the Commission for their work to date and encourages them to make these focused changes, using the full legislative flexibilities afforded to them in order to deliver the best and most compliant Revised Recommendations