[TC – Democratic Unionist Party]

***Democratic Unionist Party response to 2023 Review Revised Proposals***

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Revised Proposals published by the Commission.

From the outset we wish to acknowledge the work of the Commission to date and for taking onboard a number of counterproposals submitted at the Secondary Consultation Stage.

It is clear the Commission in a number of constituencies gave weight to the legislative requirement placed upon them, to maintain special geographical considerations, to respect existing boundaries and to avoid disruption to local ties.

However, we wish to put forward a number of modest amendments to the Revised Proposals.

As with our previous submissions at all stages of this process, these changes would produce proposals that are more compliant with the legislative framework set out in the Act and ensure that Rule 5 was more closely followed.

**Foyle**

The DUP oppose the changes made by the Commission in their Revised Proposals.

As IC001 noted in their response to the Initial Proposals, the Foyle constituency was a sound unit as proposed.

As we previously articulated to the Commission, the counterproposals put forward for Foyle, all suffered from the fatal flaw of not being compliant with Rule 5 of the Act, whilst at the same time failed to minimise disruption to existing communities and constituencies.

The rationale set out by the Commission for their Revised Proposals for Foyle, is in our view very weak.

The vast majority of people in the rural villages and townlands in Slievekirk have much more in common with their near neighbours in Newbuildings and Prehen (Foyle) than they do with people in Strabane or Omagh (West Tyrone).

Their sporting, social and cultural links are predominantly with their more immediate neighbours, the villages of Magheramason in West Tyrone and Newbuildings in Foyle are less than 2 miles apart along the main A5 road.

Rule 5 is clear on this issue and requires the Commission to ensure their proposals do not break or unduly disrupt local ties. The rationale used to contravene this rule, is not in our view a strong one. The initial proposals produced by the Commission were not in breach of Rule 2 and as such, should be maintained.

The DUP supports a return to the Initial Proposals by the Commission to include the ward of Slievekirk in Foyle.

**East Belfast**

As was apparent from our first and second submission, we broadly accept that the constraints on the Boundary Commission and the requirement for balanced constituencies across Northern Ireland lead to the removal of the Garnerville ward, with the overall number of electors required being gained toward areas that naturally and historically rest within the Belfast South Constituency.

That does not however diminish the radical encroachment of North Down toward the Belmont and Stormont wards of Belfast East when Garnerville is removed. On the other side of the constituency, the removal of the current and extant split wards has caused some consternation.

The Hillfoot ward is split currently and we would ask the Commission to consider the merits of retaining that division. To seek to place the entirety of the Hillfoot Ward in Belfast East spreads the constituency into the well-established and recognised Belfast South territory.

The current boundary at the Hillfoot Ward between East Belfast and South Belfast has been in place since 2008 and has been used for seven separate elections. That split ward is well established and respected locally.

To maintain that geographical division, we recognise that a deficit in the number of electors would arise. Accordingly, we would suggest placing the Moneyreagh ward (currently in Strangford) within Belfast East rather than the proposed transfer to Belfast South.

The Commission will be aware that the Castlereagh East DEA of Lisburn City and Castlereagh Council predominantly falls within Belfast East. The inclusion of Moneyreagh would complete the entirety of that DEA within the constituency and ensure consistency of representation across the three representative tiers of Government.

For accuracy, the Hillfoot Ward is comprised of 3602 electors. To maintain the current split, approximately 1200 electors would transfer from the Belfast South total to Belfast East. A switch with Moneyreagh, comprised of 2290 electors would mean approximately 69,964 for Belfast East and 70,774 for Belfast South.

These proposals are fully compliant with Rule 2, but more importantly they ensure that the test of Rule 5 is fully met.

Additionally, an argument could be made for retaining the split within the Cregagh Ward. The areas currently in Belfast South, including Wynchurch to Galwally are ingrained within Belfast South. We would not oppose any suggestion that the current split should be maintained.

**Lagan Valley**

The Commission will be aware of our consistent proposals for Lagan Valley.

We note that the Commission has retained its proposal to transfer the part of the Gransha ward currently within the Lagan Valley constituency to South Down.

This includes the villages of Kinallen and Waringsford. There are strong local ties between the area and the nearby towns of Dromore and Dromara, both within Lagan Valley.

The social and educational links between Kinallen and Waringsford are with these two towns.

The majority of the population of the ward looks primarily towards Dromore and Dromara for access to local shopping and public services such as GP surgeries and to Dromore and Lisburn for post-primary education. Much of the ward is divided from South Down by the physical presence of the Dromara Hills and the River Lagan itself flows through the section currently within Lagan Valley.

Gransha is part of the Lagan River DEA and it is physically linked to several other Lagan Valley wards and is part of a natural grouping of wards around the town of Dromore.

Taking these factors into account and in recognition of the well-established current split of the Gransha Ward, we propose the current split of the Gransha Ward between Lagan Valley and South Down which has been used since the 2010 General Election is maintained. This would respect local ties and avoid unnecessary disruption by the Commission.

If the Commission feels unable to split the Ward along the current Parliamentary Boundary, then as per our initial response, we propose the move of the Gransha Ward from South Down to Lagan Valley and in turn, Strangford would gain Ballymacbrennan from Lagan Valley.

In these three constituencies, these modest changes would allow for the production of Final Proposals by the Commission that are much that are more compliant with the legislative framework set out in the Act and ensure that Rule 5 was more closely followed.

We again thank the Commission for their work and look forward to continued engagement.