

Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

Response to: Review of Northern Ireland Local Government Boundaries Revised Recommendations Report

To:
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General

The Alliance Party welcomes the opportunity to respond to the revised recommendations from the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

Alliance continues to oppose the seven-Council model for Local Government. Its response to this consultation on boundaries is made without prejudice to that view.

Alliance does recognise that some positive amendments have been made to the detail of internal ward boundaries, in particular in response to suggestions made by the Alliance Party. However, there are still problems of boundaries not reflecting natural communities, including the unnecessary division of townlands.

Alliance would express concern that changes have only really been considered where objectors have tabled specific counter-proposals. Where objectors have identified more general problems, but not made specific counter-proposals, these problems have remained unaddressed. Measures to address this problem should be considered in advance of any future processes.

Alliance would express disappointment that the potential problems for creating future District Electoral Areas was not a material concern in how wards were devised. While the creation of DEAs is to be left to a future process, it is difficult to entirely separate the two from each other.

In particular, Alliance would have particular concern over the absence of any significant alterations to the proposed boundaries of the seven Super-Councils. The only alterations have been a small alteration in the Hillfoot area of Belfast/Castlereagh, and the change relating to Mussenden Temple.

Two particular problems remain:

Between Belfast & East Council

The boundary here is not logical. Either the Knock dual-carriageway or the Castlereagh buildline around Belfast should act as the boundary. It is Alliance's view

that the latter would be simpler to execute, and would carry less anomalies. Fundamentally, it makes more sense to service these areas from Belfast.

At present, the most westerly wards from the current Castlereagh BC are to be retained in East while other wards are to be transferred into Belfast. Alliance would reiterate its proposal to transfer the proposed Beechill, Four Winds and Newtownbreda wards into Belfast. The people living in these areas regard themselves as living in Belfast. Four Winds ward would also need to be extended as part of this process to take in the current development line. This would allow the boundary between Newtownbreda and Four Winds to be readjusted to better reflect natural boundaries rather than splitting a housing development. Alliance notes that the Assistant Commissioner for the East inquiry did recommend making similar modifications to the boundary, while the Assistant Commissioner for the Belfast inquiry did not do so.

Also, the boundary around the Old Hollywood Road area should be reconsidered. Alliance would advocate that the current boundary between Belfast and North Down should be retained with respect to current houses on the Old Hollywood Road that are part of North Down and the Cedar Grove development. In short, those houses accessed from the Old Hollywood Road currently in North Down should be in the East Council, and those houses accessed from the Knocknagoney Road that are currently in North Down should be in Belfast. This applies only to a couple of houses at most in the Richmond development. The former people would regard themselves as part of Hollywood and should remain with the rest of that town in one Council area.

Between East & South Council

Alliance notes that there was strong support for uniting the Mourne area within one Council. The Commissioner has rejected this on the grounds that the proposed regional park is only at consultation stage, and is disputed locally. However, Alliance's comments on the desirability of placing the Mourne area under one Council are independent of the creation of a formal regional park.

Alliance maintains that the better option is to transfer the proposed Donard, Newcastle, Murlough and Castlewellan wards into 'South' Council. If the Mourne area is to be promoted as a tourist destination, it makes sense for only one council to have jurisdiction over it. Newcastle and the Mourne area are fundamentally linked. The Magilligan/Causeway Coast/Glens tourist area will inevitably have to extend across two Councils. However, there is no need to divide the Mourne area, and there is an opportunity to unite it within the South Council. To place all of the Mourne area into the East Council would create a very unwieldy Council area, which would be difficult to service. The distance from Bangor to Warrenpoint would be much greater than from Loughgall to Waterpoint. It would be much more logical to service all of the Mourne area from Newry.

*Dr Stephen Farry MLA
General Secretary*