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Ards & North Down District Council Boundaries

Report by Assistant Local Government
Boundary Commissioner

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank those who attended the public hearing to present their views and to respond to queries from myself and others and to those who made written submissions. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of staff at the Office of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and at Land & Property Services with the preparation of this report.

1 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 On 17th September 2008, the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner published his Provisional Recommendations for the boundaries and names of the eleven new local government districts for Northern Ireland. This was followed by an eight week statutory consultation period during which written representations were made to the Commissioner's office. A programme of public hearings was then held in each of the eleven Council areas, each chaired by an Assistant Local Government Boundary Commissioner.
- 1.2 In October 2008, I was appointed as an Assistant Local Government Boundary Commissioner by the Minister for the Environment. I was invited by the Commissioner to conduct a public hearing into the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations for the proposed Ards & North Down District.

Written representations and public hearing

- 1.3 Following my appointment I was provided with a copy of all written representations to the Commissioner in respect of Ards & North Down District. Copies of all the representations can be viewed on the website of the Local Government Boundary Commissioner (LGBC) at www.lgbc-ni.org. The following organisations and individuals made written representations to the Commission in respect of Ards & North Down District:
 - Alliance Party (Alliance)
 - Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
 - Green Party
 - Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)
 - Ards Borough Council
 - North Down Borough Council
 - Mr Robert Gardiner
 - Ms Margaret Hoben
 - Mr Marcus G Potts

- 1.4 In addition, 19 representations of a general nature which were not specific to Ards and North Down district were received and considered. A full list of written submissions is at Appendix A.
- 1.5 The Public Hearing took place on Thursday 27th November in the Clandeboye Lodge Hotel in Bangor. It was attended by representatives of North Down Borough Council and of the Alliance Party, the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party, each of whom made oral submissions to the hearing. A copy of the transcript of the hearing is available on the LGBC website.

Content of this report

- 1.6 This Report sets out the written and oral views of interested parties in the Provisional Recommendations for the proposed Ards & North Down District and the conclusions that I have drawn from these representations. These representations relate to the Council boundary, the Council name and several of the ward boundaries and ward names.
- 1.7 The report also contains my recommendations for changes to the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations for Ards & North Down District. In drawing my conclusions and making my recommendations, I have taken account of the legislative framework within which the Commissioner is operating.

2 District Council Name and Boundaries

Introduction

- 2.1 In the written submissions and at the public hearing I have heard points raised in relation to both the District name and also in relation to the District boundaries proposed by the Commissioner. I have set out below the points made to me and the rationale for any suggested changes. I have then given my views and made a recommendation accordingly.

District name

- 2.2 North Down Borough Council made the point in their written submission, and again in their oral representation to the public hearing, that historically and traditionally when the two local authorities have been joined for whatever reason, the combined area is known as North Down & Ards, for example, North Down & Ards Institute of Further & Higher Education, North Down & Ards Area Plan and so on. They argued that this practice should be continued with the name of the new District which should be called 'North Down and Ards District', rather than 'Ards and North Down District', as used in the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations.
- 2.3 This position was supported in the Alliance and Green Party written submissions. The DUP submission expressed acceptance of the name of 'Ards and North Down' used in the provisional Recommendations but acknowledged that there were differences of view in the area as a whole.
- 2.4 At the public hearing, 'Ards and North Down' and 'North Down and Ards' were used interchangeably by a number of the speakers. While North Down Borough Council was strongly in support of the alternative name, I gained the impression that it was not a critical issue for the political parties. It should also be noted that Ards Borough Council made no reference to the name in their submission and the Council did not make an oral submission to the public hearing.
- 2.5 I would recommend that the Commissioner should continue to use 'Ards & North Down District' as the name for the new Council area and that it should be left to the new Council, once elected, to decide if it wishes to change the name.**

District Boundaries

- 2.6 The main issue relating to District boundaries that emerged in the written and oral submissions was the boundary with the Belfast District at Knocknagoney. The Commissioner had proposed in his Provisional Recommendations that a small area at Knocknagoney should transfer from the existing North Down Council area to the new Belfast City Council area.
- 2.7 In their written submission to the Commission, North Down Borough Council argued that the southern boundary of the Loughview Ward where it abuts Belfast City Council area should be extended south to the Knocknagoney Road to take in the housing developments to the north side of this road, including the Cedar Grove development which was formerly in North Down Borough Council area. It was also proposed that the boundary should be extended across the Tillysburn intersection to include the commercial development known as Hollywood Exchange. This view was supported by the Green Party in their written submission.
- 2.8 The rationale for this proposed change was explained by representatives of the Council at the public hearing and is based on a number of factors:
- It was argued that the Cedar Grove development has stronger links with Hollywood town than with Belfast and that residents would historically regard themselves as part of Hollywood
 - The current North Down Council boundary includes Cedar Grove but not the other adjoining developments on the Knocknagoney Road and it was argued that the Knocknagoney Road itself would be a more appropriate boundary than the green area between Hollywood and these developments
 - It was also argued that Hollywood Exchange also has strong links with Hollywood town with collaboration taking place between traders in both areas
 - Hollywood Exchange is also accessed from a roundabout which is located inside the Ards & North Down District
 - Reference was also made to the new Council needing access to sufficient rates revenues which would clearly be enhanced by inclusion of Hollywood Exchange and the Tesco store at the bottom of the Knocknagoney Road, although it was recognised that this is not a relevant consideration for the Commissioner
- 2.9 In order to adjust the ward population for the increase in population created by the extension of the boundary to Knocknagoney Road, the Council proposed to redraw the northern boundary of the Loughview ward along the centre of My Lady's Mile in Hollywood across the Golf Course to its eastern boundary. The area to the north would then transfer to Hollywood ward.

2.10 While the Council promoted this view, the UUP and DUP written submissions express support for the Commissioner's recommendations in relation to this boundary and this position was re-iterated at the public hearing by the DUP representative who highlighted this issue as the "one principal area of difference" between his party and the Council. Alliance did not express a party view on this boundary in their written or oral submissions.

2.11 I visited the area at Knocknagoney to which the North Down Borough Council proposals refer. I also used the Land & Property Services database to estimate the number of voters in the proposed revised Loughview ward. I have reached the following conclusions:

- The green wedge between Holywood town and the housing developments at Knocknagoney form a natural physical boundary.
- While the Cedar Grove development may at one stage have been more closely linked to Holywood, it has been absorbed by the extension of the boundary of Belfast with the other developments on the Knocknagoney Road and in any case community identity is not a relevant criteria for the Commissioner.
- According to the LPS database the proposed changes to Loughview ward would reduce the electorate of that ward from 2,751 to 2,573 which is close to the ward electoral average for the council area of 2,557. However, the changes would result in an increase in the electorate of Holywood ward to over 3,000 which would be around 20% above the ward electoral average.
- The boundary of the Harbour Estate forms a natural physical boundary between Belfast and Ards and North Down and the main basis for inclusion of the Holywood Exchange in Loughview ward appears to be the rates revenue that it would generate for the new Council, which is not a relevant consideration for the Commissioner.

2.12 A written submission from an individual, Mr Robert Gardiner, arguing in favour of county boundaries, expressed the view that it was odd that Moneyreagh and a part of County Down is included in Lisburn City & Castlereagh District, rather than in Ards & North Down. A similar point was made in a submission by another individual, Mr Marcus G Potts. The Ulster Unionist Party submission also points out that Moneyreagh tends to look towards Comber and Newtownards rather than Lisburn (see p 7), but it does not propose any changes to this external border. These representations are based on arguments about local affinity rather than identifiable boundaries. However, this is not a relevant consideration under the rules. Furthermore, the district concerned is, as the name suggests, a merged council of Lisburn City and Castlereagh and not just Lisburn alone.

2.13 I would therefore recommend that the external boundary proposed by the Commissioner in the Provisional Recommendations should remain.

3 Ward Names and Boundaries

Introduction

3.1 There were a number of written and oral submissions made in relation to the proposed ward boundaries in the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations for Ards & North Down District. In reading and listening to these submissions it was clear to me that:

- (a) A considerable amount of discussion had taken place within Councils on the proposed boundaries;
- (b) Substantial research had been undertaken, particularly within North Down Borough Council, of alternative boundaries to some wards and the electoral implications of these changes with a view to maintaining a balance of electors across wards;
- (c) The ward boundary changes proposed by North Down Borough Council for the existing North Down area were all supported by those political parties that made written and oral submissions, namely, Alliance, DUP, UUP and Green Party; and
- (d) The ward boundary changes proposed by Ards Borough Council were also broadly supported by Alliance, DUP and UUP, although there was some slight variation in the details in the various submissions.

3.2 In considering the proposed changes, I was greatly assisted by maps produced by North Down Borough Council as part of their written submission, on which the proposed changes to ward boundaries had been marked.

3.3 As with the District name and boundaries, I have set out below the proposed changes and rationale and then drawn my conclusions and made my recommendations. The analysis is presented under four headings relating to the main groups of changes:

- Whitespots ward and related changes
- Islandhill ward and related changes
- Other miscellaneous boundary changes
- Ward names

Whitespots Ward and related changes

- 3.4 North Down Borough Council and the submissions of the political parties (Alliance, DUP, UUP, Green Party) all made a strong case that there is an imbalance in the size of wards across the new Council area. Wards in the northern part of the new area (the existing North Down Council area) are generally above the ward electoral average while those in the southern part (the existing Ards Council area) are below the average. This means that electors in the northern area are underrepresented compared with electors in the southern area.
- 3.5 It had been estimated that there are twenty proposed new wards within the existing Ards Council area, nineteen in the existing North Down Council area and one – Whitespots - which straddles the two areas. The average electorate in the 19 North Down wards was estimated to be just under 300 above the average for the 20 Ards wards.
- 3.6 All of the written submissions received from both North Down and Ards Borough Councils and from the political parties (Alliance, DUP, UUP and Green Party) also refer to the unsatisfactory and unnatural nature of the Whitespots ward, which includes the housing development at Beechfield, which is part of Bangor, the village of Conlig, which lies between Bangor and Newtownards, and the northern part of Newtownards town around Beverley. This ward also links part of the existing North Down Council area with part of the existing Ards Council area across the existing boundary just south of Conlig.
- 3.7 The North Down Council and these political party submissions then go on to suggest that the lack of electoral equality across the new District can be resolved by eliminating Whitespots ward, redistributing the electorate to neighbouring wards and creating a new ward at Rathgael. Thus the existing Council boundary at Whitespots would be restored and the northern section of this ward including Conlig Village and Beechfields would be incorporated into Clandeboye ward. The North East corner of the existing Clandeboye ward would then be separated to form the basis of a new ward with the proposed name of Rathgael.
- 3.8 This results in a series of consequential changes to the surrounding wards in the Bangor area which have been detailed in the Council's written submission and maps and replicated in the submissions of the Alliance Party and the Democratic Unionist Party. The written submissions of the latter two parties also set out the proposed redistribution of the electorate in the southern part of the Whitespots ward to neighbouring wards of Glen and Cronstown.
- 3.9 At the public hearing these arguments were elaborated on and reinforced with evidence that Conlig Village has a more natural linkage with the Bangor area, than with a part of Newtownards. One example given was that since Conlig Primary School was closed, parents have sent their children almost exclusively to Bloomfield Primary School in Bangor, rather than to

Newtownards. However, it is recognised that community identity is not one of the criteria in the legislative framework for the current review of local government boundaries.

3.10 The Ulster Unionist Party also endorsed the Council proposals for the re-organisation of wards at the public hearing, including the elimination of Whitespots and the redistribution to other wards.

3.11 The detailed consequences of the proposed changes to Whitespots and surrounding wards in the **existing North Down Council area** are set out in the North Down Council written submission and maps. These are designed to achieve electoral equality across the other wards and can be summarised as follows:

- **Clandeboye** ward - the northern part of Whitespots ward transfers into Clandeboye and the north eastern corner of Clandeboye transfers to the proposed new Rathgael ward;
- The proposed **new Rathgael** ward is created from transfers from the section of Clandeboye and also from the south east corner of Silverstream ward;
- **Silverstream** ward - the eastern edge of Rathmore ward and the western corner of Bryansburn ward transfer into Silverstream;
- **Bryansburn** ward - a small portion of Harbour ward transfers into Bryansburn;
- **Rathmore** ward - a portion of the north of Kilcooley ward transfers into Rathmore ward;

3.12 The consequences of the proposed changes to Whitespots and surrounding wards in the **existing Ards Council area** are described in the DUP and Alliance Party submissions, with some small variations between the two submissions. These are less detailed but essentially involve redistribution of the electorate in the southern portion of Whitespots into Glen and possibly Cronstown with consequential changes for Regent ward. The DUP submission also flags a number of consequential changes for Glen ward which would lose electors to Cronstown, Conway Square, Regent and Scrabo, in order to ensure an electoral balance between these wards.

3.13 I have visited the area of the proposed Whitespots ward and looked at the proposed alternative boundaries. I have also used the Land & Property Services database to estimate the revised electorate for each of the affected wards. I have reached the following conclusions:

- The proposal to eliminate Whitespots ward is strongly supported by both existing Councils and by the Alliance, DUP, UUP and Green Party;

- The rationale for the proposed changes is based on achievement of electoral equality across the whole new District and this is in line with the legislative framework for determining ward boundaries;
- The proposed new boundaries represent clear physical or natural boundaries, including the re-introduction of the existing Council boundary at Whitespots;
- The proposed new ward of Rathgael appears to be well defined, within 10% of the ward electoral average (2,358) and appropriately named ;
- The adjusted ward electorates in the proposed revised ward boundaries for Clandeboye, Silverstream, Bryansburn and Rathmore, with minor changes to Harbour and Kilcooley, are within a 10% range of the ward electoral average; and
- The consequences for changes in the wards around Newtownards are less clear with some of the proposed changes resulting in ward electorates outside the 10% range of the ward electoral average.

3.14 I would therefore recommend that the elimination of the Whitespots ward and the consequential changes for surrounding ward boundaries to the north, as outlined in the North Down Borough Council submission, should be implemented.

3.15 I would also recommend that further work should be undertaken to address the consequences of elimination of the Whitespots ward for the neighbouring wards in the Newtownards area to ensure that there is an electoral balance in this area.

Islandhill ward and related changes

3.16 There was also concern expressed in the written submissions by Ards Borough Council and by Alliance, DUP and Ulster Unionist about the proposed Islandhill ward between Newtownards and Comber. This concern related to the inclusion of the West Winds housing development on the southern fringe of Newtownards with a small area on the northern fringes of Comber together with a large rural area in between.

3.17 Both the Alliance Party and the DUP have suggested changes to the boundaries of this ward to address these concerns:

- Alliance have suggested that the area to the south and west of Ballyhenry Road and Ringcreevy Road in Islandhill ward, including the housing developments on the northern fringe of Comber, should be moved into Comber North. In compensation a portion of Regent ward would transfer to Islandhill and the resulting ward should be re-named West Winds;

- The DUP have also suggested transferring the southern portion of Islandhill into Comber North but have suggested an alternative northern boundary for Islandhill boundary. This would include the eastern part of Scrabo ward which is the western edge of Newtownards town. It is suggested that this ward should be renamed Scrabo;
- Under these proposals there would be consequences for Comber South and Comber West wards, and a small numbers of electors from Comber North would transfer into these wards;
- Under the DUP proposals, the Mountain Road/Crawfordsburn Road area of Glen ward would transfer to Scrabo ward and in turn the southern portion of Whitespots would transfer to Glen ward. It is proposed that Scrabo ward should be re-named Bradshaws Brae.

3.18 These proposals were discussed further at the public hearing and during the course of the presentations, the Alliance Party expressed its support for the more detailed proposals by the DUP.

3.19 The rationale for the proposed changes appear to be based partly on community identity and partly on the consequences for the subsequent drawing up of District Electoral Areas (DEAs). It was argued by Ards Borough Council and by the DUP that inclusion of parts of Newtownards with parts of Comber would mean that a future DEA would result in the electorate of one town being in the DEA for the other town. Neither of these is a valid rationale for change in to the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations as they are not relevant criteria.

3.20 I have visited the Islandhill ward and viewed the proposed alternative boundaries as far as I could identify them from the written submissions. I have also examined the implications of the suggested boundary changes for the size of the ward electorates in Islandhill, Comber North, Comber South, Comber West, Scrabo and Glen, using the Land & Property Services database. I have reached the following conclusions:

- The rationale for the proposed boundary changes and re-naming of Islandhill ward, which are based on community identity and the implications for a future DEA boundary, are not relevant to the considerations of the Commission;
- However, there is clearly strong support from both Ards Borough Council and a number of the political parties for changes to the boundaries of this ward;
- The alternative boundaries proposed in the DUP submission do meet the criteria of physical diversity and result in an appropriate mix of rural and urban electorate in the restructured ward;

- The consequential changes for other wards in the Comber result in an acceptable electoral balance but the implications for other wards in the Newtownards area are less clear, as they are mixed with the consequences of the elimination of Whitespots ward to the north of Newtownards; and
- It is not clear to me that the consequential changes on wards in the Newtownards area will result in an appropriate electoral balance although this may be resolved by further delineation of the boundaries.

3.21 I would therefore recommend that the boundary revisions to Islandhill ward proposed in the DUP submission should be implemented by the Commissioner.

3.22 I would also recommend that the consequential changes to other ward boundaries in the Newtownards area should be reviewed as part of the same exercise that reviews the consequences of the elimination of the Whitespots ward referred to above, in order to ensure that an appropriate electoral balance across wards is achieved.

Miscellaneous changes

- 3.23 In addition to the above substantive ward boundary changes, a number of additional smaller changes were proposed in the written and oral submissions of the various parties. The first group of changes relate to the boundaries of wards in the existing North Down Council area and were proposed in the Council's written submission. The proposals were replicated in the written submissions of the Alliance Party and the DUP and endorsed by the Ulster Unionist party at the public hearing.
- 3.24 The rationale for these minor changes was expressed by the Alliance Party and DUP members of the Council delegation at the public hearing as making more use of natural boundaries, such as the arterial routes, the ring road and the railway line and avoiding the splitting up of streets between separate wards, and was described as a general 'tidying up' of the boundaries.
- 3.25 I visited each of the boundaries concerned and considered the implications for the ward electorates on the Land & Property Services database. I have described each of these smaller changes to North Down boundaries in turn below and provided my conclusion on each:
- **Hollywood/Cultra** – here it is proposed by the Council, the Alliance Party and the DUP to move the north eastern corner of Hollywood ward into Cultra and to re-draw the border to include part of Ballymenoch Road including Greensleeves, Carlston Avenue, Lochinver Avenue, Torgrange and Princess Gardens from the corner of Rannoch Road eastwards. Initially, I thought that this change was a consequence of the proposed

extension to the external boundary proposed by North Down Borough Council and the associated re-drawing of the Loughview-Holywood boundary (see para 2.9 above) Holywood has the largest electorate of any of the wards in Ards & North Down under the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations. This proposal would result in a significant transfer of 392 persons from Holywood into Cultra, reducing the electorate of Holywood from 2,765 to 2,373 which is still within 10% of the ward electoral average. The electorate of Cultra ward is correspondingly increased from 2,683 to 3,075 but this is then reduced to 2,980 by the proposed transfer of part of Cultra ward into Clandeboye (see below). The rationale for this particular boundary change appears to be based on a more natural physical boundary but it appears to create a greater imbalance of electors between Holywood and Cultra than the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations.

- **Cultra/Clandeboye** – this proposal appears to be linked to the previous one and involves a westward shift in the boundary so that it runs south from the Ballymoney Road junction on the Belfast Road to Craigtantlet crossroads. It involves the transfer of a large rural area with some 95 electors into Clandeboye ward. This appears to be a stronger boundary than the one proposed by the Commissioner and reduces the electorate of Cultra ward from 2,683 to 2,588 which is close to the ward electoral average of 2,537, but is not necessary if the Holywood/Cultra boundary change is not accepted.
- **Ballyholme/Harbour** – it is proposed to transfer a small area of housing at Baylands Fourth Avenue with 32 electors at the western end of Ballyholme ward to Harbour ward. The rationale is that this is a more natural physical boundary and it has minimal impact on the total electorate of either ward. Harbour ward loses 56 electors as a result of the shift of an area at its eastern end into Bryansburn which is a consequence of the Whitespots rationalisation. The net change to the Harbour electorate is therefore a small reduction from 2,650 to 2,626, well within the 10% range of the ward electoral average.
- **Ballyholme/Broadway** – it is proposed that the southern boundary of Ballyholme should continue along the Donaghadee Road to the roundabout instead of cutting off the corner. This would transfer a small group of 36 electors into Broadway ward. The net effect of the two adjustments to Ballyholme ward is a small reduction from 2,588 to 2,584, close to the ward electoral average of 2,557. This appears to be a logical change with minimal impact.
- **Broadway/Castle** – at the other end of Broadway ward it is proposed to extend the boundary of Castle ward to include the properties on the other side of Castle Street. There are an estimated 34 electors in these properties - this means that there is virtually no net change to Broadway ward electorate which remains just above the ward electoral average at

2,665, while Castle ward increases marginally to 2,650 electors. This also appears to be an acceptable change with a good rationale and minimal impact.

- **Conlig/Bloomfield** – two small changes have been proposed to the Conlig/ Bloomfield boundary, first the transfer of the remaining parts of Balmoral to Bloomfield and secondly the use of the Gransha Road as the natural boundary of Bloomfield which would be achieved by the transfer of Brookvale to Bloomfield. However, there appear to be some inconsistencies between the Council maps and the written submissions. There are an estimated 74 and 98 electors respectively in each of these small areas, so the electorate of Conlig would reduce by 172 from 2,301 to 2,129. Conlig ward was already the smallest ward in the district and these changes would reduce it further in size and by more than 10% below the ward electoral average. It is not clear that this would meet the requirements of electoral balance.
- **Name of Conlig ward** – it is also pointed out by the Council and all the parties that Conlig is not an accurate name for this ward, as it does not contain any part of Conlig. The alternative name suggested is **Ballygrainey** which is the largest townland in the area covered by this ward. This seems a reasonable suggestion.
- **Silverbirch/Bloomfield** – it is proposed to move Bexley Meadow, part of a development off the Gransha Road with 45 electors from Silverbirch into Bloomfield. The rationale for this proposal is not clear to me as it creates a boundary through the middle of a development.
- **Bloomfield/Ballymagee** – it is proposed that Bexley Green and the southern side of Bexley Road from the corner of Gransha Road to the corner of Irvine Park should be transferred from Ballymagee into Bloomfield. This involves an estimated 316 electors but the rationale for these changes is not clear to me as they appear to create unnatural boundaries and one of the areas does not appear to adjoin Bloomfield ward and would more naturally be associated with Silverbirch ward. Furthermore Bloomfield ward electorate would increase from 2,409 to 2,942 which would be more than 10% above the electoral ward average.
- **Ballycrochan/Silverbirch** – the written submissions suggest that an area on the western boundary of Ballycrochan should transfer to Silverbirch and the boundary should be redrawn along the western boundary of Ballycrochan Linear Park, including areas of Pinehill Road, Silverbirch Park and Pinehill Park. However, the accompanying map suggests that the transfer is in the other direction from Silverbirch to Ballycrochan. There are 102 electors in the area identified on the map. The net impact of this change and the transfer from Ballymagee to Silverbirch would be to increase the Silverbirch electorate from 2,684 to 2,855, which would be marginally more than 10% above the ward

electoral average. The rationale for these changes is a more natural physical boundary than that used by in the Provisional Recommendations.

- **Ballycrochan/Ballymagee** - finally, the written submissions include a proposal to transfer a small area on the northern boundary of Ballymagee from Ballycrochan into Ballymagee. This includes the dwellings at Perry Road, Briarwood Road and Briarwood Park. The estimated number of electors in this area is 91 and the net impact of this and other changes to Ballymagee noted above would be to reduce its electorate from 2,536 to 2,311. Ballycrochan ward would remain largely unchanged.

3.26 I would recommend that there is a good rationale for implementing the following minor boundary changes proposed in the North Down Borough Council written submission:

- **Ballyholme/Harbour**
- **Ballyholme/Broadway**
- **Broadway/Castle**
- **Ballycrochan/Silverbirch**
- **Ballycrochan/Ballymagee**

3.27 I would also recommend that the name of Conlig ward should be changed to ‘Ballygrainey’.

3.28 In respect of the boundary changes proposed for Holywood/Cultra and Cultra/Clandeboye, this would produce an imbalance between the electorates in these wards and would result in the electorate of Cultra ward being more than 10% above the ward average and I recommend that the boundaries proposed by the Commissioner should be retained.

3.29 In respect of the remaining proposed changes to ward boundaries at Conlig/Bloomfield, Silverbirch/Bloomfield, and Bloomfield/Ballymagee, I did not receive sufficient detail about the reasons for the proposals and I consider that the existing boundaries in the Commissioner’s Provisional recommendations are more readily identifiable. I therefore recommend no change.

3.30 Some submissions were also made in respect of Loughries and Carrowdore wards in the existing Ards Council area. The concern, which was expressed by the Ulster Unionist Party in its written submission, and was echoed by the Alliance Party at the public hearing, is that Loughries ward is primarily a rural ward but it contains an urban area on the eastern edge of Newtownards town on the border of Cronstown and Gregstown wards and at the other end of the

Loughries ward is part of Millisle village. The other half of Millisle village is include in Carrowdore ward. While Loughries ward contains a mix of urban and rural, like Whitespots and Islandhill wards, it seeks to include two separate urban areas.

3.31 As the Alliance Party spokesperson acknowledged, there is no easy solution to this problem, without a series of consequential problems for wards all the way down the Strangford Peninsula.

3.32 I would recommend that the proposed Loughries ward should remain as outlined in the Provisional Recommendations

Ward names

3.33 A number of general written representations were received by the Commissioner requesting that districts and wards be named in Irish as well as English. The representations were not from residents of the Ards and North Down district nor did they refer specifically to the district. There did not appear, from the written submissions, to be sufficient demand in the area to justify the use of names in both languages and the issue was not raised raised at the public hearing. I am therefore not persuaded that there is sufficient support for the name of the district and its constituent wards to be changed.

3.34 I would recommend that the names of the Ards and North Down district and its constituent wards should be in English as proposed in the Provisional Recommendations.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- 4.1 Overall it was evident to me that a great deal of thought and consideration had been given by the two existing Councils and the political parties to the Provisional Recommendations for the boundaries of Ards & North Down District. I was also impressed by the research that had been undertaken on the ward boundaries and the proposed changes to the boundaries recommended by the Commissioner. I found the maps that were provided by North Down Council, illustrating the proposed changes to wards in their area, particularly helpful.
- 4.2 It was also clear both from the written submissions and the representations at the public hearing that there was a high degree of consensus on the proposed ward boundary changes. The only issue where there was not a unanimous view was that of the external boundary with Belfast at Knocknagoney. While the North Down Council proposed an extension of this boundary, the DUP and the UUP both indicated their support for the external boundary proposed by the Commissioner .
- 4.3 The major ward boundary issues relate to the Whitespots ward and the Islandhill ward and, as indicated above, considerable effort had been put into finding solutions to the problems raised by the current proposals for these wards. I have by and large accepted the proposal to eliminate the Whitespots ward between Bangor and Newtownards and to redistribute the electorate across neighbouring wards with the creation of a new ward at Rathgael. I have also accepted in principle the proposed adjustments to the Islandhill ward between Newtownards and Comber. However, in both cases I have suggested that a little more work is required to clarify the consequences for boundaries of wards around Newtownards to ensure that the boundaries address the requirements of the legislation and that an electoral balance in terms of numbers is achieved.
- 4.4 Finally, a series of very small changes to ward boundaries in the Bangor area were proposed. I have accepted the majority of these.

Summary of recommendations

- 4.5 Finally, for convenience, I have listed my recommendations to the Commissioner below:

District name

- (a) I would recommend that the Commissioner should continue to use 'Ards & North Down District' as the name for the new Council area and that it should be left to the new Council, once elected, to decide if it wishes to change the name.

District boundary

- (b) I would recommend that the external boundary proposed by the Commissioner in the Provisional Recommendations should remain.

Ward names and boundaries

- (c) I would recommend that the elimination of the Whitespots ward and the consequential changes for surrounding ward boundaries to the north, as outlined in the North Down Borough Council submission, should be implemented.
- (d) I would also recommend that further work should be undertaken to address the consequences of elimination of the Whitespots ward for the neighbouring wards in the Newtownards area to ensure that there is an electoral balance in this area.
- (e) I would recommend that the boundary revisions to Islandhill ward proposed in the DUP submission should be implemented by the Commissioner.
- (f) I would also recommend that the consequential changes to other ward boundaries in the Newtownards area should be reviewed as part of the same exercise that reviews the consequences of the elimination of the Whitespots ward referred to above, in order to ensure that an appropriate electoral balance across wards is achieved.
- (g) I would recommend that there is a good rationale for implementing the following minor boundary changes proposed in the North Down Borough Council written submission:
 - Ballyholme/Harbour
 - Ballyholme/Broadway
 - Broadway/Castle
 - Ballycrochan/Silverbirch

- Ballycrochan/Ballymagee

- (h) I would also recommend that the name of Conlig ward should be changed to 'Ballygrainey'.
- (i) In respect of the boundary changes proposed for Holywood/Cultra and Cultra/Clandeboye, this would produce an imbalance between the electorates in these wards and would result in the electorate of Cultra ward being more than 10% above the ward average and I recommend that the boundaries proposed by the Commissioner should be retained.
- (j) In respect of the remaining proposed changes to ward boundaries at Conlig/Bloomfield, Silverbirch/Bloomfield, and Bloomfield/Ballymagee, I did not receive sufficient detail about the reasons for the proposals and I consider that the existing boundaries in the Commissioner's Provisional recommendations are more readily identifiable. I would therefore recommend no change.
- (k) I would recommend that the proposed Loughries ward should remain as outlined in the Provisional Recommendations.
- (l) I would recommend that the names of the Ards and North Down district and its constituent wards should be in English as proposed in the Provisional Recommendations.

Appendix A: Written Submissions

Alliance Party
Ards Borough Council
Campbell, Brendan
Campbell, Máirtín
Caraher, Maria
Carey, Joe
Coleman, Oonagh
Cuan, R G
de Buitléir. J
Democratic Unionist Party
Equality Commission
Gardiner, Robert
Gaston, Máirín
Graham, Bumper, NIPSA
Green Party
Hoben, Margaret
Limavady Borough Council and Magherafelt District Council
MagUidhir, Pól
Mac an tSaoir, Pádraig P
Mac Giolla Fhinnéin, Seámas
McKee, Barry
North Down Borough Council
Ó Cuinneagáin, Pádraig
Ó Muireagáin, Seán
Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Potts, Marcus G
Ulster Unionist Party
Vallely, Siobhan