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Elizabeth House
116 Holywood Road
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BT4 1NY 19 December 2006

Mr Richard Hill Mackenzie CB
Boundaries Commissioner
Office of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner
Forestview
Purdy's Lane
Belfast
BT8 7AR

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20 DEC 2006

Dear Mr McKenzie

The Consumer Council welcomes this opportunity to consult on the Review of Northern Ireland Local Government Boundaries Provisional Recommendations Report.

The Consumer Council acknowledges the Commission's regard for the statutory rules as set out in Part III of Schedule I to the Local Government (Boundaries) (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

In the Consumer Council's response to the Review of Public Administration (RPA) Consultation in September 2005 we stated our support for a reduction in the number of local councils in Northern Ireland to seven, believing that this reduction would provide the necessary economies of scale to deliver the cost-effective, efficient, accessible and accountable services which are important to consumers. We also stated that it would ensure a stronger local voice and a greater opportunity to enhance and develop innovative services to meet the needs of its population.

Although there have been comments that the seven Council plan will lead to a loss of local identity, RPA research has indicated that there is not a strong sense of belonging to a local council area and that people have a closer affinity to their neighbourhood or village. Almost half of all interviewed (48%) stated that quality of service is more important than the size of the council area. In qualitative research, participants tended to identify with smaller geographical units such as their immediate neighbourhood or village, a town or city. It was elected representatives who tended mainly to identify most with their respective electoral wards.

The Consumer Council's own research shows that people consider any prospective changes to local government as an opportunity to improve and



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streamline the existing structures. They feel that this may encourage local government and councillors to focus on achieving better outcomes for local communities. There is a hope that this restructuring will provide more uniformity across local government areas, greater accountability and more locally focused service provision based on local knowledge and decision-making. A copy of the research is enclosed for you information.

However, consumers have also voiced concerns over the possible negative effects that the reduction in the number of local councils may mean. There are fears that there will be a loss of adequate representation or that rural areas will be neglected or too far removed from local council headquarters to have meaningful engagement with local service providers. Therefore, there is a need to ensure fair and equitable governance arrangements and to build in safeguards to address these concerns, real or perceived, and inform people openly and honestly about impacts of decisions taken.

Yours sincerely



ELEANOR GILL
Chief Executive

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