

**Local Government Boundaries Commissioner  
for Northern Ireland**

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Transcript begins on following page.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Good Morning. First of all before I say anything, we have to my left a gentleman who is recording these proceedings and I am under duty to make you all aware that everything said here is being recorded. My name is Mark Orr and I now open the public hearing into this proposed Local Government District. I have been appointed by the Department of the Environment to conduct the hearing. I am independent of the Local Boundaries Commissioner Mr McKenzie and my job is just to listen to and consider all the evidence put forward and to make a report to the Commissioner within four weeks. The evidence comprises what I will hear today plus all of the written objections which have been lodged up to six o'clock yesterday evening. We have two days available ten am to twelve-thirty and one-thirty to four pm. If we have to adjourn at any time we will. We may be able to conclude today and I hope we can to save public expense. You have over here copies of the maps and a copy of the procedure guide and you're welcome to take them. Copies of the written representations except those received yesterday have also been made available on the website. All 11 maps I think are on display somewhere. The purpose of this hearing is simply to consider the oral representations, you can add to any written objections or any written submissions which have been made. You can take it that I have read all of them and have them on file here. Can I ask you not to repeat anything that is already in your written submissions? If you want to emphasise a particular point or give particular importance to one particular point please feel free to do so. There are a number of issues outside the scope of this hearing. I have no jurisdiction in relation to the number of councils, the grouping of councils, the location of headquarters, financial consequences, District Electoral Areas and the city or borough status of the new councils. Anybody here who wishes to speak I think has spoken already to the administrative staff and entered their name. As with planning enquires there is a tradition and it seems to be long established and accepted that the priority list is the Members of Parliament, Assembly Members, local councillors, council officials, representative groups and organisations and individual members of the public and I propose to adhere to that order. As far as procedure is concerned, if I can ask each person to come up to the microphone and start by stating their name and for whom they are speaking whether it's a person in a representative capacity. If you have already made a written submission that is fine, if you want to hand in another written submission today there is no problem with that either obviously

no decision will be made today on any matter. When you have finished your submission I can ask you questions, other people here can ask you questions through me if you have no objection to that. Trying to keep this as informal as possible, there are only other two matters that I want to raise; first of all, under the local government legislation and again according to acceptable practice I have the right to make site visits. I can go out and look independently at various sites or various areas in the proposed district. The second thing is we have to be conscious in these days of health and safety. Gail Downey on my right from the Commissioner's office is just going to say a few words about safety and emergency and then after that what we propose to do is just adjourn for a few moments to get the order of speakers. We have a number of people who I am told are on their way who have indicated they wish to speak but as I said I propose to adhere to the normal order of MPs, MLAs, Councillors and down the list in the normal fashion. So I will hand over to Gail just for a moment.

[Housekeeping]

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

The recommendation I have here is to adjourn for 15 minutes. I do not think it will take anything like that. We are just going to adjourn for a few moments to agree the order of speakers and then we will get started.

ADJOURNMENT

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Apologies again, Ladies and gentlemen, I propose to start now and in accordance with the normal practice in these things, if there is an MP present the MP goes first and I see that Mr Campbell is here, so if I could invite Mr Campbell to come up and make a submission.

**Gregory  
Campbell**

Okay, thank you very much, Mr Orr. I appreciate going first. I think I have about five months of government work to make up for.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

I am sure everybody knows who you are, but just for the record if you would identify yourself.

Gregory Campbell, leader of the Londonderry DUP. We have given a written submission which goes into a series of issues. The one issue that I wanted to deal with today is one that we have alluded to in the written submission and it is the name of the new council. As I think the boundary commission, and just about everyone else in Northern Ireland knows, names have quite a symbolic significance here and unfortunately the single most contentious and controversial issue to arise in local government in the past 25 years in this area was the council name change. That occurred in 1984 and it was the culmination of a series of attempts by some councillors to get the name changed. I am not going to go into the detail of what happened there, as it is a matter of public record. This issue became so contentious, so controversial, that the Unionist councillors left the council for two years. Mass protests were held about the name change, both to the Guildhall and to Stormont. The direct rule minister, Mr Chris Patten, was the government minister who took the decision and he was lobbied intensely regarding the name. I suppose a simplistic way of looking at it was that the Nationalist community preferred Derry and the Unionist community preferred Londonderry. From our perspective, we put forward the view that the combined name if you like, the London expressing the British and the Derry expressing the Irish, was the preferred choice and if people were about a shared future then that is what they should be adopting. That is water under the bridge; 1984 came and went. The controversy still continues with us. The result of the 1984 name change was that the intercommunity relationships in the city deteriorated and the city council faced demands for a separate council because of the name change issue. Over a period of time they diminished those demands but to this day, the city council still carries, in the recruitment advertisement that it has at all levels within the council, the strap line that the council would particularly welcome applications from the Protestant community. Now the reason they do that is because, in consultation with the equality commission, it was ascertained that there was a significant under-representation from the Protestant community in employment within the city council. That came about, not exclusively, but to a significant degree, as a result of the name change. Yet the council still has to carry the strap line on its advertising, indicating that this legacy continues. Setting aside the political issues, it is our view that it is absolutely a prerequisite to the commencement of the new council boundaries that there is a degree of satisfaction and contentedness amongst the local population regarding the council's name. It follows then, from what I have said that if the

name was to be as contained in the draft name, which would be Derry City and Strabane Council, that the legacy of mistrust, disadvantage and alienation which has existed is still there. This has been well documented, not just by Unionists but by the community and voluntary sector in Londonderry as well, in various reports which they have published. If the name that caused the problem is not changed, then the underlying problems that result from the name will continue. So that brings us then to the proposition of what should replace it. Our view is that the Royal Charter names are used in every other name of a council, so we find it somewhat strange that in one case and in one case only the Royal Charter name is not used. Our preferred choice would be Londonderry and Strabane District Council. If there are attempts being made to try and arrive at a conclusion that would be less unacceptable to each side, if not more acceptable to both, then there are a number of variations and we have outlined them both publically and privately. We could have a Foyle Valley Council or a North West Regional Council. Neither of those names would cause offence or would result in either Catholics or Protestants or any other group having to be particularly identified in recruitment advertisements by the local council to try and ensure that their numbers are commensurate with the wider community. It is absolutely crucial to getting a new council off to a start that will give it a reasonable expectation of a fair wind from all sections of the community. The name is not just divisive because the DUP or the Unionist community are saying so, it is divisive because of the facts that are before us, as I have outlined, over a quarter of a century and show no sign of changing. This is an opportunity for a fresh start in terms of the name, to give people across the community the hope and expectation that the bad old days are gone and there is a fresh start.

**Assistant**

**Commissioner**

Thank you, Mr Campbell. I note on page 13 of the submission by the DUP it says that the party is content with the proposed external boundaries of the Council. Is that still the party position?

**Gregory**

**Campbell**

Yes.

**Assistant**

**Commissioner**

I have no questions for Mr Campbell. Does anyone here wish to ask him any questions subject to my approval? Mrs Nelis? Maybe you would come up to the microphone.

**Mary Nelis** My name is Mary Neillis. I am representing Sein Fein here today. Can I ask Mr Campbell to verify that Derry City Council re-enacted a resolution last year to change the name and that that particular matter is ongoing at the moment?

**Gregory Campbell** Mr Orr, I think what Mrs Nelis is referring to is the city council's pursuing of the issue of the name of the city, as opposed to the council. That does not assist the Unionist community; if the council wish to proceed down the route of not only changing the council name, but also changing the city name, that merely worsens the problem. As I understand, this was the resolution that was passed at the council last year. As I think you will see, Mr Orr, in our written submission we referred to Lord Justice Weatherup's ruling on the name change.

**Assistant Commissioner** Page 12.

**Gregory Campbell:** Yes, on the 25<sup>th</sup> January he ruled that the official name of the city remains Londonderry.

**Assistant Commissioner** Any other questions, Mrs Nelis?

**Mary Nelis** Yes. It seems to me that the Commission's proposal to name the new council Derry and Strabane District Council would eminently reflect the geographical features of both the 40 electoral wards contained in the new council area. To pursue any other name, especially a name such as the North West Regional Council, as has been proposed by the DUP, is not only geographically incorrect, given that Donegal is definitely not included, but it is also a very bland geographical term. I think that we have to be extraordinarily careful, even aside the politics of it, that in naming any new council we must identify a proper sense of place and belonging for all the people of the new council.

**Assistant Commissioner** Mrs Nelis, before Mr Campbell answers that ...

**Mary Nelis** I would like Mr Campbell to respond to that.

**Assistant Commissioner** I have 27 years in legal practice for my sins and in the early years I was always getting told off for making statements and not asking questions; is there a question in there?

**Mary Nelis** Does Councillor Campbell agree with me that the name North West Regional Council is geographically incorrect, and that to pursue such a name would diminish the sense of belonging and the sense of place that I believe is so important in this particular new council?

**Assistant Commissioner** That is a question alright. Mr Campbell?

**Mary Nelis** Of course, it is geographically incorrect because it does not include Donegal.

**Assistant Commissioner** I understand.

**Gregory Campbell** Okay, Mr Orr, yes I am happy to respond to the question. If we look at the maps you have very kindly provided. I think if we are looking at the context of Northern Ireland, it is eminently correct to describe Londonderry and Strabane as the North West. You cannot get any further north or further west than the north-west which includes Strabane and Londonderry. I do agree with Mrs Nelis in terms of the issue, that the name should accurately reflect the area. If it were to very accurately reflect the area, it would be Londonderry and Strabane because those are the two officially approved Lord Justice Weatherup pronounced upon names of the area.

**Assistant Commissioner** Any further questions Mrs Nelis?

**Mary Nelis** No, thank you.

**Assistant Commissioner** Thank you. Does anyone else have any questions for Mr Campbell? Unless you have anything further to say in conclusion Mr Campbell, thank you for coming.

**Gregory Campbell** Thank you very much for your kindness.

**Assistant Commissioner** We have three councillors who all rank equally who have indicated an intention to speak. We will proceed in the order in which they indicated their intention; Councillor Hussey, Councillor Begley and Councillor Durkan. Councillor Durkan is not here. By agreement with Councillor Begley, I now invite

Councillor Hussey to speak. Councillor Hussey, can I ask you just for the record for the transcript if you could just formally introduce yourself?

**Derek Hussey** Thank you, Mr Orr. My name is Derek Hussey, and I am an Ulster Unionist councillor on Strabane District Council representing the Derg electoral area. I am speaking on behalf of the West Tyrone Constituency Association of the party and also in my capacity as a Derg area elected councillor. I took on board, Mr Orr, your opening remarks about not repeating but as you know, the party have made an overall response and reserved the right then for each constituency to respond at the various hearings that are being held. The West Tyrone Constituency Association of our party, in line with the stated policy of the Ulster Unionist Party, believes that the ideal model for local government in Northern Ireland would have been created by the establishment of a 15 council model. I would want to quote from the submission, with your permission, Mr Orr?

**Assistant Commissioner** Yes.

**Derek Hussey** The Ulster Unionist Party supports option three, i.e. a 15 council model based on Parliamentary boundaries option 15a. We believe that the basic building blocks should be those developed independently by the Parliamentary Boundaries Commission, thus ensuring proportionality of electorate and citizens combined with a single representative structure that will enhance the accountability of all services. This model would also reduce the confusion on the part of the electorate and reduce conflicts of interest between MLAs and MPs in certain areas. Equally the Ulster Unionist Party supports the idea of coterminosity of services either in discreet units or by combination of units as appropriate. We would now wish to examine the proposed council structure for Omagh and Strabane District Councils, which are the two council areas within our own particular constituency area. Based on our existing party policy, we as a constituency association firmly believe that the best interests of Omagh and Strabane would have been served by the creation of a West Tyrone District Council incorporating the existing Omagh and Strabane Council areas. That would have been our preferred option. Reviewing the proposals as they stand in relation to the merger of Fermanagh and Omagh Councils and Derry City and Strabane District Councils, we can see taking a ward electoral average in the proposed Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area to consist of 1860 voters and a ward electoral average in the Derry city and Strabane District Council areas to

be 2314. Immediately identifiable is a differential of 454 electors per ward. The Commission remit as stated in point two, four of the statutory rules is, and I quote "As far as is reasonably practicable having regard to the requirement of Paragraph 17 to be substantially the same with regard to voter representation in each of the wards." Under statutory rule 2.2 the Commissioner has the discretion to increase or decrease by not more than five wards in each district council area. We would therefore suggest that the following wards be transferred into the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area from the proposed Derry City and Strabane Council area and I should precursor that by saying that our party would endorse the remarks with regard to the naming of the new council already expressed by Mr Campbell. The three areas that we wish the commission to consider would be Castlederg with 2263 voters, Newtownstewart with 2177 voters and Glenderg with 2330 voters a total of 6770 voters. If these wards were re-designated into four wards with an average of 1690 voters per ward, a 44 member council could be created for Fermanagh and Omagh District Council areas with an equal balance of representatives from Tyrone and Fermanagh. This would allow for the natural movement of electors within the area. There is a natural affiliation for the residents of these specific areas towards Omagh in respect of work, education, social and recreational activities. I noticed in Mrs Nelis's contribution she talked about the natural affinity of people and where they naturally orientate to and I would want to exemplify that in several ways. The Presbyterian Church, for example, has recently indicated that these areas will be part of the Omagh Presbytery as of March 2009, moving from the present Derry and Strabane presbytery. That religious indicator is also a social indicator of the allegiance that these areas show towards Omagh, the county town of Tyrone. The local papers read in the above areas are the Omagh-based Ulster Herald and Tyrone Constitution, rather than the Strabane Weekly news and the Strabane Chronicle. This is evidence of the news and social advertising the residents of the area wish to receive. All association football clubs in the area are affiliated to the South West Regional Association that is the Fermanagh and Western Football Association. This is evidence of sporting identity to the southwest, rather than the northwest. On the agricultural front, the main marts attended by our local farmers are those of Omagh and Enniskillen. Many in the area believe that the rural nature of the present Derg electoral area can best be reflected within the southwest rather than an urban dominated Foyle amalgamation. Within second level education, the vast majority of those from the current Derg electoral area not attending the excellent secondary schools in Castlederg

attend second level schools in Omagh, both in the controlled and maintained sector. Our hospital health care is provided mainly via Tyrone County Hospital in Omagh or the Erne in Enniskillen. Within the bounds of the former Sperrin Lakeland area and indeed the new southwest hospitals provision arrangement is predicated on a critical mass of patients being included from the Derg area. Travel-to-work figures clearly show an economic balance of employment being sought towards the southwest region. The Apprentice Boys Clubs in that area are represented on the general committee of the Apprentice Boys via the south-west amalgamated committee of the Apprentice Boys. So this city-based organisation recognises the natural affinity of people in that Castleberg, Ardstraw, Newtownstewart area towards the southwest. These identity indicators clearly demonstrate to me and to our party that the residents in the wards of Glenderg, Castleberg and Newtownstewart are declaring their affiliation with the southwest rather than the northwest. This movement would reduce the proposed Derry City and Strabane District Council area electorate to 85,823 and would increase the Fermanagh and Omagh Council electorate to 81,184 making it a more sustainable and reasonable sized council for the geographical area that it will have to cover. The transfer of the three wards from the proposed Derry City and Strabane District Council area would enable the creation of a 50 seat council to reflect the status of Londonderry as Northern Ireland's second city. This could create an average ward size in the region of 1700 electors, which would ensure a fair and equitable split for the rural and urban dwellers of the new council area, with a smaller sized ward helping to ensure minority representation on such a new council. The creation of one of the larger councils in geographical terms would also equate to increased membership, to reflect the unique rurality of the proposed region. This would allow for growth in population and reduce the need for further adaptation of the structure in years to come. Thank you, Mr Orr.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

I just have a couple of questions. First of all, you amplified considerably on your party submission which was received by the Commissioner. I wonder could we have a copy of that submission that you made this morning please. Secondly, a very simple question; how many miles is it from Newtownstewart to Omagh and how many miles is it from Newtownstewart to Strabane? Or will I need to measure it? You seem to agree that it is halfway. You read from the rules under which we have to decide where boundaries are to be fixed and which wards go with which council. The three wards

that are in dispute and concerning what you have made express submissions are Castledearg, Newtownstewart and Glenderg, is that right?

**Derek Hussey** That is correct.

**Assistant Commissioner** It says the first thing that I have to do is have district and ward boundaries which are readily identifiable. Now is it your party's submission that, leaving aside which district they should be in, those ward boundaries are identifiable?

**Derek Hussey** The actual ward boundaries?

**Assistant Commissioner** The actual ward boundaries.

**Derek Hussey** We are identifying them in this submission to identify the specific area that they feel should be part of a southwest amalgamation of councils.

**Assistant Commissioner** But you do not seek to alter the boundaries ....

**Derek Hussey** There is a suggestion within our submission that perhaps these could be reoriented into four wards as opposed to three. I realise in our opening remarks you did comment on the viability of that and I realise the regulations within which you operate, but that would be a suggestion. I would certainly hope that the commissioner is there to do a genuine job and that this is a genuine consultation.

**Assistant Commissioner** I take it there is no townland issue here; there is no split of a townland?

**Derek Hussey** There are no townland issues within the boundaries of those three wards as identified on page 77. There would be one small townland issue with regard to the townland of Erganagh.

**Assistant Commissioner** You will need to spell that for me.

**Derek Hussey** Erganagh, yes.

**Assistant Commissioner** Where is that?

**Derek Hussey** It is located in the southwest corner of the proposed Finn ward and there is a community there. The community of Erganagh lies outside the particular boundaries and may be due for consideration to be brought in with either the Castleberg or the Glenderg area, given the close affinity of that hamlet with the town of Castleberg.

**Assistant Commissioner** Maybe you would identify that on a map for us in due course?

**Derek Hussey** Yes, certainly. I can identify it on the map.

**Assistant Commissioner** There is no issue here about the district being severed by the boundary of another district or encompassing the boundary of another district? Rule 17 of the rules, annex to the local government legislation, says that I have to have regard to the size, population and physical diversity of the district and the desirability there should be proper representation of the rural and urban electorate. Take the first one first. I take what you have been saying about the affinity with Omagh and the links to Omagh go to the category of the size, population and physical diversity of the district.

**Derek Hussey** Absolutely.

**Assistant Commissioner** Regarding the proper representation of rural and urban electorate within the district, the only urban area would be the town of Newtown Stewart, would that be right?

**Derek Hussey** The towns of Newtown Stewart and Castleberg.

**Assistant Commissioner** You are saying that because of the affinity with Omagh, proper representation would lead me to conclude that they should be with Fermanagh and Omagh rather than with this proposed council. It is under that category?

**Derek Hussey** That is included or implied within the submission.

**Assistant Commissioner** You have set out your figures. Through that I have to have regard to is that, so far as is reasonably practicable, there should be substantially the same number of electors in each ward and I follow your argument on that. I have no further questions for Councillor Hussey. Does anyone wish to question

him? Would you to come to the front and can I just ask you to formally identify yourself?

**Derek Reaney** Derek Reaney, from West Tyrone DUP.

**Assistant Commissioner** Will you address your question to Councillor Hussey?

**Derek Reaney** I accept that there are concerns within the rural community within Strabane council area about the role that, what might be perceived as an urban council, will have. Does he not think that by moving these three wards into Omagh and Fermanagh, those perceived opinions will even be made worse and that by having these three rural wards we can have a stronger rural voice in the new council here in the northwest?

**Derek Hussey** Thank you very much, Derek, for that question. No, it is our contention that the proposed Foyle amalgamation and you will understand why I describe it that way, will be by its very nature urban-dominated, no matter what happens, even with our three wards in. My contention and the constituency association's contention is that as a rural area we would receive better attention and representation within what is essentially a rural southwest area.

**Derek Reaney** Could I ask one other question? The ward of Glenelley Valley, which I actually live in, comes within 100 yards of the main street of Newtown Stewart. Does he propose to include Glenelley Valley in his recommendations as well?

**Derek Hussey** I sit as a Derg elected councillor, as Mr Reaney well knows. This representation has been agreed by our constituency association. I cannot comment on Glenelley, as I am not an elected representative in that area and could not give issues with regard to that particular electoral area. You will notice that all of my representations and exemplars have been relative to the area that I represent and I have done that deliberately on the basis of my own local knowledge of that area.

**Assistant Commissioner** Have you any further questions, Mr Reaney? Does anyone else any questions for Councillor Hussey? Councillor Hussey, could you identify on the map where the townland of Erganagh is please? If anyone wants to come up and observe Councillor Hussey identify this on the map they are free to do so.

Just for the record, Councillor Hussey has identified Erganagh just to the east of Castledearg and linked it with the community of Spamount and it is on that basis that I am going to make a note and proceed with this inquiry. Thank you Councillor Hussey. Can we have a copy of your submissions?

**Derek Hussey** I would like to add that we will also be making representation at Mahon's Hotel in Irvinestown.

**Assistant Commissioner** For your information, Mahon's Hotel in Irvinestown is the Fermanagh and Omagh public inquiry. Thank you, Councillor Hussey. Councillor Sean Begley from Strabane is here and by agreement with Councillor Hussey I will ask him to address the commission next. Councillor, just for the record and the transcript could you identify yourself before starting your submission.

**Sean Begley** Councillor Sean Begley, from Omagh District Council. This morning I am speaking on behalf of Sinn Fein in West Tyrone and Sinn Fein in Fermanagh.

**Assistant Commissioner** Whenever you are ready, councillor.

**Sean Begley** We do not have a written submission, so I am giving this oral submission.

**Assistant Commissioner** We have a written submission from Derry City and Strabane District, received from an Eric McGinley on the 11<sup>th</sup> November.

**Sean Begley** Yes, that would be right. I will not be elaborating on that submission.

**Assistant Commissioner** I understand.

**Sean Begley** In response to the publication of the provisional recommendations September 2008 for the new Omagh and Fermanagh boundaries and names, I wish to further expand and say that we recognise and accept the decision by the then Minister for Environment, Arlene Foster, on 13 March 2008 on the eleven council model. This includes the decision of the new Omagh and Fermanagh Local Government District, incorporating the former Omagh and Fermanagh District Council areas. We concur with the view of the Minister and the recommendations of the Boundaries Commission that the

former Local Government Districts of Omagh and Fermanagh should be included in full in the new Omagh and Fermanagh district. We recognise that, to meet the needs and challenges of the future, the new districts need a strong coherent and unified core. I will now elaborate on the name of the new council. We recommend that the new council incorporating the existent Omagh and Fermanagh district council areas should be called Omagh and Fermanagh District Council, to fully reflect the position of Omagh as a major service centre of the region in the context of the regional development policy and also Omagh as the county town of County Tyrone. I would like to refer to the written submission that has been put forward to yourselves and Fermanagh District Council, which does not have the support of our councillors on Fermanagh District Council, that the new council be named Fermanagh and South Tyrone. I would just like to elaborate on a number of points there. Firstly, we have a constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone which takes in Dungannon; Dungannon would be in South Tyrone, but Omagh would not be in South Tyrone and over the years would have had more of an affinity with West Tyrone and probably would be known more as west Tyrone. It has a District Electoral Area within the Omagh District Council area of West Tyrone as well and the constituency in which Omagh exists is West Tyrone. Therefore we would contend that the new council name should be Omagh and Fermanagh, emphasising the point of Omagh being a major service centre and the county town of Tyrone. That identity cannot be lost.

I want now to elaborate in terms of the rules governing the boundary recommendations. In considering the rules governing the recommendations of the Commissioner within the local boundaries Northern Ireland Order 2006, we note that only minor changes to boundaries are permissible within the legislation. Schedule four, Part three Paragraph 16 states that as far as possible a district council shall hold (a) a district council shall not be wholly or substantially severed by the boundary of another district and (b) that a district council shall be wholly and substantially encompassed within the boundary of another district. We are aware of the submission from Fermanagh District Council, which officially recommends substantial changes to the boundaries in Omagh District Council and the immediate hinterland of Omagh town to two other proportions of the district council area. These recommendations fall well outside the spirit and legislation governing the scope for amendments which can be made and should be rejected by boundary commission. The District Electoral Area of mid Tyrone has six wards in it; Gortin, Owenkillew and Drumnakilly, Termon, Beragh and Sixmilecross.

The proposal from Fermanagh is that three of these wards, namely Gortin, Owenkillew and Drumnakilly, are put into the new Derry and Strabane District Council and that Termon, Beragh and Sixmilecross are put into the new Mid Ulster council. These wards are on the hinterland of Omagh town. The Boundaries Commission must take cognisance of the strong natural affinity to Omagh and the pathways and catchment populations when making the final decision, particularly in respect of the rural areas. To take this into a sporting context, specifically Gaelic football, the Tyrone County Executive took a decision to build stadia for the county in the Gortin ward, which is on the periphery of Omagh town. If Gortin was put into the new Derry area, that particular ground would find itself within Derry City Council. The people within those six wards have a natural affinity with Omagh; the children go to school, the people do their shopping and have their business there. The town of Carrickmore only lies about ten miles outside Omagh, so really we would rebut the suggestion that these six wards should be split between Derry, Strabane and the new Mid Ulster council.

I also want to speak about the sub-regional position of Omagh and make a statement regarding that. The Omagh District Council area is the largest of the four districts which currently cover County Tyrone, with a population of approximately 160,000 people. Omagh town has a population of approximately 25,000 people and a district population of almost 50,000. The population of Fermanagh is approximately 58,000 people so if you look at Omagh, you can see that the population is divided quite equally between the rural and the urban area. Omagh District Council is the second largest council in the six counties and is strategically located at the main hub of the Rural Development Strategy, as it is at the centre of the west rural region and is one of the gateways to the northwest of the island of Ireland. In addition to its role within the district council there is a strong natural affinity for many people in communities across the wider catchment area. Omagh has a pivotal contribution to the wider region as a county town and key administration centre for the region as well as its educational excellence, strong employment base, high quality of retail base and its contribution in terms of culture, arts and leisure. The Boundary Commission is requested to give recognition to recommendations that will further strengthen the position of Omagh within the sub-region and reject the proposals that would undermine that position. I want to emphasise that. In terms of the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland, can I quote from the Shaping our Future Report 1998, The Family of Settlements. 'Omagh has

strong potential growth with relatively few constraints on development and a high level of residential growth is envisaged. Omagh's location on the Belfast to Derry transport corridor and its central location to the rural west equip it well to develop as a major service centre with the west rural region'. Omagh District Council has a vision in framework which will be published within the next number of weeks and that vision takes us into 2025. The strategy will address the economic, social and environment challenges with the aim of achieving city status for Omagh by 2025. This vision is reinforced by the potential development opportunities afforded by the 170 acre site west of the town, that is the St Lucia and Lisanelly side, where it is intended to have a school campus in the future for practically all the schools within the Omagh area. There is 50,000 square feet of office accommodation within the site and that offers a once in a life time opportunity to provide sub-regional administration headquarters for central and local government departments and the shared school campus which I have mentioned as well which will free up other sites within the town. Omagh is growing faster than the six county average and projected forward over the next 20 years it could see its population double. The need therefore to make key decisions around the growth into the future is crucial, as is the reinforcement and support of the Boundaries Commissioner's final recommendation in relation to recognising and securing Omagh's sub regional status within new local administration. This is pivotal to Omagh's vision of city status.

I just want to make a quick comment in terms of the Derry and Strabane name. Obviously we have made a written submission in terms of the naming of that council, stating that the name should be Derry and Strabane Council and I support that.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

You fully endorse the submission made by your party?

**Sean Begley**

I am endorsing that submission yes and there will be someone else to speak on that later on in the day or the afternoon.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

I am just trying to be clear. I wonder if the councillor could have a copy of this in front of him, would that be possible?

**Sean Begley**

You can see it on the large map.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

I think it is on page 60 to start with. You see, councillor, this is the proposed ward structure. You see at the top of the page it

says 'This diagram displays proposed ward structure within Derry City and Strabane District Council.' Do you see that?

**Sean Begley** Yes.

**Assistant Commissioner** That refers to Newtownstewart, Castlederg and Glenderg, which Councillor Hussey referred to. You know about them and then you have, in terms of territory, a very large ward called Glenelly Valley. Now are the wards you are talking about just to the south of that?

**Sean Begley** Yes, that is correct.

**Assistant Commissioner** Just immediately to the south, they all border that?

**Sean Begley** The ward of Gortin actually goes there, but it runs right into the edge of Omagh town.

**Assistant Commissioner** I just want to be absolutely clear, as this was not in the submission from your party.

**Sean Begley** Gortin is one of the wards and you can see that at the lower end where it meets Fairy Water that is right into the edge of Omagh town. It actually takes in a part of the town in towards Strathroy.

**Assistant Commissioner** The other two you were talking about were ...?

**Sean Begley** The other two are Owenkillew and Drumnakilly. Drumnakilly also goes right into the edge of Omagh town. The other three wards that I talked about were Beragh, Sixmilecross and Carrickmore.

**Assistant Commissioner** I understand. Page 224 has them all in it.

**Sean Begley** If you take the Beragh and Drumnakilly wards, you can see that they go right into the edge of Omagh town. If you take that ward out, you are taking that whole rural area away and that comprises of a District Electoral Area in Tyrone.

**Assistant Commissioner** What you are saying is that, taken together, Fairy Water, Gortin, Owenkillew, Termon, Drumnakilly and Beragh is an identifiable area?

**Sean Begley** That is a very identifiable area known as mid Tyrone, where the community looks toward Omagh in every facet. The people from the area are, by and large, educated in Omagh, although we have a school in Carrickmore. From a point of view of shopping and other matters, Omagh would be their natural affinity. We can see that the town is actually in the centre. If these wards were taken out, it would push the town of Omagh onto the periphery of the area. In terms of the Shaping our Future Report, it actually contradicts the whole argument of it being it being a county town and a sub-regional centre.

**Assistant Commissioner** I will just ask you the same thing as I asked Councillor Hussey. Would you say that those ward boundaries are readily identifiable?

**Sean Begley** They are very readily identifiable and are part of the present Omagh configuration.

**Assistant Commissioner** And as I asked Councillor Hussey, there is no problem there with splitting a townland that you know of?

**Sean Begley** No, that is a natural area and I would not be splitting any townlands.

**Assistant Commissioner** Would you say that to do what you are proposing would ensure, to quote from the legislation, 'A proper representation of the rural and urban electorate.'?

**Sean Begley** Absolutely.

**Assistant Commissioner** I understand and will submit it under that heading. Does anyone here have any questions for Councillor Begley? Thank you for your submission, Councillor.

**Sean Begley** Thank you.

**Assistant Commissioner** The only other councillor who has indicated a wish to speak is Councillor Durkan from the SDLP in the city here. He is not here at the moment. Going down the priority list, Mr Philip Faithful, who I think is Chief Executive of Strabane District Council has indicated that he is going to be here at one-thirty. I am going

down this list in order of priority to voluntary and community organisations and we have had a request from Mr Paddy Devlin, of Churchtown Community Association, who wishes to address the Commission. Is Mr Devlin here? Mr Devlin, would you come up please?

I do not know if you have been here when the others have given their submission, but just for the transcript if you would identify yourself and who you are representing.

**Paddy Devlin** Paddy Devlin, Churchtown Community Association, Castlederg.

**Assistant Commissioner** Could you take it slowly, because you have made no written submission, is that right?

**Paddy Devlin** I have no note, so I am going to be fairly brief.

**Assistant Commissioner** If you are going too fast, Mr Devlin, I will stop you.

**Paddy Devlin** I am somewhat amazed about what has happened with this boundary commission, in the fact that the ancient territory of Tyrone, (Tír Eoghain) is going to be airbrushed from the map. We have been suggesting that my grandchildren will not even know where Tyrone is, it will be an imagination. Over the last few years we have had great exuberance and we were shouting 'Come on Tyrone' and 'Tír Eoghain abú!' That is not going to happen under this present Boundary Commission. I feel for the interest of Castlederg to be served properly, it should be within the context of Tyrone. I would suggest that Tyrone has been airbrushed out of the equation, I do not know for what reason, but it is certainly very plain to me that there is going to be no administrative centre for Tyrone. I am casting no aspersions on the area or the amalgamation of Derry and Strabane, or the abilities or acumen of any of those people. However, I feel that we in Tyrone deserve Tyrone people to look after us, not anybody outside. We are the biggest entity in these six counties and the second largest county in Ireland. If you go into Tyrone, Sir, and you ask anybody whether it is in Strabane, Omagh, Cookstown or Dungannon, they will identify with their locality but they will also tell you that they are Tyrone. We are proud people in Tyrone.

Is there some undercurrent to write Tyrone out of this equation? That has been said to me on numerous occasions over the last few months and it would be remiss of me to be in Castlederg

and not to raise those concerns and to maybe try and find answers to them. I am not going to go into the logistics of population and areas, as I do not have that acumen as I am just an ordinary 5/8th. I am talking more from the heart, but also the head, because it tells me that Tyrone has a right to be represented as an entity in itself, not amalgamated and hived off at the behest of some official somewhere, wherever he or she may be. We are there of an ancient right and we would like to remain that way for the future. I think it is going to ill serve anybody in Tyrone if this is not highlighted, raised and rectified.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Can I ask you two things, Mr Devlin? First of all would you like to see the name Tyrone in one or more councils, if Tyrone is split?

**Paddy Devlin**

There is only one Tyrone. The name goes back into the dawn of history, you know Tyrone, Tír Eoghain, the land of Eoghain; that is all we are and that is our entity.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

You do not want to see for example East Tyrone or West Tyrone or the name Tyrone appearing in a qualified form in any council name?

**Paddy Devlin**

Tyrone is an entity; we have a well-defined boundary and therefore that boundary and entity should be retained.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

That is the old county boundary?

**Paddy Devlin**

Yes.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Which I think was established about 1888 by legislation ...

**Paddy Devlin**

That legislation maybe, but Tyrone itself has been there for a hell of a lot longer than that. It is our birthright.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

You have heard me ask Councillor Hussey and Councillor Begley this same question: would you say that there is a readily identified boundary and we do not need to go beyond that?

**Paddy Devlin**

I will say to you to back up my argument ... Tyrone has been deprived of a maternity hospital. There is not a child in the County of Tyrone who can say hand on heart 'I was born in Tyrone' unless he happened to be born in his own home. We

are losing a major hospital or it is being downgraded. We are being sold a pig in a poke for this new hospital that is going to be built somewhere in and around Omagh. I think this is the last nail in the coffin for Tyrone and that there is some conspiracy somewhere along the line and I am not given really to conspiracy theories but this hits me in the face every time I think about it and a lot of other people as well.

**Assistant**

**Commissioner**

I understand what you are saying, Mr Devlin, I have no problem with that. I have no further questions for you. Has anybody else? Councillor Hussey would like to ask you a question. He is going to come up and sit on your right hand side here.

**Derek Hussey**

How are you doing, Paddy? It is not a very difficult question, Paddy - can you confirm really that what you are saying is that it would be your belief that the Derg area affiliates to the county town of Tyrone, namely Omagh, rather than the city that we are currently sitting in?

**Assistant**

**Commissioner**

When you say the Derg area do you mean the three wards, Castlederg, Glenderg and Newtownstewart?

**Derek Hussey**

The Derg area which covers the three wards that I have mentioned, yes.

**Paddy Devlin**

What I am saying that Castlederg, per se Glenderg, and all those other areas are Tyrone, not anywhere else. I am not going to go into this thing about Omagh, because Omagh is going to be hived off with Fermanagh and they are going to be the lesser partner in that development and that gives me great concern. I am saying that Castlederg is Tyrone, has been Tyrone and always should be Tyrone, but I believe the officials are trying to airbrush Tyrone out of the whole equation.

**Derek Hussey**

And just a subsidiary to that, we are accepting then that Omagh is the county town of Tyrone?

**Paddy Devlin**

Yes.

**Derek Hussey**

Thank you.

**Assistant**

**Commissioner**

Thank you Mr Devlin.

I take it Councillor Durkan is not here? Mr Faithful is not here. We have had two new submissions in writing, one from Omagh

District Council emailed this morning and one from Newtownstewart Presbyterian Church also sent this morning. I take it there is no one here from either of those entities? Could you come up Councillor, sorry, it is just so that what you say goes into the transcript.

**Sean Begley**

Omagh District Council has forwarded you a written submission but the Council, the Chief Executive and a number of Councillors will speak to that submission at Mahon's Hotel. It will be elaborating on some of the things that I have ....

**Assistant**

**Commissioner**

Just for the record, we have got a submission from Omagh District Council. We also got a very long submission from Omagh Chamber of Commerce.

**Sean Begley**

I am not aware of that. I cannot comment on that.

**Assistant**

**Commissioner:**

You cannot comment on that one. Thank you, Councillor. Thank you all for coming this morning. In the absence of Councillor Durkan, I really have no alternative but to adjourn. Mr Faithful is expected at one-thirty, so I apologise if it is inconvenient for anyone. Unless anyone wishes to strenuously oppose that suggestion, I will declare the hearing adjourned until one-thirty. Thank you.

**ENDS**

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**Please scroll down to view the afternoon session**

## **Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland**

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| Transcript Details   |            |                        |          |                    |                 |
|----------------------|------------|------------------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|
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Transcript begins on following page.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We will resume the hearing. The only submissions we have this afternoon that I know of are from Strabane District Council in the persons of Councillor McNulty and Mr Faithful. I am obliged just to advise you before we start that these proceedings are being recorded, there will be a transcript. I have to ask you just at the start to introduce yourself and then make your submission. Again, I can ask you questions by way of clarification and if anyone else here wants to ask you questions they can, after you have concluded your submission. At that, I will turn off my microphone.

**Philip Faithful**

Philip Faithful, Chief Executive, Strabane District Council. Could I first of all thank the Commissioner for agreeing to see me this afternoon. Strabane District Council has debated this at length and we have already made a submission on behalf of the Council in relation to the new council boundaries and wards and I do not intend to go over every detail of that submission. I would say in general terms, though, that in relation to the new Derry City and Strabane Council, we have already started to work within that agreement. We are working currently on cooperation committees and in the process of moving to transition committees. Up to this point we have been working well together, both at an officer level and a council level. There are a few issues, however, that we would like to clarify and just make sure that the commission is in receipt of our concerns in certain areas. First of all - and I can only talk obviously for Strabane District Council - the number of wards within Strabane District Council has been reduced from 16 to 11.5, with a proposal to take away the Clare Ward, Victoria Bridge Ward, Strabane East and the Strabane South ward within existing Local Government District. This is obviously creating some concern at council level. It is also creating concern that the Slieve Kirk Ward is now split between the Strabane Local Government District and the Derry Local Government District. We do appreciate that that leaves us in a situation where we are reducing from, without being parochial, 16 councillors down to either 11 or 12, depending on what comes out of the election in 2011. But it obviously leaves Strabane District Council in a minority in relation to the new councils. We always accepted that was going to happen once you go into the bigger structures. We want to maintain and to ensure that the voice of the Strabane electorate and the Strabane councillors is heard throughout this whole process. We also know that the traditionally named Plumbridge

Ward has been renamed the Glenelly Valley Ward and I think we accept that, but the council are concerned regarding the impact of these ward boundary changes on local people. Many changes are merging the urban and rural wards together and in the Slieve Kirk case, merging two district council wards together. Councillors have expressed a preference for the ward boundaries staying the way they were and have suggested this would offer some more continuity in this change process. Strabane District Council also recognise that legislation dictates that each Local Government District should ideally have 40 wards and that due regard should be given to geographical size of the district. I think if you look at the size of Strabane district, it is a very rural population; we want to ensure that the urban and rural dimension is taken on board. We are one of the few council areas that are joining up with a city council and we want to protect that identity at the local level. The council would have preferred more clarity in the report in terms of what wards were defined as rural and urban, and an indication of the overall balance achieved within each Local Government District. Council also assert that change in the ward boundaries will have significant effect on the deprivation measures for each ward. The councillors within Strabane District Council have taken this very seriously on board and have discussed this at length. We know traditionally that Strabane District Council has many deprived wards in relation to the deprivation indices. We would like to make sure that that is recognized once we move into the new structures. For example, locally, the deprived East ward has now been merged with the somewhat more affluent North ward and this will significantly mask the overall deprivation ranking of this area, leading to pockets of deprivation. It may not accurately reflect the official data. In other words, you are getting an amalgam of deprivation indices in there, rather than very defined areas. Council have already witnessed this happening at the Carlton Drive estate area in Strabane, which suffers from high deprivation, yet is unable to access its fair allocation of funding as it currently sits within the more affluent South ward. Council are gravely concerned about the impact of merging the wards on the quality of life within these deprived areas. Obviously we rely very heavily on, for example, Department for Social Development neighbourhood renewal money and we want to ensure that that is reflected back into these defined and deprived wards. We hope that central government takes this on board, particularly in relation to social deprivation within the area. Council are also aware that we are going to end up with roughly 40 councillors within the new council structure. I said, from day one as Chief Executive, that Strabane councillors, like all other councillors, are quite capable of

fighting their own battles once they get into those chambers. However, we have got to be realistic in the whole process in that we are going in as less than one third of the overall council structure in relation to councillors. This means that the reduction down to 11 would have significant problems for us in relation to the council boundaries. Strabane District Council also knows that the legislation shows some discretion between the number of wards and each Local Government District to be in the range of 35 to 45 wards. This discretion has allowed for quite a bit of debate within the chamber, and quite rightly so, from some councillors in relation to Glenderg, Castlederg and the Newtonstewart wards within the Strabane District Council boundaries. As Chief Executive, I take my instructions from the 16 councillors and the majority vote within that chamber, and the reaction from Strabane District Councillors has been the overall Strabane district should be protected. That would certainly be the Council line on this. To be fair to other councillors, there would be a nucleus of councillors and perhaps individual electorate who would say that some of the area should be moved to another district. However, I would reiterate that the Council do not want to see Strabane District Council split up in any new regime. Individual councillors would have different attitudes on this and that is to be respected.

I do not want to get into the council name at this point. There has not been a major debate in relation to the naming of the council. Perhaps the chairman would want to comment on this. I think it is true to say that we would not want to see Derry City as a name of the overall council. There have been a few generic names put up recently, such as Foyle. Suffice to say, I think it should be left very much to the cooperation committees and transition committees to decide the way forward in relation to naming and perhaps put this out for some type of competition locally within the districts. I would say that, as somebody heavily involved in the Review of Public Administration, we welcome at least the clarity that's been brought in relation to the 11 Council model. While people may disagree with it being seven, 11 or 14, at least we have now reached a stage where we can move forward constructively on it. That is all I have got to say and I just wish you luck for the future on this one.

**Jack McNulty**

Though I am the chairman of Strabane District Council I am here speaking as a councillor in a party capacity, with just a short draft submission to the boundary. First of all, I would like to thank the Boundaries Commissioner for having this opportunity to come here today to speak. Sinn Fein support the Provisional Recommendations of the Boundaries Commission in relation to

its proposal to incorporate all electoral areas of Derry City and Strabane District Councils within the boundary of the new amalgamated Council area. In relation to the name of the new council area, the Sinn Fein group of Derry City and Strabane District Council wish to make the following submission. We note the boundary commission recommendation that the new local government district which carpets the Derry City Council and Strabane District Council areas should be named Derry City and Strabane District Council. We strongly support the incorporation of the core words Derry and Strabane in the new name of the Council. We believe that incorporating these core words to be the most holistic way of ensuring that equal recognition is given to local identities of the people in each of the 40 electoral wards in the new council area, and to be the best way of ensuring that a sense of place and belonging is retained. We also believe that the title of the new council should be bilingual, in both English and Irish, to reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the new area. Thank you.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

I have no questions, except for one thing and whether Councillor McNulty or Mr Faithful could help me. I am just trying to establish where the Carlton Drive estate is.

**Philip Faithful**

With your approval, we could supply a map extra to this committee. Would that be possible after this committee? We will send through a detailed diagram of where that estate actually lies.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

It is mentioned in the submissions in relation to the point about deprivation.

**Philip Faithful**

It is just off the Ballycolman estate here and the map just cuts it off unfortunately, but after this meeting we can supply that.

**Jack McNulty**

On the map on page 87, you have the reflection of the new Strabane North; by creating that, you have removed an area of high deprivation, the East ward, which has serious concerns for some local councillors.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

I wonder if you could give me a map with the areas of deprivation, that are being moved, shaded? Could that be done maybe in the next few days? For the record, it does not really appear on any of the maps here and Mr Faithful is going to furnish us with a map showing us the two main areas of deprivation.

I have no questions for Strabane District Council and thank you for coming.

**Philip Faithful** Thank you

**Assistant Commissioner** I understand we have one more speaker this afternoon; Joanne McDade, on behalf of Raymond McCartney.

**Joanne McDade** It is just a quick question. After some of our members attended this morning's session, there was a notion that maybe tomorrow's session was not going to go ahead because of the low turnout. We would like clarification on that, because obviously this is open to the public and if there were public members who felt they were going to turn up to tomorrow's session we would want them to be properly notified of that.

**Assistant Commissioner** There is going to be a session tomorrow. At the moment, we ask people who are going to speak to fill in the form so that they are not missed. As presently advised, we have two speakers for tomorrow, Councillor Durkan Jnr, from the SDLP and Mr Wright, from the Unionist party. They have both indicated they are coming tomorrow and are going to speak. So we will be starting tomorrow at ten o'clock. I suspect it is not going to last very long tomorrow if they are the only two. Anybody else who wants to come and speak can come tomorrow morning.

**Joanne McDade** Thank you for clarifying that.

**Assistant Commissioner** I suspect there will not be a session tomorrow afternoon.

**Joanne McDade** If there was not going to be a session, would you publicise that in any way, in case people had planned to come to tomorrow's afternoon session? Could members of the public put in written submissions after that?

**Assistant Commissioner** Once I close the hearing we cannot take any submissions after that unless we have specifically asked for it, such as where we wanted a map because the current maps did not make it clear which were the two mainly deprived areas in Strabane. Unless we ask for it, we cannot take evidence after tomorrow. We have taken written evidence last night and today. There is

not much point in us sitting here if there is going to be nobody here.

**Joanne  
McDade**

That is fine, thank you.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

We will be here tomorrow at ten. Councillor Durkan is coming at ten and Mr Wright is coming at eleven. Of course, it is a public hearing, so anybody else who wants to come can.

Is there anybody else who wants to make a submission today? In that case, I will adjourn the inquiry for today.

**ENDS**

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